THE REVOLVING DOOR OF EDUCATION: RETAINING FIRST-
GENERATION LATINX STUDENTS DURING THE FIRST TWO
YEARS AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY EAST BAY

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Abstract

Although the United States is in the middle of an unprecedented growth of the Latinx population/community, the numbers are not translating into higher academic achievement rates, particularly in higher education. First-generation Latinx students continue to be the most underachieving ethnic group in the nation with higher dropout rates than their non-Latinx counterparts. An inability to improve these academic retention and graduation statistics will perpetuate current societal inequities and prevent this growing social group from bettering their socioeconomic position by furthering their education. In order to offset the lack of prior exposure to higher education for this community, a more intentional approach is needed for Latinx youth that focuses on expanding access, improving college preparation, and providing support during the critical first two years of college. Moreover, the strong cultural and historical experiences of Latinx youth must be leveraged to provide this group with the best opportunities for greater academic success. While identifying the contributing factors within the educational pathway has been vastly studied, less focus has been placed on understanding the resources needed by Latinx youth and how these resources may contribute to improved academic success during the first two years of college. Understanding the direct insights that can be provided by students as they matriculate through their first years of

college is critical to improving retention and graduation results for first-generation Latinx youth. Therefore, I conducted an interview study of California State University East Bay (CSUEB) first-generation Latinx students who completed their first year of college. The frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Social Capital provided the lens through which to analyze resulting data with a goal of making recommendations for improving retention rates for CSUEB first-generation Latinx students, particularly during the first two years of their college experience.
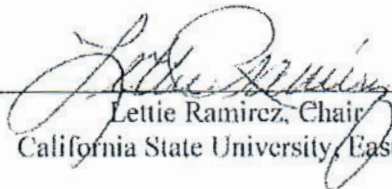
California State University, East Bay
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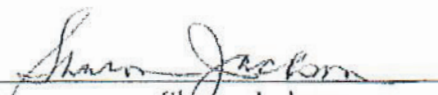This dissertation was presented
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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Zaragoza and Navidad Castillo, who were model examples, for me and my twelve first-generation siblings, of the value of a strong work ethic, connection to familia, and perseverance through life's journey. Their dream of providing better life opportunities for each of their children through a stronger educational foundation has been a constant motivational push, which has empowered me to become a scholar practitioner in the field of education. And to my siblings—Elodia, Elisavet, Amelia, Erasmo, Zaragoza, Jr., Eliazar, Delia, Emma, Nena, Marcos, Andres, and Oscar—I appreciate the unwavering support and inspiration.

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Lastly, I want to thank all of my family and friends who provided support in numerous ways. Your unconditional support and your understanding for the missed family gatherings over the last three years has been especially appreciated.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

First-generation Latinx students historically have alarmingly low retention and

graduation rates (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Engstrom & Tinto,

2008; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007).

Approximately 25% of first-generation college students leave school after their first year

(Engle & Tinto, 2008). Since many first-generation students are Latinx, this translates

into a higher departure rate for Latinx students than their White counterparts. Using data

from the 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tara Yosso's (2006) examination of the Latinx

educational pipeline found out of 100 elementary school students of Latinx descent, 56

of these students will drop out of high school and only seven are expected to graduate

with a bachelor's degree. The fact that the Latinx community is the largest growing social

group in the United States compounds the importance of the problem (Colby & Ortman,

2015). These dismal retention rates are reflected in the data found at California State

University East Bay (CSUEB). Data from the 2015 cohort of incoming first-year students

at CSUEB showed that more than one-half (53.5%) of those who left after their first year

of college self-identified as Latinx. These Latinx student retention figures contribute

directly to the historically low, six-year graduation rates of Latinx students at CSUEB,

which has hovered around 32% annually since 2005 (see Appendix A). The graph found

in Appendix A provides a direct, 10-year comparison between Latinx students and their

White counterparts at CSUEB and highlights the academic opportunity gap, in terms of

graduation, between the two groups after six years of attending the university. In addition, Appendix A provides a comparison of retention rates during the first two years for both social groups. Moreover, Appendix A shows the accelerated growth of Latinx students entering the university beginning in 2007. The chart demonstrates that the retention rates for Latinx students remained below those of White students; therefore, contributing to the revolving door of higher education for Latinx students.

In an effort to address the low graduation rates of Latinx students at CSUEB, increasing their retention rates within the first two years of college is critical. First off, studies of the primary year in higher education for first-generation Latinx students indicate that several factors contribute to lower retention rates including lack of access to prior knowledge (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters, & Zuniga, 2013); lack of adequate pre-college preparation (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015), and limited university support systems in higher education (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Each of these factors often creates stumbling blocks for first-generation Latinx students in navigating the historical bureaucracy linked to higher education. From as early as knowing the most advantageous college preparatory curriculum to complete in high school to completing college application and financial aid paperwork, these students are challenged largely due to a lack of economic, social, and cultural *capital* (Adams et al., 2013). Each version of capital stretches throughout a student's educational pipeline and provides a distinct advantage to those who are part of the norm or a comparable disadvantage to those outside of the norm. Without prior knowledge from family members, first-generation Latinx students often miss out on opportunities to better prepare for success prior to college and which resources to seek out once they arrive in higher education (White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

For many first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of higher education, their educational pathway does not get any easier. Most institutions

of higher education devote much energy, funding, and transparent support programs for first-year students (Schaller, 2005). A false sense of support is created when the support often does not continue into the second year of college. Academic dialogue about the concerns with the second year of college dates back more than 60 years to Mervin Freedman who coined the phrase *sophomore slump* referring to a measurable drop-off in performance during the second year of college (Freedman, 1956). The enthusiasm with which students arrive at college and the excitement of gaining independence starts to fade after the first year, and the second year of college is seen as time when students are supposed to establish their identity and develop their life's purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lemons & Richmond, 1987). Second-year students face unique challenges including low levels of academic engagement and high levels of indecisiveness and anxiety regarding selecting a major and/or developing concrete academic plans (Hunter, 2010; Schaller, 2005). The challenges for first-generation Latinx students in their second year of college coalesce with the continued inability to rely on a family support structure, unlike many of their peers, while navigating high levels of anxiety (Lopez, 2013).

Although retention issues with first-generation students during their primary years in college are well established in the literature, further research is needed to illuminate best practices for eliminating the academic and opportunity gaps inherent with the current educational model employed with first-generation Latinx students. Despite the seemingly overwhelming evidence regarding low success rates in higher education for first-generation Latinx youth, research demonstrates that a small percentage of these students successfully navigate the process and attain a degree (Yosso, 2006). Increasing that percentage is critical to the future success of the growing Latinx population.

Background of the Problem

Growing Population with Stagnant Achievement Rates

Although the number of first-generation Latinx students enrolled in higher education has increased in recent years, the data indicate that half a million Latinx students between the ages of 18 through 24 will be absent from higher education by 2050 (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). These Latinx youth will be missing largely due to 56% of them dropping out before graduating high school and only 7% persisting through college and achieving a bachelor's degree (Yosso, 2006). Several factors contribute to the low rates of Latinx enrollment in college including low socioeconomic status (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), lack of pre-college preparation (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015), and limited-to-no access to a knowledgeable support system (Adams et al., 2013; Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). The population growth over the last few decades has produced more college-aged Latinx students than ever before; however, they lack a support system within the educational curriculum to help them achieve success (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

A Deficit Model Perspective

Although many factors contribute to the anemic retention and graduation rates in higher education for first-generation Latinx students, the deficit model from which many of these students are approached will need to be addressed in order to avoid the anticipated underrepresentation of Latina/o students by the middle of the twenty-first century (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Defining students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths is an approach used in education known as a deficit model (Collins, 1988). In a 2013 research study, college peer mentors were assigned to work with Latinx high school

students regarding applying to college. The peer mentors reported overwhelmingly that they believed that the students lacked confidence about succeeding in college, primarily due to the lack of encouragement they had experienced from the staff members with whom they interacted (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Students are not viewed holistically, and the additional intrinsic resources (language, culture, family) they possess are undervalued in an educational environment that views Latinxs from a deficit perspective (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). Reimagining the definition of "success" with Latinx students may garner desirable results beyond mere access to higher education. As higher education seeks to understand this problem, defining access beyond mere admittance becomes crucial in the exploration of the issue.

Pre-College Preparation

Connected closely to success rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education is the process of pre-college preparation (Everett, 2015; Lopez, 2013). If the deficit model approach with first-generation Latinx students that is found at some high schools is not addressed, data suggests that the negative consequences will continue to impact higher education retention rates for Latinxs (Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004). A deficit model negatively impacts the student's preparation for achieving success in college. Rather, the real world experiences that first-generation Latinx students often gain from their families contribute to their *funds of knowledge*, and, when accessed within an educational setting, become valuable resources (González, Moll, & Armanti, 2006). Broadening the concept of pre-college preparation beyond what is learned in a classroom can provide a counterbalance to the undermining of K-12, first-generation Latinx students by some authority figures (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The knowledge, skills, and experience that first-generation Latinx students gain as part

of their upbringing and extended familial community translates into currency that can be used to offset a lack of traditional capital (González et al., 2006).

Access without Support

Despite these alarming statistics, increasing the number of first-generation Latinx students attending higher education institutions is not the end goal (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Instead, the goal needs to encompass increased Latinx retention and graduation rates. As more Latinx students are making their way to college, the lack of intentional support systems for their specific needs prevents them from succeeding. Merely admitting students into college does not translate into equal access from a social justice perspective (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). In other words, access goes beyond simply opening a door to and granting admission into an institution. As noted by Lopez (2013), true access addresses the needs of the student and their support systems prior to entering college and continues through their college careers. Because the retention of Latinx students in college is low, universities will need to provide continuous and complementary support systems. Such support would follow first- and second-year Latinx students through their academic curriculum thus increasing their retention rates (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

In order to offset the lack of prior exposure to higher education, a more intentional approach is needed for Latinx youth that focuses on expanding access, improving college preparation, and providing support during the critical first two years of college. Moreover, the strong cultural and historical experiences of Latinx youth must be leveraged to provide them with the best opportunities for greater academic success (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). While identifying the contributing factors to low success rates for Latinx students has been vastly studied, less focus has been placed on understanding the resources Latinx youth need and how these resources may contribute to their improved academic success

during the first two years of college (González et al., 2006). Utilizing the direct insights that can be provided by students as they matriculate through their first years of college is critical.

Statement of the Problem

Not only do we have a serious problem with getting first-generation Latinx students to believe that they belong in college, there is also a need to get them to understand that they can successfully complete their degree aspirations while providing them with the appropriate resources to help them succeed (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Despite the increase in the number of first-generation Latinx students attending higher education in recent years, data from the 2011 U.S. Department of Education demonstrated a large achievement gap between White students and their Latinx counterparts. Unlike their peers who benefit from the experiences and support of family members who have attended college, most Latinx students do not have easy access to the kinds of support systems and basic information that help them answer the questions that arise as they move along their educational paths (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters, and Zuniga (2013) described this insider information as *economic, social, and cultural capital*. Capital provides an advantage to those who are part of the norm*,* like White and college-educated families, and a disadvantage to those outside of the norm. In a university setting, examples of this advantage range from simple practices (knowing to set an alarm for early classes) to more complex knowledge (introducing yourself to your professor to establish a relationship). These patterns of socialization that are often unknown to those who lack access to prior experience are examples of *hidden curriculum* and contribute to the overall problem for Latinxs in higher education (Lopez, 2013).

The fact that the Latinx community is the largest growing social group in the United States elucidates the importance of addressing the opportunity and academic achievement gaps in Latinx educational pathways (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The population growth over the last few decades has produced more college-aged Latinx students than ever before; however, they lack a support system within higher education to help them achieve success (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to understand the primary factors that contribute to persistence beyond the first year of college for first-generation Latinx students particularly in contexts as diverse as CSUEB. This qualitative study will explore the breadth of the educational curriculum for these students from K-12 through their first two years of college to examine any overlapping experiences that might contribute to the success of those first-generation Latinx students who persist from their first year of college and into their second. Examining their awareness and use of university support systems available to first-generation Latinx students will shed some light on which specific resources might be the most effective in helping them persist beyond their first year of college at CSUEB.

In order to gain insight into the experiences of first-generation Latinx students, I completed personal, semi-structured interviews with CSUEB first-generation Latinx students in their second year. These interviews allowed me to compare their experience with literature references. I also incorporated interviews with Latinx students from the same cohort who did not persist beyond their first year. This study examined the history and background of these students to determine whether there is a shared commonality in their K-12 experiences that might shed some light into low persistence rates for first-generation Latinx students during the first year of college at CSUEB. Secondly, I sought to identify the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized

by this population of students that contributed to persistence rates beyond the first year. Simultaneously, I explored which of the resources may have been missing for the many first-generation Latinx students who did not persist beyond the first year of college. These interviews and the analysis of the resulting data allowed me to identify specific strategies and resources for successful persistence from year one to year two that can be incorporated into CSUEB practice in future years. My findings and recommendations are included in the concluding chapter with the goal of expanding access to and knowledge of those factors; consequently, creating a positive impact on increasing persistence and improving graduation rates for first-generation Latinx students.

Significance of the Study

Although retention issues with first-generation students during their primary years in college are well established in the literature, further research is needed to illuminate the best practices for eliminating the academic and opportunity gaps that disproportionately impact first-generation Latinx students. Despite the overwhelming evidence of low success rates in higher education for first-generation Latinx youth, research demonstrates that a small percentage of these students successfully navigate the process and attain a degree (Yosso, 2006). Knowing that academic success already exists within the Latinx community, it is now a matter of expanding that success beyond the small percentage. The ability to move the needle in a positive direction and begin closing the opportunity gap for first-generation Latinx students is not going to be accomplished overnight. However, college preparation programs can help to address the structural inequalities surrounding economic, social, cultural, and intellectual capital while moving the social justice needle toward full and equal participation. And the definition of success with this demographic will need to be reimagined to include desirable results beyond mere

access to higher education. Successful models will include support systems that provide continuous support throughout the student's academic career.

Intentional or otherwise, "social institutions codify oppression in laws, policies, practices, and norms" (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013, p. 28). Ultimately, the institutional oppression found in education will only be addressed if the CSUEB administration is open to exploring the issue more deeply and understanding that supporting marginalization will deny Latinx students a fair opportunity to better their lives (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Young, 2013). In order to provide more equitable opportunities for first-generation Latinx students, it is essential to understand how the lack of access and support is impacting the educational lives and economic opportunities of Latinx youth and their communities at large. Additional research may aid CSUEB in identifying strategies to recognize and utilize Latinx students' inherent strengths, particularly in their first two years in order to help reverse the low persistence rates for this group.

Research Questions

In this study, I sought to determine whether CSUEB first-generation Latinx students experience their educational pathways as described in the literature. Personal interviews with CSUEB first-generation Latinx students in their second year allowed me to compare their experience with literature references. I also incorporated interviews with students from the same cohort and social group who did not persist beyond their first year.

The research questions that guided my research are as follows.

Primary research questions

1. What are the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of college?

2. Which of these resources, if any, is lacking for students from the same social group who did not persist beyond year one?

Secondary research questions

3. How did the students' K-12 educational curriculum impact their persistence in college?

4. How did the students' first-generation status impact their educational opportunities?

5. What versions of community cultural wealth have the students knowingly or unknowingly leveraged throughout their educational curriculum?

Definition of Terms

In order to provide clarity, it is important to ensure that the following terms are being defined in a similar manner between researcher and reader.

*   **Capital (Economic, Social, and Cultural)**—A form of social currency that provides a distinct advantage to those who either hold or have easy access to information and/or experience. Often capital is accessed via family.

*   **Community Cultural Wealth**—The Latinx community translates the idea of cultural capital into intrinsic cultural strengths including multi-linguist, perseverance, and communal support.

*   **First-Generation College Student**—First member of a family to attend college. For the sake of this paper, family members who attended college, but did not receive their degree, are not considered.

- **Funds of Knowledge**— The real world experiences of Latinx students that often become valuable resources within the educational setting.

- **Hidden Curriculum**—A covert pattern of socialization, which prepares students to function in the existing educational setting. Although not intentionally secretive, students would not be aware of the practices without access to someone with prior experience.

- **Imposter Phenomenon**—An irrational belief that one does not belong within specific settings. In this paper, this refers to Latinx students who feel as though they are not good enough to be in college.

- **Latinx**—Removes gender from the description of the students within this study.

- **Opportunity Gap**—Paradigm shift from outcomes (achievement gap) to inputs (opportunity gap) highlighting the deficiencies with institutional and systemic concepts that tend to blame the disparity in education between Whites and persons of color on the persons of color and their inability to learn.

- **Retention**—Persistence in education from one year to the next.

Limitations of the Study

As a former undergraduate college student who is also a first-generation Latinx, I have been and continue to be immersed in the Latinx culture. This status could not help but influence my view on the research topic including potential problems and solutions to address the problem with Latinx youth. In addition, I am an administrator at the site where the research is being conducted and; therefore, acknowledge that the study will be completed from a position of power. These dynamics required that I build a trusting relationship with participants and create a comfortable environment that allowed them to speak freely about their experiences. I intentionally generated questions in advance while

maintaining a neutral stance during interviews, which allowed me to minimize the bias that is organically present due to my status as a former first-generation Latinx college student (Alvesson, 2003). However, I was fully aware that I could not fully separate myself from the subjects; therefore, I employed intentional strategies to help mitigate this limitation including, but not limited to, refraining from meeting in my office setting and being aware of how I was dressed during interviews to avoid introducing an unintentional power dynamic.

Summary and Organization of the Study

In 2015, CSUEB was officially granted the designation of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). An HSI designation occurs when the Latinx student population exceeds 25% of the undergraduate, full-time student enrollment and 50% of these Latinx students identify as low income (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008). As shown in Appendix A, the incoming first-year Latinx student population steadily increased over a 10-year period; however, the graduation rates declined for this same social group. Moreover, data provided by the CSUEB Department of Institutional Research indicates that since 2013, more than 40% of the students who do not persist during the first two years of college at CSUEB self-identify as Latinx (see Table 1). Considering the projected growth of the Latinx population, there is a need to rectify the current educational patterns to ensure a reversal of these trends (Colby & Ortman, 2015). As a recently named HSI, these retention numbers at CSUEB are even more jarring. Without a plan of action to reverse this trend, Latinx students will have less access to the upward mobility that is afforded by a college degree.

The purpose of this study was to identify the resources that first-generation Latinx students access during their first two years of college that are helping them persist. In doing so, I aimed to bring a focus on continuing and expanding those resources that aid

this social group with persistence while simultaneously illuminating the concerns for the students who did not persist in order to correct and address those concerns. It was important to not only understand the successes experienced by members of the cohort but also the challenges. By embarking on research focused on both the elimination of barriers and the identification of accessible opportunities, a model for best practices within the educational pipeline for the Latinx community at CSUEB can be formed.

I identified specific strategies and resources for successful persistence during the first two years of college that can be incorporated into institutional practice in future years. By identifying the factors that are contributing to the persistence rate of the CSUEB first-generation Latinx students in their first years of college, I aimed to expand access to and knowledge of those factors for Latinx youth; consequently, creating a positive impact on increasing persistence to graduation. As assessment data becomes available for any new practices and policies implemented as a result of this research, it will allow for continuous opportunities to reflect on the work being done and make changes as needed. Eventually, the goal of moving the needle forward and increasing the historically low success rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education will be realized.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In working through the literature review, it became clear that the conceptual review needed to precede the empirical review to allow the reader to understand the frameworks through which the prior research was being interpreted. Three main conceptual frameworks (social capital, Critical Race Theory, and transitional support) emerged as the most relevant through which to view the themes that emerged from the literature (access, college preparation, and university support systems) as contributors to the problem. Threaded throughout the sections was the notion of community cultural wealth and how it directly impacts the Latinx community.

Conceptual Review

Clearly, first-generation Latinx students face particular barriers in their navigation of higher education; however, facts and figures alone do not allow us to fully understand the conditions that led to these inequities and deficit of capital that they inherit at birth (Adams et al., 2013). A few conceptual frameworks can be utilized to explore the connections between this social group of students and their current academic achievement rates. First, the concept of social capital provides insight into first-generation Latinx youth and how, historically, their lack of information and access to knowledge impacts their academic success within higher education (Adams et al., 2013; Bourdieu, 2011). Second, Critical Race Theory (CRT) illuminates the continued presence of race as a major factor regarding systemic inequities within education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

The third framework centers on the need to provide additional support for this social group during the transition from K-12 to higher education to compensate for the inherent inequities (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Each of these concepts is explored below in more detail including how they connect to the success rates of first-generation Latinx students in higher education.

Social Capital

Bourdieu (2011) developed his concept of social capital in the late 1970s and early 1980s and emphasized the power afforded to anyone who holds capital as a resource. This notion of capital connects social currency to direct and indirect benefits. Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (2011), allows for an easier path through social institutions, including education, for those who hold it. In relation to higher education, social capital may manifest in the form of resources found within support networks including family (White & Ali-Khan, 2013); community (Kumasi, 2015; Yosso, 2006); and academic enrichment programs (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013).

Social Capital from Family Support Network

As noted by White and Ali-Khan (2103), students with a family history of attending college and successfully attaining a degree are better equipped with a support network, which can direct them around potential pitfalls particularly in the first year of college. As the first in their family to attend college, first-generation Latinx students do not have access to resources afforded to students whose family includes alumni from higher education institutions (Adams et al., 2013). Without built-in familial support systems to which non first-generation students have direct access, first-generation Latinx students' path to postsecondary education becomes more challenging (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). This form of social capital yields quick dividends for

those who hold it; therefore, for first-generation Latinx students, who lack the years of knowledge from previous generations, a need arises to expand the traditional definition of a support network beyond familial connections.

Social Capital from the Community

Within Latinx communities, a support network extends beyond immediate family into more of a communal cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006). A student who brings that mentality to higher education can expand their college support network in a similar way. First-generation Latinx peer mentors from the local area have been successfully integrated to help engage Latinxs in college thus expanding their network of support (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). Researchers, including Yosso (2006) and Kumasi (2015), continue expanding the traditional notion of a support network by including the students' life experiences as a form of currency that they can access. The strong work ethic that arises from having to work from an early age for everything they have provides this group with the strength to persevere through barriers, which theoretically should yield a higher level of persistence (González et al., 2006).

Social Capital from Academic Enrichment Programs

Another strategy for extending the traditional definition of a support network is to access the natural cohort models to which many students are exposed in K-12 academic enrichment programs. Per the literature, there are a few successful and nationally recognized college preparation programs including the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP; Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The cohort model emphasized within programs like AVID and GEAR UP leverages social capital by having students work together on college paperwork (admission, financial aid).

These programs teach students to embrace their collective capital while simultaneously providing an expanded support network (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). For first-generation students and their families, any gained advantage in expanding their capital can help encourage confidence in light of the uncertainty they experience (Everett, 2015).

Critical Race Theory

Although social capital provides a useful way of explaining how first-generation Latinx students may access and utilize the resources organically woven within their social patchwork, it lacks the ability to illuminate the educational practices that have historically created systemic barriers for students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In order to understand the comprehensive educational experiences for this group, researchers have successfully applied Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is often connected to a social movement as opposed to a specific theory and it is built upon previous movements including critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) share that CRT rose to the forefront during the 1970s in response to the slow movement of racial reform after *Brown v. Board of Education*. CRT has been used to better understand various topics with racial undertones including school inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), campus micro-aggressions (Solorzano, 1998), and school funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The basic and fundamental charge of public education to provide an equitable education for all students is called into question when examined using the lens of CRT (Adams et al., 2013). CRT offers an opportunity to explore dynamics within educational systems between students and administrators/faculty including the use of deficit models and the impact on Latinx students' college aspirations/ preparation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Also, CRT provides an additional approach to understanding the issues experienced by first-generation Latinx students around access

to educational opportunities and adequately preparing for academic success (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005).

Historical Connections to CRT

Although the seminal 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education* officially ended segregation, most public schools in the United States remain segregated in one form or another (race, socioeconomic, etc.) demonstrating that "separate but equal" remains a current reality (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The systemic racism that was common practice during segregation continues to be prevalent in society and thoroughly ingrained in who we are and how we operate as a society (Decuir & Dixson, 2004). The CRT framework provides both historical context and structure to issues of equity for first-generation Latinx students, particularly the idea that those in power (White students) hold advantages solely by the color of their skin (Kumasi, 2015). From a historical perspective, research demonstrates that schools have failed to provide equal efforts and opportunities for academic achievement for students of color as opposed to their White and more affluent peers (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; Ramani et al., 2007; Swanson, 2004). These disparities only exacerbate the inherent deficit in capital valued by the dominant society and particularly valuable within the higher education setting (Adams et al., 2013).

CRT and Supplemental Life Experiences

The additive framework is used to expand upon the traditional concepts of college readiness (Conley, 2010) by turning the traditional deficit view of first-generation students and their life experiences into an asset within higher education. Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) expand on Conley's (2010) traditional concepts of college readiness by asserting that the unique struggles experienced by first-generation

students should be seen as an asset rather than a deficit. Through the works of various authors, the literature supports the concept that a student's cultural background and experiences should be seen as assets (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Garcia & Ortiz, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). It is no longer accurate to make assumptions regarding native language or the need to work at an early age because these experiences develop skills that have not necessarily been seen as advantages in an educational setting (Yosso, 2006). It is all a matter of switching from deficit to additive approaches and understanding the potential value inherent in the life experiences Latinx students bring to the table (González et al., 2006). The work from Garcia and Ortiz (2006) supports this argument by pointing out that in a deficit educational environment, students are not viewed holistically and the additional resources (language, culture, family, etc.) that are inherent to their culture are undervalued.

Rather than deny the perceived deficits, Valenzuela (1999) asserts that a better approach for educators might be to embrace the perceived cultural limitations of Latinx students and highlight them as another strategy for strengthening their educational journeys. The strength and will they develop throughout their lives can prepare them for what they will encounter in college by providing them with the ability to persist. As a strategy to prepare first-generation Latinx students for the rigors and challenges of higher education, educational institutions can embrace the students' life experiences, perceptions, and beliefs (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014). In addition, an emphasis on Latinx cultural wealth can create meaningful opportunities for success and counteract assumptions by their schools, teachers, and/or peers as not being suited for college (Yosso, 2006).

Transitional Support

Although the social capital and CRT frameworks demonstrate the inherent barriers that first-generation Latinx students face in their educational journeys, the third framework acknowledges that the challenges continue beyond secondary education. The marked difference between high school and college environments creates a need for additional support through this transition period. Higher education institutions typically offer academic programs and services to incoming students to ease the transition. The literature (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013) suggests an additional need to expose first-generation students to non-academic curriculum found in college in order to lessen the anxiety that is experienced in a new environment. Early connections to higher education, like new student onboarding programs, can be instrumental in expanding the comfort zone for first-generation students. Institutions of higher education are not excused from acknowledging the challenges encountered by many first-generation students. Many of these challenges are encountered outside of the classroom (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Consequently, merely admitting students into college does not translate into equal access from a social justice perspective (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lopez, 2013).

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Building confidence with the unknown can help minimize the impact of the *imposter phenomenon* experienced by many first-generation Latinx students. This irrational and reasonless belief that they are frauds who do not belong in higher education consequently impacts retention rates for this social group (Stebleton & Soria, 2013). To combat this insecurity and build confidence, the literature (Schlossberg, 1989; Sinek, 2014) speaks to the importance of a sense of belonging and worth. A student's sense of connection to their campus community can have a positive impact on retention. Research

demonstrates the disparity in confidence of first-generation K-12 students and their belief that they are ready to successfully access higher education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Schaller, 2005). Beyond the traditional college preparation objectives, White and Ali-Khan (2013) believe that first-generation students require additional exposure to the differences between secondary and higher education in order to minimize the culture shock in their first year. Addressing the specific issues of Latinx students, Lopez (2013) adds his voice specifically addressing their inability to connect and engage at a new setting without understanding the unspoken rules with which they are unfamiliar including academic jargon and classroom etiquette. True access addresses the needs of the student and their families prior to entering college and continues through their college careers by creating a sense of welcome and belonging (Lopez, 2013).

Theory Analysis

All three frameworks provide a different lens from which to view and analyze the systemic barriers encountered by first-generation Latinx students in their efforts to successfully navigate academic opportunities. Although the frameworks are all distinct, there is an interconnected quality. The social capital framework illuminates the disparities that are inherited by those who are not in power and the impact that deficit has on educational curriculum. Meanwhile, Critical Race Theory sheds some light on how the concept of "separate but equal" is still a fully functioning force in the United States' educational system and allows us to see how the social capital valued by society is racially distributed. Oftentimes, the more subtle forms of discrimination prove to have the most long-lasting and far-reaching negative impacts. Considering the impact these two frameworks have on the systemic processes that affect the academic success rates of first-generation Latinx students in higher education, the transitional support framework can

be seen as a critical component for providing a positive counterbalance to the historical oppression that has contributed to the overall problem.

When viewed within the context of the literature, two of the frameworks provide a stronger foundation for analysis and understanding of the problem I am exploring. I will rely on the frameworks of social capital and Critical Race Theory for my research analysis. Each framework allows us to understand the reproduction of racial bias in institutional settings over a period of time. In order to ascertain a more complete view of the phenomena that I will be studying, I will need to span a number of years within the K-16+ educational pathway. Both frameworks provide a holistic view into the educational settings for first-generation Latinx students including deep-rooted systemic policies and practices that have historically impacted academic success rates.

Additionally, rather than abandon the transitional support framework, I believe it will prove useful in shedding some light on my findings and resulting recommendations, particularly regarding how some first-generation Latinx students feel when they arrive at college and how this feeling impacts their persistence rate during the critical first years of college.

Empirical Review

A review of the literature regarding first-generation Latinx students within an educational context suggests that several factors contribute to the disparity between Latinx and White academic achievement rates in higher education, particularly during the first two years of college (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Lopez, 2013; Schlossberg, 1989; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). The literature is divided into three main sections. First, I lay out the concept of access to education in the form of opportunity, experience, and information and how each form of access influences retention rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education. Second, I discuss the correlation

between college preparation programs and higher education persistence rates and the impact of remediation courses (Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky, 2010), cohort models (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013), and academic jargon (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2014; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Finally, I discuss the importance of support systems in higher education particularly during the transition through the first two years of college (Lopez, 2013; Schaller, 2005; Schlossberg, 1989; Stebleton & Soria, 2013). As Latinx participation numbers in higher education increase, a need arises to provide continuous and/or complementary support systems that will follow these students through their academic careers and avoid the idea that the opportunity to attend college in America has become a whirling turnstile for many Latinx students who do not persist through the first years of college (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

Access to Education through Opportunity, Experience, and Information

Although the number of first-generation Latinx students attending higher education has increased in recent years, data indicate that half a million Latinx students between the ages of 18 - 24 will be absent from college by 2050 because they will either not attend or they will drop out prior to completing a degree (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Yosso, 2006). One of the larger concerns is ensuring that Latinx students have the opportunity for college. As noted in Yosso's (2006) study of the Latinx educational pipeline, out of 100 elementary school students of Latinx descent, 56 of these students will drop out of high school. Immediately, over half of Latinx students lose the opportunity to go to college. Prior research indicates that several factors can contribute to these statistics including historical systemic oppression (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Everett, 2015), socioeconomic pressures (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005), and limited-to-no access to a knowledgeable support system, such as family who have previously attained educational degrees (Adams et al., 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

If success rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education are going to improve, there is a need to expand the concept of access beyond ensuring that these students have the knowledge and skills to qualify them for admission (Everett, 2015). To this point, an assessment of the traditional concepts related to gaining access to higher education is needed with a critical eye toward those models that focus solely on academic rigor (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). The assessment may identify missing components within those models that will impact access to and success rates in higher education for first-generation Latinx students. True access addresses the needs of the students and their families prior to entering college and continues through their college careers by creating a sense of belonging (Lopez, 2013; Schlossberg, 1989). In other words, access goes beyond simply opening a door to and/or granting admission into an institution. Therefore, reimagining the definition of access with this demographic may garner desirable results beyond mere entry to higher education.

Reduced Access to Educational Opportunities

Convincing first-generation Latinx students that they have access to higher education is a first step in making the educational path easier for them (Everett, 2015). Although many factors contribute to the anemic retention rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education, prior research indicates that the deficit model in K-12 environments is a main contributor (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Collatos et al., 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). As supported by findings from Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013), the deficit model found at some high schools negatively impacts the student's preparation for achieving success in college when authority figures convince students that they are not "college material." As a result, first-generation Latinx students are often guided to alternate paths in their secondary education (non-Advanced Placement/college prep high school courses for example) due to preconceived notions of

their abilities (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Supporting this research, Garcia and Ortiz (2006) pointed out that students are not viewed holistically, and the additional resources (language, culture, family) available to them are undervalued in a deficit educational environment. The prevalent deficit mentality for this social group translates to fewer opportunities and less information-sharing, directly contributing to lower participation and success rates for first-generation Latinx students (Everett, 2015). If the deficit model many high school, first-generation students experience is not addressed, the negative consequences will continue to impact retention rates for this group of students in higher education (Collatos et al., 2004).

By approaching first-generation Latinx students from a deficit perspective, their confidence is negatively impacted (Everett, 2015). Peer mentors who worked with first-generation Latinx high school students overwhelmingly reported that the students lacked confidence about succeeding in college, primarily due to the lack of encouragement they had experienced from the school administrators with whom they interacted (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). As evidenced earlier, authority figures in K-12 hold much influence over students and their belief in whether they are fit for college (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015). Bolman and Deal (2013) refer to a self-fulfilling prophecy citing the example of managers who expect employees to perform a certain way and those employees inevitably match their performance to those expectations. Applying this example to the underperformance of many first-generation Latinx students would mean that they are potentially manifesting the behaviors and traits projected on them by their teachers, matching the low expectations that teachers may have. Without built-in support systems, which can access prior experience, these students' path to postsecondary education becomes tougher (Adams et al., 2013; Everett, 2015).

Embracing Access to Education via Diverse Life Experience

Despite the lack of previous experience in higher education, there is an argument for the idea that the Latinx students should be encouraged to embrace their life experiences to create meaningful opportunities in preparing them for the rigors and challenges of college (Valenzuela, 1999). A lack of awareness of self, their culture, and their community, and how this knowledge can be embraced for advantage rather than a disadvantage, contributes to the current opportunity gaps for first-generation Latinx students (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013; Yosso, 2006). As noted by Yosso (2006), the Latinx community translates the idea of cultural capital into *community cultural wealth,* which is comprised of many aspects, including strength in the face of adversity, knowledge of more than one language, and a sense that entire communities support and root for the success of their youth.

Deficit models, as discussed above, contribute to Latinx students being unaware of the strengths found within their culture. To this point, research demonstrates that students of color rarely encounter a pedagogical approach that allows them to use their diverse backgrounds as an advantage in preparing for college (González et al., 2006; Knight-Manuel, Marciano, Wilson, Jackson, Vernikoff, Zuckerman, & Watson, 2016). Incorporating a critical mindset for these students to pursue and succeed in higher education will better prepare them to think, learn, and ask questions regarding access to, and preparation for, higher education (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006).

Lack of Information Compromises Access to Education

As the number of first-generation Latinx students attending higher education in recent years has increased, data from the 2011 U.S. Department of Education demonstrate a large academic achievement gap between White students and their Latinx counterparts. Unlike their peers who have previous generations in college, most Latinx students do

not have easy access to basic information to help them with questions that arise as they move along their educational paths (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Adams et al. (2013) offered the notion of economic, social, and cultural capital as possible contributors to the current academic achievement gap. Economic capital includes access to financial resources; whereas social and cultural capital includes access to influential and well-connected people for knowledge and information valued by society. This same concept was addressed much earlier by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) who likened the advantage to one of being born into the *right* family in order to access information. In that vein, most first-generation Latinx students are not born into the right families. Their family network does not include members who have attained a college degree. Without access to basic information to assist in navigating the maze of college selection and applications, these *othered* students are at a disadvantage from the onset (Adams et al., 2013). In contrast, White students are more likely to be born into families who have college alumni; therefore, they are more likely to be familiar with the rules of higher education (Lopez, 2013). Consequently, for first-generation students, family, as a main source of information-sharing, is rendered moot for Latinx students.

Throughout history, students of color have received subpar information regarding access to educational opportunities (Ramani et al., 2007), lower high school completion rates (Swanson, 2004), and fewer college applications (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Consequently, these lower expectations are shaping the academic outcomes for these students before they even consider college. As noted in Yosso's (2006) example, only 7% of students from Latinx descent are expected to achieve a bachelor's degree. The disadvantage of not being part of the norm materializes in very real ways for first-generation Latinx students. Students on the fringe of educational opportunities tend to be less prepared for success in college than those who are more privileged (Engstrom

& Tinto, 2008). This disadvantage often results in an early departure from higher education (White & Ali-Khan, 2013; Yosso, 2006).

College Preparation

As cited in the literature, lack of pre-college preparation can be a factor in low retention rates for students of color (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015; Lopez, 2013). Prior research shows that successful college preparation expands beyond academic rigor including introducing students to the benefits of working within a cohort model (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013) and preparing for the cultural differences found in college (Lopez, 2013: White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Lopez (2013) adds his voice specifically addressing Latinx students and their inability to connect and engage at a new setting without understanding the unspoken rules with which they are unfamiliar. He argues that they have not been prepared by secondary educators on the differences they will encounter between high school and higher education cultures. College preparation should teach Latinx students about the hidden curriculum that they will experience in higher education (Lopez, 2013: White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Beyond the traditional college preparation objectives, White and Ali-Khan (2013) believe that first-generation students require additional exposure to the differences between secondary and higher education to diminish the culture shock in their first year of college. Providing a real world approach to life as a college student can better prepare these students for surviving the challenges that are part of the transition to higher education which can contribute to lower retention rates in the first year of higher education.

Avoiding Remediation Courses

Even when viewing college preparation from a perspective that highlights academic rigor, the disproportionate percentage of first-year Latinx students in college

remedial courses in the core content areas of English and mathematics (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Howell et al., 2010) demonstrates a major disconnect between secondary and higher education institutions. The national average of first-generation Latinx students who must complete remedial courses within their first year of college is approximately 33% compared to the overall national average of 21.2% (Howell et al., 2010). These statistics indicate that something in the educational experience for Latinx students in K-12 is lacking in preparing these students for entry standards of higher education.

The extra remedial courses required for many Latinx students only increases the amount of time these students must spend in college, which often translates into additional thousands of dollars of debt (Attewell et al., 2006). The thought of extra time, money, and resources that will be required in order to achieve their higher education degree while not being able to earn a full-time income is yet another obstacle in the path of many first-generation Latinx students (Bailey, 2009).

Embracing Cohort Models

In support of expanding the idea of college preparation beyond the classroom, several nationally recognized early outreach and college readiness programs already exist (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) incorporate a cohort model when completing various college processes and paperwork. The cohort model utilized within these programs emphasizes the idea of working together on college preparation and expanding the students' support network (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The ability for a person to draw upon resources from within a personal network of support denotes the access to capital (Adams et al., 2013). A student's sense of connection to their campus community can often impact persistence rates (Schlossberg, 1989). Additionally,

programs like AVID should serve as models for increasing access for first-generation students in the form of knowledge and exposure to key processes associated with higher education (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). In essence, these programs help to demystify higher education and create opportunities for informed decisions regarding the reality of attending. Creating opportunities to expose first-generation Latinx students to the real possibilities of higher education needs to be a priority in order to improve the current retention rates in higher education during the first two years of college. A focus on providing ongoing mentorship and supportive relationships will also prepare Latinx students for successful transitions into higher education (Lopez, 2013).

Exposure to Academic Jargon

Beyond the traditional college preparation objectives, White and Ali-Khan (2013) believe that first-generation students require additional exposure to the differences between secondary and higher education in order to curtail the alienation experienced in their first year. The literature references an additional need for first-generation students to expose them to non-academic curriculum found in college in order to reduce the culture shock (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). As noted before, students of color are less likely to have family members who attended college and, therefore, lack the exposure to the expectations of higher education (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Research argues that Latinx students, in particular, struggle with adjusting to college because they have not been prepared by secondary educators on the differences they will encounter, including a less regimented environment, a focus on strong time management, and the need to connect with faculty on their own initiative (Lopez, 2013). The resulting theories from White and Ali-Khan's (2013) research offered three key points (a) "minority students' academic preparation for college is inadequate, (b) there is a lack of appropriate college-educated mentors, and (c) cultural alienation from, and thus their resistance to, White

college culture" (p. 25). All three points lead to isolation within the university because they believe that they have no one to talk to about this new experience. Once again, their social capital deficit is exposed. For example, many Latinx youth believe that they must sell out their culture or "act White" in order to succeed in college rather than viewing it as a simple shift in terminology or language (Lopez, 2013). Providing prior exposure to academic discourse and simultaneous support during this period of transition are two integral strategies to promote the success of Latinx youth as they enter the world of higher education (Collatos et al., 2004; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

Transitional Support

As valuable as proactive preparation to college may be, first-generation Latinx students also require intentional university support systems. As the number of first-generation Latinx students attending higher education institutions increases, the need arises to provide continuous and complementary support systems that will follow these students through their academic careers and avoid the low retention rates, particularly between the first and second year of college (Schaller, 2005). Research indicates that true access addresses the needs of the student prior to entering college and continues through their college careers (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

In an attempt to address the potential detriment to students, higher education typically offers academic programs and services to incoming students to ease the transition. Early connections to higher education, like student learning clusters and welcome week programs, can be instrumental in expanding the comfort zone for first-generation students (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Many of these challenges are encountered outside of the classroom (Hurtado et al., 1996). Consequently, intentional support systems for the specific needs of first-generation Latinx students are required to ensure academic success. For example, much of the literature references a

practice of utilizing peer mentors to assist students during the first two years of college

with developing autonomy, establishing their identity, and finding a connection to

campus (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Hurtado et al., 1996; Sanchez-

Leguelinel, 2008).

Creating a Sense of Belonging

A student's sense of connection to their campus community can impact

persistence rates (Lopez, 2013; Schlossberg, 1989; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Once

Latinx students arrive on campus, the institution must be able to offer support and

connect them to the campus community. Additional literature addresses the effects of

campus racial climate on Latinx college students' sense of belonging and whether it

impacts why students leave college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, &

Solorzano, 2009). In addition, the authors offer insight into how the students' cultural

home lives impact this sense of belonging. A primary argument within the literature

asserts that the concept of integration has a different meaning for members of groups who

have historically experienced marginalization; therefore, traditional student onboarding

programs require a paradigm shift to achieve successful transitions to higher education

(Lopez, 2013; Hurtado et al., 1996). For example, offering a new student orientation

session completely in Spanish to allow family members to freely participate and

comprehend sends a clear message of acceptance.

Addressing the Sophomore Slump

Another critical transition for first-generation Latinx students within higher

education occurs from first year to second year. Though one might expect second-year

students to be confident in their academic pursuits after having effectively navigated the

first year of college, research demonstrates that there is a disconnect between a student's

first and second year of college (Hunter, 2010; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008; Schaller, 2005). Students in their second year of college have historically been overlooked In regard to requiring intentional support (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Research shows that sophomores often feel a sense of being lost, spend less time studying than other students, and face a high degree of psychological stress (Schaller, 2005). Compiled with this added stress are the unique needs for first-generation Latinx students during periods of transition (Hurtado et al., 1996). Ensuring campus engagement and a connection to others is noted within the literature as a critical strategy to improving retention within the first years of college (Hunter, 2010).

Summary

The literature on first-generation Latinx students and their educational pathways addresses academic achievement from the perspectives of access (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Bourdieu, 2011), college preparation (Everett, 2015; Lopez, 2013) and higher education support (Hurtado et al., 1996; Schaller, 2005). Themes emerged within each category that directly address potential obstacles and barriers that historically have impacted Latinx youth including lack of opportunity (Conley, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008), understanding hidden curriculum (Collatos et al., 2004; White & Ali-Khan, 2013), and a support system through periods of transition (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). In addition, the literature provides insight into the notion that the transition between the first two years of college should garner similar attention as the transition from high school to higher education (Hunter, 2010; Schaller, 2005).

However, there is limited information regarding the resources that first-generation Latinx students can access to help them persist during the critical first two years of college. In particular, exploring whether these resources manifest from personal

experience, learned social/interpersonal techniques, or through support programs within higher education. Moreover, a question arises as to why some first-generation Latinx students are unable to successfully access these resources to help them persist through the first two years of college. This gap in current literature requires additional research to help explore how colleges can expand resources while working on reducing and eliminating the obstacles encountered by Latinx youth that are contributing to their anemic retention rates in higher education. Specifically, at a newly designated Hispanic Serving Institute like CSUEB, the attrition rates for Latinx youth during the first two years is alarming and requires immediate attention.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, I sought to identify the primary resources available to and utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who successfully persist beyond their first year of college. I utilized the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews as my methodology. An interview protocol allowed me to hear directly from first-generation Latinx students about their specific experiences during their first year of college and provided insight into my research questions. First, I examined the history and background of these students to determine whether there is a shared commonality in their K-12 experiences that might provide insight into low persistence rates for first-generation Latinx students during their first year of college at CSUEB. Secondly, I endeavored to identify the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by this population of students that contribute to higher persistence rates beyond the first year of college. Simultaneously, I explored which of the resources may have been missing for the many first-generation Latinx students who did not persist beyond the first year of college.

Research Questions and Design

The research questions that will guide my research are as follows.

Primary research questions include

1. What are the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of college?

2. Which of these resources, if any, is lacking for students from the same social group who did not persist beyond year one?

Secondary research questions include

3. How did the students' K-12 educational curriculum impact their persistence in college?

4. How did the students' first-generation status impact their educational opportunities?

5. What versions of community cultural wealth have the students knowingly or unknowingly leveraged throughout their educational curriculum?

Although the primary research questions appear to engage two different groups of students, in reality, the students from each group are members of the same cohort who started their educational journey at the same time; yet, somehow ended up on opposite ends of the first year of college. Students answering the first question will have persisted into their second year and the students answering the second question will have dropped out. In order to establish which resources impact retention rates during the first year of college, it is important to understand both successes and challenges. The data findings from this study will help the university to focus on intentionally accessing, expanding, and/or highlighting the resources that lead to success while simultaneously exploring how to close the current academic opportunity gap for this social group (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Yosso, 2006).

I employed a qualitative methodological approach in the form of a one-on-one interview study to gather data for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Interviewing participants individually allowed me to hear directly from first-generation Latinx students about their specific personal and educational experiences beginning with their last years in high school through their first year of college. Engaging them in conversation including their time in K-12 granted me an opportunity to explore the possible connections with success and failure rates during the first year of college. Any theory generation was a result of data collected directly from these students with an aim to better understand the transitional processes and periods and the impact they have on this social group (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). My research design employed a semi-structured interview format incorporating an outline of predetermined questions while allowing for follow up questions as needed (Roulston, 2010).

Context

The CSU system is the largest and most diverse university system in the country, consisting of 23 campuses that service 460,000 students. CSUEB is one of the 23 campuses and is located in Hayward, CA in the San Francisco Bay Area. The fall 2016 enrollment figures show just over 15,800 students with a 60/40-percentage split of females to males. CSUEB has a diverse student population with the top three ethnicities consisting of Hispanic/Latinx (29.8%), Asian American (22.8%), and White (17.6%). Sixty-one percent of the student body identify as first-generation students (CSUEB, 2016).

Of interest for this research, persistence rates during the first two years of college are a major challenge for Latinx students. As noted in the chart below (see Table 1), approximately two-fifths of the 2013 fall quarter incoming first-year cohort who did not persist during the first two years of college self-identify as Latinx.

	# Students Retained	% Retained	# Lost	% Loss of Cohort	# Latinx Students Retained	% Latinx Students Retained	# Latinx Students Lost	% of Attrition
2013 Freshman Cohort	1476	100%	286	19.4%	598	100%	115	40.2%
Retained Year 2	1190	80.6%	177	31.4%	483	80.8%	79	44.6%
Retained Year 3	1013	68.6%	104	38.6%	404	67.6%	44	42.3%
Retained Year 4	909	61.4%			360	60.2%		

Table 1: Retention Rates for 2013 Incoming First Year Cohort (All Students vs Latinx Students)

This table demonstrates an overall problem with retention of Latinx students. Of particular concern are the transitional periods of the first two years of college. During the first two years, the annual percentage loss of Latinx students equals more than 40% of the overall student population. Considering that CSUEB was officially designated a Hispanic Serving Institute in 2015 and almost 30% of the student population identifies as Latinx, additional research is required to correct the disparity between retention rates and begin to better serve Latinx students.

Data Collection

Participants and sampling. With the assistance of CSUEB colleagues who work with the Sophomore Transition Enrichment Program (STEP) and Institutional Research (IR), I identified 20 students from the 2016 CSUEB cohort of first-year students who identify as first-generation Latinx students. With the help of STEP, I identified 10 students who successfully persisted from their first year of college and into their second year and who were willing to be recorded in a one-on-one interview. Additionally, with the help of IR, I identified 20 students from the same 2016 cohort who did not persist beyond their

first year. I requested a slightly larger pool with the understanding that these students might be less inclined to agree to an interview. From the initial pool of students available to me, seven students in their second year agreed to an interview; however, only four of the students who stepped out after their first year were willing to be interviewed.

My goal to match the CSUEB gender breakdown of 60% female and 40% male was met. Between the two sets of students, I ended up with seven females and four males. Additionally, only two of the students attended a rural high school and four of them were from Southern California. As expected, all four of the students who did not persist beyond their first year were local to Hayward, which made it easier for them to meet me for their interview. The sample groups correlated directly with my main research question.

Interviewee	Persist (P)/ Disqualified (DQ)	Female/Male	NorCal (N)/ SoCal (S)	High School Rural (R)/Urban (U)
1 (Alan)	DQ	M	N	U
2 (Ysa)	DQ	F	N	U
3 (Julie)	DQ	F	N	U
4 (Jenny)	DQ	F	N	U
5 (Chuck)	P	M	N	R
6 (Gloria)	P	F	N	R
7 (Vicky)	P	F	S	U
8 (Tony)	P	M	S	U
9 (Angie)	P	F	N	U
10 (Delia)	P	F	S	U
11 (Stu)	P	M	S	U

Table 2: Demographic Information of Interviewees

I used cluster sampling to identify subjects from a naturally occurring group of students from the same time-of-entry cohort (McMillan, 1996). Specifically, I relied on the snowball/network sampling technique, which assisted me in identifying subjects

for interviewing (Rea & Parker, 2005). With the shortened time for the interviews, the snowball effect permitted me to tap into my network at CSUEB to identify the participants from a pre-existing cluster of students. Although the snowball technique does not allow for generalization, by intentionally incorporating the participant criteria discussed above, I created a level of generalization that is not a natural aspect of this technique (Rea & Parker, 2005). In addition, these samples consisted of students who are most knowledgeable regarding this research topic as they recently experienced the first year of college.

Instruments or data sources. In-person interviews along with CSUEB statistical information were my primary sources of data for my research. Interview questions can be found in Appendix B and C.

Interviews. As noted before, I used a semi-structured interview format with first-generation Latinx students who successfully persisted into their second year (Roulston, 2010). I created an interview protocol beforehand (see Appendix B and C) and received permission to record each interview prior to commencing. I asked these students about their educational journey from pre-college preparation to their transition to college and their experience throughout their first year of college. I also requested that they reflect on the resources that they accessed throughout their educational pathway that may have positively impacted their persistence including how they became of aware of the resources available to them. For the students who did not persist beyond the first year, I asked them to reflect on the primary challenges they encountered that may have negatively impacted their ability to persist. Additionally, I intentionally scheduled 30 minutes after each scheduled interview to reflect on the interview and journal my initial

impressions of each interview. The data from these interviews and my journals served as the core data in answering my research questions.

University data. I requested and received longitudinal retention data for first-generation Latinx students over the past 10 years to provide a historical analysis of how this social group has fared with academic achievement at CSUEB. In addition, I requested and received preliminary information generated during the first year of the STEP program and incorporated this information into the research findings. Both university data sets contributed additional context to frame the information retrieved from the interviews and provided insight into the research questions.

These data sets presented an opportunity to compare CSUEB information with interview findings and provided methodological triangulation during data analysis between students, transitional support services, and university data (Seale, 1999).

Data collection procedures. After receiving approval from the CSUEB Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with my research in mid-November, I worked with my contacts at STEP and IR to produce a list of potential interview candidates. Given the holiday season and the end of the academic term (fall quarter), I scheduled interviews for January, which allowed me to conduct the majority of the interviews during the winter quarter. My goal was to generate and analyze data based on the subjects' personal experiences; therefore, I completed an interview study with a semi-structured format since it allows for follow up questions (Roulston, 2010). All participants were informed that the interviews would be taped and none of them expressed any concern when they signed the consent forms. Although I intended to personally transcribe the interviews, my timeline did not allow for this. I used an online transcription service to complete the process; however, I intentionally listened to each

interview again and reviewed my journals while reviewing the transcription in order to make any additional notes as needed.

Within the interview protocol, my main focus was on aspects of reflexivity to acknowledge the real and perceived power differences with the interviewees (Roulston, 2010). I took brief notes during the interview to allow me to remain fully engaged with each student. Immediately after each interview, I completed a journal to ensure I captured my initial thoughts and reactions. I worked to minimize the perception of power differences by intentionally selecting settings (outside of office) and clothing (casual attire) for each interview. I was particularly aware of the perception of power difference when interviewing the subjects who were no longer at CSUEB. By meeting in a neutral setting and dressing less formally, my goal was to put each student at ease and create an informal, trusting environment that contributed to a free-flowing conversational tone. In addition, my questions sought to do two things. First, to develop an understanding of the interviewees' experiences during their complete educational journey. Second, to identify resources that may have been instrumental in either helping Latinx students persist through their first year of college or that were lacking and may have contributed to their inability to persist beyond their first year of college.

Analysis

A combination of inductive and deductive reasoning allowed me to generate findings by examining the data sets through the filter of my proposed theoretical framework and the prior research in the literature (Schwandt, 2001). I am particularly drawn to the inductive approach because I believe it allows the data from the students to speak for itself and ensure that I am not influencing or dampening their voices. I also recognize the value of the deductive method to test pre-existing notions and theories regarding the subjects and/or the data (Roulston, 2010). Of particular interest to me was

the potential interconnection between the data sets of continuing second-year students and those who did not persist beyond year one (Maxwell & Miller, 2008).

My goal for the data analysis was to determine which resources were utilized by the interviewees during their first year of college that helped them persist into their second year. In addition, I was looking for any similarities in experience that might help inform why these students successfully navigated their first year of college while more than 20% of their social group cohort did not. Initially, I was determined to personally transcribe the interview recordings because I felt as though I needed to immerse myself in the data from the 11 students by listening to their stories again while I transcribed. However, time constraints forced me to use a transcription service instead. I compensated for this change in plan by listening to the recordings as I reviewed the transcriptions. This allowed me to listen for inflection and/or emotion that was not as evident from the transcribed words. As I progressed through the first cycle of coding, I leaned heavily on descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2015) or a summation of the responses within the interview. I found myself decoding the responses with my first impression of the data. As a result, I encountered an overwhelming number of independent emergent codes.

However, as I completed a second review of the data, I began to see patterns that connected to my literature. I began to move toward encoding the data to assign a label that seemed to clarify the responses. In completing this step, I became concerned about my positionality, particularly with my personal connection to the subjects. Therefore, I allowed myself a third pass at the data and used a deductive process; a priori method to see whether my initial codes were essentially a variety of words that ultimately tied back to prominent themes from my literature (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). In the end, the deductive process helped me discover patterns within the data that resonated strongly with the primary themes that have emerged from my literature. Moreover, by connecting back to my literature, I was able to see oppositional data, which may actually assist in

validating the themes within the literature. The main oppositional points include (a) the contrasting nature of a rigid structure in high school and an independent environment in college, and (b) a fear of failure and disappointing family as a motivation for success.

Positionality

In over 20 years of working in higher education, I have often encountered good students who are unsuccessful in persisting beyond their first year of education. In speaking with many of them, I learned that a predominant characteristic was that they were first-generation college students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Upon further study, I learned that unlike their peers who had the social capital of previous generations who attended college, these first-generation students did not have easy access to support systems and basic information to help them navigate the bureaucracy of college selection and applications.

As a researcher, I am aware that my educational background as a first-generation Latinx student is part of my positionality and could influence my research, particularly since I work at the site that will be providing the majority of my data. In addition, as a middle-aged, Latinx male, I am aware of the cultural implications that could influence interview responses if they are not addressed at the start of each interview. Although respect for elders, within the Latinx community, had a potential for unintended influences, I kept a close eye on my past experience with this topic and ensured that it did not influence my interpretation of the data. I also informed each interviewee of my positionality at the start of each interview and made a concerted effort to put them at ease to ensure genuine responses. I reminded them of their anonymity within the context of the study.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Interviewees were selected with the intention of incorporating as broad
of a range of criterion as possible in order to better extrapolate findings to a more
generalized perspective. In addition, I incorporated data from other sources to create data
triangulation and refrain from relying solely on the assertions made within the interview
setting (Seale, 1999). In addition, I utilized a semi-structured, open-ended interview
technique to allow me to engage the interviewees by creating more of a conversational
tone as opposed to a static and sterile protocol. I predetermined the interview questions to
minimize any inherent bias that might result based on my positionality and the interview
format (Roulston, 2010).

However, I am fully aware that such a small sample size cannot easily be
generalized to represent the larger population of students who fall within this social
cohort. Time constraints and difficulty engaging non-matriculated interviewees prevented
me from increasing the number of interviews. Additionally, although an interviewer
can be seen as an intrusive force that can bias the process in a variety of ways including
how questions are asked (i.e., tone and speed; Roulston, 2010), my goal remained to
minimize this notion by allowing subjects to select the interview setting and to focus on
the predetermined questions.

Conclusion

More than 40% of the students who do not persist during the first two years
of college at CSUEB self-identify as Latinx. Of this group, many of them are first-
generation. Considering the projected growth of the Latinx population nationwide, there
is a need to rectify the current educational patterns to ensure a reversal of these trends.
As a recently named Hispanic Service Institution, these retention numbers at CSUEB
are even more jarring given that 30% of the overall student population is Latinx and that

number rises annually. Without a plan of action to reverse this trend, this social group remains unable to break the systemic cycle that perpetuates the lack of upward mobility afforded by a college degree. Although retention issues with first-generation students during their primary years in college are well established in the literature, further research is needed to illuminate best practices for eliminating the academic and opportunity gaps inherent with the current educational model.

The purpose of this study was to identify the resources that first-generation Latinx students are accessing during their first two years of college that are helping them persist. In doing so, I aimed to bring a focus on continuing and expanding those resources while simultaneously illuminating the concerns for the students who did not persist in order to correct and address those concerns. It is important to not only understand the successes experienced by members of the cohort but also the challenges. By embarking on research focused on both the reduction of barriers and the identification of accessible opportunities, a model for best practices within the educational pipeline for the Latinx community at CSUEB and other educational institutions can be formed.

Based on the research findings, I was able to identify specific strategies and resources for successful persistence during the first two years of college that can be incorporated into institutional practice for future years. By identifying the factors that are contributing to the persistence rate of the CSUEB first-generation Latinx students in their first years of college, I aimed to expand access to and knowledge of those factors for Latinx youth; consequently, creating a positive impact on increasing persistence to graduation. As assessment data from the proposed recommendations becomes available, it will allow for continuous opportunities to reflect on the work being done and make changes as needed. Eventually, the goal of moving the needle forward and increasing the historically low success rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education will be realized.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF FINDINGS

Overview

This interview study analyzed the educational pathways of first-generation Latinx students with a particular focus on the primary resources accessed by these students that help them persist beyond the first year of college. First-generation Latinx students from the 2016 fall cohort of full-time, matriculated, first-year students were interviewed. A total of 11 students comprised the interview study: seven in their second year of college and four who did not persist beyond their first year at CSUEB. The objective of the analysis was to unearth the primary resources that were utilized by the students who successfully persisted beyond their first year of college and determine whether these resources were missing for those students who did not return for their second year. Additionally, the analysis encompassed an exploration of what impact, if any, first-generation status and pre-college curriculum had on persistence during the first year of college. Finally, the concept of community cultural wealth and its role on educational tenacity was examined.

In this chapter, analytic findings are presented to answer the research questions that were introduced in Chapter 1. The research questions that were incorporated into my interview protocol are as follows.

1. What are the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of college?

2. Which of these resources, if any, is lacking for students from the same social group who did not persist beyond year one?

3. How did the students' K-12 educational curriculum impact their persistence in college?

4. How did the students' first-generation status impact their educational opportunities?

5. What versions of community cultural wealth have the students knowingly or unknowingly leveraged throughout their educational curriculum?

The Findings

The three overarching themes which emerged from analyzing the 11 interviews corresponded to the literature by highlighting the importance of (a) pre-college preparation (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015; Lopez, 2013), (b) social capital (Adams et al., 2013), and (c) support services provided during transitional periods (Hunter, 2010; Schaller, 2005), particularly for first-generation Latinx students. A fourth supporting theme surfaced in relation to how these subjects tap into their community cultural wealth; oftentimes, without even realizing it. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality for the interviewees. For each theme, the findings are presented from two viewpoints. First, I present the theme from the perspective of the students who successfully persisted through their first year of college. I then follow with the perspective of the students who did not return after their first year of college.

Theme 1: Institutional Resources

   Academic enrichment programs in K-12. Among the seven interviewees who persisted into their second year of college, references were made by each of them regarding intentional supplementary support within the K-12 educational system that better prepared them for success in higher education. As mentioned in the literature, students of color require reinforced pre-college preparation to offset low retention rates in higher education settings (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Everett, 2015; Lopez, 2013). The following quotes demonstrate the importance of a supportive K-12 program that provides a strong foundation for preparing students for college.

   I would talk to my academic enrichment teacher during my senior year because that class was about completing the college application process and applying for scholarships. It was basically like a support class or service that we had on campus. He was very knowledgeable about everything we needed to know for college and stuff that we wanted to do after high school. (Interviewee 11, Stu, personal communication, January 27, 2018)

   There was a teacher at my school and it was like her job to remind us of college deadlines. I'm not sure what the title of her job was, but she worked in the library. She had her own office and everything. She was really good at what she did, and she told us when the deadlines were. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Stu accentuates the amount of broad personal support he received from the academic enrichment program at his high school. Gloria highlights that the underlying importance of academic enrichment programs is not connected to program or position titles, but rather, the additional guidance provided to students. All seven interviewees were part of an academic enrichment program at their high school with the majority of them enrolled

in an AVID program. As mentioned before, the AVID model utilizes a cohort model to emphasize an expanded network of support while also providing the practical experience of dealing with bureaucratic processes found within higher education (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The extra layer of support is enhanced within the cohort model, which essentially creates a built-in support network among the participants that they can then carry into higher education (Lopez, 2013).

On the other hand, only two of the four subjects who stepped out after their first year had access to an academic enrichment program at their high school. Additionally, the two enrichment programs that were mentioned seemed to have a broader focus than preparing students for college. Chuck (Interviewee 5) participated in a program named the Community Multimedia Academy (CMMA) and Jenny (Interviewee 4) was involved with a program called BUILD which she shared "is a business and entrepreneurship program, but they also help you with college" (personal communication, March 24, 2018). Additionally, Chuck stated, "CMMA was a multimedia thing, but they also helped us for college especially with FAFSA and writing our personal statement" (personal communication, February 2, 2018). Although both programs appear to be K-12 enrichment programs, neither program has a singular focus of using a cohort model to create a support system while addressing higher education bureaucracy (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The remaining two interviewees who did not persist after their first year of college did not have access to any academic support and/or college preparatory program in their high school.

Academic rigor in K-12. Although California State University East Bay (CSUEB) is one of the most ethnically diverse college campuses in the nation, the ethnic make-up of students enrolled in English and mathematic remedial courses mirrors a national trend at universities with a high percentage of students of color (Attewell et al., 2006). In particular, there is a high percentage of incoming first-year Latinx students

who are required to enroll in at least one remedial course. In reviewing the data for the incoming fall 2014 first-time freshmen cohort at CSUEB (see Appendix D), a total of 1,407 students were admitted. Of that number, 602 (approximately 43%) self-identified as Mexican-American and/or Latinx. From this group, 345 (57%) were required to complete remedial math courses and 334 (55%) were required to complete remedial English courses (CSUEB, 2016). Compared to the national average of Latinx students enrolled in remedial courses, approximately 33% (Howell et al., 2010), these statistics indicate that there are obstacles in preparing Latinx students for higher education entry standards. As further proof of the benefits of a strong pre-college preparation, six of the seven interviewees in their second year of college indicated that they met the college entry requirements in mathematics and English which allowed them to bypass remedial courses and immediately begin completing coursework that would count toward their degrees.

> I didn't actually have to take any remedial classes. I went straight to English 1001 and other classes I needed to take for GE [General Education]. They told us that our high school, like the classes that we had to take and stuff, were like the curriculum closest to going into college. (Interviewee 10, Delia, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

Although there is more to academic rigor than solely preparing students to avoid remedial courses in college, the strong pre-college preparation completed by these students allowed them to avoid a common deterrent to persistence beyond the first year of college. The extra remedial courses required for many Latinx students only increases the amount of time these students must spend in college which often translates into additional thousands of dollars of debt (Attewell et al., 2006). The additional effort required to achieve a college degree while foregoing earned wages serves as discouragement for first-generation Latinx students (Bailey, 2009).

To that point, all four of the interviewees who did not persist beyond their first year of college were required to complete remedial courses in either English or mathematics or both. However, all four of them shared that the remedial course(s) that they completed was comparable to the work they completed in the equivalent high school subject.

> Our high school is a school that prepares us for college, so yeah, we had Senior Thesis, and we had a 20-page research paper to do about a question and we had to present it. So yeah, the remedial English class was about the same. (Interviewee 1, Alan, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

Ysa (Interviewee 2) also shared the following, "But I'm not really good at math, but that [remedial] math class was really…it was pretty easy. It was the placement test that was hard. I just guessed at all the math questions" (Interviewee 2, Ysa, personal communication, January 27, 2018). The literature demonstrates that the national average of Latinx students in remedial courses is 33% (Howell et al., 2010). Although my sample size of 11 students is comparably small; five of the 11 students (or 45%) were enrolled in remedial courses during their first year and four of them did not persist beyond that first year. In addition, two of the students who were required to enroll in remedial courses specifically shared that the remedial curriculum was equal to, if not easier, than the equivalent high school curriculum. This data will warrant a more thorough review in Chapter 5 to better understand what criteria is being used to determine which students require remedial coursework.

Learning clusters and block enrollment at CSUEB. Each interviewee had a strong opinion regarding the freshmen learning cluster program at CSUEB. Eight out of the 11 students recognized the value of the program.

> I actually really liked my GS class. My professor and my peer mentor were very supportive. I did hear from other students who didn't really connect, or their class would get cancelled a lot, but I feel like I had a lot of support and I met people through GS that I still talk to. I feel like they gave us a lot of information and they were very open. (Interviewee 9, Angie, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

The other six students who persisted to year two also recognized the value of the learning cluster program; however, they also expressed some challenges that they had to overcome with program logistics. For the most part, the consensus was that selecting a cluster prior to entering college is a daunting task, particularly for students who lack prior experience with college as a whole.

> I think it was kind of confusing. Everyone was telling you all these things in workshops and stuff, and it's a lot being thrown at you. I was already stressing out about school and stuff. Some people believe they know what they want to do, but I do think it is a little too early. I feel like maybe we should be given like a year and then declare. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

> I actually learned about that [learning clusters] at orientation and I don't remember if it was based on...I mean it has to be based on your major. But at that point, I didn't even know specifically what option of biology I was going to take. So, the decision to rush into my cluster at orientation, I think, was difficult for

me because it felt like a big decision but yet, I wasn't really prepared to make it.

(Interviewee 5, Chuck, personal communication, February 2, 2018)

All three students acknowledge the value of the learning cluster program; however, the final two students believe first-generation students might need more time before making monumental decisions that will impact the rest of their academic pathway. Ironically, overlooking the lack of prior experiences that impacts first-generation Latinx students in matters such as these, negates the concept of equal access that the learning cluster program seems to champion (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lopez, 2013).

Contrastingly, three of the four disqualified students shared their concerns with the learning cluster program including the block enrollment process and how it negatively impacted their first year of college.

I got put in a cluster that wasn't in my top five or not even in my top fifteen that I selected. I took an astronomy class, an engineering class, while other people are taking sociology, psychology going towards my major. When I tried to speak to [program coordinator], I was told that I couldn't change anything because it was too late. No matter that I was running from Meiklejohn to Robinson and only had 10 minutes. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

My schedule was hard. I had like a 3-hour break between classes. I couldn't really work like I needed to because I was riding with my sister to school. So, I ended up missing class to work. I kept hearing that lots of people do it, but then I just lost motivation and it was easier just to work. (Interviewee 2, Ysa, personal communication, January 27, 2018)

Recognizing the growing number of first-generation Latinx students who are enrolling at CSUEB and the impact of committing to an educational direction prior to ever experiencing higher education needs further consideration. Leveraging the life experience

that they bring with them might help to bridge this gap (González et al., 2006; Knight-Manuel et al., 2016.

  Transitional support programs in higher education. Acknowledging that there is a marked difference between high school and college environments is a first step in recognizing that first-generation Latinx students require additional support to successfully navigate the transition. As a form of addressing the potential detriment to students, higher education typically offers academic programs and services to incoming students to ease the transition. Case in point, all seven of the interviewees in their second year were members of the Sophomore Transitional Enrichment Program (STEP). In response to prior research, students navigating their sophomore year of college are provided with intrusive advising, academic skills workshops and designated peer academic coaches within the STEP model to ensure that they are not overlooked in the transition from their first to second year of college (Hunter, 2010; Schaller, 2005). All seven of the students acknowledged the value of STEP regarding their continued persistence in college.

> In the STEP program, we are assigned peer mentors and mine is someone I knew
> from Orientation Team so I could easily connect with her and easily talk to her
> about stuff and she could refer me to other people within the STEP program who
> could help me in whatever I need. (Interviewee 11, Stu, personal communication,
> January 27, 2018)

However, in order to access STEP, these students had to successfully navigate the first year of college. Institutions of higher education are not excused from addressing the challenges encountered by many first-generation Latinx students during their first year of college (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Lopez, 2013). Many of these challenges are encountered outside of the classroom. In addition to STEP, several other CSUEB academic support programs were accessed by the seven interviewees, including the

Academic Advising and Career Education (AACE) department, the Student Center for

Academic Achievement (SCAA), and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

Conversely, although all four of the academically disqualified interviewees

acknowledged awareness of the same academic support programs, they all expressed

various reasons for not utilizing them. The reasons ranged from time constraints to lack

of effort; however, each one of them disclosed that if they could redo their first year of

college, they would make more of an effort to utilize these resources.

> I got into EOP, but I didn't know how EOP could help me, so I never really
>
> went. Mind you, I have an EOP mentor that I talked to like every two weeks,
>
> but I never went to the EOP office and asked. So, I didn't really know…like
>
> when I went to see her after I was disqualified, she told me that if I had come to
>
> her before, I probably wouldn't be disqualified. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal
>
> communication, March 24, 2018)

Consequently, intentional support systems for the specific needs of first-generation Latinx

students are required to ensure academic success; however, promoting the benefits of

each support program might need to be amplified. These students do not know what they

do not know and the institution must do its part in assisting the diverse population that

they often promote to their advantage. True access addresses the needs of the student and

their support systems prior to entering college and continues through their college careers

(White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

Theme 2: Social and Interpersonal Resources

Cohort models. The cohort model emphasized within programs like AVID ties

closely to the second theme that emerged from the interviews. The concept of working

together on college paperwork (admission, financial aid) bridges the concepts of pre-

college preparation and social capital (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). The ability for a person to draw upon resources from within a personal network of support denotes the access to capital in some form. Various forms of capital provide a distinct advantage to those who are part of the "norm" or a comparable disadvantage to those outside of the norm (Adams et al., 2013).

> So being in AVID, we did all of the college paperwork in class. We did the FAFSA and they helped us go through it and everything. Sometimes, when we didn't know how to do something, we would call each other and help each other. Our AVID teacher told us that we should never be afraid to ask for help. (Interviewee 9, Vicky, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Five of the seven interviewees in their second year of college referenced utilizing cohort models within student clubs, their dormitory, and fraternities/sororities. Expanding the cohort model learned in high school increased their network of support.

> I haven't really utilized tutoring services on campus. Normally, we have someone who is good at a subject during study hours for our fraternity so we kind of help each other out. Like, I will help them with math and they will help me out with English and anything I need help with. (Interviewee 8, Tony, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

Both students highlight the advantage of an expanded network of support particularly outside of the classroom. In particular, first-generation Latinx students benefit from the additional support available to them from their peers as it helps to bridge the gap of social capital regarding available resources in college (Conley, 2010; Lopez, 2013).

Despite the additional support, this did not translate to persistence in college

for the four disqualified interviewees, though each of them did participate in a learning

cluster which provided a cohort model.

> Yeah, having the same group of students with you all day was like high school.
> But it also kind of helped because if I wasn't able to attend a class then I would
> get notes from someone else. (Interviewee 3, Julie, personal communication,
> February 12, 2018)

Although this student was disqualified at the end of her first year, the cohort model

did not seem to have contributed as a primary reason. In fact, unlike most of the other

resources accessed by the students who persisted, the cohort model was not a missing

resource for the students who were disqualified. The interview data seems to indicate

that the cohort model is a strong resource; however, its presence is not able to offset the

absence of other critical resources required for persistence.

An adult mentor in college. Connecting peers via a cohort model helps to expand

a network of support that is a critical factor for first-generation Latinx students (Amaro-

Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Moreover, the literature speaks to the importance

of a sense of belonging and worth (Schlossberg, 1989; Sinek, 2014). A student's sense

of connection to their campus community can often impact persistence rates (Schaller,

2005). All of the seven second-year students spoke about at least one person on campus

with whom they felt comfortable enough to ask for guidance. Most of the persons

identified were staff members within one of the university support programs including

STEP, EOP, and Student Housing. Faculty members were also identified.

> What I like about STEP is that they inform you of things that I wasn't aware
> of. They informed me about many things. I like that [STEP counselor] is like a
> mentor, someone to watch over you. It's like being in a sorority or fraternity. It's

someone to look after us. We don't have like a big brother or big sister so that's where a mentor comes in handy. (Interviewee 7, Vicky, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Well, I think that one thing that I didn't touch on that kind of helped me succeed was living on campus. Having a [Residence Life Coordinator] help me find stuff, especially where my classes would be during that first week of classes. I was nervous already but he pointed things out on the map and then he walked with me to make sure I knew exactly where to go because my first class was really early. (Interviewee 8, Tony, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

Creating a sense of belonging can manifest in a variety of ways and ultimately knowing that they have an authority figure who cares enough to watch out for them becomes a comforting experience for first-generation Latinx students that translates into social currency, which can positively contribute to higher persistence rates (González et al., 2006).

On the other hand, negative interactions with authority figures seemed to detract from the academic experience for three of the four disqualified students who specifically mentioned barriers encountered with General Education.

Having one person in charge of all freshmen is horrible. First they lost my transcript that I sent in the summer. I kept calling to see what was going on, but I never heard anything and then my fall classes showed up so I thought I was okay. Little did I know it was gonna catch up to me in the winter quarter when she put me in a communications class that I had already taken at Alameda. Getting an appointment to see her was terrible. I had to wait five and a half hours and finally I had to leave to get to work. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

>But I didn't have support about what I should do or what classes I should be taking. It was kind of hard to go to the counselor on campus and just work around the schedule that they have their office hours and the availability that I have with work. So I ended up getting lost. (Interviewee 3, Julie, personal communication, February 12, 2018)

As first-generation Latinx students, these students are already navigating unchartered waters and may require additional and different types of assistance than their White counterparts. Meeting these students where they are as opposed to expecting them to have knowledge that they inherently lack due to their first-generation status is an insurmountable barrier (McNair, Albertine, Cooper, McDonald, & Major, 2016).

Peer mentors. As a complement to having an adult authority figure as a mentor in college, prior research has identified the strong positive impact of utilizing peers to augment academic support in a non-threatening manner (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). Several CSUEB programs were cited in the interview study as employing a peer mentor model including General Education (peer mentors), EOP (peer mentors), Student Housing (resident assistants), and STEP (academic coaches). The students in their second year spoke at length about the benefits of the STEP academic coaches.

>And then the STEP program, as well. I meet with the science tutor every week and we do homework. She helps me with my…what are they called…reviews for tests…study guides. She helps me do that because she took the exact same teacher that I have right now. She got a good grade and she's good at it. She helps me and that's how I'm staying on track. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

A few of them also mentioned the benefit of having a peer mentor during their first year. The learning cluster format coupled with a peer mentor also provided co-curricular support.

> Our peer mentor really encouraged us to find a connection to campus during our first year. She said that in her first year, she didn't feel as connected and started to feel a little sad until she started attending events and started to feel more connected. Like for me, I used to only stay here for classes and then leave for home, but now I got to a play, a fair and just try to stay more connected. (Interviewee 9, Angie, personal communication, January 24, 2018)

The peer mentor reinforced the idea that being connected and engaged in campus positively impacts the persistence rates (Hunter, 2010; Schaller, 2005).

However, it appears that not all learning clusters employ a peer mentor. Three of the four disqualified students mentioned that they did not have a peer mentor as part of their learning cluster. The fourth student never felt connected with his peer mentor. Ultimately, all four of them missed out on utilizing a resource that was beneficial to the seven students who persisted.

> No, there weren't any peer mentors in mine [learning cluster]. I heard from other people that they had a peer mentor assigned to their class, but I didn't. Only some people from EOP. I think they did that on purpose or something. (Interviewee 2, Ysa, personal communication, January 27, 2018)

I have not been able to ascertain why some learning clusters might not have peer mentors; however, it is clear to see a discrepancy between the experience of students who do have access to a peer mentor and those who do not.

Exposure to college expectations. The literature references an additional need to expose first-generation students to non-academic curriculum found in college in order to reduce the transition anxiety that can be experienced between high school and college (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Early connections to higher education can be instrumental in expanding the comfort zone for first-generation students and the idea of attending college. Only two of the seven second-year students mentioned an intentional exposure to academic jargon in high school; however, all seven spoke about transferrable skills they learned in high school that helped them with their first year of college including time management, study skills, and asking others for help.

> Thanks to my AVID class, I now know how to seek help. I think that's why I'm also really comfortable to communicate with people because I'm so used to learning how to adapt and why I reach out to professors and ask them for help because that's what they're for. (Interviewee 7, Vicky, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Being able to ask for assistance is a valuable skill to bring to college; however, it can be intimidating for first-generation students who have not learned this skill.

Unfortunately, all four of the interviewees who did not persist beyond their first year of college mentioned a struggle with learning how to deal with challenges that arose for them from the beginning of their college experience.

> I was kind of lost just because I'm the first one in my family to come to college so I didn't really have anybody around me to ask about deadlines and getting things done. And I didn't really have any support to like encourage me as well. (Interviewee 3, Julie, personal communication, February 12, 2018)
>
> Well, yeah, I didn't know that it was going to be really different with the teachers because in my high school, they would work one-on-one with us every

single class. Now this is all our responsibility to do everything by ourselves.
(Interviewee 1, Alan, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

It [college] kind of reminded me of how high school was. It was more like
you're more independent and you meet more people and it's like, I don't know,
I feel like it's like you're more grown up. Where in high school it's like you're
more closed in. I don't know how to explain it, but it's like you're not really
independent. (Interviewee 2, Ysa, personal communication, January 27, 2018)

A lack of understanding the need to shift from the rigid structure of high school to the
independence of college exposes the lack of social capital for first-generation Latinx
students (Adams et al., 2013). Without any connection to the college experience in
their personal support network, these students often struggle to navigate obstacles
encountered when transitioning between high school and college from the simple tasks
(setting an alarm for early classes, study skills, time management) to the more complex
concepts (approaching faculty for assistance with coursework, remaining connected to
family while prioritizing time for college expectations). In other words, the high school
environment seems to facilitate an environment that wraps its arms around a student
and guides them through an entire day of school, which is very different from the
independence required to navigate college.

Theme 3: Internal Resources

The imposter syndrome. Once first-generation Latinx students arrive on campus,
the institution must be able to offer support and connect the student to the community
(Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Additional literature addresses the effects of
campus racial climate on Latinx college students' sense of belonging and whether it
impacts why students leave college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). In
addition, the authors offer insight into how the students' cultural home lives impact this

sense of belonging. This irrational and unfounded idea of not being good enough for college impacted students from both groups equally. However, the students who persisted figured out how to overcome the feelings of inadequacy at a quicker pace.

> I think when I first came into college, I was really scared. I thought that I wasn't going to be able to pass any of my classes. I knew I would put in the amount of effort that I had to, but I was just scared that it was going to be a completely different level of education. And so, I guess I'm really surprised that I've made it this far. And now, I know that I can continue on my path for me. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

> I knew nothing about college. College was nothing. Nobody mentioned it, nobody in the neighborhood goes there. It was kind of taboo to even speak of college. Like you wouldn't talk about owning a yacht. You know? And I think that impacted my self-image, self-insecurities. Thinking that sometimes I'm not enough, because in high school I really suffered with that. So in college is when I learned that I am capable of doing things. (Interviewee 7, Vicky, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Both students successfully faced their inner insecurities about college for the time being, but the imposter syndrome is a consistent threat to this population throughout their educational career so consistent reinforcement is a strategy to help these students combat these feelings (Stebleton & Soria, 2013).

Similarly, the disqualified students mentioned their struggle with fitting in at college. The feeling of constant alienation contributed to their departure. The inability for these students to connect to the college environment leaves them vulnerable to feelings of isolation (Lopez, 2013).

I'm just working. And I'm trying to figure out what I wanna do. I just didn't

feel like I was meant to be here [CSUEB]. It's not that I don't like school, it was

just that I didn't belong here, if that makes sense. (Interviewee 2, Ysa, personal

communication, January 27, 2018)

It is fair to say that college is not for everyone, but the decision to remain in college

should at least be based on an even playing field. One's culture or knowledge base

should not play a critical role in determining one's suitability for college. Students must

understand that no matter their background, they are deserving of a college education and

they must be encouraged to not fall into the traps of what are dominant and subordinate

roles in education beyond high school (Bourdieu, 2011). Additionally, an understanding

of the out-of-classroom culture, such as student development, campus engagement,

and campus resources available to all students, is necessary for increasing a sense of

belonging (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

The role of family support. The challenge of not being part of the "norm"

materializes in very real ways for first-generation students of color (Adams et al., 2013).

As the first in their family to attend college, they do not have access to resources afforded

to second-, third-, or fourth-generation students. Without access to traditional intrinsic

support systems related to higher education, first-generation Latinx students face a less

informed path to college from the onset. However, although their families do not have

prior experience with college to assist them, they do provide motivation in other forms.

I didn't drop out when times got tough because I wanted to try. I see my mom

work. It makes me sad. So I want to work, got to college, and get her the house

she wanted or just get her out from working. (Interviewee 5, Chuck, personal

communication, February 2, 2018)

My parents are a really good support system. They text me every day.

They call me all the time. They know that…they miss me. They make me feel

loved and stuff. And I feel like my nieces and nephews…I feel like they're my

motivation. I have to do good to encourage them. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal

communication, February 3, 2018)

Although neither student received prior knowledge about college from their family

members, the encouragement they do provide to work hard and succeed proves to have its

own value and serves as incentive to continue their educational journey. The knowledge

that their educational success will be a source of pride as well as an example of success

within their community network—elders and youth—becomes a stimulus for educational

persistence (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006).

Despite being disqualified in their first year of college, the four interviewees also

vocalized the importance of having the support of their family and the desire to be a role

model for the younger family members. The motivation to return to higher education was

present for all four students.

My motivation right now is just my brother and sister honestly. They're my

biggest motivation. Growing up my family always said that being the oldest, I

would need to set the example for leading everyone out of our situation. Low

income, Mexican family barely getting through, you know? Seeing my sister now,

she's struggling with school, so my thing is like, I need to show you even if you

struggle, you have to keep going. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal communication,

March 24, 2018)

I would say it [motivation] comes from seeing my parents and how they

struggled with work and everything and just try to do better. I do want to go back,

but I have to pay tuition from last year. But as soon as I get it paid, I want to find

out more information about how can I get back enrolled and what I can do. But yeah, I definitely want to go back. (Interviewee 3, Julie, personal communication, February 12, 2018)

Their status of being academically disqualified did not prevent either student from planning a return to college. Each of them was inspired by the circumstances of their respective family and the possibilities of improving their circumstances via a college education (Bailey, 2009).

Relating to family expectations, there was some overlap between both sets of interviewees regarding the idea that as much of a resource that family can be, it can also be a distraction due to cultural expectations. Members from both groups of students experienced a pull from family to continue to meet family obligations regardless of whether it may be a detriment to academics.

When you stay local for college, it is really hard to get the full college experience because you can't dedicate so much time to college-related activities because your family members will start to question why you're gone from the house for so long. For example, I would show up for a party and maybe a few minutes later someone would ask why they haven't seen me in so long and I want to say that I've been busy with school because it's hard. You are still expected to do so many things by your parents or just family members. (Interviewee 5, Chuck, personal communication, February 2, 2018)

In order to take care of my younger brother and sister, I fixed my schedule so that I could be home four days a week. So, basically what I would do is like, take classes and work Monday through Thursday and right after my last class, I could go home to be with my brother and sister. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

So, although the role of family was overwhelmingly expressed as a positive influence for first-generation Latinx students, there is room for reflection on whether cultural norms and expectations might need to shift in order to provide these students with the biggest advantages to attain academic success.

Perseverance and resilience. Regardless of not having direct access to prior knowledge of the college experience, first-generation Latinx students have access to multiple life experiences that can be transferable to the academic setting and contribute positively to the obstacles presented by higher education (González et al., 2006; Valenzuela, 1999).

> I notice a lot of my peers…they're really book smart. Really book smart, but not about life experience. It's funny to me and my friend. Like, she's a sophomore like me but she has credits like a junior and she's gonna be an honor student soon, but she is not life experienced. Because of what I went through growing up—five schools in four years—I think that is why I'm really comfortable and know how to adapt quick cause I spent my life trying to learn how to adapt quick. (Interviewee 7, Vicky, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

> I think it's just hard experiences that I went through. Back then [high school], it was really hard, and I was like how am I going to get through this, family problems, self-image issues. But now looking back, I know how to handle things. Sometimes, it's hard and it becomes overwhelming, but it's going to be okay. I'm going to get through it. (Interviewee 6, Gloria, personal communication, February 3, 2018)

Embracing their collective past experiences and using learned life lessons as an advantage is a way to expand the tool kit with which these students can persevere and succeed when the absence of the more traditional social capital is exposed (González et al., 2006; Yosso,

2006). The concept of *community cultural wealth* allows for a broadening of the inherent strength, which can be accessed when facing challenges during the first year of college (Yosso, 2006).

For the disqualified students, this community cultural wealth may not manifest early enough to ensure persistence; however, that does not mean it is not present. When facing the reality of disqualification, the wealth of prior life experience does materialize in an action-oriented manner. All four of the disqualified students stated that they have not given up on attaining a college degree; albeit, they recognize that they will have to expend more energy to ensure that their plans come to fruition.

> When I received the notice that I had been DQ'd that was my reality check. I immediately did some research to see which schools were still taking applications for spring [2017]. I found out that it was DeAnza and Foothill and I decided that DeAnza was my best option. I literally received my DQ and immediately started applying to community college so that I can come back to East Bay. (Interviewee 4, Jenny, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

> I was notified that I could take classes at Chabot and lift up my GPA and come back [to East Bay] next year. It's not what I wanted, but it's my only shot and I am not giving up. So yeah, that's what I'm gonna do. (Interviewee 1, Alan, personal communication, March 24, 2018)

Perseverance and resilience are two traits that can be learned and applied by first-generation Latinx students based on their upbringing. Neither characteristic is going to show up in a high school transcript which is why we must widen the definition of academic preparation to account for the non-traditional skill set available to this group (González et al., 2006; Knight-Manuel et al., 2016). The definition of college

preparation for first-generation Latinx students will need to be reimagined to include the competencies attained outside of the classroom (Lopez, 2013).

Summary

The abysmal retention rates at CSUEB of first-generation Latinx students during their first two years of college supported the need to study this phenomenon. Moreover, the literature highlighted that low retention rates for this social group was not an isolated situation to one college. Despite more than a decade passing since Yosso's (2006) seminal study that highlighted this educational issue, similar concerning retention rates continues to exist today. The findings from the data overlapped with the themes found within the literature.

The research questions that guided this study yielded three predominant themes that addressed the internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by first-generation Latinx students who persist through their first year of college. By expanding the interview study to include students from the same social group and the same incoming cohort, I was also able to examine which of these resources were not accessed or available to students who were disqualified after their first year of college. Many of the findings mirrored aspects of prior research and the resulting literature including (a) the importance of pre-college preparation, (b) the impact of social capital, and (c) the need for supplemental support during periods of major transition.

The early focus on being "college ready" seemed to help the subjects master the college entry requirements as six of the seven second-year students bypassed remedial courses thus avoiding one of the primary deterrents for persisting beyond year one of college (Howell et al., 2010). All four of the students who dropped out after year one were required to complete remedial courses. Moreover, each of the subjects who persisted through their first year of college participated in a K-12 academic enrichment program

that incorporated cohort models and emphasized the importance of preparing for college (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). On the other hand, only two of the four disqualified students were exposed to an academic enrichment program in high school. The discrepancy between the two groups of interviewees regarding college preparation was a telling sign.

Additional themes that emerged included the role that social capital (Adams et al., 2013) plays as a support mechanism for first-generation Latinx students. The interviewees expanded this theme by addressing how being engaged on campus created a reason to stay in college. Consequently, by being involved and feeling accepted generated a sense of belonging (Schlossberg, 1989). The interviewees also noted a need for support systems in higher education that can provide stability during a major transitional period. An emphasis on support outside of the classroom was noted by all four interviewees (Lopez, 2013).

In addition to answering the research questions, the findings recorded in this chapter will guide the discussion in the following chapter. Chapter 5 includes the conclusions drawn from the research findings and shares the implications and recommendations of those findings in regard to possible impact to theory, policy, and practice. Recommendations for future research and final thoughts are also included.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This chapter briefly restates the study's purpose before providing a synopsis of the research findings. These findings are then discussed broadly and followed by an examination of their implications on current and future policy and practice including recommendations based on analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with proposed future research.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose for this interview study was to explore and identify the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources that were accessed by first-generation Latinx students during their first two years at CSUEB that aided them in persisting through their first years in college. Simultaneously, I explored whether these same resources were missing for students from the same demographic cohort who did not persist past their first year of college with a goal of ascertaining why these same resources were inaccessible to them. The dismal retention rates for first-generation Latinx students during their first two years of college was the impetus for studying this phenomenon. Additionally, I intentionally chose to approach the study from a non-deficit perspective by examining positively impactful resources rather than common barriers encountered by first-generation Latinx students during their educational pathways.

A total of 11 first-generation Latinx students were interviewed. Seven of them were in their second year of college and four of them had not persisted beyond their first year. Despite the limitations of the sample size, the findings provide insight into the resources that are being utilized by the students who are successfully persisting through their first year of college and part of their second year. Furthermore, the findings also illuminate the shortfalls experienced by this demographic of students which often leads to non-retention status in higher education settings. Both sets of findings echo prior research and themes found within the literature. The findings were presented within an outline of three broad categories of resources, which corresponded to the primary research question, and include (a) internal resources; (b) social/interpersonal resources, and (c) institutional resources. The literature review provided a supportive framework through which the findings could be interpreted.

Discussion of the Findings

Although the interview findings provided the primary source of data for analysis, university data sets and reflective analytical memos from the interviews were also incorporated as part of the overall evaluation of the findings. The memos were written immediately after each interview to capture first impressions that were then compared to themes that emerged from the interview data (Saldaña, 2015). The university data sets were provided by CSUEB Institutional Research and the STEP program. The additional layers of information assisted in providing the structure in which the findings were reported.

Interpreting the findings became much clearer when I reverted back to answering my primary research question and focusing on the narrative of success rather than the typical narrative that focuses on barriers and obstacles. However, I will admit that as determined as I was to approach this research from an additive perspective, the

conventional and historical deficit models often utilized with first-generation Latinx students continued to cast a shadow on the resulting anecdotes from the interviews. I finally decided that the most authentic manner in which to share these students' stories was to present each perspective as it pertained to each of the three broader themes from the interviews.

Institutional Resources

Among the 11 students interviewed, I was struck by the idea that their propensity for educational success seemed to be connected to the decisions made early on in their education. Oftentimes, without the benefit of previous experience or well-informed family members (i.e., social capital), these students accessed educational resources in their K-12 settings almost by happenstance. Whether accessing academic enrichment programs or Advanced Placement courses, the students who were fortunate enough to connect to these resources fared better in higher education. By tapping into the benefits of each K-12 resource, these students learned how to work in cohorts and expand their support network. They also benefitted from being guided by informed adults through the college bureaucratic paperwork and processes, while also managing to avoid remedial coursework during their first year of college (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). On the other hand, the four students who did not persist beyond their first year did not access the same K-12 resources. The interview study did not delve deeply enough to ascertain what may have been the reason for the lack of access (not offered at their school, time constraints, etc.); however, the interview findings did highlight the discrepancy between the two groups. Additionally, it appears as if at least two of the students who ended up with remedial courses was a result of poor performance on the placement test. Since starting this interview study, the California State University system has announced some promising new changes that will expand the sources that are used

to determine the need for remedial coursework. I will discuss this further in the section pertaining to future research.

Regarding resources in higher education, the interviewees expressed mixed feelings about the cohort model and learning clusters utilized with incoming first-year students. Although the majority of the interviewees acknowledged the value of inheriting an immediate network of support in the form of a peer cohort group, the group consensus was that selecting a learning cluster before enrolling in any courses was a challenge for first-generation students with zero exposure to higher education settings. Even for those students who believed they had a good idea of what they wanted to declare as a major, the seemingly impossible process of changing clusters mid-year deterred them from even attempting it. Again, most of the group acknowledged the value of a supportive peer cohort with an assigned peer mentor; however, the lack of staff members in the General Education department was a common challenge among the group. Additionally, the block enrollment process during the first year of college proved to be a hardship, particularly for the students who did not persist, as it did not allow for flexibility for work and family commitments. The other institutional resources in higher education mentioned by the interviewees were less polarizing. Several resources were credited for contributing to persisting through the first years of college including the AACE, EOP, and Housing departments as well as SCAA and STEP. The primary concern verbalized regarding these other institutional resources was the lack of awareness of their existence and accessibility by the general student population.

Social and Interpersonal Resources

As mentioned in the preceding section, engaging students in a network of group support was embraced unanimously by the interviewed students. Whether they were exposed to the concept in high school or in college seemed to determine the total value

and use of the group support. The students who had an earlier exposure to the model seemed to embrace and utilize it more actively in college than those whose first contact with the model was in college. The idea of learning to break down barriers and ask for help appeared to be a learned behavior, and the more exposure first-generation Latinx students had with it, the more willing they seemed to tap into it in college, despite not knowing anyone in the learning cluster beforehand. Having the social know-how to access and expand their network of support translated into learned behavior and increased the *funds of knowledge* available to these students within the unfamiliar setting of higher education (González et al., 2006; Yosso, 2006). For example, the cohort model used in K-12 environments, like AVID, acknowledges the social environment of expanded families and bridges the concepts in a manner which values a cultural trait that is often overlooked in environments that are focused solely on academic performance. These transferrable, learned skills also aid in reducing stress and anxiety that can be associated with navigating a new world with which they have limited-to-no exposure (Lopez, 2013).

Expanding the support network was a key concept that was also mentioned by the students. The learning clusters provided peer mentors for most of the interviewees and having a slightly older student who has successfully navigated the first year of college resonated as a critical source for reducing some of the anxiety associated with the first year of college. In addition, these first-generation Latinx students also expressed a desire to have an adult associated with the college to whom they could speak with whenever they had a question or concern. Although I did not specifically gather any information to support this thought, I am curious to know whether the culture of respect for elders contributes to these students verbalizing the request to an adult authority figure who can provide guidance whenever needed. These mentor figures seemed to help establish a sense that these students belonged in higher education and reinforced their drive to succeed. Unfortunately, the opposite proved true for the larger part of the disqualified

students. The combination of negative interactions with authority figures without access to an adult mentor who might have been able to help them navigate, overcome, and/or reinterpret the interaction for positive impact seemed to derail the educational experience.

Internal Resources

The final theme centered on how first-generation Latinx students access their life experiences in higher education, often organically and without the specific intentional purpose of persisting in college (González et al., 2006; Yosso, 2006). In fact, the somewhat subconscious manifestation of these life experiences seem to be strongest when there is a fear of failure which could result in disappointing their family unit. Although fear may seem like an unhealthy motivation, when placed within the context of high hopes expressed by family members for improving their future opportunities, the angst seems to generate a level of strength and perseverance in the face of adversity. This proved to be a uniting theme among all 11 of the interviewed students and places a cultural value on educational success that goes beyond the potential monetary gains that accompany a college degree, although the financial benefit is a subset. Each one of the students had a chance to discuss what motivates them to succeed and from where they draw their strength. Unfailingly and unanimously, all 11 students alluded to their family in one way or another. That unwavering faith in the support from their family helped them overcome numerous obstacles (real and imagined) and continue to strive for success. Although this is rather evident with the students who are in their second year of college, I was even more aware of the level of resiliency demonstrated by the disqualified students. Each one of them already had concrete plans to continue their education at a community college and earn their educational degree. Three of them expressed intent to return to CSUEB and prove that they belonged.

Poetically ironic, many of the students also mentioned the distracting pull of family and its impact on their educational responsibilities. As first-generation Latinx students, the majority of their families were unaware of the commitment required to succeed. Family and cultural obligations remained in place despite the requirements of college. Most of the students were still required to help around the house and attend all family functions and gatherings if they lived at home. For those students who were not local, the pressure for them included an expectation to contribute to their family's financial stability, which often materialized in working one or two jobs to meet the obligation while also sustaining their college life. Understanding the cultural implications as a former first-generation Latinx undergraduate student, there appears to be a demonstrated need to bridge the gap in knowledge for the families of first-generation Latinx students so that there is a more informed knowledge base and understanding regarding cultural standards and traditional obligations. This observation, among others, is discussed in the following section.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Attaining an educational degree has been recognized as a gateway for improving socioeconomic status for some time (Bailey, 2009). The fact that the Latinx community is the largest growing social group in the United States, guiding more first-generation Latinx students successfully through the educational pipeline is critical in order to meet the future work demands of the country (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Based on the findings from the interview study, coupled with the analysis of the university data sets, there is a demonstrated need for CSUEB to take a more critical look at a few current and upcoming policies and practices in order to reverse the high non-retention rates for first-generation Latinx students during their first two years of college. This assessment of university policies and practices should be depersonalized in order to ensure an honest

and transparent review. As referenced in the literature, assessment should be a part of every organization's development plan in order to ensure continual improvement and growth while addressing emerging concerns or shifts in culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013). A review of this magnitude will require patience, tenacity, and strength of character given that many of the systemic policies and practices will have deep-rooted, historical origins. In addition, it will require CSUEB to address the asterisk of being the most diverse campus in the continental United States with one of the largest achievement gaps within the California State University system. Following are resulting recommendations from this interview study which address the need to critically examine CSUEB policies and practices including (a) how students are on-boarded for successful transition; (b) the number of support systems available to students during their first years of college; and (c) how to embrace a shift toward becoming a student-ready campus rather than expecting college-ready students. In addition, CSUEB must ensure a high level of transparency regarding the availability of support systems to first-year students, particularly first-generation Latinx students. Finally, although the disproportionate number of first-generation Latinx students requiring remediation courses speaks to a major concern, the new Executive Orders (EO 1100 and EO 1110) seem to address this need. However, I have included the topic as an area for future research.

Onboarding First-Year Students

Nationally recognized programs like AVID and GEAR UP should serve as models for increasing access for first-generation Latinx students via knowledge of and exposure to key processes associated with higher education within a cohort model. In essence, these programs utilize peer support networks to help demystify the concept of higher education and create opportunities for informed decisions regarding the reality of attending and persisting through college (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser,

2013). Creating opportunities to expose first-generation Latinx students to the realities of higher education while also preparing them for successful transitional years into higher education needs to be a priority in order to improve the current retention rates in higher education during the first two years of college (Lopez, 2013). Emphasizing the importance of providing a supportive cohort of peers is a key to the success of these K-12 programs. In an effort to meet the goal of increasing the historically low success rates for first-generation Latinx students in higher education, the following actions are recommended for onboarding students at CSUEB based on the interview study.

- Identify specific and collaborative program learning outcomes for new student orientation between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to ensure the traditional onboarding practice is maximized and will provide incoming first-generation Latinx students and their families with a clear understanding of the first year of college and the multiple expectations placed on students (time management, academic focus, study skills, student involvement, etc.) in order to persist through their college years.

- Critically assess the learning cluster model and the use of block scheduling with an understanding of the flexibility in schedule required by these students who often have to work one or two jobs to pay for their education as well as the lack of exposure to expectations of college curriculum and the possibility that they are not prepared to identify a major before setting foot on campus.

- Implement an intrusive mandatory advising requirement for all first-year students during their first eight weeks. As first-generation students, they do not know what they do not know and ensuring academic concerns are addressed early in their first year of college and by the appropriate authority figures will add a necessary layer of support.

Student Support Programs

Due to lack of social capital, first-generation Latinx students are less likely aware of the common pitfalls of the first years of college and the common support programs that are often in place to help offset those obstacles. In addition to increasing transparency and awareness of these available programs, creating new and/or expanding current support programs that can encompass the growing number of first-generation Latinx students at CSUEB is critical to improving the retention rates for this social demographic, particularly during the first years of being exposed to higher education (Lopez, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). To that point, the following actions are recommended for student support programs at CSUEB based on this interview study.

- Increase the staffing within the General Education (GE) department. Placing the heavy burden of our most vulnerable cohort of students in the hands of one staff member is not a sustainable model for first-generation Latinx students who lack the awareness of how to navigate concerns encountered with the curriculum in their first year of college. The lack of accessibility to GE advising was a common thread for the disqualified students interviewed. Additional resources devoted to this area would seem to yield the highest return of investment based on the interview findings. As a side note to this recommendation, some attention should also be devoted to finding out why learning clusters do not have a peer mentor given that research shows this strategy is a high impact practice for first-generation Latinx students (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013).

- Assign a campus community member (faculty or staff) to each incoming first-generation Latinx student to serve as an "adult" connection at college. The interviewed students in their second year all referenced an adult figure of

whom they could ask advice. Most of these adults are members of established

support programs (EOP, STEP, etc.); however, with the large incoming

cohort of first-years, additional campus community members will need to be

recruited to meet the needs of the ever-growing number for this social group.

A couple of current initiatives that are still in beta mode (Campus Connectors

and Take a Faculty to Lunch) might serve as a good model to meet this need.

- Expand the STEP model to first-year students to provide additional support

   to first-generation Latinx students. With its recent designation as an HSI and

   the growing number of incoming Latinx students, a similar model of intrusive

   support should be expanded to first-year students. All seven of the students

   in their second year were members of STEP and expounded on the real-time

   benefits of having professional staff members and peer members assisting

   them in successfully navigating their second year of college. Additional or

   redirected funding will be needed for this recommendation.

Cultural Shift

For many years, colleges have looked to attract college-ready students,

inadvertently placing the burden of improving success rates in higher education on

students. A new culture of leadership for student success explores new avenues of

advancing student learning while valuing the inherent assets that they bring to campus.

One of the main principles of this shift in culture is the idea that the burden of student

success in higher education truly lies with the college campuses (McNair et al., 2016).

In other words, this paradigm shift inverts the traditional narrative and embraces the

concept of a student-ready campus. A key concept of this model is that universities in

general must be ready to better support students through their educational journeys.

When this model is applied to first-generation Latinx students, the opportunities for

success are infinite. Rather than expecting these students, who lack exposure to college

environments, to arrive at college exhibiting traditionally recognized characteristics

of success, the college has proactively prepared to address the historical challenges

documented in previous educational research. The following actions are recommended

for becoming a student-ready campus and they present numerous intersections with the

previous recommendations. These recommended actions are based on this interview

study and the fact that I am a member of the campus community and aware of upcoming

opportunities.

- Increase student engagement during University Hour, which will be a part of
  the campus schedule beginning with the 2018 fall semester. This biweekly
  dedicated hour without any scheduled courses provides CSUEB with an
  opportunity to create intentional outreach to first-generation Latinx students
  and better connect them to the campus community. This will also present an
  opportunity to expand the onboarding process by offering targeted workshops
  (study skills, financial aid, time management, etc.) to address the concerns
  shared within the interview study.

- Utilize the move to semesters to conduct a more comprehensive check-in
  with first-generation Latinx students. This can be accomplished in multiple
  ways including utilizing the assigned campus community members to conduct
  informal check-in interactions during the first four, eight, and 12 weeks of
  the semester while intrusive advising occurs during the first eight weeks.
  Implementing multiple intersecting support strategies increases the web of
  support enveloping these students.

- Provide more on-campus work options to ensure these students can
  successfully navigate their academic schedules without having to compete
  with off-campus work expectations. These students are not afraid to work;

however, they need the campus to minimize scheduling conflicts while

maximizing availability of time for studying, seeking supplemental academic

support, or connecting to their peer group.

For all of these recommendations, as assessment data becomes available, it will allow for

continuous opportunities to reflect on the work being done and make changes as needed.

For the sake of this research study, the recommendations were made specifically for first-

generation Latinx students at CSUEB; however, most of them can easily be applied to

other underserved communities.

Implications for Future Research

As with most dissertations, this interview study provided a narrow scope with a

focus on first-generation Latinx students at CSUEB and the resources this group accessed

that helped them persist through their first two years of college. However, based on the

findings from the analysis, the majority of the data pertained solely to the first year of

college. My initial recommendation for future study would be to expand the interview

study to focus more intentionally on the second year of college. Additionally, I was

deliberate in placing the focus on resources utilized; however, it was difficult to refrain

from addressing barriers encountered. There is value in focusing on the barriers that are

negatively impacting a large section of first-generation Latinx students at CSUEB and

their ability to successfully navigate their first two years of college. Finally, two other

subthemes that emerged from the initial analysis that were of lesser significance for this

study, but warrant further study, is the importance of proximity to family and outdated

concepts of communication with students. For example, within Latinx communities, a

support network extends beyond immediate family into more of a communal cultural

wealth. A student who brings that mentality to higher education can expand their college

support network in a similar way. In referencing literature (González et al., 2006; Yosso,

2006) the notion that in the Latinx community, the ability to persevere through barriers provides a toughness that expands traditional views of resources and capital. For first- and second-generation Latinx students, this would include a sense of supportive networks outside of the "traditional" definition (including community members from where a student grew up) and a level of persistence due to the need to work hard for everything the student has. Two of the students who were not local mentioned a desire to have their family in closer proximity for support. However, it is possible that the distance from the familial support network illustrates the perseverance factor. Another common obstacle referenced by a few students was the lack of adequate communication from the university prior to and after arriving on campus. Additional time and research could be devoted to either or both barriers, particularly to see how they might have impacted the first-generation Latinx students who were not retained beyond their first year of college. Additional recommendations for future research include

- The impact of the proximity of family to a college student's successful transition to college.
- What are the most effective communication options for today's college generation?
- The impact on persistence rates from second to third year of college.
- The impact of converting to semester terms on continuing students.
- The impact of implementing CSU Executive Orders 1100 and 1110 which determine the need for remedial coursework for incoming first-year students.
- The perception of "hand-holding" students in K-12 and its negative impact on transitioning to the independence of college.

Conclusion

The reality of the growing Latinx population, particularly in California, creates an enhanced moral obligation for the California State University system to actively improve the retention and graduation rates for this group of students. The primary focus of this research was to shed light on the resources that are successfully utilized by first-generation Latinx students who persist during their first two years of college. Within the study, it was difficult to ignore the barriers that also impact this social group and the appalling retention rates during their first two years at CSUEB. If this university is truly open to moving beyond the celebration of having such a diverse student population and critically examining institutional policy, practice, and resource allocation in order to aid in closing the current opportunity gap of first-generation Latinx students, the findings from this interview study are meant to support those efforts.

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APPENDIX A

CSU SYSTEM-WIDE GRADUATION AND

PERSISTENCE REPORT FOR CSUEB

All Degree-Seeking First-Time Freshmen (CSRDE)

Subgroup : Hispanic (CSRDE)

FALL	HEAD-COUNT	AVERAGE SAT	RETENTION		CUMULATIVE GRADUATION AND CONTINUATION RATES					
			AFTER 1 YEAR	AFTER 2 YRS	WITHIN 4 YEARS		WITHIN 5 YEARS		WITHIN 6 YEARS	
					GRAD	CONT	GRAD	CONT	GRAD	CONT
2004	146	890	0.801	0.685	0.144	0.432	0.349	0.192	0.459	0.062
2005	126	908	0.786	0.611	0.135	0.317	0.254	0.159	0.333	0.079
2006	150	869	0.740	0.547	0.080	0.333	0.213	0.193	0.307	0.100
2007	209	882	0.670	0.502	0.072	0.340	0.239	0.129	0.306	0.072
2008	342	870	0.690	0.488	0.064	0.371	0.257	0.149	0.339	0.061
2009	427	892	0.712	0.567	0.119	0.398	0.297	0.190		
2010	350	884	0.720	0.620	0.123	0.414				
2011	421	885	0.720	0.608						
2012	601	898	0.742	0.656						
2013	598	890	0.808							

Subgroup : White (CSRDE)

FALL	HEAD-COUNT	AVERAGE SAT	RETENTION		CUMULATIVE GRADUATION AND CONTINUATION RATES					
			AFTER 1 YEAR	AFTER 2 YRS	WITHIN 4 YEARS		WITHIN 5 YEARS		WITHIN 6 YEARS	
					GRAD	CONT	GRAD	CONT	GRAD	CONT
2004	159	1040	0.836	0.635	0.157	0.352	0.358	0.107	0.409	0.038
2005	138	1058	0.790	0.638	0.196	0.297	0.370	0.101	0.442	0.029
2006	126	1009	0.698	0.579	0.214	0.317	0.389	0.143	0.468	0.063
2007	124	1004	0.685	0.565	0.153	0.282	0.282	0.137	0.411	0.040
2008	188	997	0.713	0.532	0.133	0.346	0.314	0.165	0.415	0.064
2009	187	1009	0.738	0.615	0.144	0.385	0.369	0.139		
2010	165	1020	0.721	0.570	0.152	0.358				
2011	136	1030	0.801	0.699						
2012	164	1012	0.793	0.683						
2013	135	997	0.800							

Based on Federal regulations requiring the educational institutions to change how it collects and reports data on race and ethnicity.

(See the Federal Register, Volume 72, Number 202, pp. 59266-59279: http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/pdf/E7-20613.pdf)

APPENDIX B

Student Interview Protocol – Second Year

First-Generation Latinx Students in their Second Year of Higher Education

Primary research questions:

1. What are the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of college?

2. Which of these resources, if any, is lacking for students from the same social group who did not persist beyond year one?

Secondary research questions:

1. How did the students' K-12 educational curriculum impact their persistence in college?

2. How did the students' first-generation status impact their educational opportunities?

3. What versions of community cultural wealth have the students knowingly or unknowingly leveraged throughout their educational curriculum?

Introduction

- Introduce myself and thank the interviewee again for agreeing to take the time to talk. I am very interested in learning more about you and your experiences in higher education thus far.

- How are you today?

- What time to do you need to conclude? I expect this will take approximately 45 minutes.

- Would you mind signing this release form? The interviews will remain confidential.

<u>Purpose of the Interview:</u>

- As I mentioned when I set up the interview, I am interested in learning about your experiences during your educational journey including your first year of college. In particular, I would like to know more about why you believe you successfully made it through your first year. I am especially interested to hear about any resources you accessed that made your first year easier to navigate. I am hopeful that the information you provide will assist me with research I am working on that could ultimately teach us (the University) how to better support first-generation Latinx students in their transition to college. As a student who is part of this demographic, I am interested in learning about what you think were some effective resources during your first year as well as some things that you would want to improve about the support we offer.

- Given your background, I am looking forward to learning about your experiences and perspectives.

- I'll be taking notes during this interview. I will also be recording the interview. I will transcribe the recording and if you'd like, provide it to you for review to ensure accuracy. I will be using a dialogue approach, so at times I may share my thinking with you as I listen to your responses. If at any point you have questions, please feel free to ask them.

- Finally, as is mentioned in the release form, you are welcome to remove yourself from this research at ANY time during the process even after the interview is complete.

- Are you ready to start?

Section I: Background Information

1. Let's start with you telling me…did you always know you were going to go to college? How old were you when you first realized it was something you wanted to do?

2. Why did you choose to attend Cal State East Bay?

3. What do you think of college so far? Is it what you expected it to be? If not, what is different from your original expectation?

4. What is your major and why did you choose it?
   If student has not chosen major: Is there a specific reason why you haven't chosen a major yet? Are you feeling any pressure to choose one?

5. Part of my research involves exploring the high dropout rate for Latinx students during the first year of college. Why do you think you were successful during your first year of college?

Section II: Social Capital and Deficit Models

1. Think back to your time in elementary, junior high and high school. Talk to me about your favorite teacher in high school. Who was it and why were they your favorite?

2. Do you have any memory of anyone ever telling you that you weren't "ready for college" or you weren't "college material"? If so, what was your response?

3. Did anyone ever try to steer you toward something besides college (like a trade school, community college, work, etc.)? If so, what was your response?

4. Have you ever experienced any racial undertones at any point in your educational journey? If so, were you able to confront it?

5. Did you ever speak with any of the high school staff members (counselor, principal, teacher, etc.) about your plans for college? If so, what was their response? *If student responds that they did not speak with anyone, ask why they didn't.*

6. Similarly, in your senior year of high school, did you ever speak with anyone in your family about your plans for college? If so, what was their response? *If student responds that they did not speak with anyone, ask why they didn't. (Keep in mind they are first-generation and may not be comfortable "outing" their family).*

Section III: Social Capital and Access to Prior Knowledge/Information

1. Once you figured out that you were going to college, who helped you with all the paperwork and timelines (college application, financial aid information, etc.)?

2. In high school, did any of your friends have the inside scoop about college? Did it seem easier for some students than for you? Talk to me about that.

3. Earlier you mentioned speaking (*not speaking*) with your family about college. Was there anyone in your family who talked to you about what life would be like in college? For example, setting your alarm for early classes; visiting with your professor during office hours; not needing a pass to go to the restroom, etc. Did you struggle with any of these things?

4. If you did not learn these things from your family, who did you learn these things from or how did you figure them out?

Section IV: Pre-College Preparation

1. Think back to your final years in high school. Did anyone at school encourage you to take the SAT/ACT tests early in your sophomore/junior years or to begin applying for college scholarships?

2. How many Advanced Placement (AP) or dual credit courses were you encouraged to take in high school and who encouraged you to take them?

3. When you arrived at CSU East Bay, did you have to take any remedial courses in English or math? If so, which courses did you have to take? How did you feel when you learned you had to take these courses?

4. What do you remember about your first English and math classes at Cal State East Bay? How would you compare them to your high school English and math classes?

5. What about your first experiences with CSU East Bay—from the admissions process, to orientation, to arriving on campus? Do you feel as though you understood all of the "steps" to getting to college?

6. If you had to name at least three things that you struggled with during your first year of college, what would they be?

Section V: Support in College

1. As I mentioned at the start, we are aware that Latinx students struggle with the first year of college and we end up losing about half of the incoming Latinx students during the first year. Do you know anyone that fits that category from your first year? *If student responds affirmatively, follow up with—do you*

have any ideas about why that person/person(s) didn't make it through the first year?

2. Are you aware of any support services available to students in college? If so, can you tell me which services you personally looked into? *If student seems confused or asks for examples—For example, there is free tutoring; workshops on how to study; your professors have office hours for help outside the classroom; and even some services that are geared toward students with your background like EOP.* If you already know about these services, when, where and from whom did you learn about them?

3. Are there any support services in college that you have utilized or are currently utilizing? If not, what are the main 2 or 3 reasons that you haven't used them?

4. If you are using any of the support services, please tell me about your experience with them. Which ones have you found most helpful and why? How exactly have they helped you?

5. Two programs designed specifically for incoming first-year students are New Student Orientation and the Learning Clusters. Talk to me about what do you remember most about your experience with Orientation? Did you attend a 1 day or a 2-day session?

6. Now tell me what you remember about your learning cluster?

7. Can you pinpoint when you realized that you belonged in college?

8. If I gave you a magic wand and asked you to design the best way to support you during your first year of college, what would you design and what would that look like? In what areas would you want or need the most support?

9. At Cal State East Bay, who is included in your support network? How did they support you during your first year of college?

<u>Section VI: Community Cultural Wealth</u>

1. What about outside of college—who do you include as part of your support group? In what ways did they support you during your first year of college?

2. Do you have easy access to your family? If so, is it mainly through phone calls/texting or are there other ways that you are able to communicate/interact with them?

3. Is there any knowledge or wisdom from your experience growing up that you believe helps you persevere in college?

4. What do you think it means to your family that you are in college?

5. Did you have a job during your first year of college? How did that impact your first year of college?

6. As I mentioned before, we lose over half of the incoming Latinx students during the first year of college. It takes a lot of strength and *ganas* to make it through. Where would you say your strength comes from?

<u>Section VII: Conclusion</u>

1. Congratulations on your success in college! Before we end the interview, is there anything else you would like to add regarding anything we've discussed?

ENDING: I know the life of a college student can be very hectic, so I thank you for taking the time to speak with me!

APPENDIX C

Student Interview Protocol – Non-Retained Students

Non-Retained First-Generation Latinx Students after their First Year of Higher Education

Primary research questions:

1. What are the primary internal, social/interpersonal, and institutional resources utilized by CSUEB first-generation Latinx students who persist beyond their first year of college?

2. Which of these resources, if any, is lacking for students from the same social group who did not persist beyond year one?

Secondary research questions:

1. How did the students' K-12 educational curriculum impact their persistence in college?

2. How did the students' first-generation status impact their educational opportunities?

3. What versions of community cultural wealth have the students knowingly or unknowingly leveraged throughout their educational curriculum?

Introduction

- Introduce myself and thank the interviewee again for agreeing to take the time to talk. I am very interested in learning more about you and your experiences during your year at Cal State East Bay.

- How are you today?

- What time to do you need to conclude? I expect this will take approximately 45 minutes.

- Would you mind signing this release form? The interviews will remain confidential.

Purpose of the Interview:

- As I mentioned when I set up the interview, I am interested in learning about your experiences during your educational journey including your first year of college. In particular, I would like to know more about why you believe you didn't make it through your first year. I am especially interested to hear about any resources needed to make your first year easier. I am hopeful that the information you provide will assist me with research I am working on that could ultimately teach us (the University) how to better support first-generation Latinx students in their transition to college. As a student who is part of this demographic, I am interested in learning about what you think.

- Given your background, I am looking forward to learning about your experiences and perspectives.

- I'll be taking notes during this interview. I will also be recording the interview. I will transcribe the recording and if you'd like, provide it to you for review to ensure accuracy. I will be using a dialogue approach, so at times I may share my thinking with you as I listen to your responses. If at any point you have questions, please feel free to ask them.

- Finally, as is mentioned in the release form, you are welcome to remove yourself from this research at ANY time during the process even after the interview is complete.

- Are you ready to start?

Section I: Background Information

1. Let's start with you telling me…did you always know you were going to go to college? How old were you when you first realized it was something you wanted to do?

2. Why did you choose to attend Cal State East Bay?

3. Was college what you expected it to be? If not, what is different from your original expectation?

4. Part of my research involves exploring the high dropout rate for Latinx students during the first year of college. Sadly we lose over half of the Latinx students during their first year. Do you have any thoughts about why that might be?

Section II: Social Capital and Deficit Models

1. Think back to your time in elementary, junior high and high school. Talk to me about your favorite teacher in high school. Who was it and why were they your favorite?

2. Do you have any memory of anyone ever telling you that you weren't "ready for college" or you weren't "college material"? If so, what was your response?

3. Did anyone ever try to steer you toward something besides college (like a trade school, community college, work, etc.)? If so, what was your response?

4. Have you ever experienced any racial undertones at any point in your educational journey? If so, were you able to confront it?

5. Did you ever speak with any of the high school staff members (counselor, principal, teacher, etc.) about your plans for college? If so, what was their

response? *If student responds that they did not speak with anyone, ask why they didn't.*

6. Similarly, in your senior year of high school, did you ever speak with anyone in your family about your plans for college? If so, what was their response? *If student responds that they did not speak with anyone, ask why they didn't. (Keep in mind they are first-generation and may not be comfortable "outing" their family).*

Section III: Social Capital and Access to Prior Knowledge/Information

1. Once you figured out that you were going to college, who helped you with all the paperwork and timelines (college application, financial aid information, etc.)?

2. In high school, did any of your friends have the inside scoop about college? Did it seem easier for some students than for you? Talk to me about that.

3. Earlier you mentioned speaking (*not speaking*) with your family about college. Was there anyone in your family who talked to you about what life would be like in college? *For example, setting your alarm for early classes; visiting with your professor during office hours; not needing a pass to go to the restroom, etc.* Did you struggle with any of these things?

Section IV: Pre-College Preparation

1. Think back to your final years in high school. Did anyone at school encourage you to take the SAT/ACT tests early in your sophomore/junior years or to begin applying for college scholarships?

2. How many Advanced Placement (AP) or dual credit courses were you encouraged to take in high school and who encouraged you to take them?

3. When you arrived at CSU East Bay, did you have to take any remedial courses in English or math? If so, which courses did you have to take? How did you feel when you learned you had to take these courses?

4. What do you remember about your first English and math classes at Cal State East Bay? How would you compare them to your high school English and math classes?

5. What about your first experiences with CSU East Bay—from the admissions process, to orientation, to arriving on campus? Do you feel as though you understood all of the "steps" to getting to college?

6. If you had to name at least three things that you struggled with during your first year of college, what would they be?

Section V: Support in College

1. As I mentioned at the start, we are aware that Latinx students struggle with the first year of college and we hope to change that. Were you aware of any support services available to you during your first year? If so, can you tell me which services you personally looked into? *If student seems confused or asks for examples—For example, there is free tutoring; workshops on how to study; your professors have office hours for help outside the classroom; and even some services that are geared toward students with your background like EOP.* If you knew about these services, when, where and from whom did you learn about them?

2. Are there any support services in college that you utilized? If not, what are the main 2 or 3 reasons that you didn't use them?

3. If you used any of the support services, please tell me about your experience with them.

4. Two programs designed specifically for incoming first-year students are New Student Orientation and the Learning Clusters. Talk to me about what do you remember most about your experience with Orientation? Did you attend a 1 day or a 2-day session?

5. Now tell me what you remember about your learning cluster?

6. If I gave you a time machine that allowed you to redo your first year in college, what would you do differently, if anything? In what areas would you want or need the most support?

7. At Cal State East Bay, who was included in your support network? How did they support you during your first year of college?

Section VI: Community Cultural Wealth

1. What about outside of college—who do you include as part of your support group? In what ways did they support you during your first year of college?

2. Do you have easy access to your family? If so, is it mainly through phone calls/texting or are there other ways that you are able to communicate/interact with them?

3. Is there any knowledge or wisdom from your experience growing up that you believe helps you persevere in life?

4. Did you have a job during your first year of college? How did that impact your first year of college?

5. As I mentioned before, we lose over half of the incoming Latinx students during the first year of college. However, it takes a lot of strength and *ganas* just to make it to college like you did. Where would you say your strength comes from?

<u>Section VII: Conclusion</u>

1. I am happy to know that you are not letting this setback define you and your
   future. Before we end the interview, is there anything else you would like to
   add regarding anything we've discussed?

ENDING: I know you are busy and I thank you for taking the time to speak with me! If I can ever help you in any way, please feel free to reach out.

APPENDIX D

Fall 2014 Final Regularly Admitted First-Time Freshmen Remediation

East Bay

Ethnicity	# of Freshmen	# Needing Remediation in Mathematics	% Needing Remediation in Mathematics	# Needing Remediation in English	% Needing Remediation in English
American Indian	3	2	66.7%	1	33.3%
African American	165	122	73.9%	105	63.6%
Mexican-American	471	268	56.9%	266	56.5%
Other Latino	131	77	58.8%	68	51.9%
Asian American	140	54	38.6%	68	48.6%
Pacific Islander	20	13	65.0%	10	50.0%
White, Non-Latino	134	54	40.3%	35	26.1%
Filipino	124	51	41.1%	51	41.1%
Two or More Races	82	38	46.3%	32	39.0%
Unknown	30	11	36.7%	13	43.3%
Non-Resident	107	56	52.3%	84	78.5%
Total	1407	746	53.0%	733	52.1%