Exploring the ways first-generation Mexican American male transfer students experience their community college support structure

Luis S Moreno

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EXPLORING THE WAYS FIRST-GENERATION MEXICAN AMERICAN MALE TRANSFER STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THEIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUPPORT STRUCTURE

By

Luis S. Moreno

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2019

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Debora Liddell
Educational attainment may not be an educational outcome in and of itself, but education clearly has a powerful influence on a student’s future occupational, social, and economic status as well as on other factors that affect quality of life.

– Pascarella & Terenzini

There are many people to whom I am forever indebted for my success and achievements. First and foremost, the completion of my doctoral degree would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my advisor, Dr. Debora Liddell. It has been a long journey and Deb encouraged me to keep moving forward when I questioned whether or not I could continue. You and I both know this would not have been possible without you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how first-generation Mexican American male students experienced their community college support structures and successfully transferred to a public four-year university. This study sought to answer the questions: How do community college transfer students experience the institutional agents while they were in college? How did the services provided by the institution affect student progress? How did the services provided by the institution affect their aspirations? The focus of this study was to identify and highlight these experiences during their time at the community college that facilitated their success.

Using a conceptual framework that takes an anti-deficit perspective informed by the work of Harper (2010), this study discusses personal characteristics and identifies community college institutional agents and services that lead to college success and completion. Harper’s work sheds light on the fact that success stories of Black males in the American higher education system have been secondary to the emphasis placed on why they were not doing well (2012). Respectively, this study takes an anti-deficit perspective to study the positive factors and characteristics rather than focusing on the reasons male Mexican American community college students fail. A qualitative approach was used to interview six students who met the criteria and were selected to participate in this study. Two face-to-face interviews were conducted and focused on the agents and services that helped them succeed or served as an inspiration at the community college, which then led to their successful transfer to a four-year institution.

The results were organized into three major themes: 1) which institutional agents influenced student success; 2) how did the services provided affect their progress; and 3)
how the services provided affect their aspirations. In addition, I describe other non-higher education individuals and services that influenced their success. A discussion of the findings found that while some of the subjects entered college with a lack of understanding how to properly deal with the stress of culture shock, new social life, and the rigor of the college’s academic requirement, they were determined to succeed. Machismo did get in the way of seeking assistance when some needed help since they did not want to appear weak. While the six subjects shared many traits and characteristics that identified them as high-risk students with statistical odds showing they would not likely complete their college degree and graduate, they found a way to be successful on their terms, and at times, with the assistance of institutional agents or services along the way. The support and love they received from their family kept them moving forward since failure was not an option. Overall, this study contributes to the literature and is targeted to community college personnel to help them better understand how these students navigated the college-going process in order to develop a stronger support system for current students, as well as improve the onboarding of future first generation students.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This study offers recommendations for community college personnel in assisting first-generation Mexican American male college students access and properly utilize college agents and services to succeed and transfer to a four-year institution. Students must recognize that colleges have many programs and services designed to help them become successful, but they need to be open to the idea of asking for assistance and honest with themselves about the assistance they need.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today’s community colleges can be traced back to William Rainey Harper. While president of the University of Chicago, he worked with the public schools in Joliet, Illinois and pushed for the creation of a junior college (Levine, 1986). Levine (1986) states these colleges were set up to “help the many students who were too poor or not ready to go straight to college after high school, as well as the lower-middle class” (p. 162). These colleges were built in locations that could be easily accessed by the masses, especially minority students, with tuition priced well below that of the larger colleges and universities. The cost to attend a community college remains an attractive alternative for families or students with limited income, students who want to stay close to home, students who are unsure about their program of study, students who must balance school with work or family obligation, or students who just do not want to pay the higher cost of a four-year public or private college.

According to a 2016 report by Krogstad in the Pew Research Center, “in 2014, 35% of Hispanics ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in a two- or four-year college, up from 22% in 1993 – a 13-percentage-point increase” (p. 2). Even though more Hispanics are going to college than ever before, Hispanics are not completing a four-year degree like other ethnic groups. Krogstad found that among Hispanics ages 25 to 29, just 15% of Hispanics have a bachelor’s degree or higher (2016). By comparison, “among the same age group, about 41% of whites have a bachelor’s degree or higher (as do 22% of blacks and 63% of Asians)” (p. 3). Fry and Taylor (2013) also found that Hispanics continue to lag behind Whites in some key higher education measures and that young Hispanic
college students are “less likely than their White counterparts to enroll in a four-year college (56% versus 72%), they are less likely to attend a selective college, less likely to be enrolled in college full time, and less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree” (p. 1).

While much is known about why minority students fail, this study seeks to identify to what do students attribute their college persistence. This study particularly seeks to identify how college transfer students experience their institutional agents and identify the services provided that affected their progress and aspirations associated with success to help other persist toward graduation. With only an estimated 15% college completion rate for Hispanic males (Fry and Taylor, 2013), there is an opportunity to focus on what helps students succeed in at a community college as they pursue their four-year degree to replicate strategies that lead to successful college completion. As the number of first-generation male Mexican American community college students’ increases, their need for a support system to help them persist through graduation grows. Having sufficient support staff and programs in place is not just an issue for the student services division. Student success needs to be a priority issue for the entire college community.

The focus on minority student enrollment has historically been on admission, not persistence (Harris & Bensimon, 2007). One tool to assist in the understanding of persistence is the Equity Scorecard, developed by the Center for Urban Education in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California (Bensimon, 2012). According to Harris and Bensimon, the equity scorecard was developed “when it became evident that equity, although valued, is not measured in relation to educational outcomes for traditionally marginalized student in higher education” (2007, p. 79). The scorecard is
a tool “and an established process to develop evidence-based awareness of race-based inequities among practitioners and to instill a sense of responsibility for addressing these gaps” (2007, p. 79). Simply put, as a tool, it is designed to help college officials become experts on educational outcomes in order to take the results and make them a matter of institutional responsibility. Bensimon states that by moving beyond a deficit frame, we will stop attributing negative cultural stereotypes to minority students (2005).

**Need for the Study**

There is limited research that has been conducted on first-generation Hispanic community college students. While there is limited research on the topic of Hispanics, there is even less research that has been conducted on Mexican American male students who fall under the first-generation community college student category. Given the accelerated population growth of Hispanics in the U.S., understanding why first-generation Mexican American males succeed at their community college will help us better set the stage for their success in both two-year and four-year settings.

Historically, community colleges helped alleviate the large growth in demand for higher education in this country when they were first introduced (Levine, 1986). According to Levine (1986), community colleges were developed to address these changing community needs, and provide access to those historically marginalized such as the children of immigrants, second-generation Americans, females, blacks, military veterans, Hispanics, low-income, and others who might not otherwise attend. Revisions of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 have advocated for minority students to be represented in fields of undergraduate and graduate study, in which underrepresentation
has been common (HEA 2008). Unfortunately, as of 2011, only 5.4% of undergraduate and graduate populations were of Hispanic descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how first-generation Mexican American male students experienced their community college support structures and successfully transferred to a public four-year university. This study also sought to understand how these experiences affected their progress and aspirations. It is essential to understand the perceptions of first-generation male Mexican American community college students as they relate their personal and academic experiences from high school, through their community college experience, and transfer to their four-year university. The focus of this study was to identify and highlight these experiences during their time at the community college that facilitated their success.

Using a conceptual framework that takes an anti-deficit perspective informed by the work of Harper (2010), this study discusses personal characteristics and identifies community college institutional agents and services that lead to college success and completion. Harper’s work sheds light on the fact that success stories of Black males in the American higher education system have been secondary to the emphasis placed on why they were not doing well (2012). Respectively, this study takes an anti-deficit perspective to study the positive factors and characteristics rather than focusing on the reasons male Mexican American community college students fail. Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit achievement framework for studying students of color provides the framework for this study.
By interviewing the students directly, my intention was to better understand what experiences helped them succeed and how they made sense of their success. Harper’s framework includes possible questions to explore student success. Harper points out that the tendency to ask a “Why” question is rooted in deficit-oriented questions while “How” and “What” questions are for anti-deficit reframing (2010). By using Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement model as a basic theoretical framework for this study, I sought to understand what students attribute to their success and how this helped them succeed by answering the following research questions:

1. How do community college transfer students experience the institutional agents while they were in college?
2. How did the services provided by the institution affect student progress?
3. How did the services provided by the institution affect their aspirations?

**Significance of the Study**

First-generation male Mexican Americans are capable of graduating from a community college and successfully transferring to a four-year university. Their failure to do so reflects on higher educations failures. This study provides additional research and information to identify the policies, practices, and institutional agents that helped these students overcome barriers to success.

The results of this study will give community colleges information and strategies to implement for student success. Ultimately this may help identify possible strategies that can be widely implemented by other community colleges to assist these students, as well as other first-generation students, succeed in their quest for a college degree.
Theoretical Perspective

According to several studies that identified students’ deficits, some Mexican American men attend community colleges because: (a) they did not prepare for college (right classes, GPA, poor test takers), (b) are underprepared for the rigors of college (study habits, test taking skills, note taking skills), (c) come from a lower socioeconomic background and do not understand the financial aid process, (d) or cannot afford the higher tuition rate charged by universities of other four-year colleges (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; Aspelmeire, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012). These studies did not identify whether it was the individuals who failed to prepare appropriately, or if it was the system from which they came that failed to prepare them. While deficits of first-generation students are briefly discussed, this study will focus on an anti-deficit approach, as represented by Harper’s model (2010).

The Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework is “an example of how to explore and better understand the enablers of minority student achievement in STEM” (Harper, 2010, p. 64). Rather than focusing on why Black students failed and what they lacked, Harper wanted to shift the focus to understanding why Black men excelled. A study using the anti-deficit framework identifies systematic attributions as well as personal factors of successful students and how students overcame any real or perceived barriers. Additionally, Harper suggested the responsibility of student engagement should shift from the student to the faculty. Lastly, Harper acknowledged the success of programs where a group of hands-on scholars and community leaders focuses on issues that help minority students succeed. This framework is described in more detail in chapter two.
Research Design

The issue of retention and graduation of Mexican American male students in higher education has been studied through both qualitative and quantitative lenses. By using a qualitative approach, I sought to understand the details of how students identified resources to help them succeed, as well as what resources were most associated with success in their pursuit of a four-year college degree. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011), “qualitative data provide a detailed understanding of a problem, while quantitative data provides a more general understanding of a problem” (p. 8).

All students have their perspectives as to how they persisted through adverse times. A qualitative approach helped frame their individual journey that included their family members, mentors, friends, peers, community members, high school, college faculty, college staff, as well as administrators. For some students there was a real transformation, while others learned to adapt and made necessary short-term adjustments to who they are in order to survive or overcome barriers, whether real or perceived. Data was collected using a qualitative method that reflects the habits and community. The qualitative approach allowed research to be gathered about their educational journey and the resources they used to understand how they were able to succeed at the community college level and transfer to the college or university of their choice and what helped them succeed.

Positionality of the Researcher

Acknowledging the potential bias of researchers is a necessary step when conducting qualitative research. I identify as a first-generation male Mexican college graduate who became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. after college, at the age of 23. I
started college at a four-year university the spring semester after high school graduation. Like other first-generation college students, I had not prepared appropriately for the college admission process. I failed to file paperwork for financial aid in time to be considered for a fall start following my high school graduation. I had not taken the ACT exam to determine if I placed into college-level classes or would be required to take developmental education classes. My university did not offer a new student orientation for spring semester new starts, so I was unaware of the services available for students. Instead, I relied on limited information from my peers. It was only after befriending the director of the cultural center that I started to receive helpful information on how to navigate the college-going process and what resources were available to me.

One of the barriers I faced was the lack of familial support since my family returned to Mexico during my sophomore year. This caused me to lose state grant aid since they no longer physically lived in the state. I was unaware I could have continued receiving the Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant since my parents continued filing an Illinois tax return due to my dad’s retirement pay. Not having a home to return to on weekends and holidays also posed a problem. Were it not for the director of the cultural center who gave me a job and provided personal support, as well as the family of one of my best friends who allowed me to live with them, I would have dropped out of college before completing my degree.

I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at the University of Iowa, who has identified my research interest in the experience of Mexican American college students. I have also served as a community college senior student services administrator for 13 years. I acknowledge the potential
biases and subjective stances that could distort the interpretation of the interviews throughout the interview process. As guided by the suggestions of Patton (2002), I will cautiously reflect on and report any potential sources of error.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, I propose the following work definitions and terms.

*Academic success:* Academic success refers to the successful completion of an associates’ degree, while recognizing that it is not the goal of every community college student to attain an associate’s degree.

*Anti-deficit framework:* An invert of deficit framework, this framework highlights the students’ achievement rather than their shortcomings or negatives (Harper, 2012).

*Chicano/a:* Someone who is native of, or descends from, Mexico and who lives in the United States. Chicano or Chicana became widely used during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s by many Mexican Americans to express a political stance founded on pride in a shared cultural, ethnic, and community identity (exploratorium.edu).

*College experiences:* The academic and social experiences that students encounter while in college.

*Community College:* Any institution accredited to award the Associate of Arts or Associate of Science as the highest degrees. Community colleges offer academic, workforce, and continuing education training (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

*Cultural Capital:* The knowledge, skills, education, and other advantages a person has that make the educational system a comfortable, familiar environment in which he or she can succeed easily (Oldfield, 2007).
**Deficit thinking:** Taking the position that minority-identified students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education (Yosso, 2005).

**Enriching Educational Experiences:** Opportunities available to the student by which he can learn through experience and reflection outside the classroom.

**Extra-curricular activity:** For the purpose of this study, any activity outside of the classroom setting that is directly tied to a faculty member, organizational advisor, or mentor.

**Family and parental involvement in education:** For the purpose of this study, any support or information given by the primary guardians of the students as it relates supporting the student’s educational outcome.

**First-Generation:** Students who have parents with little to no postsecondary education (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2019).

**Hispanic:** Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries (Passel & Taylor 2013).

**Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI):** Having a total Hispanic enrollment constituting a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment. “Total Enrollment” includes full-time and part-time students at the undergraduate or graduate level (including professional schools) of the institution, or both (i.e., headcount of for-credit students). (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2019).
**Institutional Agents:** For the purpose of this study, any individual employed by the college.

**Latino:** A member of an ethnic group that traces its roots to 20 Spanish-speaking nations from Latin America and Spain itself (Passel & Taylor 2013).

**Latinx:** A gender-inclusive and gender-fluid way of referring to people of Latin American descent as well as a way of removing the way the Spanish language defers to the masculine as the normative gender (Padilla, 2016).

**Mexican-American:** Mexican descendants born in America (Salas, J. A., 2017).

**Microaggression:** Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue, D.W., 2010).

**Out-of-Class Engagement:** For the purpose of this study, student interaction with institutional agents outside the classroom context.

**Pre-college program:** For the purpose of this study, any assistance given or sought out by the student to assist in their pursuit of a college education prior to entering college.

**Purposive Sampling:** The intentional selection of participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

**Relationship with faculty:** For the purpose of this study, experiences with faculty in the pursuit of additional support and instruction outside of the classroom.
**Hispanic versus Latino: Terminology**

For the purpose of this study, while the terms *Hispanic* or *Latino* are often used interchangeably, “Hispanic” will be used when referring to the group under study here. Exceptions will include using the term being referenced by the author. According to Population Reference Bureau, the term *Hispanic* was created for the 1970’s census by the Nixon administration for demographic clarification reasons, but was not prominently displayed on the forms nor was there much information shared with the general population before the census was sent out. Prior to the 1970 decennial census, Hispanics were not counted as a single group, but rather, one of five different subgroups: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, Other Spanish (Haub, 2012).

Fischer (2014) states that the term *Hispanic* rose to prominence during the 1970’s as Mexicans from the southwest and Puerto Ricans from the northeast tried to compete for political clout and federal funds. *Hispanic* describes the language or culture of those countries colonized by Spain. The term *Latino/a* also rose to prominence by activist during the 1970’s at the same time the term *Hispanic* was used since *Hispanic* was more popular on the east coast while *Latino* was popular on the west coast (Haub, 2012). In recent years, the term *Latinx* has been used to represent gender-neutral individuals. Since no research I have included used the term *Latinx*, I will continue to use the term *Latino/a*.

Not all Hispanics are the same. People whose ancestors migrated from Latin America differ greatly in their customs, traditions, and the importance they place on higher education. Mexicans, and more precisely Mexican Americans for this study, are a larger subgroup (Haub, 2012) of Hispanics that represents the majority of all Hispanics in the Midwest (United States Census Bureau, 2016). When research or data for this study
was identified or attributed specifically to Mexican American students and/or families, this study attributed it to Mexican Americans rather than the general category of Hispanics. However, as was the case with the clear majority of research, much research was completed looking through a Hispanic/Latino lens without taking into account the subject’s country of origin.

**Summary**

This study will help identify factors, practices, and services that will increase the potential for first-generation male Mexican American community college students to complete an associate’s degree and transfer to a four-year college or university of their choice. No single practice or program can guarantee student success for all first-generation Mexican American male students or community college. However, Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, and Kleiman (2011) state, “Each institution must know the population it serves and develop strategies and plans that complement the political realities and technical capacities of each state and school” (p. 86). This study provides possible approaches college personnel can utilize to reach out to other first-generation Hispanic students and families. Any results uncovered by this study may lead to a transformative design to advocate for change by identifying how student services offices can affect a student’s progress and aspirations. The findings of this dissertation may help lead to the disruption of the cycle of poverty for many first-generation students through education by laying out the strategies of how the higher education process can be accessed and maneuvered. While deficits of first-generation students are briefly discussed, it is only used as a perspective from which these students were able to overcome and succeed
despite these traditional disadvantages attributed to this population and well documented by many previous studies.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Anderson (1988) traced the higher education of non-Indians, racial, and ethnic minorities in the United States to the 1800’s. He states that in the south, blacks could only receive an education “through a system of private liberal arts colleges” (1988, p. 238). The three types of educational systems for blacks consisted of the white benevolent societies, the black religious organizations, and the large corporate philanthropic foundations (1988). The philanthropists viewed the missionary program of black education as “futile and even dangerous work of misguided romantics” (1988, p. 247).

During the 1900’s, the education of other minorities began to increase. A significant paradigm shift for access to higher education came with the evolution of the local community college system. The rise of community colleges reflects its importance in educational access to the masses, especially for minorities, low-income, and those living in rural America.

This chapter examines a brief history of Mexican migration to Illinois followed by how the rise of community colleges in the United States have provided greater access to minority student populations. As we take the anti-deficit approach for this study, I examine some common barriers students face in their pursuit of a college degree. Afterwards, I identify the services attributed by researchers that contribute to the progress and aspirations of students who attend community colleges and help them transfer to a four-year institution are identified. Once this large body of material is discussed, I narrow the focus onto data that is specific to the first-generation Mexican American male community college student and the important role family plays in their success. Recent
State of Illinois data was reviewed to illustrate how state budgeting affects community colleges. The way in which undocumented students affect the Illinois community college system is also addressed. Using Harper’s Anti-deficit Achievement Framework, this chapter further provides an overview of the scholarship related to environmental factors, educational conditions, and educational support that influences the educational experiences of first-generation male Mexican American community college students as they completed a degree and transferred to a four-year college or university.

While much has been written on first-generation Hispanics/Latinos college students and their failures, research focusing specifically on first-generation male Mexican American (as opposed to other Hispanic) community college students using an anti-deficit approach is limited. Because of the limited research, specifically on first-generation Mexican American male community college students, Hispanics will be included in this chapter to examine strategies used by these community college students that contributed to their successful retention and persistence towards a college degree.

Hispanics, in particular Mexicans, have become the largest minority population in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). With the growth in this population, Hispanics are also on track to becoming the least educated ethnic group (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). By understanding how successful students utilized institutional agents, college policies, programs, and resources to succeed, programs can be created at other community colleges to help their first-generation Mexican American male students succeed, as well as other first-generation college students. This information will also help inform educational professional of potential barriers and how these students successfully navigated them.
**Mexican American Migration Patterns**

Beginning around the 1890s, new industries in the Southwestern portion of the United States attracted Mexican migrant laborers, especially mining and agriculture (Young, 2015). In 1910, the citizens of Mexico found themselves in a civil war started by a middle-class movement against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz who ruled the country since 1876 (Knight, 1980). The continuous warfare between 1910 and 1920 claimed the lives of up to 2 million Mexican fighters and civilians. The country was a wasteland of ruined crops, burned buildings, ripped up railroad tracks, and other devastation. A quarter million Mexican war refugees had fled to the United States. (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2010)

As America entered World War I, many American workers were drawn away from Illinois’s farms and factories to serve in the armed forces and war-related industry. Mexican immigrants took many of their places in both agricultural fields and factories (Young, 2015). As refugees made their way across the border and into Texas, jobs in the railroad industry were plentiful. According to Kerr, (1999), “the first large group of Latino immigrants to Chicago and the Midwest were Mexicans who arrived as contract workers to replace soldiers and European ethnic workers during World War I” (p. 1). This wave of immigrants settled in the Chicago area and these immigrants later spread the word to family members and friends from their hometowns about the plentiful jobs in the railroad and steel mill industries in Illinois, in particular, the Chicago area. Kerr (1999) states that once Mexican immigrants planted roots in Illinois, they sent for other family members to join them since the jobs were plentiful.
Brief History of the Rise of Community Colleges

The story of the modern community college began with America’s fascination of the German educational system during the late nineteenth century. According to Levine (1986), as colleges and universities were trying to reinvent themselves for survival, one aspect that caught the educator’s attention was the way the German educational system extended their general high school education by two years. The German educational system allowed the graduates to go “directly into the university for advanced or professional education” after graduation (p. 174).

In 1892, William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, decided to divide the University of Chicago into the Academic College and the University College. Levine (1986) notes that the University of Chicago was a leader among major universities in the country and this was a historical example of an institution differentiating between the types of courses students took. A decade later, working with the public schools in Joliet, Illinois, Harper encouraged the establishment of the nation’s first junior college. Many other top universities pursued this division. The lower division was separated into a distinct unit dedicated to general education. Prior to this, the Truman Commission brought the two-year college to the national stage.

President Truman established the Commission on Higher Education in July of 1946 and tasked the members to examine “the functions of higher education in our democracy and the means by which they can best be performed” (Thelin, 2004, p. 268).

In essence, the President asked the commission to:

- concern itself with ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able you people;
- adequacy of curricula, particularly in the fields of international affairs and social understanding;
- the desirability of establishing a series of intermediate technical institutes; financial structure of higher education with
particular reference to the requirements for the rapid expansion of physical facilities (2004, p. 286).

The significance of this commission was the creation of a plan for future federal policies for federal financial aid, expansion of the GI Bill, long-term expansion of postsecondary education, and the presentation of “data and commentary on the inequities and injustices of discrimination in higher education on the basis of income and race” (2004, p. 269).

This report provided much needed discussion regarding legislation and programs that led to social justice in education, which ultimately led to a focus on community colleges and the role they could play in providing accessible education to the masses from all walks of life. The drawback of this report was the lack of funding and support from the congressional subcommittees needed to follow through with any of the recommendations. This mantle was later picked up by states on an individual basis.

While many students depart college for a variety of personal reasons, in the early years of the ‘junior college’ system, some believe junior colleges served to remove students for whom college is not appropriate. Clark used the term “Cooling-Out” in 1960 as a major and necessary function of all community colleges. He explained that the cooling-out process “is one whereby systematic discrepancy between aspiration and avenue is covered over, and stress for the individual and the system is minimized” (1960, p. 576). During the late 1950’s, Clark identifies a problem with democracy and overcrowding in higher education as being an “inconsistency between encouragement to achieve and the realities of limited opportunities” (1960, p. 569). He believed colleges were overcrowded and filled with students who had little academic ability and their destiny was to fail. It was the duty of the junior colleges to help the student realize they needed a cooling-out period to prepare them for their eventual failure and departure from
college. “The general result of cooling-out processes is that society can continue to encourage maximum effort without major disturbance from unfilled promises and expectation” (1960, p. 576).

Junior colleges seemed to be the “catch basin” for these students, and the junior college’s job was to gently let them down as they were advised to switch their degree of study or fail college. In 1980, twenty years after his initial study, Clark recognized some of the issues he would have addressed differently. He recognized that he should have distinguished “more clearly between effort and effectiveness in the cooling out process” (1980, p. 28). Clark felt he concentrated on the effort side and did not quite have a grasp on the effects of the cooling out process.

**Minority Student Enrollment in the Illinois Community College System**

According to a 2014 report by the National Conference of State Legislatures, the open access and affordability community colleges offer traditionally have appealed to student populations who have been characterized as low-income, first-generation, minority or working adults. Among adult learners, community colleges are a college of choice for many in this age group because of these colleges’ affordability and flexibility (Anderson, 2013). Ma and Baum’s report shows that Asian and White first-time full-time students are “much more likely to be enrolled at public four-year institutions than at community colleges, while black and Hispanic first-time full-time students are disproportionately represented in the public two-year and for-profit sectors” (2016, p. 5).

According to the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) website, it states that Hispanic students made up the largest number of minority enrollments in 2015 (2017). Until this time, African Americans were the largest minority in the Illinois community
college system but by 2015, the Latino student population became the largest minority group in the state system. The Latino population grew by 25% in 15 years, increasing from 12.3% in 2000 to 16.9% in 2015 (ICCB, 2017). Community colleges constitute a critical stage in the dramatic increase of educational opportunities. It has resulted in the rapid and broad diffusion of higher education. Community colleges are a good stepping-stone for students who want to go to a four-year college but may not be able to afford or are unable to move away from home for personal reasons (Levine, 1986). Thus, the community college system continues to be instrumental in furthering the college education of male Hispanic’s in the state of Illinois, especially because of the lower cost associated with attending a community college over a four-year university. Even when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency) or higher</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associates degree (or higher)</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau)

taking into account the affordability of community colleges, Hispanics in Illinois have the lowest percentage of college degrees and high school diplomas of all racial and ethnic groups. Hispanics continue to lag far behind Whites, Blacks, and Asians (see table 2.1), and are the only racial/ethnic group with a higher proportion of bachelor’s degrees at the national level (15.3%) than in Illinois (14.5%) according to the Women and Minorities in the Illinois Labor Force Progress Report (2018).
As the economy continues to do well overall in 2018 and with unemployment relatively low, community colleges are seeing the number of new students enrolling at their colleges continue to drop from their record enrollment years of 2009-2012. According to the Illinois Community College Board data center’s Summary of Annual Unduplicated Headcount Enrollment by Gender report, enrollment hit a record high of 730,335 students in 2010 but has continued to decrease each year to a total of 519,387 students for fall 2018 (ICCB, 2019). A story headline of July 25, 2013, New York Times read: College Enrollment Falls as Economy Recovers. Perez-Pena (2013) found that College enrollment fell two percent in 2012-13, the first significant decline since the 1990’s, but nearly all that decline was in the area of for-profit and community colleges.

Perez-Pena found that after more than a decade of increased community college enrollment, many adults who had difficulty finding jobs during this recession returned to college (2013). However, once the economy started to improve and new jobs created, these adult students responsible for much of the enrollment increase for community colleges were now returning to the workforce. In Illinois, the employment participation rate was 61.3% in both 2017 and 2016. The employment participation rate is the percentage of the non-institutional working age population (age 16 and older) who are employed (Illinois Department of Employment Security, 2019). According to the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES):

Employment participation rates in Illinois declined for Whites (-0.3 point) but rose for African-Americans (+0.5 point) and Hispanics (+2.1 points). Hispanics reported the highest employment participation rates in 2017 (67.1%), followed by Whites (62.9%) and African-Americans (51.7%). However, Hispanics had their highest rates of employment in Illinois as laborers (39.9%), operatives (25.0%), service workers (20.6%), and craft workers (16.6%) whereas Whites had their highest rates of employment in management, professional and craft jobs. Whites
filled 88.2% of executive/senior officials and managers positions, 78.6% of first/mid-level officials and managers jobs, 72.8% of professional jobs, and 71.8% of craft jobs. They also filled 67.5% of sales jobs (IDES, 2019).

**Hispanics in Illinois**

A 2013 report for the Pew Research Center estimated there are 2.1 million Hispanics out of 12.9 million people living in Illinois (Brown & Lopez). Since Illinois has the fifth highest population of Hispanics in the nation (Brown & Lopez, 2013), this study will focus on the Illinois community college system. According to a report by Hoffman of Reboot Illinois (2015), Hispanics are one of only two growing segments in the population:

Between 2010 and 2014, the minority population in Illinois as a share of the total population increased by 1.4 percentage points from 36.3 percent to 37.7 percent. In fact, if it weren’t for the growth in Illinois’ Latino population during those four years, the state’s already diminishing populace would have plunged by roughly 80,000, according to Northern Illinois University’s Center for Governmental Studies. In 2014, Illinois had 10,000 fewer residents than in 2013, which was the biggest over-the-year decline of any state in the U.S. (p. 1)

This report by the World Population Review (2015) supports Hoffman’s report by stating that, “In responding to the 2010 Census, 71.5% of the people of Illinois declared themselves to be white alone. 14.5% were black or African American, and 4.6% Asian. 83.7% declared themselves to be non-Hispanic or Latino and 16.3% declared that they were Hispanic/Latino” (p. 1). With Mexican Americans being the largest Hispanic population in the state of Illinois, this makes them the largest potential market for higher education of traditional-aged students ages 18-22 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

As of 2013, Hispanics made up 17% of the total population in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2014). This report further stated that those who self-identified as Mexican American made up 64% of this population, which equates to nearly
10.9% of the total population in the United States (2014). The number of degrees conferred by Hispanics has been rising from 2000 to 2010. During this period, the percentage of associate’s degree earned by Hispanics has risen from 9.3% to 13.5%. The numbers have also risen in all subsequent degrees from bachelors (6.3% to 8.8%), to masters (4.8% to 7.1%), and even in doctoral degrees (4.7% to 5.8%) according to the National Center of Education Statistics (2012). However, these numbers still lag in last place for degree completion. According to a 2012 report by the Pew Research Center, in 2012, degree completion among Asians was at 60%, Whites 40%, Blacks, 23%, and Hispanics 15% (p. 2).

Demands of First-Generation College Students

In dealing with the demands of first-generation college students, there needs to be an understanding of who they are and their lack of knowledge of the higher education system in order to find a way to help and serve them. It is estimated that 24% of students enrolled in post-secondary education today are first generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The lack of cultural capital may serve as a barrier for some students especially if they are from a low-income family. Baum and Flores (2011) found that “young people whose parents have no college experience are much less likely than others to enroll and succeed in post-secondary education” (p. 174). This research does not consider an individual student’s determination and ability to succeed. Being a first-generation college student may be a barrier but not an insurmountable one. Providing this population with useful information can appear to be difficult since they look to people they know, like a family member or friend, rather than going to the correct college source to ask for this information.
Recognizing that many male Latino students begin college with uncertain educational goals, Pérez (2017) found that the participants “relied primarily on peer network to translate their aspirations into tangible outcomes” instead of faculty and administrators (p. 134). Pérez (2017) concludes that the ‘success of Latino male achievers was dependent on cultural wealth rather than institutional conditions that supported their academic determination’ (p. 137). In Peña’s 2012 study, students identified positive peer influence as one contributing factors that helped them focus on degree completion rather than to allow distractions from stopping them. Bravo-Gutierrez’s 2014 study found that even though students in her study needed to balance school and familial obligations, they were still able to build relations with classmates and faculty to succeed in their coursework. All subjects could identify individuals who were supportive of their higher education journey and who provided personal and academic validation.

A useful way colleges can help young adult students’ is to insure they receive assistance from the people they should be able to trust the most: teachers and administrators. Ceballo (2004) found that “many teachers and administrators maintain negative stereotypes about poor parents, portraying them as apathetic, uninvolved, and uncaring about their child’s education” (p. 183). The root of this problem needs to be corrected to provide these students with the kind of support given to students from higher income levels. School policies need to reflect the fostering of greater parents-school cooperation and education (Ceballo, 2004). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Bravo-Gutierrez (2014) found that students were still able to build relations with faculty to succeed in their coursework. This relationship with faculty allowed the students to better balance school and familial obligations. Davila reinforces this sentiment stating the
involvement of teachers was another primary structure for on-time completion (2011). Harper’s study (2010) showed how black men were able to cultivate value-added relationships with faculty and administrators in order to help these students succeed.

Latino males are not all doomed to failure since many can and do succeed in higher education (Pérez, 2017). Perez and Taylor (2016) found that Latino males could successfully adapt and use the different forms of cultural capital to their college-going process as identified by Yosso’s Critical Race Theory with assistance from their peers and mentors. Davila’s 2011 study found that students self-identified their lack of taking responsibility for their added task as a primary barrier to on-time completion. Campa’s 2008 study focused on re-conceptualizing the educational resilience of Mexican American community college students. Her study found that participants used pedagogies of survival or strategies to navigate through the barriers they encountered at community colleges. Additionally, the participants discussed the importance of showing respect and asserting themselves to cultivate the larger purpose and build on their critical resilience.

Benefits of a College Degree to Mexican-American Males

The Illinois Community College Board reports, “Overall, in fiscal year 2015, minority students accounted for 41.4 percent of the individuals enrolled in credit coursework at Illinois community colleges whose ethnicity was known” (2017). According to a College Board report by Ma and Baum, (2016), community colleges play a crucial role in American higher education for all student populations through their open admissions policy, low cost, and proximity to a students home. This allows college access to first-generation college students, students from low-income families, and the adults returning to school to earn a degree or new work skills.
The benefits of completing a bachelor’s degree in higher education are well documented. Wyner (2014) states that most students who begin at the community college level plan on transferring to a four-year institution to earn a bachelor’s degree. However, he states “as little as 20 percent make the leap to a four-year college, let alone actually receive a degree there” (p. 26). For many first-generation Mexican American male students, a college degree represents an end to a cycle of poverty and an opportunity to join the middle class. Baum and Flores (2011) found that “adults with bachelor’s degrees typically earn 50 percent more a year than their counterparts with only a high school education…30 percent more with an associate’s degree…and 16 percent more with some college but no degree” (p. 184). Research conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) confirms the earning potential based on high school degree, some college/associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, and an advance degree. Figure 2.1 displays earnings as a proportion of high school graduates’ earnings.
Figure 2.1: Average Earnings of Full-Time, Year-round Workers as a Proportion of the Average Earnings of High School Graduates by Educational Attainment: 1975 - 2013

A second figure from the Pew Research Center (see Figure 2.2) shows the actual pay disparity among the different aged young adults in 2012. The chart shows the median annual earnings of fulltime workers between the ages of 25 and 32, in 2012 dollars in order to account for inflation (Pew Research Center, 2014). According to the Pew Research Center, “On virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment—from personal earnings to job satisfaction to the share employed full time—young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education” (2014). A college degree also presents these students with broader career choices that can lead to a change in lifestyle.
Students in a 2010 study conducted by Hornak, Farrell, and Jackson stated that the only way to a secure financial future is by earning a college degree. They felt the “sacrifices at this point in their lives were essential to secure their futures” (p. 486). Seidman (2005) also found that college graduates earn more money over a lifetime but they also “incur fewer health problems, suffer less penal involvement, and live longer than non-college graduates” (p. 5). While making a statement that college-educated individuals live longer than non-degree college-educated seems bold, it can be surmised based on the assumption that college-educated individuals will have access to proper and better-quality health care, live a healthier lifestyle, and work in a job that is not as physically demanding as many blue-collar jobs.
Barriers to Student Success

Despite scholarship on how to help students succeed, there is a low probability of male Hispanics transferring to a four-year institution. According to Sáenz and Ponjuán (2012), Latino community college students are the least likely group of males to transfer to a four-year institution. Tinto (2012) states, “the inability to obtain needed advice during the first year or at the point of changing majors can undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure, and, for those who continue, lengthen the time to degree completion as student transfer to other degree programs” (p. 11). While not much is known about first-generation Mexican-American community college students, too often, these males are given statistically low probabilities to successfully graduate from college based on generalities assigned to students with similar backgrounds who fail to graduate from a college or university. Stresses and barriers Hispanic students face are discussed in the following paragraphs.

According to a study completed in the fall of 2011, “approximately 60 percent of community college students entering college demonstrate a need for at least one remedial/developmental course and some community colleges that serve mainly low-income and minority students now enroll a student population of which upwards of three-quarters need remediation” (Deil-Amen, p. 59). A 2011 report from the Complete College America organization states, “Remediation is broken, producing few students who ultimately graduate. Sadly, efforts intended to catch students up are most often leaving them behind” (p. 3). For colleges and universities already overloaded with services they must provide to underprepared students, additional remediation plays a major role in colleges day-to-day operations. Adding additional programs to assist
students with remedial classes may be even more problematic once the topic of housing
new staff or programs is raised. The amount of staff, time, and money used to reteach
material to students they should have learned in high school is tremendous.

Tinto found that minority first-generation students’ attempts to attain a
baccalaureate degree is complicated by the fact that these students are generally from less
educated families, have lower incomes, are more likely to attend a two-year and less than
two-year institution, attend a public institution, and work while in college (2004). Other
researchers support this view, adding that first-generation students also have lower
GPA’s, are underprepared for the transition, have difficulty with the language pattern,
feel alienated, and suffer from low self-esteem and anxiety due to the culture change
(Hall 2010; White 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Watson
stated, “efforts aimed at helping first-generation college students to persist in their pursuit
of an education are compounded by academic hurdles that students must overcome,
social issues that students encounter in trying to fit into college, and cultural factors that
often leave students feeling marginalized, isolated, and not well understood by their
peers, faculty, and college personnel” (2004, p. 7). These factors can be overwhelming
for a student to handle and eventually lead to students leaving a four-year institution after
their first year of school (Pascarella et al., 2004).

First-generation students are of concern for colleges and universities because
colleges and universities understand that these students may have entered their institution
unprepared for the higher level and more demanding work requirement of college.
Russell (2007) states that students who enter college academically underprepared for
their new environment tend to transfer to other institutions, drop out, or are expelled.
According to Lichtenstein (2005), many students enter college without the necessary academic skills. She also notes that other common causes of students withdrawing or dropping out of college include social isolation and anonymity, as well as external obligations such as family, health, and job pressures. Gardner (2007) adds that general first-year students need to learn to cope and handle their newfound freedom. Gardner states that many of these students are unable to handle the self-management issues, which includes the need to be focused and disciplined enough to handle all the coursework without having a parent or guardian looking over their shoulder in order to ensure coursework is completed (2007).

Reid and Moore’s 2008 study found college was especially challenging for first-generation urban college students. These students arrived at college with the “challenge of not having someone at home to call on for direction when they have questions” (p. 259). Pino, Martinez-Ramos, and Smith (2012) suggest, “Universities must also contend with the observation that first-generation students come with different experiences and needs and face numerous upward struggles” (p. 28). Aspelmeire et al. (2012) found that self-esteem is an issue for first-generation community college students. Their study found that having “lower self-esteem or a more external locus of control resulted in poorer personal and emotional adjustment among first-generation students than among their peers. The pattern was nearly identical for locus of control and GPA” (p. 775).

Machismo

Mexican culture is rich in beautiful traditions and yet stubborn in other ways. Machismo is “a male archetype characterized by hyper-masculine traits like stoicism, aggression, sexism, and heavy drinking” (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey,
Anzaldua found that machismo traits played out in the form of Latino male dominance that included power and aggression, homophobia, and restriction of emotions, emphasizing this behavior as the norm (2012). It is these aspects of machismo that negatively impact Hispanic males if they were brought up in this type of a household. Person and Resenbaum (2006) found that Latino students relied less on services colleges offered since they relied on their family members or friends to help them figure out the college-going process, especially when seeking help with campus problems.

Unwilling to seek help is associated with the machismo attitude of not wanting to look weak or helpless. Ponjuan, Clark, and Sáenz 2012 study of Latino male students in Texas and Florida found that the “many men expressed discomfort in approaching authority figures, especially faculty members. This fear of feeling vulnerable and emasculated limits the amount of help Latino males seek, if they sought help at all” (p. 14). Sáenz and Bukoski also found that Latino males were less likely to ask for help in order to avoid being viewed as weak (2014). Cabrera, Rashwan-Soto, and Valencia state that although Latino males struggled academically they “tended to avoid any type of help-seeking behavior” which included using services from the tutoring center, academic advising, or seeking help from faculty (2016, p. 80). Seeking assistance from these offices would have been and admission of weakness, which goes against the machismo way (Cabrera, et al., 2016). The Latino male student preferred to take personal responsibility to excel and persist rather than seeking help.

**Cost of College**

For many Hispanics, the ability to pay for tuition remains an obstacle to college enrollment. In a 2014 National Journal poll, financial considerations was the main reason
students who graduated from high school entered the workforce or the military rather than going to college. According to their 2014 survey, when students were asked why they made the choice to not attend college, “59 percent said it was because they could ‘not afford to pay for education beyond high school.’ The next-most-common reasons cited for skipping higher education were eagerness to begin a career (53 percent) and the need ‘to help support your family’ (46 percent)” (p. 4).

A multitude of studies researching parents’ ability to help their child navigate and pay for college have been completed. In a study conducted by Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008), their findings suggested that at a minimum, “knowledge of state merit-aid programs encourages college-related conversations between students and parents around college preparation and planning issues” (p. 581). Before students even set foot on any college campus, it is important to for both students and the families to have a discussion centering on financing college to understand how to manage their college expenses fiscally. If this conversation does not take place, there is a chance students may reconsider attending if they think college is unaffordable. Even worse, student and parents may not take into consideration all cost associated with going to college.

A key factor stopping first-generation students from being able to continue with college is funding. Once a student begins college, if they have not planned adequately for all cost, it could lead to students dropping out and being burdened with student loan debt without earning a degree. First-generation students may not be aware of all the cost associated with living away from home. A student can have all the ambition and determination to attend college, but if the student does not have the means to continue paying for tuition, room, or books, the student may be forced to withdraw.
Tinto (2004) believes that colleges and universities need to provide sufficient financial support for part-time students to attend school on a full-time basis. Baum and Flores (2011) add, “making funds available is important, but it is only part of the process. The students most in need of support generally lack the information they need to access these funds” (p. 187). In a study by Kienzel, Alfonso, and Melguizo (2006), financial barriers were the most commonly listed reason that students drop out or stop out of college. Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2011) state that many Latino students who do not plan appropriately for college or are not eligible for financial aid from state or federal sources must work for the entire year to save money to go to school to complete just one semester and then stop out for one or two semesters while they save more money for another semester.

Parents may discourage college if they do not see a financial benefit for a college degree. For some families, parents may think they or their child will incur great debt with no guarantee of a job immediately after college. Others may begin to question whether a college degree will help their child find a good job that will pay a good middle-class salary. Kaushal, (2008) found that “Individuals with a college education earn higher wages and are less likely to experience unemployment” (p. 772). Seidman (2005) states, “The failure of the Mexican parents to connect the completion of a college degree to greater value or the fear of incurring debt to complete an education” will also inhibit the parent’s willingness to send their child to college (p. 18). Not preparing for the cost of college can bring about a feeling of hopelessness to the first-generation families. Being a low-income and first-generation student decreases the odds of going to college or being successful. Baum and Flores (2011) state, “exacerbating the financial constraints is the
reality that low-income students and those whose parents have little education are frequently ill-prepared academically to succeed in college” (p. 171). Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that parents will often voice their support for their child to attend college but they also “express doubt about being able to pay for college” (p. 206).

First-generation students may be less likely to have properly saved enough money and more likely to attend in nontraditional modes such as working full-time while attending college or working multiple part-time jobs. Hornak et al. (2010) found that students who lack adequate financial support through their families must work during the school year. Vergara and Hightower (2006) added that many Mexican–American students who come from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds are often expected to work one or more jobs while in college in order to help their families pay bills. In a 2006 article, Perna stated:

“Research generally shows that many prospective college students are poorly informed about both the costs and the economic benefits of an investment in higher education, and that the lower observed enrollment rates for low-income students, African-Americans, and Hispanics may be attributable, at least in part, to this lack of information” (p. 109).

Hornak et al. (2010) state, “As unmet need increases, students will attempt to bridge the gap by borrowing more money and working more hours” (p. 482). Having to take out student loans is not only a concern for lower-income families but for middle-income families also. Carter (2006) found “excessive loans can be problematic for middle-income families, who may question whether their expected earnings will grow sufficiently to justify continued borrowing” (p. 43). In dealing with first-generation and minority families, Perna (2006) found, “parents and students overestimate college costs and lack accurate information about financial aid” (p. 109). This may explain why going
to college is not a part of the family’s conversation prior to a student starting high school. Not knowing how to finance college or the benefits of attending college represents a lack of cultural capital knowledge. Perna’s 2006 study found that individuals who lack the required cultural capital might lower their educational aspirations or self-select out of situations (e.g., not enroll in higher education) because they do not know the particular cultural norms (111).

Working in College

For first-generation Mexican American male students who do not understand the financial aid process, they may not file an application to receive free state or federal financial aid. For some first-generation Mexican American male students, working their way through college is a reality. Diaz-Strong et al. (2011) found in some families, “not only do students work, but family members (including siblings) also actively contribute financially toward tuition payments” (p. 113). As some families struggle to pay other bills such as medical care, rent, utilities, they may not be able to contribute much toward their child’s college bill. Therefore, these students may need to find a way to supplement their own college education. Students who work may be setting themselves up for failure if they try to work too many hours in order earn money for the second semester of classes while they are attending classes in the first semester (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011; Hornak et al., 2010; Romano, Gallagher, Shugart, 2010). According to Astin, “The single largest negative effect on retention is associated with working full-time as a student” (2001). Astin also found that “other negative relationships involved working off-campus at a part-time job” (2001, p. 196).
Working in college can lead to other issues that affect their ability to be successful and remain in school: enrollment loads, schedule restrictions, and access to the library (Hornak et al., 2010). Hornak et al. (2010) found that “excessive levels of unmet need for low-income students translate to abandoned plans for full-time, on-campus attendance in favor of part-time attendance, long work hours, and heavy debt. Although motivated by financial considerations, students make choices that significantly lower the probability of their persistence and degree completion” (p. 483). Other consequences of working while going to college include the physical demands of trying to attend college while working. For some students, working too much and trying to do college-level work can lead to a high level of stress and exhaustion that can wear the student down.

**Contribution to Student Success at a Community College**

Engle, Bermeo, and O’Brien (2006) state that the problem many colleges fail to address is the need for additional support once the student arrives on campus. This includes support for students in the area of academic support and/or advising, social aspects, and financial aspects to help the students stay on campus. Engle et al. believe colleges need to do anything necessary to ensure students remain enrolled at their respective colleges or universities (2006).

While previously mentioned studies found first-generation students at-risk for failure, the reality is that not all students are alike. Many first-generation Mexican American male students do not focus on what the statistics say about their chances for success or failure. One could argue that these students are not aware of what statistics state about their chances for college success. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that with first-generation students in their study “persistence was more likely where English was
not the primary language spoken, and identified ‘living at home’ and ‘faculty reputation’ as their reasons for attending a particular institution” (p. 419). This study suggests the “first-generation students may connect more to the local ingredients and aspects of the family and school environments associated with the college-going behaviors.

**Financial Assistance**

Providing sufficient financial support will reduce the number of hours students will have to work. The time that is spent working a job is time spent away from studying. Tinto (2006) believes that if a student has the necessity to work, it is better to find a job on campus. The odds of completing a college degree begin to diminish when a student is a part-time student or when the student is working over 20 hours a week. If students must work while going to college, it is recommended they get a work-study job on campus. Lohfink and Paulsen’s 2005 study found that the amount of work-study aid received by the student had a positive correlation from first-to-second year persistence. They believe, “It is possible that work-study aid provides students with both monetary benefits (i.e., wages to help cover college cost) and other benefits, such as personal relationships with campus staff from whom they could receive assistance and support” (p. 422).

Work-study jobs cap a student’s work hours at 20 a week. Work-study jobs also allow students to do their homework during work hours if the students are not busy. Most supervisors are very understanding of the plight of the working student. By getting to know the students, the supervisor becomes an additional ally in helping the student with any issues or concerns they may have. Hornak et al., (2010) believe that the ideal situation for college students who need to work should work only 12 hours a week.
Working only 12 hours a week would allow students to balance their class work with campus life while allowing them to stay fully engaged (Hornak et al., 2010).

Engle et al. (2006) are also in agreement that aid given to first-generation and low-income students is insufficient to cover the expenses associated with going to college. They believe that tuition increases, expensive textbooks, and the cost of driving back and forth between home and the college can have a negative affect on first-generation students. Their research found that most students decided to work to raise money for school instead of continuing to take out additional loans. Jenkins (2009) believes that to help with student retention, it is the college’s responsibility to find additional resources for scholarships and retention efforts. Harrell and Forney (2003) state:

Financial Aid and other assistance programs are needed to address this disparity in family income. What is important here is that the difference in income means the students have not had the materials or experiences necessary to be successful when they begin school (p. 153).

Tinto (2004) believes the federal government needs to promote innovation through various forms such as expanding programs like the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). FIPSE is a grant program intended to support innovative educational reform projects that can serve as national models for the improvement of postsecondary education. This includes ideas for improving teaching or student learning, or for improving access to postsecondary education. FIPSE funded programs provide institutions funds and resources to develop and pilot innovative programs created to keep students on the path towards graduation, especially for first-generation and low-income students. This can be expanded if FIPSE were also to address
the issue of underprepared students. Creating a partnership between colleges and high schools could prove to be beneficial.

Tinto (2004) also believes that the federal government can do other things to increase retention and graduation rates right now. This includes increasing student aid substantially in the form of Pell Grant funding, encouraging states and institutions to link increases in need-based aid to increases in tuition, and to “increase funding for TRiO, especially Student Support Services” (p. 13). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), TRiO funds are federal funds that originated from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 beginning with the Upward Bound programs as a response to the government’s war on poverty. TRiO now includes a host of federal programs, of which, Student Support Services is a significant component.

**Summer Bridge and Transition Programs**

One way to help first-generation college students be successful in college is with a summer bridge program before students start their first day of class. Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that perceived barriers affect first-generation students “belief in their ability to do the task necessary to get to college as well as their belief in their ability to succeed if they do arrive at college” (p. 205). Summer bridge programs can provide programs that build up a student’s self-esteem and reinforce their ability to succeed. Santa Rita and Bacote (1996) also found that these summer bridge programs became an established part of the college landscape in the 1990’s to recruit, retain, and graduate the high-risk low-income, and minority students.

Students may not get involved in pre-college programs because they did not know the programs existed or the programs did not have enough resources to serve them.
Creating summer bridge programs can help educate these students on how to prepare and succeed in college. Many studies point to summer bridge programs as a method to mitigate the gap between first-generation students and non-first-generation students (Jenkins, 2009; Hall, 2010; Engle et al., 2006). These summer transition programs help the students understand what is expected from them at the college level. Information needs to be shared with these students about the processes and services of the college they are about to attend. For students whose high school GPA or college entrance exams scores may have been on the lower end, incoming first-year college students could be required to complete a summer bridge program before allowing them to take college-level courses. McCurrie (2009) recommends that these students who “show potential but lack academic or social readiness” be required to participate in this type of program to prepare them for college (p. 28).

Summer bridge programs will also help these students ease their anxiety as they get to meet more individuals associated with the college. It will help students strengthen the skills they will need to be successful in college (Jenkins, 2009; Hall, 2010; Engle et al., 2006). Jenkins’ (2009) research has led him to conclude that the most successful programs tend to be those that provide systematic and comprehensive academic support services (such as assessment and remediation, learning laboratories, tutorial services, intrusive advising, and monitoring students’ progress) until a student is firmly established in a major. Jenkins further adds that such programs may be more effective for minority students if the curriculum: encompasses ‘validating’ experiences-encounters with administrators, faculty, and other students who send important signals to first-generation minority students that they are competent learners, that they can succeed, that they have a rightful
place in the academic’s community, and that their cultural experiences are sources of knowledge and pride, not something to be devalued (2009, p. 3).

The goals of a summer bridge program need to be expanded to increase the retention and graduation of first-generation students. Santa Rita (1995) states that the purpose of any retention program is to “transform students from uncommitted to committed, from uninvolved to involved, from passive to active, or from failure threatened to achievement motivated” (p. 6). In trying to re-educate students as to their abilities, bridge programs try to give students the skills needed to be successful by reassessing their expectation of college and the goals they set for themselves. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found evidence that bridge programs participants are more likely than nonparticipants to persist into their second year. Giuliano and Sullivan’s (2007) data suggests, with appropriate assistance, underprepared students can be just as successful in higher education as their better-prepared classmates.

Harper (2012) found that targeting racial minorities, first-generation, and low-income students for summer bridge programs allow them to:

- take a pair of credit-earning introductory-level courses, exposes students to resources, important institutional agents, and engagement opportunities; and includes peer mentors who can advise newcomers on effective ways to navigate the campus, cope effectively with onlyness, respond productively to racism and stereotypes, and identify funding opportunities (internally and externally) to help offset their college expenses (p. 21).

According to Harper (2012), these programs should be offered to this student population at no cost, during the summer between their high school graduation and the start of their freshman year in college, and last between six and eight weeks.

Summer bridge programs will continue to operate every summer across the country. Kezar (2000) believes these summer programs play an important role “as higher
education continues to expand, increasing access to more and different populations” (p. 4). In 2011, Strayhorn found that “participating in an SBP yielded the greatest effects on students from low-income families, in terms of college enrollment but not academic performance” (p. 145). However, there are many approaches to tackling the usefulness of summer bridge programs. Community colleges can take a larger role in creating Summer Bridge programs to improve the transition rates from high school to college for all first-generation students, especially male Mexican Americans. McCurrie (2009) states, “The efficacy of open access programs like Summer Bridge demands that our teaching and learning be opened to the larger community to encourage the broadest possible participation in our efforts to pursue success” (p. 47). Having an opportunity over summer to help these students change and grow from high school students to college students gives them an opportunity to forget about their past experiences and focus on the future, one where the label of first-generation does not mean they are destined for failure nor define their future.

**New Student Orientation**

New student orientation programs help acclimate students to their college campus and environment. These programs allow students to feel more prepared to navigate the college campus, allows them to meet new classmates and friends, and learn how to balance their academic and social life. This type of program works by easing the student’s transition to college life (Hall, 2008; Engle et al., 2006). Effective pre-college orientation programs provide students with descriptions of program offerings, college’s expectations, information about assistance and services for examining interest, values, and abilities; encouragement to establish working relationships with faculty, information
about services that help with adjustments to college, and financial aid (Hall, 2008).

According to Tinto, “student retention and graduation is shaped by the availability of clear and consistent expectations about what is required to be successful in college” (2012, p. 10). Tinto adds, “knowing the roadmap to success – the rules, regulations, and requirements for degree completion – is central to students’ ability to successfully navigate the path to timely completion” (2012, p. 10). It can also help create a level playing field for first-generation students.

In the book *Student Success in College* (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2010), the authors speak about the two key components that contribute to students’ success. These components are “the amount and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to experiences and outcomes that constitute student success” and “ways the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities” (2010, p. 9). The basis for all new student orientations is to provide clear and consistent information about college expectations and what is required to be successful in college. Colleges need to create a learning opportunity and introduce available services to all new students. Colleges also need to have the students become familiar with and use the services they provide such as counseling, tutoring, academic advising, and many other.

Several authors have found that new student orientations work by easing the student’s transition to college life (Hall, 2010; Engle et al., 2006). Hall (2010) found that effective pre-college orientation programs provide students with descriptions of program offerings, college’s expectations, information about assistance and services for examining
interest, values, and abilities; encouragement to establish working relationships with faculty, information about services that help with adjustments to college, and financial aid. Collier and Morgan (2008) believe that “specialized orientation programs for students from non-traditional backgrounds could emphasize a basic understanding of the different kinds of faculty expectations they will encounter” (p. 444). It is important to note that orientation programs can be expanded to include other family members. Including parents in the new student orientation program can help parents understand the type of support their student will need from them.

Getting parents involved in the new student orientation may take some stress off the student. Engle et al. (2006) state that for many first-generation students, preparing and going to college may involve the entire family. Orientation programs that encourage the participation of parents in the new student orientation may help the family support their child. Through these sessions, parents who never attended college can get a better understanding of what their child is about to undergo, allowing the parents to enhance their cultural capital. Kuh et al. (2010) have found that these orientations offer parent sessions on the college transition, which promote knowledge of campus activities and services, facilitates interaction with faculty and staff, and educate both parents and students about their rights and responsibilities.

**Academic Advisors**

College is a new experience for first-generation students. Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, and Ruder (2006) research found that students seek advice from their friends because they feel their friends are trustworthy. Academic advisors are strangers to the students who do not know them very well. Torres et al. (2006) suggested, “Advisors need
to create a sense of trust with the students, which happens through frequent contact and time investments in the advisor-student relationship” (p. 69). First-generation male Mexican American community college students lack information on how to start the college process, and academic advisors can play a crucial role in helping students on a pathway toward successful degree attainment. Torres et al. (2006) developed a model to explain which approach first-generation Latino/a college students use to seek this information (see Figure 2.3). The frustrating issue for first-generation students and their families is that they do not know what they do not know nor do they know where to ask for assistance.

**Figure 2.3: Model of first-generation Latino/a college students’ approach to seeking information** (Torres et al., 2006, p. 68)

Rather than ask a college staff member about the information they may not know, first-generation college students often look for answers from their peers or by reading pamphlets they may have picked up. When compared to their peers in college, Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, and Terenzini (2003) found that “first-generation students completed
fewer credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studied fewer hours and
worked more hours per week, were less likely to participate in an honors program, and
made smaller first-year gains in reading comprehension” (p. 420). Some of this can be
attributed to not knowing the expectation of being a college student. These issues serve as
potential barriers for the completion of a college degree. Therefore, it is crucial for the
first-generation Mexican American male student to make a connection with someone at
the college such as their academic advisor. This connection can serve as the go-to person
that can point the student in the right direction or can serve as an additional support
person for when the student begins to doubt themselves and questions if they should
continue with college. It does not take long for a student who gets behind to begin to
panic and decide college is too difficult for them, whether real or perceived.

A person that is key to the students’ early college success is their academic
advisor (Torres et al., 2006). An academic advisor is trained to help the student chart a
path that will help them reach their goal. Having effective advising is the foundation for
successful retention strategies. According to Tinto (2004), effective advising must
address the needs of those students who enter college undecided about their majors and
helping these students navigate college. Hall (2010) states that using developmental
counseling and intrusive advising techniques do help assure maximum retention. Hall
further states that academic advising is a developmental process based on close student-
advisor relationship intended to aid students in clarifying and achieving educational,
career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and
community resources (2010).
One way to positively affect student success is by having the student forge a relationship with their faculty. The difference between high school teachers and college faculty expectations are huge. According to Collier and Morgan (2008), “differences in the fit between university faculty members’ expectations and their students’ understanding of those expectations can result in differential student academic outcomes” (p. 441). First-generation high school students may not know how to be a college student. Students may be accustomed to having their teacher in high school give reminders about assignments being due or when a test will occur. At the college level, assignments are listed in the syllabus, and the student is responsible for making sure the assignments are completed and submitted on time without reminders from the faculty. These students are in a new environment that has a different dynamic than high school.

Astin (2001) notes that in the case of the college classroom, the environment that is created by the faculty and the students is what matters. No two-faculty members are alike so the student must adapt to multiple classroom environments their first-year in college. College faculty can play a vital role in the intervention and retention of first-generation Mexican American male students. Students can learn and understand what an instructor is expecting, and if they do not, they know they should know they can go to the professor for clarity or additional assistance. According to Collier and Morgan (2008), student’s grades may suffer if they do not understand what the professor is looking for or the level of work they are expected to turn in. Professors should always be willing to help any student after class or during their office hours.
Tinto (2004) also reiterates the importance of involving students with other students, faculty, and staff, especially those activities that are directed toward student learning. Tinto further states that students who are actively involved with peers, faculty, and staff, especially in learning activities, are more likely to learn, persist, and graduate (2004). Hall (2010) believes that students need to connect to the institution through a variety of activities designed to promote student involvement and integration. Faculty can involve and integrate students by using Astin’s findings to help retain college students. Astin (2001) identified three involvement measures that have a positive effect on retention, “giving presentations in class, taking more essay exams, and working on an independent research projects” (p. 196).

Gardner states that a student’s attitude towards faculty is an important indicator of student retention (2007). His research shows that a higher percentage of students who regularly interact with faculty earn a degree at a higher rate than their peers who do not have regular contact with their professors. Derby and Smith’s (2004) research also led them to the conclusion that an essential institutional environmental factor involves faculty participation and/or faculty interaction with their students. They found some studies either explicitly state or strongly imply that faculty participation is paramount to student retention. Collier and Morgan (2008) conclude that the cumulative effect of a student’s greater ability “to recognize and respond appropriately to professors’ expectations leads to higher rate of graduation and better jobs” (p. 443). Some of these stronger faculty members who are genuinely concerned about the student’s well-being would be good candidates to teach a first-year success course.
First-Year Experience Classes

First-year success courses are another positive tool to use for student success purposes. This course should include critical topics that are instrumental in the success of first-generation students and their academic persistence, such as managing time, note-taking, organizational skills, memory techniques, test-taking skills, writing papers, and coping with anxiety and adjustment. Hall (2010) suggests that financial aid information should also be included in the curriculum. Many colleges now have freshman orientation classes to provide smaller group discussion on issues that are important to first-generation students. While these classes are for all student populations, first-generation students will greatly benefit from a first-year experience class.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) credit John Gardner for starting the “University 101” first-year seminar at the University of South Carolina in 1972. They found that with respect to degree completion, “an informal examination of evidence of varying degrees of quality from more than 40 reports supports the estimate that FYS participants are 5 to 15 percentage points more likely than nonparticipants to graduate within four years” (p. 402). Pascarella and Terenzini do note that none of the studies controlled for differences in students’ precollege characteristics. There is “a wide array of other positive and statistically significant effects for FYS participants (versus nonparticipants) in addition to higher persistence rates and better academic performance” (p. 403).

Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, and Tincher-Ladner (2014) completed a research study on student success courses with 1,740 students that included 785 (45.1%) males and 938 (53.9%) females. The major finding in this study was that student success courses enhance student retention. This study found that first-time, full-time students
entering college with an ACT/COMPASS score who successfully complete a study skills course are 63.6% more likely to be retained fall to fall than students who do not take the course. Students who participate and succeed in the study skills course provided at the community college have a greater chance of being retained from fall to fall, confirming the value that the study skills course offers to the institution and its students. A key component of this class has instructors provide resources that allow students to identify how to navigate the college system more clearly.

Gardner (2007) identified five basic types of a first-year seminar course including an extended orientation course, an academic seminar with common course content, a discipline-based academic seminar, a professional seminar, and an orientation at the remedial developmental level. Gardner believes there are five things first-year success courses can do to be of great value (2007). He begins by stating there is a need to extend orientation course in order to familiarize students with the culture of the school. Students who take this type of course typically receive one hour of credit. The second type of orientation course is the academic seminar with common course content. The third type of course is the discipline-based academic seminar. Gardner (2007) states, “These are small seminars that share no common content and are based on the professors’ discipline. These are meant as an opportunity to explore one topic in great depth” (p. 8). The fourth type is the professional seminar. These classes introduce students to different professional majors. The fifth type is created for students who place at the remedial developmental level. These are for students who come to college who are unable to place in college-level math, reading, or English. Proficiency in these gateway classes are needed for success in the classroom and are required prerequisite in other classes. These deficiencies may be
due to the student’s academic ability, study habits, or the lack of institutional support from the student’s high school.

Hall’s (2010) research on orientation classes led him to conclude that completion of an orientation program during the first term of enrollment promoted and improved student performance regardless of age, gender, race, major, entrance exam scores, or employment status. Additional research from other sources in Hall’s 2010 study found that between 1987 and 1992, 81% of students who enrolled in extended orientation courses passed their first-term courses, compared to 56% of the students enrolled in other college preparatory courses and 67% of all other students. Additionally, after four terms, 65% of the students who enrolled in the extended orientation course were still enrolled at the college.

**Remedial Classes**

The 2011 Complete College America report states that colleges need to keep students from taking the traditional remedial programs and mainstream as many of them as possible into college-level courses. This will cut down on the total number of classes they will need to take and graduate as well as save students a significant amount of money and time that would otherwise be spent on remedial classes. Overhauling the remedial process can be accomplished by providing co-requisite and embedded support for those needing extra help. In addition, Complete College America states, “Colleges need to provide alternative pathways to a career certificate or career-related credential for students with major academic weaknesses” (2011, p. 15).
**Tutoring Programs**

Additional assistance can be provided for struggling students through a tutoring program. White (2005) states that mediation in academic literacy may enhance some students’ chances at finding academic success (and increased feelings of inclusion) in the college community. Many of the first-generation students may not have a strong foundation for learning. One-on-one tutoring helps break it down in a non-threatening manner. These tutors will help rebuild the foundation by incorporating study skills and academic habits, especially if they entered college without these skill sets. In a 2010 survey conducted by ACT, “when students were asked to identify the three campus retention practices that had the greatest impact on student retention,” many survey respondents identified tutoring programs (p. 4).

Tinto (2004) agrees that the institution should provide academic, social, and personal support. Regardless of the form, Tinto believes that successful retention efforts must empower students to access support when needed. He further states that an essential feature of effective support programs is that they are connected to everyday student learning needs. He recognizes that institutions need to emphasize academic support and what it takes to be successful in college to address the fact that many low-income students begin college with inadequate academic skills. Some of this support can be directed in the form of a tutoring center, writing lab, or a math lab. Astin (2001) found that receiving tutoring in courses positively associated with satisfaction, but it was negatively associated with their GPA. He added that the lower GPA was most likely since the students were receiving tutoring because they were already struggling with the class.
The importance of federally funded programs such as TRIO whose services includes tutorial services is well recognized (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Kuh et al., 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that these comprehensive programs “have a statistically significant and positive effect on student persistence” (p. 405). Wild and Ebbers (2002) believe that tutors should be provided for classes that “typically have a high percentage of student who have difficulties (i.e., English, math science, selected vocational program courses)” (p. 516).

**TRiO – Student Support Services (SSS)**

TRiO Student Support Services uses an anti-deficit approach to their programs. Developers of this grant program have taken into account the populations who are at the highest risk for dropping out of college and developed approaches that focus on building up the students self-esteem and academic skills while building knowledge about the college-going process. According to the U.S. Department of Education Website (2016), TRiO Student Support Services is a federally funded college program that provides opportunities for “academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. The goal of SSS is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants.” These programs have a low counselor to student ratio based on the number of students each counselor is required to have.

All SSS projects must provide: academic tutoring, which may include instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, science, and other subjects; advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection, assist student with information on both the full range of student financial aid programs, benefits and resources for locating public and private scholarships; and assistance in completing financial aid applications. Education or counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy and assist students in applying for admission to graduate and professional programs; and assist students enrolled in two-year
institutions and applying for admission to, and obtaining financial assistance for enrollment in four-year programs.

Not every community college has a TRiO Student Support Program, but first-generation minority students would benefit from joining this program. TRiO provides a low counselor to student ratio as required by the federal grant guidelines. The life of their grant is dependent on having successful retention and graduation percentage rate, so these staff members’ jobs are depending on the success of their overall student success. It is their job to get to know students and help provide whatever services are necessary for a students’ successful transition to a university. A great benefit is that all programs are required to organize college visits for their students who wish to participate in these trips. Because of the free college visits, many students are able to visit a college or university and make an educated decision on the transfer institution of their choice.

Engle et al. (2006) state, “Orientation activities as well as advising and on-campus programs such as Student Support Services can help low-income students and first-generation college students to safely navigate the sometimes turbulent waters of the institution” (p. 11). Furthermore, “SSS programs add an extra layer of support and guidance as well as membership in a community of students who are on a similar journey” (p. 50). Kuh et al. (2010) found Fayetteville State’s SSS program “provides highly structured academic development programs, including personal and group counseling, co-curricular programs, and peer tutors” (p. 128).

**Student Services Staff**

Gardner (2007) recognizes that the task of retention implementation efforts will fall to the student services personnel with the support of college administrators. In order to get the rest of the campus to buy into creating and implementing a retention strategy,
Gardner recommends appealing to the literature and the data (2007). Members of the student services staff need to educate those who oversee the decisions making process by sharing the current research in the field. Kuh et al. (2010) emphasize that simply offering various programs and services will not help students succeed but instead, “programs and practices must be tailored to and resonate with the students they are intended to reach, be of reasonably high quality, and actually touch large numbers of students in a meaningful way” (p. 264).

Having many different programs in place will not necessarily help students succeed. Programs need to be based on data sources to justify the expense of money and personnel that are designated to help retain students. Gardner believes that colleges can no longer afford to ignore the retention issue and they need to become proactive rather than reactive (2007). Laden, Hagedorn, and Perrakis, (2008) recommend that community colleges focus attention and resources on poor male academic performance. These students must learn how to use services made available by the college staff members. It is crucial for them to know they need to learn how to work collaboratively rather than individually.

According to Astin (2001), a good analogy to use for how colleges should view their students is similar to how hospitals, clinics, or doctors view their patients. “Medical facilities administer treatment programs based on a diagnosis of the patient’s illness; colleges administer educational programs that presumably are relevant to the student’s education needs” (p. 17). Their recommendation for postsecondary educators is to provide cognitive-behavioral interventions focusing on improving the student’s self-perceptions, which could “help improve outcomes for a great number of students” (p.
Along the lines of Astin’s analogy, not all patients will respond to medicine in the same manner. Therefore, multiple programs must be created or at least offered in different formats or variations to help students find what works best for them and help keep them in college. One issue that student services staff can assist a student with is helping them understand they are just as capable of succeeding as any other student. Aspelmeire et al. (2008) found that self-esteem was a better predictor of college success more so than the label of first-generation college student predicting they would not persist. Their results suggest, “…not all first-generation students are at risk” (p. 778).

**College Administrators**

It is necessary to understand some of the barriers first-generation Mexican American male community college students encounter in order to comprehend how much self-persistence they possess to transfer to a four-year institution successfully. Understanding the barriers will help administrators understand the difficulties many of these students face. College administrators must move to make student success a priority from all levels of the institution, including finding additional resources to provide for scholarships. Not all programs meant to help students succeed will work in every setting. Kuh et al. (2010) state that student services staff need to learn “what works and what doesn’t through reflecting on their experiences and by swiping good ideas from their colleagues elsewhere” (p. 271).

Some of the stresses a student endures could be lessened if the institution of higher education would recognize some of these barriers and work to reduce or minimize the barriers. Jenkins’ (2009) study concludes that most colleges do not do a good job in helping first-generation students of color feel connected on their campus. He states that
colleges have an opportunity to introduce diversity at all levels of the educational system but fail to do so. For many first-generation students, this is important because they want to know they matter.

For some colleges, rethinking how and what types of services we provide students may result in a paradigm shift. Komives, Woodard, and Associates (2003) state that it is through “establishing new paradigms, researching their parameters, applying them to practice, dealing with their anomalies, and debating their value for explaining reality that we create new knowledge” (p. 448). Gardner, Tobolowsky, and Hunter (2010) offer recommendations to improve sophomore student success, yet it is a plan for success that can help any college student. Gardner et al. (2010) state “Students will be successful in the second-year transition if they are recipients of thoughtful and intentional curricular and co-curricular initiatives that are delivered through a partnership among faculty, academic and student affairs administrators, institutional researchers, and students” (p. 252). While many colleges focus on the first-year students’ experience, fewer schools consider having a second-year experience course or experience program.

Arbona and Nora (2007) have identified positive academic and environmental factors that have contributed to college degree attainment. They state that positive pre-college experiences, academic achievement, constructive faculty interactions, and the use of campus resources have been found to reinforce academic persistence within higher education for all students. Cejda and Rhodes (2004) found that ample social and familial support, perceived mentorship, and variables contributing to high self-efficacy have been shown to increase the persistence and determination among Hispanic undergraduate students. Further personal protective factors, such as a strong work ethic, determination,
resiliency and optimism have been shown to foster continued tenacity among Hispanic college students and support success in college (Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Castro, & Vela, 2010; Contreras, 2009). Giuliano and Sullivan (2007) find the data suggest, with appropriate assistance, underprepared students can be just as successful in higher education as their better-prepared classmates.

**Educational Experts**

There are many agencies, both for-profit and non-profit, that have sought to find ways to help college students succeed. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) was founded in 2001 by the University of Texas' College of Education. It was established “as the umbrella organization for survey research, focus group work, and related services for community and technical colleges interested in improving educational quality through strengthened student engagement and student success” (CCCSE, 2019).

Based on its 2012 survey results, the Center for Community College Student Engagement outlines seven design principles that are critical for student success. According to CCCSE, “No matter what program or practice a college implements, it is likely to have a greater impact if its design incorporates the following principles” (p. 5):

1. A strong start. Making sure students’ earliest contact and first weeks in college include experiences that build personal connections and improve their chances of success.
2. Clear, coherent pathways. Students face many choices as they weave through college systems, which can be confusing and serve as barriers to students’ success.

3. Integrated support. Building support such as skills development and extra instruction into coursework rather than referring students to services that not part of the learning experience improves success.

4. High expectations and high support. Set a high standard for students and give them the supports to reach them through services such as academic planning and financial aid.

5. Intensive student engagement. Promoting student engagement is the overarching feature of successful program design, the guide says.

6. Design for scale. Successful endeavors require time, money, political and financial support, as well as the involvement of faculty, staff, and students.

7. Professional development. Instructors, staff, faculty, administrators and governing boards must all re-evaluate their roles and work differently to foster student success.

CCCSE has found promising practices that are a part of “collegiate learning experiences that attend to students’ needs from their first interaction with the college through the successful completion of their first academic term and beyond” (p. 8).

CCCSE divided the practices into three groups: Planning for Success, Initiating Success, and Sustaining Success (2012). Most of the interactions listed in their study were identified under the following themes:
Planning for Success

- Assessment and Placement
- Orientation
- Academic Goal Setting and Planning
- Registration before Classes Begin

Initiating Success

- Accelerated or Fast-Track Developmental Education
- First-Year Experience such as intrusive counseling for at-risk students, peer mentoring and augmented instruction
- Student Success Course
- Learning Communities

Sustaining Success

- Class Attendance
- Alert and Intervention
- Experiential Learning beyond the Classroom
- Tutoring
- Supplemental Instruction

Complete College America (2019) is a non-profit national organization created with the single mission of leveraging their Alliance to eliminate achievement gaps by providing equity of opportunity for all students to complete college degrees and credentials of purpose and value. Their goal is to clear student success barriers such as low credit enrollment, poorly designed and delivered remedial education, overwhelming and unclear choices, and a system out of touch with the needs of students who most often
balance work and family with their coursework. The following are strategies they recommend to all colleges and universities.

- **15 to Finish** – Boost the number of students who are on track for on-time graduation by encouraging them to take 15 credit hours each semester (30 credits per year, including summers).

- **Math Pathways** – Ensure all students enroll in and complete gateway math in their first year by designing math courses that are aligned with the skills students need for their chosen program of study.

- **Co-requisite Support** – Increase gateway course completion within the first year by enrolling entering students into college-level math and English courses, providing those who need additional help a concurrent course or lab that offers just-in-time academic support.

- **Momentum Year** – Build momentum so students meet first-year benchmarks: informed choice of meta majors or major, enrollment in 30 credits with nine in the program of study and completion of gateway courses. Provide early support and guidance for decision-making, using interest assessments and labor-market data.

- **Academic Maps with Proactive Advising** – Default students onto highly-structured academic maps that lay out a semester-by-semester plan toward on-time completion. Design maps to include 15 credits per semester. Indicate milestones and pre-requisite courses, and empower advisor to effectively monitor progress and provide intervention as needed.

- **A Better Deal for Returning Adults** – Increase degree attainment by inviting adult learners back to complete their education, providing a redesigned system that
offers accelerated courses, year-round enrollment and predictable schedules that fit their busy livers. Give credit for prior learning and experiences and additional support to help students navigate the system.

**Research on First-Generation Mexican American Male Community College Students**

The past twenty years have generated many qualitative dissertation studies relating to retention, first-generation, Hispanics, community colleges, and college students. However, not much is known about the experiences of first-generation Mexican American male students since there is minimal research focusing specifically on this topic. Using the University of Iowa’s Library online services, a search was conducted in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (PQDT Global) database using the key phrase ‘retention of first-generation Mexican community college students.’ In researching dissertations completed in the last 20 years, only four dissertations mentioning Mexican/Mexican Americans were located in the top 200 entries of the ProQuest search, while another five dissertations were geared towards Hispanics or Latino/a(s) and no dissertations used the term Chicano.

Much of the research focused on first-generation Hispanic students rather than Mexican Americans and tended to focus on students on a four-year residential campus where the students can focus on their education while possibly working a part-time job. In researching dissertations completed in the last 20 years, only nine studies were based on community college students. A significant assumption by many of these studies is that Hispanics/Latinos can be treated as one single racial group.

Because of the low college completion rates, there have been many studies that have sought to answer the best method for retaining students. Several studies have
identified strategies that can be put into practice to increase the retention rate of any student population. These strategies include teaching students the academic cultural knowledge of the institution (Derby & Smith, 2004), developing counseling and intrusive advising techniques (Tinto, 2004; Hall, 2010), helping students navigate the college admissions process (Engle et al., 2006), involve faculty to participate or interact with students (Derby & Smith, 2004; Gardner, 2007), creating mentoring programs (Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004; Jenkins, 2009), additional resources for scholarships and grants (Tinto, 2004; Engle et al., 2006), creating new student orientation programs (Engle et al., 2006; Hall, 2010), creating orientation classes (Gardner, 2007; Hall, 2010), involving parents in the college-going process (Engle et al., 2006), and creating a summer bridge program (Jenkins, 2009; Hall, 2010).

Importance of Familial Factors

The focus of this study is factors that contribute to the success of the first-generation male Mexican American community college students. Harper’s 2010 study revealed that parents “consistently conveyed what many of the participants characterized as non-negotiable expectations that they would pursue postsecondary education” (p. 9).

Every student in Ceballo’s 2004 study mentioned parental support as the home experiences “most important in contributing to their academic success” (p. 184). The parents in this study included other adult role models and mentors to help their child learn more specific assistance with the college-going process. Ceballo (2004) identified three common factors that facilitated Latino students’ college-bound trajectories as related to their familial support. These included “(a) parental commitment to the importance of education, (b) parental support of adolescent autonomy, and (c) nonverbal parental
expression of support for educational goals” (p. 183). Ceballo concluded, “Relationships with a caring adult or mentor can buffer children from many adverse life circumstances” rather than doom first-generation student to automatic failure (2004, p. 184).

At times, it is only with the blessing and support of the parent that a first-generation Mexican American child goes to college. Melendez and Melendez’ 2010 study revealed, “a strong attachment to parents was a positive influence on aspects of college adjustment for the participants involved” (p. 431). They concluded that for many students, “maintaining strong support within the family and effective quality within the parental relationship positively influences the factors associated with college adjustment” (p. 432). Their findings support an earlier study by Tinto (2006) whose findings concluded that:

“Where it was once argued that retention required student to break away from past communities, we now know that for some, if not many students, the ability to remain connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe is essential to their persistence” (p. 4).

Although first-generation parents play a limited role in their child’s college process, Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) found that if the “ultimate goal is having students continue their education beyond high school, school staff must leave behind their preconceptions about what parents should be doing and try new approaches to getting parents involved” (p. 583). Gofen (2009) adds that even though first-generation students face “many material challenges, the families of first-generation students are often a key resource rather than a constraint” (p. 114). The interviews conducted for this study cast a wide net to see what factors played an actual role in the student’s college success. The following chapters will explore this topic in greater detail.
Current Status of Community Colleges in Illinois

To keep community colleges affordable, community colleges receive a significant amount of their funding directly from property taxes within their district, which has been guaranteed by the state. The state of Illinois’ Department of Revenue (2013) has set a maximum amount of tax community colleges can levy for collection. “110 ILCS 805/3-1, 805/3-14, 805/7-18 DOR Code 159 allows for a 0.75% tax for educational purposes, for districts not located in cities having 500,000 or more inhabitants. For the smaller districts, Illinois codes 110 ILCS 805/3-1, 805/3-14, 805/7-18 DOR allows for 0.10% tax for districts not located in cities having 500,000 or more inhabitants” (p. 10). Some community colleges in Illinois have increased the amount of taxes they collect from property owners by setting the levy near the maximum allowed by the state.

Community colleges set their budgets based on several factors including enrollment prediction, tuition paid, property taxes, and anticipated funding from the state. Since the state of Illinois was dealing with a net population decline since 2013, a report predicted a decline in high school senior population over the next foreseeable ten years (WICHE, 2013). Even though overall high school student population has been declining, the state actually saw a gain in high school seniors with 144,521 in 2014 to 150,036 in 2018 (Illinois Report Card, 2018). This same report noted that overall high school enrollment has dropped by nearly 45,000 students in this same period.

As states face large deficits (DiMaggio, 2010) and cuts to their state award programs (McMorris, 2010), colleges are scrambling to balance their operational funds. Because of the deficits and cuts to state funding, colleges can no longer afford to ignore students who are dropping out for various reasons and find ways to retain them.
Retaining students will then increase the number of credit hours taken at the college, thus increasing revenue from a purely economic standpoint. An article in the Crain’s Chicago Business weekly newspaper best seems to sum up the current status of higher education in the state of Illinois:

While New York, Oregon, Tennessee and Rhode Island roll out free tuition programs for two-year schools and in some cases even for four years of college, Illinois is trying to stanch the bleeding from the self-inflicted wound of the budget standoff while weighing the pros of shutting down state universities against the cons of robbing downstate communities like Carbondale, Macomb and Charleston of their most vital economic engines (2018).

Illinois colleges and universities did not received funding due to a deadlock over a budget beginning on July 1, 2016 (O’Connor, 2016). For a 10-month period, colleges did not receive any state money. While some stopgap funding was provided, it was nowhere near the level the colleges were used to receiving (Brown, 2017). Brown states the lack of state funding for the budget forced higher education institutions to use up their reserve funding, lay off faculty and staff, mandated furloughs, freeze hiring, and limit university-sponsored travel (2017). The lack of state funding and the uncertainty of Illinois’ MAP grant funding by the state caused many low- to middle-income families to consider whether attending college was a viable option since it was more money than they anticipated they would need to pay (Lisi, 2018). Lisi reported that many students decided to sit out for a year or drop out of college all together if their MAP funding did not get approved.

The stalemate between the Republican governor and Democratic controlled legislature from 2015 to 2017 created much uneasiness among prospective Illinois college students about the long-term condition of the educational system in Illinois and their options to stay in state (Bauman, 2018). Bauman states that the exodus of Illinois
college students to out-of-state institutions had been going on for years but Illinois was able to absorb the loss. "In both 2012 and 2014, around 33,000 Illinois residents attended college as freshman outside the state. The state filled only about half of that deficit with enrollment each year of about 17,000 out-of-staters" (Bauman, 2018). Bauman states that five times over a 10-year period prior to Rauner’s election, Illinois had seen an 8,000-student deficit from students leaving the state and out-of-state students coming to Illinois. The budget stalemate brought the deficit to the surface and made it much worse (2018).

In Illinois, current community college facts from the American Association of Community College’s (AACC) show that of all the community colleges students, Hispanics represent 24% of students enrolled for college credit (AACC, 2018). The AACC website shows that thirty-six percent of all students in the system are first-generation students, with a gender gap showing 56% of the students are female while 44% are males (2018). Community college attendance by Hispanics makes up 52% of all Hispanics in college. This is the second highest, slightly ahead of Native Americans who are at 56% (AACC, 2018).

There is some mixed news when it comes to Hispanic males in higher education. A report from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) shows a continued increase in the percentage of male Hispanics attending college and graduating. In 1980, 44.9% of Hispanic males and 44.21% of Hispanic females had graduated from high school or higher among those over the age of 25. In 2017, 69.5% of Hispanic males and 71.6% of Hispanic females had graduated from high school or higher among those over the age of 25. When it comes to student receiving a Bachelors degree or higher, in 1980, 9.2% of Hispanic males and 6.2% of Hispanic females had received a Bachelors degree.
or higher among those over the age of 25. In 2017, 15.8% of Hispanic males and 18.6% of Hispanic females received a Bachelors degree or higher among those over the age of 25. While the number of Hispanic females tripled over this period, the number of Hispanic males failed to double. In fact, growth among Hispanic females indicates their numbers grew twice as large compared to the growth of Hispanic males.

**Undocumented Students**

Although college enrollment among Hispanics has been growing steadily among this population, it is important to note that undocumented college students are not extended the equal protection afforded them during their K-12 years. The role played by both the state and the federal government is a complex role. In 1982, the Supreme Court case of the United States, *Plyler v. Doe*, held that states were not allowed to discriminate against any student in grades kindergarten through 12th grade in any public school based on their legal status of being undocumented (Diaz et al. 2011; Olivas 2009). This right was not extended to postsecondary education. Individual states have used the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) as a way to discriminate against undocumented college students by charging them out-of-state tuition even though these students are in their “home” state (Kaushal, 2008; Olivas 2009). The IIRIRA and PRWORA Acts banned public colleges from offering undocumented immigrants in-state tuition unless out-of-state U.S. citizens were allowed the same rate (Kaushal, 2008; Olivas, 2009).

Since 2003, many states have interpreted the IIRIRA and PRWORA Acts in a way that favored undocumented students by passing state laws to allow in-state tuition
for these students. Some states chose to ignore the IIRIRA and PRWORA Acts and still allow for in-state tuition for the undocumented students. Kaushal (2008) found that when nine states needed to deal with many undocumented immigrants who had low college enrollment and graduation rates, they modified their state policies to circumvent the federal ban. Eligibility for in-state tuition requires undocumented students to prove they have attended at least three years of high school and graduated in that state. In Texas and California, these students were asked to sign an affidavit stating that they have either applied to legalize their status or will do so as soon as they become eligible (Kaushal, 2008). However, the states of Georgia, Missouri, Alabama, and Virginia went to the extreme against undocumented students by stating these students could not establish in-state residency. They also barred these students from being allowed to attend any state institutions altogether (Olivas 2009). In 2007, Arizona removed 5,000 students from resident status in their colleges and adult basic-education classes (Olivas 2009). Ruge and Iza state that in regard to the IIRIRA and PRWORA Acts, the “intent behind these two statues is interpreted in different and controversial ways; however, there seems to be at least some agreement that ‘these statutes do not prevent institutions from enrolling or admitting an undocumented immigrant student’” (2005, p. 263).

There have been challenges to the in-state status of undocumented college students. In 1982, the Supreme Court heard the case of *Toll v. Moreno*, which is considered the primary case dealing with the issue of states offering in-state tuition to undocumented students. The Court found that states did not need to limit in-state tuition to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragon, 2010). Another such case was the 2004 *Day v. Sibelius* case in which a citizen student
from the state of Kansas filed a lawsuit challenging the state’s practice of giving in-state tuition to undocumented students. In July 2004, the District Court found for the state. It found that the student who brought the case to trial had not been denied any benefit or received any harm by the state’s practice. In 2007, the 10th Circuit upheld the decision in *Day v. Bond* (Olivas, 2009).

**Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework**

This study uses Harper’s Anti Deficit framework. Harper developed his anti-deficit framework to focus on Black males who successfully graduated from college in STEM fields and went on to graduate school or entered the workforce with a good job (see Figure 2.4).

At a time when some studies pointed to a student’s characteristics and determine if that student would succeed in college, Harper decided to ignore the many deficits that could be used as an excuse for failure. Rather than allow the Black males in his study to be defined by their socio or economic position in life, he focused on their self-efficiency and the decisive factors in their lives that allowed them to progress. According to Harper (2015):

Philosophically, the Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework is guided by a belief that despite what is consistently reported in media, peer reviewed academic journals, and research reports, there are many Black male students who enter postsecondary institutions with high levels of academic preparation, support, and motivation, which enables them to succeed academically, accrue social capital and activate it for personal and professional advancement, benefit in myriad ways from leadership and engagement opportunities on their campuses, and ultimately persist through degree completion. The framework is intended to identify policies, practices, and structures, as well as individual, familial, cultural, and communal resources that help Black men succeed educationally (p. 142).
Harper relies on the work of psychologist Albert Bandura in his use of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1977) as “our belief about our capability to be successful at something and the ability to influence the events that will affect our lives” (p. 194). Bandura further states “Not only can perceived self-efficacy have directive influence on choice of activities and settings but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated” (p. 194).

Harper (2010) used “trajectory analyses to understand how the 219 Black male achievers managed to gain admission to their institutions” and to “overcome hurdles that typically disadvantaged their peers” (p. 66). In interviewing the 219 Black males, Harper devoted his efforts to understand how these students managed to gain the various forms of capital that they did not know about before entering the college of their choice. Many
students fail to succeed in college and the reasons why are plentiful. More important than the reasons for failure is the reason for success and persistence. In order to understand the road to success for these young men, Harper emphasized their “precollege experiences and the role of parents, peers, and significant others in the formation of their college aspirations” (p. 66). It was important to understand “who was supportive, and which interventions enhanced their educational experiences and enabled their achievement” (p. 66). It was also essential for Harper to understand “what compelled them to become actively engaged, both inside and outside the classroom” instead of trying to “discover all the reasons why Black men are so disengaged on college campuses” (p. 66).

The Anti-Deficit Achievement theoretic framework shares some similarities with critical resilience theory. According to Campa (2010), critical resilience provides a framework “to critique the established power and knowledge in educational practices, and therefore, helps us examine in greater depth how the social systems (peers, teachers, families) in a learning community influence the success of a group” (p. 77). Male African Americans students share some commonalities with Mexican American male students. By adapting Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement framework for studying first-generation male Mexican American community college students, these types of backgrounds and experiences provide a framework of how community colleges can support the resilience of Mexican American students to help them persist in the community college setting and beyond.

In addition to Campa, Yosso’s work also focused on the anti-deficit model with her work on Latino/a Critical Race Theory. Yosso’s (2005) work with critical race theory helped guide her work and views on Latino/a critical race theory (LatCrit). In education,
Yosso defines critical race theory as a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the way race and racism impacts the educational structures, practices, and discourses” (2005, p. 74). Her 2005 study looks at critical race theory and reveals comparisons to Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework as it refuses to look at students of color from a deficit perspective and instead “focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (p. 69). Yosso (2005) focused on community cultural wealth and identified six forms of capital that students used to survive and navigate the college-going process: aspirational, social, linguistic, familial, resistant, and navigational. She states that these “forms of capital draw on the knowledge Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom” (p. 69).

The work of LatCrit is based in an anti-deficit approach where the assertion is that racism, sexism, and classism occur based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname of those who are different from the norm. Yosso further states,

Indeed, one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in the US schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills, and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (2005, p. 75).

Communities of Color can benefit from research based on the anti-deficit model since the deficit model looks to pass judgment or place blame on the shortcoming of other groups of people in this community. In reality, these communities do not have access to White, middle- or upper class resources (Yosso, 2005).
There is a need to use an anti-deficit approach using first-generation male Mexican American community college students to identify institutional policies and programs that assisted these students as they sought to attain an associate’s degree. For many of these students, the pipeline through the educational system seems to be broken based on their lower completion rate. Sáenz and Ponjuán produced a 2011 report, in partnership with the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the Center for Research and Policy in Education, and The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to address the declining enrollment of Latino males in higher education. This partnership focused on the educational future for Latino male students, which was in a state of crisis. This crisis trend has been especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels in recent years. This report found that in 2010, females earned three out of every five associate or bachelor’s degrees granted to Latinos, and the degree-completion gaps were growing across all critical junctures in higher education.

Summary

Research has shown that many first-generation Mexican American male students lack the cultural capital and other resources to navigate the college-going process successfully. The statistical odds are against these students when it comes to transferring from a community college to a four-year college but they can develop skills and attitudes to succeed. While first-generation Mexican American male community college students plan on transferring to a four-year college, studies have shown they do not have the high school GPA or college entrance exam scores that show they will succeed. What these
students do have is a determination to succeed and persist regardless of the barrier placed in front of them or personal shortcomings they may have.

With the high poverty and dropout rate in the many community college districts, studies recommend that colleges step up and take an active role in creating programs or services to support these students. These changes must be embraced and supported at all levels of the college in order to create the necessary institutionalized change that will support first-generation male Mexican American community college student’s success in the classroom and beyond. Colleges also need to learn how to communicate what services are available and how to use them early and effectively with this population. Communication must be timely, but more importantly it must be done early.

Research conducted for this literature review has revealed that positive pre-college experience, social and familial support, constructive college faculty and staff interactions, and the use of campus resources have been found to reinforce a student’s ability to persist through college. There is a need to replicate Harper’s anti-deficit model using first-generation male Mexican American community college students to identify the experiences and services associated with their academic success.

The results of this study may give community colleges information and strategies to use, pertinent to Mexican American male students. This new information can assist colleges in creating an environment conducive to helping students succeed and retaining them through graduation.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe how some students successfully navigate their transfer experience from a community college to a public university. The research centers on the overarching question as to what do students attribute their college persistence. Three main questions guided this work:

1. How do community college transfer students experience the institutional agents while they were in college?
2. How did the services provided by the institution affect student progress?
3. How did the services provided by the institution affect their aspirations?

In this chapter, I discuss the methods used in this study and why a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study of first-generation Mexican American male community college transfer students. I describe the role of the researcher, the research subjects, data collection methods used, and the data analysis. I also discuss the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness while upholding the highest level of ethical standards in research.

Research Design

Qualitative Methods

According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), qualitative research has its roots in early American sociology and anthropology with ties to English and French intellectual traditions, and grew in popularity in the educational field in the 1960’s because of “their recognition of the views of the powerless and the excluded – those on the ‘outside’” (p. 17). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) believe qualitative data provides more of a detailed
understanding of a research topic while quantitative data provides more of a general understanding of a problem. Therefore, a qualitative design was the better option for an anti-deficit approach to learn and identify to what students attribute to their success and how this helped first-generation male Mexican American community college students succeed.

Both qualitative and quantitative frameworks have been used to explore the retention and persistence rates of Hispanic students. Qualitative approaches can reveal and explain relationships (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) and determine the “degree or extent to which certain characteristics are present” (Aiken, 2011, p. 95). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) caution that while “the process of quantification produces rates and measures…it does not mean there will be a natural consensus concerning how to arrive at rates and counts” (p.155). Furthermore, “numbers do not stand alone but are related to the social and historical context that generated them” (p. 155). For this research, no numerical data needed to be measured or compared.

In Harper’s approach to his Anti-Deficit Achievement, he points out that the tendency to ask “Why” questions is rooted in deficit-oriented inquiry, while “How” and “What” questions are for anti-deficit reframing (2010). The overarching focus of this study was to identify to what students attribute to their success and how this helped them succeed. In other words, what do students attribute to their persistence? By doing so, we can identify how colleges can best support students and determine what makes a positive difference, rather than focus on why students did not succeed. The what and how approach provides this study with greater depth and breadth of knowledge we can use to understand better how the participant’s experiences with college services and personnel
affected their progress. It is through this approach that we can determine what compels students to persevere, regardless of any barriers they faced, thereby assisting future students and community colleges improve student retention efforts and programs.

**Context of the Study**

This study of first-generation Mexican American male community college students who successfully transferred to a four-year university is focused in the state of Illinois. The Illinois community college system is the third largest in the nation (ICCB, 2017). Community colleges are a good stepping-stone for students who want to pursue a four-year degree but may not be able to afford or are unable to move away from home for personal reasons (Levine, 1986). Thus, the community college system continues to be instrumental in furthering the college education of male Hispanics in the state of Illinois.

**Research Site**

The transfer research site (referred to as Public University) for the subjects is a public comprehensive university in Illinois offering bachelors’, masters’, and doctoral degrees. Public University is a mid-size university with over 7,500 undergraduate students, 85% of whom are in-state residents primarily from the greater Chicago area. The community colleges attended by the subjects are in close proximity to Chicago. The Public University undergraduate enrollment breaks down as: 51% female, 10% Hispanic, 19% African American, and 1% Asian/American Indian/Pacific Islander. Public University was selected because it is a typical college reflecting the core value of respecting diversity.
Six men participated in this study. Prior to transferring to Public University, they matriculated at one of six community colleges, all in the greater Chicago area. See Table 3.1 for details.

### Table 3.1. Participant’s Community College Information (FY 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Total Student Enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage of Hispanic Students Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha College</td>
<td>Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta College</td>
<td>Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta College</td>
<td>Chicago Regional area</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon College</td>
<td>Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma College</td>
<td>Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta College</td>
<td>Greater Chicago area</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ICCB Centralized Data System--Annual Enrollment and Completion (A1) Data*

### Research Participants

I worked with a four-year public university in Illinois to identify study participants using a purposeful sampling method, a method of selecting participants “who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 173). In this study, all participants are first-generation male Mexican American individuals who started their postsecondary education at a community college and then transferred to Public University. Some of the participants transferred to Public University without earning their associate’s degree.

The following criteria were used to screen and determine which students were invited to participate in this study:

- Participants must be Mexican American and identify as male
- Participant’s parents must have little to no postsecondary education
- Participants must have attended a community college in Illinois
Participants must currently be attending a four-year university.

Using purposeful sampling, Public University sent an email on my behalf to all male students who self-identified as Hispanic and first-generation students on their admissions application. To gain approval from the research site’s university Internal Review Board, I sent Public University my Request for Participation/Recruitment E-mail (Appendix A), along with my University of Iowa’s IRB approval paperwork for their consideration. Public University approved my study and sent my initial email questionnaire directly to the students based on the criteria listed above. After reading the Request for Participation email, students were asked to click on a link that redirected them to the University of Iowa’s Data Qualtrics Student Survey to the informed consent form (Appendix B) in order to continue if they wished to participate and continue. The Qualtrics Student Survey detailed the purpose of the study, the length and location of interviews, a description of compensation for the participants, and contact information. Once the students agreed to continue with the process and the study, they were asked to complete the Demographic Information section in the Qualtrics Student Survey link to ensure they fit the criteria for this study.

Students meeting the criteria were contacted via email to set a phone interview appointment to confirm their eligibility. Six participants met the criteria and were enrolled in the study. Each chose a pseudonym.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

I followed the Institutional Review Board and Human Subject Review guidelines to protect the participants from any potentially harmful questioning. I ensured the Human Subjects Consent to Participate form (Appendix C) was reviewed with each potential
participant. I confirmed they understood their rights to refuse my invitation to participate as well as their right to terminate any further questioning if they no longer wished to participate. I ensured the participants understood a digital voice recorder and field notes would be used to ensure fidelity of the data (Yin, 2011). Prior permission to use a digital recorder was obtained by those being recorded. Interviews were then transcribed using these recordings.

**Data Collection**

Before interviewing participants for this study, pilot interviews were conducted. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to refine the questions based on feedback related to the clarity and usefulness of the questions. Those involved at the pilot stage included three professionals and two students who matched the study criteria. Pilot participants offered suggestions to clarify the wording of the questions or to add additional questions. Additional questions were identified and created in order to gather additional information from the participants. These additional questions provided greater insight into the subject’s decision to attend college and persist through completion. This new category was one of Self-Awareness and addressed concerns they may have had as well as self-reflection about their journey. The final interview protocols are included in Appendices D and E.

Also during the pilot interviews, it became evident that the participants’ family and friends played a significant role in their aspirations and success in college, more so than anyone at the college. Because of this, it was pertinent to the interview protocol to include the first column from Harper’s model. Therefore, additional questions were
added to present the full story of their success in relation to their pre-college experiences that aspired or encourage their decision to attend college.

Data were collected through two different face-to-face interviews. The interviews consisted of questions representing the College Achievement section based upon Harper’s (2010) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. The interviews were conducted in a quiet location at Public University’s campus library, which was a public and convenient location for the subjects. Prior to each interview, the IRB Consent form was reviewed, including their right to terminate the interview at any time without consequences. Subjects were asked to sign and date the form before continuing with the interview. The subjects were informed they would receive a $50 Visa Gift card at the end of the second interview.

Individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview process so that “interviews are free to probe and shuffle questions as needed” (Alkin, 2011, p. 114). Semi-structured interviews allow “questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Using semi-structured interviews allow for the adaptation and inclusion of new questions that were not considered until specific new issues or concerns arose. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews was to establish an adaptation of the College Achievement column similar to Harper’s model, while allowing for follow-up and probing questions to ensure the questions were fully answered. It was vital to ask all subjects the same questions to gauge their experience through their community college and on transferring to Public University, but it was also important to ask additional individual questions that allowed further explanations or clarification.
This study focused on Harper’s College Achievement phase, which has three main focal points he explored: classroom experience, out-of-class engagement, and enriching educational experiences. The first point of College Achievement consists of *Classroom Interactions* that helped the subjects succeed in the classroom despite previous challenges or disadvantages. How did the student negotiate “onlyness” and under-representation at their community college? What compelled the students to persist in college despite academic challenges and previous educational disadvantages? Which pedagogical practices engaged the students at their community college? How did faculty encourage the students to participate outside the classroom? How did the students craft productive responses to any racial stereotyped they may have faced in the classroom?

The second point under phase two reviewed faculty as *Institutional Agents* who served as additional support personnel to aid the subjects as they navigated their way through college. How did faculty contribute to the student’s success? How did faculty contribute to the student’s aspirations? In what ways did faculty encourage the students to participate outside the classroom?

The third point under phase two reviewed *Student Service* experiences as it relates to the student services offices and staff. What compelled the students to take advantage of campus resources, clubs, and student organizations? How did the services provided by student services offices affect their progress? How did the services provided by student services offices affect their aspirations? How did college programs or services contribute to the student’s success? As mentioned before, Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework was reformatte to fit the needs of this study. As this study concluded, an additional connection that may fit under either one of these points or phases was sought.
All focal points under the modified Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework model were examined (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Studying First-Generation Male Mexican American Community College Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the student negotiate “onlyness” and underrepresentation at their community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which pedagogical practices engage one at their community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What compelled the student to persist in college despite academic challenges and previous educational disadvantages?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the student craft productive responses to any racial stereotyped they may have faced in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSISTANCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT SERVICES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What compelled one to take advantage of campus resources, clubs, and student organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the services provided by student services offices affect their progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the services provided by student services offices affect their aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did college programs or services contribute to ones success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did faculty contribute to ones success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did faculty contribute to ones aspirations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways did faculty encourage one to participate outside the classroom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Shaun Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Studying Students of Color, 2010)

The initial interviews were conducted in April of 2018 and ranged in time from 55 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes. The subjects received a copy of their signed consent form at the conclusion of the first interview. Between the first and second interviews, subjects were asked to spend some time taking notes in a journal book provided on anything they may have forgotten to mention in regards to their community college.
experience. Copies of the interview questions were provided to each participant to use as a reference for their journal. For their journal entries, subjects were also asked to recall any interaction they had with individuals not employed in the educational field of employment to seek college information, including other family members, friends, or community agency like a church. Subjects were asked to recall any questions they had as well as the answers they received to check for information accuracy and correct any inaccuracy. The journals would be used to clarify or expand upon any responses given during the initial interview when we met for the second interview. The interviews were transcribed and returned to the subjects approximately 2-3 weeks after the initial interviews for member checking of accuracy and intent. Once the subjects approved the first set of transcripts, the second interviews were scheduled for a week later.

At the beginning of the second interview, each participant was asked to submit their journal but only one participant did so. The other five subjects did not complete any information in their journals. The five who did not submit their journal stated they reviewed the questions from the first interview but felt they had nothing more to add. Before the start of the second interview, I reviewed the IRB Consent Form and asked them if they wished to continue. Subjects were asked if I still had their permission to use the digital audio recorder, which they affirmed. The second interview consisted of 13 questions, with an additional four questions for the DACA students (Appendix E). The second interviews were conducted in May 2018 and ranged in time from 20 to 35 minutes. At the conclusion of the second interview, each participant was given a $50 Visa Gift card after signing receipt of the funds. The second interviews were transcribed
within a week and returned to the subjects for member checking of accuracy and intent. A complete review of the data collection process appears in Appendix F.

**Data Analysis**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis is the process of “systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulated to enable you to come up with findings” (p. 159). Field notes were used to seek clarification or to ask additional follow-up questions, which allowed for clarification of responses given by the subjects. Any needed clarification of the first interview was addressed in the follow-up interviews.

_A priori_ coding was used for the information gathered according to the categories of the anti-deficit framework that had been adapted from Harper’s model. Stemler (2001) notes that when using _a priori_ coding, “the categories are established prior to the analysis based upon some theory” (p. 2). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011):

Qualitative data analysis involves coding the data, dividing the text into small units (phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), assigning a label to each unit and then grouping the codes into themes. The coding label can come from the exact words of the participants (i.e., in vivo coding), phrases composed by the researcher, or concepts used in the social or human sciences (p. 208).

**Coding Process**

As this study is focused on Harper’s middle column and based on the College Achievement aspect of his model, questions for the interview centered on subjects experiences with college staff, policies, and the college. Of particular interest were their perceptions of their classroom interactions, student services and institutional agents. The decision was made to include some questions related to their pre-college experience, to get a full picture of what contributed to their success. These additional questions allowed
inquiry of their Pre-College Socialization and Readiness, another aspect of Harper’s model. Data were categorized initially as: (1) Pre-College Socialization and Readiness, or (2) College Achievement.

The initial data analysis process began by using the open coding method to place the questions and responses in initial categories. Open coding allowed me to review the initial grouping of data and place them in similar categories. After the open coding was completed using Harper’s model (2010), a secondary stage of coding was conducted using a priori “parent codes” and the constant comparative method of analysis to identify themes within the parent codes. This coding helped sort the data into the a priori categories adapted from Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework. This process was conducted until all data was categorized from each interview. I used a second person to assist with the assessment of the categories for credibility purposes. This allowed me to reassess the categories more closely for accuracy. Criteria for this process were adapted from Harper’s 2010 anti-deficit framework study to strengthen the validity of this study.

Although the foci of questions were on people, practices, and policies of their community college experience, the coding process of the overall interview questions was completed independently so that additional themes may emerge. The personal questions that focused on the subjects’ pre-college socialization and readiness, while evident, also seemed to resonate throughout the subjects’ years at their community college. After the initial categories were created, I applied the axial coding process to the data set to break down the responses into appropriate subcategories further. Once this data was placed in these categories, they were reexamined in order to assess their credibility and appropriateness for this study. As I examined the responses, I found many played no role
in answering the research questions for the subjects in this study. Because of this, many of the 149 questions and responses were excluded from this study.

Due to the reality that some Hispanic students are undocumented, additional questions were added in regards to their status as a DACA student. Since these questions came up, the conversation led to any fears or crisis of confidence the students may have about their college-going process and ability to graduate. For a list of parent codes and categories, see Appendix G.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Having confidence in the process of a study is necessary if we seek confidence in the veracity and fidelity of findings. Qualitative research focuses on the interviewer as the research instrument (Heppner & Heppner, 2004) and the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research gathered as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

A cornerstone of all research is dependent on ethical decision-making at every step of the research study. Failure to comply with ethical standards as determined by an individual’s school Institutional Review Board may lead to a failed study. For this reason, documentation is another cornerstone of every research study, representing observations as they are viewed and interpreted/intended by the person whose actions are being recorded. While it is natural to try and interpret what is being observed, it is even more critical to ensure that we are explaining the situation as intended. Our cultural bias, and to some degree our cultural ignorance, can misinterpret what is occurring. Because of the potential for errors of interpretation, making assumptions about the degree of association from one participant to another can lead to flawed results.
Qualitative studies require trustworthiness to maintain rigorous standards and ensure the transferability of the findings. It requires the reporting of research procedures and data as transparent as possible. I described and documented my qualitative research procedures in a manner that other people can review and understand as recommended by Yin (2011). I followed an orderly set of interview questions as created and adapted from Harper’s anti-deficit achievement framework to capture the participant’s decision-making processes as recorded in the interviews and reviewed by the subjects. As interviews were conducted, I shared copies of the transcript with each participant to check for accuracy.

Credibility in qualitative research is established by providing pathways for one’s work to be confirmed, such as audit trails, acknowledging research biases and perspectives, and by member checks (Alkin, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks, also known as respondent validation, allow the researcher to share the interview responses to ensure accuracy of the transcripts in order to get their feedback (Yin, 2011). This process lessens the possibility of “misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Member checking occurred during the interviews to ensure I fully understood the subjects’ response. After each interview was transcribed, subjects were emailed a copy of the transcript and asked to review it for accuracy. Discussion of the first transcript occurred at the final interview. Transcripts were corrected if I did not capture their response accurately. After the second interview, subjects were emailed their transcript and we discussed their second transcript over the phone.

I also sought to validate this study by using the method that sought discrepant evidence and negative cases, also known as rival explanations (Yin, 2009). Yin states that
rival explanations are not merely alternative interpretations, but occurs when two rival explanations compete directly with each other and are not able to coexist (2009). Did something help the student succeed or did it not make a difference? The search for programs, personnel, or policies that helped a student succeed uncovered varying levels of how much something actually could be attributed to a subject’s success. By questioning the level of contribution something had towards their perceived success, follow-up questions allowed me to differentiate between sources a participant used versus sources that had a causal effect on their success.

**Transferability**

Transferability is another standard of trustworthiness. Marshall and Rossman (2011) refer to transferability as the “ways in which the study’s finding will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice” (p. 252). They further state that it refers to the degree to which the results of the study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (2011). “Thick description and systematic and detailed analysis” will lead to transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 11). I used purposeful sampling to ensure I was only interviewing first-generation male Mexican American community college transfer students, which resulted in findings that were relatable to similar students in similar situations.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Marshall and Rossman state that dependability refers to “showing the ways by which the researcher plans to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study and changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the settings” (2011, p. 253). They further state that confirmability is the way in which “qualitative researchers can parallel the traditional concepts of objectivity” (p. 253).
Through the rigorous planning of the research project, several instruments were needed and used to record and convey the lived experiences of the subjects. The accuracy of the data lies squarely on the researcher and his or her ability to communicate the narrative as told by the subjects.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Reviewing what was transcribed and having the subjects assist with the member checking of the information provided the means for confirmability. Throughout the interview, I took notes to write down thoughts or questions I needed to clarify with the subjects after they finished their thoughts. I did not want to interfere with the telling of a story by the participant, so I waited until they finished their statement. Clarifications by the participant were confirmed and then transcribed in the interview notes.

**Limitations of the Study**

Heppner and Heppner (2004) state how critical it is to clearly state the limitations of the research to “help readers understand possible confounds in the study” (p. 229). A possible limitation encountered may be in making the comparison of first-generation Midwestern Mexican American male community college students and the relationship of this research to other Hispanics and first-generation college students cited in studies across the nation.

The students interviewed have already graduated or transferred from a community college, so their recollection of events that occurred years earlier might also be incomplete. Without a comparison group, it is impossible to address the selection effect, to which the Harper model lends itself.

Another limitation is that all the subjects came from the Chicago area where the student population had a significant number of Mexican Americans at their colleges.
There are many other rural areas where Mexican Americans live. A follow-up study consisting of Mexican Americans in rural areas may cover additional information on their success rate and determination.

A limitation of this study also includes the lack of a comparison group. An anti-deficit study does not seek to determine why students fail, therefore I did not compare subjects in this study with students who were not successful to see if the unsuccessful students used the services and connected with college agents but still failed to succeed. The selection of subjects for this study purposefully sought first-generation college students who successfully transferred to a university after their community college to determine how they navigated the process and how those experiences or agents helped them be successful, and which institutional services positively affected their progress and aspirations. In addition, since this study’s focus was on services and agents at their community college that benefited or increased student success; questions were not designed to focus on subject’s personal traits or what they did that made them successful.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of first generation Mexican American male students who successfully transition from a community college to a public university. I used Harper’s Anti-Deficit Framework (2010) to organize this chapter. First, I discuss which institutional agents influenced student success. I then describe how did the services provided affect their progress. Third, I discuss how the services provided affect their aspirations. Finally, I describe other non-higher education individuals and services that influenced their success.

One finding that was not an original focus of this study was the support the subjects received before college and from individuals outside of the college setting. Once it became apparent that experiences before college and outside influences had a major affect on student aspiration and success, this study expanded upon Harper’s study to include the Pre-College Socialization and Readiness column.

Result of this study may help community college personnel better understand how these students navigated the college-going process in order to develop a stronger support system for current students, as well as improve the onboarding of future first generation students. The research centers on an overarching question as to what the students attribute their college persistence.

Participants

The six subjects all self-identified as Mexican American and male, and ranged in age from 23 to 25 years. Five subjects attended a community college in the greater Chicago area for a minimum of two years. Five of the six subjects attended a Hispanic
Serving Institution (HSI), while one of the students attended a community college with a 21% Hispanic population. Only one student attended more than one community college.

A brief description of the subjects appears in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Participant’s Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
<th>Community College Attended</th>
<th>CC % of Hispanic Students</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>GPA at CC</th>
<th>First in Family to Attend</th>
<th>Estimated Family Income</th>
<th>DACA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>Athletic Training</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$40,000-$50,000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Exercise Science</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cesar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$40,000-$50,000</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Two older sisters</td>
<td>$10K</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>One older sister</td>
<td>$18K</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oz</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Epsilon/Zeta</td>
<td>21% 76%</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>**One older brother</td>
<td>$50,000-$60,000</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Percentage of Hispanic Students - Illinois Board of Education, 2019)*

* Name chosen by participant

**Did not graduate from college**

Four of the students are U.S. citizens, while two are undocumented but enrolled in the DACA program, which allows them to attend college without fear, at least presently, of being deported. All describe themselves as being from the Chicago area. Their family situations varied, as did their family income. One participant attended two different community colleges. A brief description of each participant follows.

Antonio attended a high school with a majority Hispanic population, which mirrored his community college. Antonio knew he wanted to go to college to build a career and become someone important who could help people and whom others respect.
He is an undocumented student living in this country while his divorced mother lives in Mexico; she encouraged him to keep studying so his dreams could be realized.

Carlos attended a high school with a majority Hispanic population. Carlos’s mother and sister were the “number one motivation for me to be here, and they helped me out a lot in college and high school and soccer, especially my mom.” He wants to be able to help his family after college. He reflected on seeing his older friends graduate from high school and working jobs that did not pay well.

Cesar attended a high school that was a predominantly white high school, but had a large Hispanic population. Cesar’s dad did not want Cesar to be like him, “I want you to be more than me. I am a cook. That’s what I do. I work. You and your siblings are more than that. You don’t want to have my life. I’m happy but there’s just so much more opportunity in this country and you guys should take advantage of that.” Not wanting Cesar to have his life, his dad encouraged him to go to college, but Cesar did not listen at first. It was not until Cesar started college that he realized his dad was right. His mother was concerned about his ability to be a college student so she just pleaded for him to at least finish high school, figuring they would deal with life after high school once that time arrived.

John attended a predominantly Hispanic high school that he considers one of the worst high schools with gang problems, which led to him dropping out after his freshman year. He was two years older than most of his classmates because he failed third grade and had a late birthday; this made him feel out of place. His high school was extremely rough so he only saw four options for high school: stay in school and join a gang, join the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and enlist in the military after
graduation, not join a gang and get targeted and “hit by everyone,” or drop out. His father was not in the picture and his family was poor so the logical solution for John was to drop out and get a job. John had two sisters who had gone to college, made a good living, and encouraged him to get his GED and go back to college. He eventually received his GED at the age of 19.

Jose attended a high school that had nearly equal numbers of White, Black, and Hispanic students. Jose had been working at a Home Depot for three years before deciding to go to college. He credited his sisters and the demanding work environment for his decision to go to college three years after high school.

Oz attended a high school that was also very diverse. Oz credits his brother, as well as working in retail for six years, for helping him decide to go to college. He was working and doing a lot of physical labor and realized he was not doing what he wanted to do so he agreed to go to college.

**Familial Factors**

When it came to getting assistance with information about the college-going process, the families of those who did not have a family member with college experience were unable to provide any guidance. John and Jose’s sisters’ were able to provide information on what to do, but the sisters gave them limited information because they wanted John and Jose to learn how to do thing for themselves. Oz’s father’s side of the family has post-secondary educational experience so he was able to get advice from them.

For the other students, they felt alone and not sure where to turn to next. Some relied on others for direction and assistance, such as coworkers or friends, while one of
the subjects refused to ask for help for fear of looking incompetent. They felt they could maneuver the college-going process without the help of others. With the knowledge they have gained about the processes, many of them plan on serving as a community resource for anyone at home who needs assistance with the college process.

While the families were not able to provide much, if any financial support, almost all the families emotionally supported their decision to attend college. Consistently, subjects reported that parents felt that their sons’ college education could lead to a better life; a life they wish they could have provided for their sons. While some did not understand the college-going process, they tried to support their sons with the little amount of money they could spare. Some parents encouraged their sons to go to college since they worked multiple jobs or had low paying jobs and they did not want their sons to work as hard as they had to work.

Antonio, Carlos, and Cesar stated their families were happy about their decision to go to college instead of just working entry-level jobs. Carlos’s family was not able to provide much money for him to go to college so he was grateful for the money his mother was able to provide whenever she could spare some money. The small amount of money his mother was able to send him showed how much she believed in him. Cesar said he was not going to waste the money she sent him by not graduating or being successful in class. Cesar’s family was just happy he graduated high school, so he said they were not quite sure what to expect with him attending college.

Jose’s family wanted him to go to college to break the cycle of poverty in which they lived. He said they told him that if he did not want to live the way they did, did not
want to work as many hours as them, or worry about how he was going to pay for this and that, then he needed to go to school, which they fully supported.

Prior to starting college, Oz’s family sat him down to talk about his decision to go to college. Oz stated they discussed the pros and cons of going to college, and encouraged him to do whatever he wanted to do. The fact that they did not place so much pressure on him made him feel very relieved. He said a lot of students get forced into going to college, but his dad thought he knew what he was doing and trusted him to make the right decision.

John’s family response was different than the rest of the subjects. While they loved their son, they did not know how to respond to the news that he decided to go to college. His parents were disappointed when he dropped out of high school after his freshman year. They did not understand how horrible the gang situation in high school was for John. While they never stopped caring about him, they just told him to do whatever he wanted to do with his life. Once no one cared about him going to school, it motivated him “in a twisted way” to want to go back to school. They did not believe he would finish his GED, so they told him to stop wasting his time and go back to work.

They didn’t really believe in me because they couldn’t get rid of that stigma like, “Oh he dropped out of school.” I think my brother told me that one time. Like, “How are you gonna succeed in college if you failed in high school?” And it was like, “Okay. Watch me.” So, it was kind of motivation to see. I feel like it kind of helped me to want to because I always liked being told that I can’t do something. And then go ahead and do it. It’s kind of fun. It’s kind of like a stigma. Up until even today, my dad was like, “Son, you gotta work.” It’s not that he doesn’t want me to (go to college), it’s that he never went to school. My mom and dad never went to school. It’s not that they don’t see the need for it…they think it’s kind of overrated. They don’t want me to get my hopes up, to try and fail. My dads’ greatest fear, he told me, was not that I was going to go to school. It’s that I was going to go and wasn’t going to finish and end up with no degree and end up being tens of thousands of dollars in debt. That’s something I always have in the back of my mind, but it’s one of the reasons even if I fail I don’t stop.
Most subjects cited their family as the strongest force behind their decision for going to college. For some students, it was extremely helpful to have someone at the high school encourage them to go to college and provide assistance. Subjects turned to their teachers, counselors, and coaches for college advice that they were not able to get from their parents.

Carlos stated that he received considerable information about college from his soccer coaches, teachers, and counselors. They gave him information on which college he should attend. His soccer coach gave him the confidence he needed to move forward with his decision to attend college at Beta and play soccer. Playing soccer is what Carlos loved to do so the opportunity to play soccer in college motivated him to work hard and make sure he did what he needed to do to be successful. He is truly appreciative of his high school soccer coach for pointing him in the direction of Beta College. By attending Beta College, he was able to continue playing soccer at the collegiate level.

Cesar’s high school did have a counselor visit every class to talk about financial aid and scholarships, but no one sat him down and discussed going to college in any detail. Although the information was limited and Cesar did not receive any one-on-one assistance, it did create a foundation for him to build upon. When asked what advice he would give himself now if he could talk to his high school self, he stated he would tell himself two major things:

I would have told myself that I was not stupid, that I had a label within the high school, and that label proved to be completely false. I never gave myself a chance. I never cracked open a book. Not because I couldn’t read, or not because I didn’t want to, I just thought that I couldn’t. I literally let myself be defined by the categorization that was put upon me. The actions were self-perpetuated and that sort of ignited their beliefs in me, but I sort of fell upon them. I started believing them. One of the things is, “You’re not stupid. You’re a smart guy.” The second
one is social, “Be more social.” Outside of my group of friends in high school, I was as well an introvert. I’ve never really been sort of the life of the party sort of thing. I would have definitely told myself, “Get involved in as many things as you can.”

Jose had a history teacher who told him he needed to go to college to prove others he was college material and could succeed. Even though Jose did not want to go to college, his history teacher encouraged him by telling him he was just as smart as the other kids and color does not matter. His teacher told him a better lifestyle would await him by going to college. These words always stayed in his head, and he said they served as inspiration when things got difficult.

In discussing any support or information they received about going to college, Antonio, John, and Oz stated they did not receive any assistance or information about going to college from anyone at their high school. It was understandable that John did not receive information about college since he dropped out after his freshman year.

Out-Of-School College Prep Resources

Cesar’s motivation for going to college and doing well was his girlfriend who told him she was not going marrying a guy that didn’t go to college, emphasizing he had to have a career.

I remember one day we were hanging out and she started crying out of nowhere. I’m like, “What the hell is wrong with you?” She’s like “You’re going away to college next year. It’s sad.” I was like, “I’m not going to college. I’m gonna work. Stop crying.” Then she stopped crying and was like, “What are you talking about?” “I’m not going to college!” That’s when she said, “This looks like it’s serious and I’m not marrying a man that has no education and didn’t go to college.” I’m like, “It’s stupid. It’s worthless. It’s a waste of money. I can make as much money doing this, what I’m doing now.” So she sort of planted a seed. Then she was pushing me, borderline abuse if you will. “What are you doing? Did you sign up for classes yet? What’s going on?” She was a major part of, she basically got the ball rolling. If I can credit anyone, it was her. Absolutely.
Jose states that his coworkers at work were incredibly supportive of going to college. They told him to go to college and not worry about his job, telling him that this work was not meant for him and that he could do better. They were like a second family asking him how school was going and about his grades during the breaks when he returned to work.

Oz’s neighbor, who was attending nursing school, had a large impact on him. He always told Oz to give it his all and try to be the best he could be and to see if he could be somebody in this life. You wanna make the best of this life. “Why not live it to the fullest? Why not” Things like that. And I was like, “You know what? That’s kind of the right mindset to have,” and I just gave it a shot. High school staff - No, but I feel like that was my fault, though. Well, maybe a little bit of both. My fault because like I said, I didn’t apply myself accordingly in high school, but also no one really reached out to see if I was even capable of doing it.

The results below are organized by research questions: How students experienced institutions agents, and how campus services may have affected student progress and aspirations. Finally, I report on the results of other positive influences that contributed to student persistence.

**How Students Experience Institutional Agents**

Research Question 1 sought to determine how the subjects’ experiences with institutional agents contributed to their persistence while at the community college. Agents refer to any college staff member. The first task involved identifying *who* the institutional agents were, and then *how* they may have influenced the subjects.

There were seven primary institutional agent categories identified by students as being influential – some in positive and some in negative ways. Those were faculty, academic advisors, financial aid advisors, TRiO advisors, tutors, counselor, and a student
organization. The agents most frequently referred to were faculty, academic advisors, and tutoring staff. The particular ways in which they were cited as being helpful were their rapport with the subjects, their accessibility, their patience/helpfulness, their genuine concern for the subjects success, and how these agents inspired them to continue in their chosen career path. The following will go into more detail as to who these institutional agents where and how they influenced the subjects’ lives.

Five of the subjects credit their rapport with a faculty member as strong and positive influences that encouraged their persistence. Four subjects identified staff members at their tutoring center as agents of their institution who had a positive affect on their experiences in college. The negative incidents did cause one participant to assume all faculty were the same and not very helpful but he kept reaching out and eventually found several influential faculty members. Other influences are better covered under the second and third question based on the service their office provided to the subjects. How faculty influenced the subjects is discussed below.

**Experience with Faculty**

When discussing incidents in the classroom that helped students persist, subjects were unable to identify any experiences that help them persist through college. They did identify faculty who they felt were helpful and encouraging when they had questions or were having a difficult time with their class. Some subjects also discussed how faculty encouraged them to continue in their area of study based on their expertise and love of the subject matter. These experiences occurred after class or one-on-one during the faculty members’ office hours. The rapport faculty developed with these subjects made them feel as if they could succeed in college in spite of any misgivings they may have had prior to starting college.
The subjects acknowledged having good, even great teachers but Carlos and Cesar specifically credit a faculty member with inspiring them to complete college by accepting late assignments, answering questions in a positive manner even for classes they were not teaching. Carlos sought help from his faculty after class for help with homework or questions about an exam. His experience was helpful as he found some faculty always made time to work with him and help him understand class concepts or figure out what he was doing wrong. His faculty took time to explain concepts to him that he did not understand. They listened to him and seemed to care about his success, even after he was no longer a student in their classes. There were times Carlos would go to his teacher’s office and ask for permission to turn in the assignment late after having to work too much the night before homework was due. He found his teachers to be patient and understanding by allowing him to submit the homework after the deadline. Never once did they make him feel like a failure for not being able to complete his work on time. Faculty understood he was trying to balance his academic life with the need to work to help support himself. Carlos developed a strong relationship with his English 101 teacher and would go to that teacher for continued assistance with his English 102 class that was taught by a different instructor. His English 101 teacher gave him the support and guidance he needed to be successful in his English classes, encouraging him to persist.

Cesar sought help from his English and science faculty. He requested assistance when he had trouble understanding an assignment or wanted his instructor to check over his work before it was submitted. Cesar also sought assistance from his previous Sociology instructor for help in a higher-level Sociology class with a different instructor. He developed such a good relationship with his previous instructor that he felt
comfortable enough to go back to him and ask for assistance. This instructor helped him understand the concepts and helping him put things into perspective. The instructor made him think about the topic until he was able to grasp the concept. This extra assistance helped identify the instructor as a person that Cesar credits with promoting his success in college. Cesar did have one negative experience with an instructor who called him by another Spanish name. He classified it as a minor incident but it was one that bothered him. While he felt it was an example of micro-aggression, Cesar did not think it rose to the level of needing to file a formal complaint against the faculty member.

I mean, something as mild as like the teacher thinking that my name is Juan or something. I don’t know what his intent was. I think he was serious because I was like, “Who the fuck is Juan?” And he was like, “Oh.” Looked at the roster. “What’s your name? Cesar. I’m so sorry.” Or whatever. Maybe it was an honest mistake. There was no Juan on the roster.

Jose’s favorite faculty member was his law enforcement instructor. She reinforced his desire to major in law enforcement. She always made herself accessible to him and was very knowledgeable on the criminal justice system. Because of this, he would go to her for assistance. They had such a good rapport with each other that he felt comfortable reaching out to her for assistance with understanding concepts for other criminal justice classes he had with other faculty. When he needed more explanation, she would take the time to elaborate, even taking the time to help him with his research topic. He found her to be inspirational. Jose did not have a good rapport with a teacher who made him feel stupid. He would go to the tutoring office for assistance with this class but he would still earn low grades.
Oz found a faculty member in English, earth science, environmental science, and law enforcement that he could ask for assistance, even a couple of semesters after he had them as instructors in the classroom.

So I sought (sic) out her assistance (Environmental Science) because I was kind of confused and I didn’t really want to get embarrassed in front of the class. So she helped out a lot giving me different perspectives and how to go about that. It was very difficult and the professor was available, like, all the time. Pretty much lived there. And the classes were three and a half hours two times a week, but they ended up being like five hours because the whole class would stay over because we knew how difficult it was. He was there, like a parent kind of.

Prior to the positive experiences he had, Oz did try to reach out to a couple of other faculty members but his experience with them was negative so he stopped trying to reach out, assuming all were the same. Oz had two faculty members who he thought were negative and were not available during office hours. They never seemed to have time for him after class or when he tried to contact them. He knew he could not let these experiences slow him down and saw them as a challenge he needed to overcome.

I like to take on challenges. I find them very attractive. If something’s kind of out of my reach, I like to work towards it. I’ve always been someone to earn it. I don’t like things handed to me. In fact, I know you have to go through obstacles to get there, whether it’s a difficult class or a difficult teacher, those things kind of push me more to keep wanting it. I’m pretty confident.

**Academic Advisor Experience**

Only half the subjects met with an advisor before registering for classes the first time because it was not required at most of their colleges. For some of the subjects, the experience they had with their academic advisors was positive. They were encouraged to continue with working hard towards their degree and often just checking on the subjects to make sure all was going well. Not all interactions with academic advisors were positive as some subjects recalled negative experiences that led them to minimize their
time with an academic advisor or to switch to other advisors. The subjects who did not meet with an academic advisor prior to starting college did eventually meet with an advisor to ensure they were on schedule to graduate on the subject’s timeline.

Antonio sought out the services of the advising office on his own even though he was not required to meet with them. They helped him pick the right classes so his credits would transfer to his transfer institution. His experience with the office was ordinary since he just met with whoever was available as they helped him pick the classes he needed. They provided the basic level of service they were required to provide but made no attempt to get to know Antonio. The advisors did not make him feel as if he was an important person on their campus but rather just another student with whom they had to speak.

Carlos was not required to meet with an academic advisor but met with one in the advising office prior to starting college. Since he was undecided, they placed him with a random advisor but he did not feel he was getting the personal assistance he needed. A fellow soccer player mentioned that the athletic department had academic advisors assigned to their department and suggested them to Carlos. He switched over to the athletic advisor and had a great experience working with her since he felt she cared about his academic and athletic needs. She would email or text him randomly to see how he was doing, which made him feel as if she truly cared about his personal well being and academic progress. He met or communicated with her approximately twice a month just to make sure he was doing what he needed to be doing. Carlos made her aware of his DACA status so he believes this is why she took the extra time with him, which helped motivate him.
Because I told her that I was a non-US citizen, so she knew I was not a typical college student. So she helped me a lot in different ways, so meeting up with her two times a month was very helpful for me. She was very helpful picking out the classes, picking out good professors. She didn’t want me to have a hard time with other professors that were not considered good at the time. I trusted her. She helped me a lot too, academically and athletically. I am very thankful for what she did for me.

Cesar had a similar experience with his academic advisor as Carlos. She became an important support person in his life and someone he could talk to about life in general. Her ability to connect and her concern for his well being made him feel comfortable enough to talk about his classes and open up about his personal life. He was the first in his family to go to college so he did not have anyone he could turn to for college advise. The advisor helped Carlos navigate the academic side of college and seemed to care about his success. His advisor helped him when he needed someone to turn to when he was having a difficult time with issues other than his classes. She cared about his success and was there for Carlos when he needed her, always responding to his emails and checking up on him.

When I was having, like, a tough time in a class, we would have this meeting and I would bring her up or I would email to her. She was a big booster. She would email me when it came down to registration time. I had carte blanche to email her. She just was very helpful in helping me decide classes and sort of giving me like a basic understanding of what it was to be in college. And yeah, she was just a very good person. At the end of it all, at the end of the sessions, I remember we would just have 10-15 minutes of just, like, “How are you? How’s things going? How’s the family home? How’s your grades? How are you feeling about college?” and stuff like that, which was very nice. At that time helpful indeed.

**Tutoring Experience**

Four of the subjects used the tutoring center to help them better understand classroom assignments and improving their writing skills. Cesar and Jose spoke about how individuals in the tutoring center helped them get through difficult assignments and
how they would not have been able to do well in specific classes without tutoring. Cesar always had pleasant experiences with the tutors since they made him feel welcomed. He stated that the assistance provided by the staff was “tremendous” as well as “monumental.” These staff members were kind and cared about his success. He felt they cared about him as if they were his teachers. Cesar stated that because of the interest they had in his success, he felt as if they taught him “somewhat” how to be better writer and be successful in his English classes. They showed him a great amount of patience.

Jose had the most significant experience with individuals in the tutoring center. He states that he never learned how to read for content and properly process the information as he read. He also never learned how to properly proofread his writing assignments. They were caring, patient and taught him how to proofread. Jose had a difficult time with one instructor who would make him feel “stupid.” After letting the tutor know how he was feeling, the tutor worked to improve his self-esteem.

Then I went to tutoring and then she helped me out. I told her that she (instructor) makes me feel I’m dumb. Like every time I’m trying to get some answers from her, she tells me this and that, and I’d tell her I kind of did it the same way. She’d say, “No you didn’t because you don’t got this answer. Because of that, you’re getting it wrong.” She makes me feel stupid. I was like, “I don’t know what to do.” She (the tutor) told me, “You know what? Who cares what she says?” You know? It matters what you think what you did. If you know you did it right, you did it right. And don’t forget too, not everyone’s good at it. I know you’re going to be successful.

The tutors did what she could to help Jose rebuild his self-esteem. Not only did she help him work on his assignments, she also helped him work on himself by reinforcing that he was not stupid, as the teacher made him feel. This is going above and beyond what her job responsibilities are as a tutor. The tutor stayed by his side and gave him hope when the teacher magnified his faults and walked away.
Financial Aid Office Experience

Half of the subjects used the services in the financial aid office. Some of their experiences were positive but not all. They quickly learned who to ask for assistance and who to avoid because those bad ones would confuse them and they would leave with more questions than when they started. Cesar found one particular lady who helped him complete his FAFSA every year. He was grateful for her willingness to sit down with him and patiently help him file his FAFSA, which relieved the stress he had of not knowing how to correctly file the form. This staff member was extremely nice and appeared to care about wanting Cesar to be successful.

Overall, the experience was everything that I was hoping for in the sense that I felt like I had accomplished something or I felt like I had a better grasp of what I was doing or what I was going into that meeting for.

Oz also had a good experience with the financial aid office and felt the staff was helpful and caring. If he had a question, they would pull out a sheet of paper, which showed him the exact steps he needed to complete or they would give him the phone number of any office he needed to call to complete his paperwork. They understood he was confused and needed extra assistance. If Oz did not know or understand how to do something, the staff recognized this and would make the call for him to help him complete his paperwork. They would not just sit him down at a computer and expect him to figure it out on his own. These staff members helped him complete his FAFSA without the additional stress of wondering how he was going to pay for college, which was a major concern for Oz. Their kindness and concern made him feel as if the financial aid staff cared about him and his success.

John had a negative experience with his financial aid office at Zeta College and felt they did not help him with what he needed. They told him he needed to file his
FAFSA form but they did not explain how to do complete it. He had never completed one prior to this and was hoping he could get some assistance. He went to the financial aid office but no staff member took the time to help him with the form.

He just like pointed me in the right direction on the computer and showed me how to log in. Then I kind of like, pretty much everything I had to just learn along the way.

John was concerned he would make a mistake on his form, which could have had negative consequences for him paying his tuition. He was not aware that he could have just walked up and asked for more assistance and assumed this was the level of service everyone received. John did not find the staff at his financial aid office to be helpful or caring. They just seemed to be going through the motions of helping students by pointing them to a computer and expecting them to figure it out on their own.

The interaction with institutional agents in the financial aid office differed from student to student. While some financial aid staff members provided explicit details on how to work through a process or even do some of the student’s work for them, staff at other community colleges simply provided the subjects with a set of instructions with the expectation of having the students work through their problem on their own. The level of service staff can or will provide a student in certain situations may depend on the amount of traffic in their office. When the office is full with a line of students waiting to be assisted, it can be assumed that staff will not have time to walk a student through the entire process of filing their FAFSA from their initial login to completion. It may fall on the individual student to speak up and state the level of assistance they require. If the level of service cannot be provided at that time, an appointment can always be scheduled.
for a later time when the financial aid staff member can sit down and walk the student through the entire process.

In summary, students experience institutional agents from their own perspective. While one student may view an interaction one way, another student may view it as something completely different. When dealing with first-generation students, it is imperative that all students be treated fairly and with respect instead of as a statistical figure that will probably never complete their community college degree or certificate. Positive experiences help students believe they are worthy of the college staff’s time and efforts. In this section we identified four areas where institutional agents have made a positive difference on subjects – faculty, academic advisor, tutors, and financial aid personnel. Subjects felt that individuals in these offices went above and beyond to help them feel as if the institutional agents cared about their progress and success. At times, these agents were critical to their aspirations for completing college. Whether it was about giving the student extra time to turn in a late assignment or reinforcing the idea that they are not stupid but rather important and capable of succeeding, the subjects were grateful that someone cared about them. It is this level of caring and positive interaction that can make a difference in a student’s ability to deal with stress and continue their progression to graduation.

**How Services Affect Student Progress**

Research Question 2 sought to determine how services provided by the institution affected the students’ progress. This includes any service that helps students succeed at their community college and differentiates between the services provided and its usefulness rather than the individual associated with providing the service. This task
involved identifying how these services affected the students’ progress through the community college. Three primary institutional services were identified as having no impact on the subjects since no one used these services – summer bridge programs, first-year-experience class, and learning communities. This may be explained by the fact that these programs are not made mandatory or they are not a service offered at their community colleges.

There were four primary services that were accessed with regularity by three or more of the subjects with varying degrees of success. Those were the services provided by new student orientation, academic advising, financial aid, and tutoring. Three services identified in the research as being beneficial in the retention of students were used by at least one student. These services include TRiO student support services, counseling, and joining a student organization or club, with three different subjects accessed at least one of these services. This may be partially explained by the fact that students are not required to use these services, and in the case of the TRiO program, not all students are eligible to join. However, since all subjects were first-generation college students, all were eligible to join the TRiO program but only one chose to do so. Table 4.2 provides an overview of which services participant used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Programs</th>
<th>Antonio</th>
<th>Carlos</th>
<th>Cesar</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Jose</th>
<th>Oz</th>
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<td>(Prior to starting college)</td>
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(Table 4.2 – continued)
TRiO Program  N  N  N  Y  N  N  1/6
Counseling  N  N  N  N  Y  N  1/6
Student Organization/Club  N  N  N  Y  N  N  1/6
Learning Community  N  Y  N  N  N  N  1/6
Summer Bridge Program  N  **N  N  N  N  N  0/6
First-Year Experience Class  N  N  N  N  N  N  0/6


*DACA students not eligible for financial aid
**Started but only attended a short period and did not complete

Tutoring Services

Neither Antonio nor Carlos used any tutoring services at their college but the other four subjects did. Of the four who used the tutoring center, three mentioned how accessible the office was. Oz mentioned how the office was conveniently located near the cafeteria so he was forced to walk by it on a regular basis.

Both Cesar and Jose mentioned how accessible the office hours were and how convenient the hours were for them, especially since they needed to use it during the evening hours. Cesar made the comment that the times were “phenomenal” since they were open for evening hours from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. as well as early in the morning. Jose also mentioned their late hours until 9:00 p.m. as well as their friendliness. Cesar states he exhausted the Writing Center as well as the Math Center once he had to take a statistics class. He would go in there multiple times during the day, innumerable hours to get the help he needed.

It helped me...it was tremendous. It was a monumental help. I mean really. I don’t think I could have gotten by on my own because the teachers were really tough. I went to college not knowing how to write a damn paper. And then that’s when I realized, “This is my high school. Now I’m just gonna start all over again from
the stuff that I neglected.” So I learned how to write now. Literally, the people in the Writing Center taught me somewhat how to write.

John does not like to ask for help. He struggled with math since he dropped out of high school after his freshman year. John realized too late in the semester that he needed help with his math class. By then, he was not able to turn his poor grade around. He ended up failing the class he sought assistance for but he did not blame it on the tutoring center. He believes they could have helped him more had he gone to them sooner. John took full responsibility for his failure to seek assistance early enough when it would have made a difference.

Jose understood the advantage of using the tutoring center early when he first realized he did not understand his homework or a class lesson. He used the tutoring center for Physics, math, and writing. He credits them for his college success because without them he would have received C’s and D’s but instead received A’s in those classes.

This was my problem: when I used to read stuff, I would try to read it in one go instead of taking breaks. And they told me because since I’m doing that, I’m causing myself, uh, like a strain in my head that I’m not focusing right. Then when it comes to trying to type it on a paper, it doesn’t make sense.

As stated earlier, Oz found the tutoring center as he was walking through the cafeteria. He walked past it on a regular basis since its location was in a convenient place. After struggling with a statistics class, he decided to use it when he walked by it one day. The tutoring center was beneficial for him since he was struggling with his statistics class. They were able to teach Oz some tips on how to work out his statistics problems in a quicker manner and also helped clear up much of the confusion he had in this class. He
does not understand why more students do not use these services; whether they are lazy or do not know about it but they are there to help.

I would stay up pretty late, until like 3:00 a.m., trying to get it out and getting pretty frustrated with math in general, you know, when you don’t get it or you get an answer and it’s not the right one. So, I decided to seek them out. I would notice that I wouldn’t really stay up that late anymore and I would start to get it.

New Student Orientation

Of the six subjects, only three participated in their new student orientation. Antonio and John stated they did not know about the new student orientation while Oz simply chose not to attend. Carlos participated in his new student orientation even though it was not required. He did not feel it was helpful for him since he could not recall any of the information that was given during the orientation. He states it was fine but he just was not that into it at that time.

Cesar stated his new student orientation was not mandatory but highly recommended, so he thought it was a good opportunity for him to see the campus since he had never been on campus prior to the orientation. By participating in the orientation, he became aware of the Writing Center, where he spent a lot of time.

They gave, like, a little tour of the place, just...I mean it’s not a huge campus, so it was a tour of the place and then they gave us a folder with all the academics, and financial aid, and all the offices that would help like the Writing Center, and the map of the whole thing. Here’s the computer lab. Here’s the English section. Here’s Law Enforcement. Here’s whatever. So, at the end of the day I’m glad I went…

For Jose, his college’s new student orientation was required for all new students. While he believes it was helpful for him to attend, he did feel the orientation lasted too long. Because of this, he developed selective hearing and only listened during the portions of the services he thought he would use.
It was Advising, living on campus, and Career Development Center. Those were the only three things I really remembered. The others were a blur, but it was mainly the Writing Center, the Career Development, and, uh, the housing plan. It was mainly…it was too much. And also that I knew that some of those services they were gonna say, I was not gonna use, so it was more like selective hearing.

However, Jose stated that this service did affect his progress because they explained the advising process, writing center, and information about the career development office. He had concerns about his writing and math abilities so knowing that there was someone there to help him made him feel more comfortable about starting college.

**Academic Advising**

Only half the subjects met with an advisor before registering for classes. Cesar did not meet with an advisor because it was not mandatory, although attendance was highly recommended. He states that he did not have time to meet with an advisor before the semester started. Prior to the start of each semester, the academic advising office emailed students to remind them about the new class registration period. This turned out to be beneficial since it got him into the habit of visiting with his advisor every semester. It was during his first semester that he decided to speak with an advisor. Once he met with an advisor, she was assigned to him for the rest of his time at his college. This allowed him to stay on track to graduate in a timely manner.

John did not see an academic advisor before classes started because he did not like the idea of someone telling him which courses to take. He stated that he was there to take classes he wanted to take and not what his academic advisor wanted him to take. Now I do see that you do need someone to guide you and help you, so I’m here now. When I went for my Associate’s, I didn’t like people helping me pick out my classes. I liked to do it on my own. The only help I wanted to get was for them telling me what did I need to graduate. Not what exact specific class, but what overall branch I had to do, like Math, Biology, things like that. Then I liked to pick the class myself. But that’s me personally. I do know a lot of students, they have to be helped, they have to be… I don’t want to sound mean, but I feel like
they need someone to hold their hand. And I never liked that. I like to be very independent and go on my way.

The “go it alone” machismo mentality was his attitude in the beginning. Once John started to have problems with classes, he realized that he needed to go to an academic advisor for assistance, which changed his mind about the role of an academic advising office. Using these services taught him about the category of classes he needed to take in order to graduate such as humanities, arts, etc.

Now that I look back at it, it probably would have been helpful if I had gone to them first. But that was just me being, you know, a little ignorant. So now I definitely...I actually just had a meeting last week with my advisor.

Jose did not meet with an academic advisor until it nearly time to transfer to a university. He did not recall receiving information about meeting with an advisor at any time. He finally decided to meet with one when he had a question about courses that would transfer to a university. He felt they were “pretty much hands off” and that they viewed his class selection as being his decision to make. He was not assigned an advisor, so he met with any advisor that was available. He did not feel that anyone in the advising office provided any services that affected his progress. While they were there to provide a service when students needed them, it was basic information.

For Antonio, Carlos, and Oz, advisor meetings were not required, although they did meet with an advisor for assistance. Antonio said advisors helped him choose the correct classes so all his credits would all transfer. He was not assigned an advisor but met with whoever was available. In this manner, they did affect his progress to graduate and transfer from his community college in a timely manner.

Carlos was undecided about his major, so he was assigned an advisor for undecided students. He did not make a good connection with his assigned advisor and felt
she was not helping him. A friend told him about an athletics’ department academic advisor who worked with athletes and since he was playing soccer, he decided to go to her. Once he met with the athletic advisor, Carlos felt as if this new advisor truly cared about his progress and success. He does feel the services she provided affected his progress by helping him balance his class schedule with his soccer practice and game schedule.

So they put me with an academic advisor, with some random counselor. That first semester I took some Gen Eds and some elective classes that I just didn’t know. I feel like it didn’t...I think it was her. She didn’t help me a lot. My friend, who was a second-year player, he told me there was an athletic advisor. She was able to help me a lot between soccer and school.

Oz met with an academic advisor after classes started because he had basic college questions and did not know whom to turn to for answers.

They didn’t require me. I did it because I didn’t really know if I had everything that I needed. Like I didn’t know if I would need the basic notebook and pencil kind of thing or where I would get the books from.

Oz remembers the feeling of apprehension he had and the fact that he did not know about the basic school supplies he would need for class. While the advisor was helpful in answering a few specific questions, he does not feel the advising office affected his progress. Oz felt as if he was a bother to them since they did not take the time to explain things to him. He felt as if he was expected to know what they were talking about. The services he received from the advising office were minimal, confusing and incomplete.

So, when I went to Advising...they just kind of told me everything as if I already knew what everything did and if I already had log-in codes and things like that. I had no idea what anything was and they just kind of wrote things on a piece of paper and said, “Go there, go there, go there,” but they didn’t tell me where it was, either. So, I was just kind of walking around.
Financial Aid

All subjects stated affordability affected their decision to start at a community college. Two of the three who worked with the financial aid office felt staff members in these offices were helpful by answering their questions and providing them the information they needed. They were always professional and courteous whenever they needed assistance. Neither Antonio nor Carlos was eligible to apply for any grants based on their DACA status. Jose chose not to apply for financial aid even though his family only earned $18,000 a year. He stated he did not apply for financial aid since his father was born in Mexico. I chose not to ask about his father’s legal status since it was outside of the scope of this study.

John’s family income was approximately $10,000, so he was eligible for the full Illinois state MAP Grant and the full federal Pell grant, which covered all his tuition and books. While the staff did not provide him assistance in filing his FAFSA, the grants definitely affected his student progress. This allowed him to go to college when he would not have been able to afford otherwise.

So, definitely one of the things I kind of like was since I went to community college, I saved tens of thousands of dollars than if I had just gone straight into a university. And it’s pretty much just the same courses and I’ve gotten to the same destination whether or not I would have gone to university.

Oz also received financial aid and credits this with allowing him to work a part-time job instead of a full-time job. Not having to work a full-time job had a direct effect on his grades. He states he received academic honors every semester and credits his ability to focus on his classes rather than working too many hours for his success in the classroom. He appreciated how helpful the financial aid office was in helping him complete any processes he needed.
If I had a question or something, they would pull out a paper, they would be like, “Here’s the exact steps. Call there.” And if I really didn’t know, they would call right there for me and they would get it out of the way.

**TRiO Program**

John was the only student to join the TRiO program and use their services. As a high school dropout, they provided extra help to find his classrooms or with other concerns he had such as getting food. The TRiO office helped John access the college’s food pantry that also stocked personal hygiene products and some home supplies available to all students. There were times when he was low on resources or could not afford food so he was able to get these resources and food from TRiO. Of great benefit was one of TRiO’s core services of taking students to visit four-year universities to help in their transfer decision. It was through this field trip that John was able to visit Public University and decide that this was the university he wanted to attend. The fact that he received a free lunch was appreciated.

They had also had, like, field trips. As a matter of fact, they had different field trips that went to different universities. One of them was here (Public University) and that’s actually the way I met this school, was through that program. Because I went on a field trip and they brought me here free of charge, I was able to have a tour and everything. They also fed us. They gave us lunch.

**Counseling**

Only one student took advantage of counseling service on campus. Jose was under a considerable amount of stress when he was attending his community college. He would find himself heading home and all the issues going on at home would start to overwhelm him. Counseling helped him cope with the fact that due to the economy, his family income dropped from between $125,000 – $156,000 a year to $18,000 when his parents lost their jobs. His mom went from working at a bank to working at a Kentucky
Fried Chicken. By taking advantage of a Career Fair that was hosted by the college, Jose found a representative of the Counseling Office sitting at a table.

Well the counseling was for the situation that was going on in my household. Just part of the experience that is always going to be with me. So during 2015-2016 when I was there, we were going through another problem in my house and it was like I needed someone to talk to because my sisters weren’t there and stuff. So I was just telling them about, like how to lead up to this problem and it’s like, I was at that point in 2015 going into 2016 that they were gonna do the foreclosure thing again. I was like, “Ahhh really? What am I gonna do?” Like, I can’t, like, try to keep giving them my money because I need this money for school. And like I don’t know what I’m gonna do.

For Jose, it was good to discuss what was causing him stress and to know that he was not alone. He realized that living at home and hearing all the family issues and concerns were the main cause of his stress, along with balancing his homework and work hours. The counseling office was able to help him work through these issues.

**Student Organizations/Clubs**

John was the only subject who joined a student organization or club. He joined the Association of Latin American Students, which he found without anyone’s assistance.

I’m pretty independent. I’ve always kind of liked doing things my own way, so when I went looking for the clubs, I literally had to go on a scavenger hunt and see where the clubs were and stuff like that.

John’s reason for joining was to meet people and he knew the best way to meet people was by joining a club. While joining a club did not affect his progress, this experience helped him broaden his perspective and meet others from different cultures and backgrounds. The negative side of joining a club was that he enjoyed socializing a little too much, which caused him to spend less time doing homework or studying for tests.

In summary, services provided by an institution can positively affect the student’s progress. At times, colleges may be tempted to use antidotal information to provide new
services or terminate existing services. Services and programs can to be based on data that is gathered from national studies but more importantly, it needs to come from listening to what students on the college campus are saying. This section reviewed the service provided to subjects that affected their progress in the following areas – tutoring, new student orientation, academic advising, financial aid, TRiO program, counseling, and student organizations/clubs. Some of programs had more student participation than other services. This does not conclude that the services not used by these students would not have affected their progress had they used the services. What this question does identify is the fact that not all subjects were aware of the services that college has to offer.

Colleges need to do a better job of making students aware of the services and possibly require students to participate in programs such as new student orientation or first-year experience classes so students learn about all the services a college has to offer. While subjects did have negative experiences with some of the services provided, it was not detrimental to their educational progress. The negative was greatly outweighed by the positive as the services provided in a supportive manner was identified has having some affect on their progression through their community college.

**How Service Affected Student Aspirations**

Research Question 3 sought to determine how services provided by the institution affected their aspirations. This service represents all services across the college as students interact with staff in many departments. This study found that people matter more than practices. Once again, four main themes were identified from the data in relation to this question: academic advising, counseling, tutoring, and the TRiO program.
Academic Advising

Antonio aspired to transfer to a university with a little more prestige and higher reputation than Public University and major in athletic training. While on summer break from Alpha College, he spoke to a person who worked at an athletic training company about his career choices. Combining his love for sports and medicine made Athletic Training an obvious choice for his major. When Antonio spoke to his college advisor about his decision, he was told the schools he wanted to attend were too expensive. It was suggested that Antonio attend a university that was more affordable. While it may have negatively affected Antonio’s ego at the time, his advisor was simply helping him set realistic expectations since Antonio would not have been able to afford the more prestigious universities. In reality, he knew the advisor was only trying to help him. He admitted the advisor was right and that he did not have the money to go to his preferred university. In hindsight, the service his advisor provided actually helped him attain his goal of graduating in his major since he would have run out of money and not completed his studies had he gone to the more expensive universities. While his advisor could have kept quiet about the cost of the more prestigious college, knowing that his advisor cared about him help inspire Antonio to be realistic and still major in the program he loves.

Carlos’s academic advisor made a big difference in his life. The service she provided was very helpful, and he was thankful for that. The advisor provided excellent services that went above and beyond what he thinks any other advisor would have provided him. This did have a positive affect on his aspirations and allowed him to refocus on the important things whenever he spoke to her.

Cesar’s academic advisor also provided him with excellent service that affected his aspirations. She was always there for him when he needed her help or she would
respond to his emails promptly. She went above and beyond her regular duties to check in on him by sending him emails to see how he was doing.

Like I said we would end our meetings with “How are you? How’s things going? How’s the family home? How’s your grades? How are you feeling about college?” and stuff like that, which was very nice. At that time helpful indeed.

Counselor

When Jose’s father lost his job, the family income took a tremendous loss and their house went into foreclosure. Worrying about whether he needed to drop out of college and get a job to help his family was always on his mind. For Jose, the counselor he met with had a significant impact on his ability to focus on college even though his family was in crisis. The service and advice he received positively affected his aspiration as the counselor encouraged him to continue with his education since he could not drop out of college every time he came across an obstacle.

I just wanted to stop, ‘cause ever since the foreclosure thing was happening again, I was like, I’m so close but I don’t know if I want to do this anymore ‘cause I got to worry where I’m going to live at. That was a crisis point for me because I was so close to finishing…about to transfer. That was a big buckle point…that was a very weak spot for me. I went to someone to talk to. I went to the counselor. They tell me to stay positive and just keep doing what I’m doing. Just don’t give up because there’s an obstacle in your way. And I just took their word and advice and it worked out for me.

Tutors

Jose recalls a math tutor who was kind to him and helped him feel good about himself instead of feeling stupid, which was the way his math teacher was making him feel. As mentioned earlier, the tutor would encourage him to keep trying harder to do things the way she wanted to see the math equations worked out. Even though Jose felt he was doing the work the way the instructor taught him, he was still doing it incorrectly. The work done by the tutor encouraged Jose to not give up and to keep trying. He knew
the tutor did not have to give him a pep talk but this was how the tutor worked hard to help him rebuild his self-confidence, which he did not have to do. His tutor inspired him to focus on the positive and to keep working hard to succeed.

Every time you always come in here late at night, you’re always coming here for help. I know you’re going to be successful.

**TRiO – Student Support Services**

John did not feel as if anyone in student services personally helped him in any way that affected his aspirations. He mentioned joining the TRiO program because he met staff members who were club advisors or involved in other aspects of student life. They encouraged him to join the TRiO program, which he did. The TRiO program took students on college visits at no cost to the students. It was through one of these programs that he visited and made his decision to attend Public University. Going on the college visits through the TRiO program inspired John to graduate and transfer to Public University. This is something he could not have done outside of the TRiO office. He was grateful for the program driving him to the university and feeding him on the trip.

In summary, this question addressed how the services provided by the institution affected their aspirations. While not all students are easily motivated or inspired, the service provided by individuals or offices can make a difference in whether a student continues towards graduation. The services provided by the institutions and identified by subjects as affecting their aspirations include academic advisors, counseling, tutoring, and the TRiO program.

The service provided by advisor helped one subject attain their goal of graduating in his major since he would have run out of money and not completed his studies had he gone to the more expensive universities he initially wanted to attend. His advisor helped
him set more realistic goals. For another subject, his advisor did have a positive affect on his aspirations and allowed him to refocus on the important things whenever he spoke to her. The academic advisor was always there for him when he needed her help or she would respond to his emails promptly. She went above and beyond her regular duties to check in on him by sending him emails to see how he was doing.

A counselor one subject met with had a significant impact on his ability to focus on college even though his family was in crisis. The service and advice he received positively affected his aspiration as the counselor encouraged him to continue with his education since he could not drop out of college every time he came across an obstacle.

The work done by the tutor encouraged subjects to not give up and to keep trying. One subject knew the tutor did not have to give him a pep talk but this was how the tutor worked hard to help him rebuild his self-confidence, which he did not have to do. Tutors inspired subjects to focus on the positive and to keep working hard to succeed.

For one subject, going on the college visits through the TRiO program inspired the subject to graduate and transfer to Public University. This is something he could not have done outside of the TRiO office.

**Other Findings Related To Student Success**

Since the subjects’ parents did not attend college and may have been unfamiliar with the benefits of college, one thing was certain - they did not know how to help their child prepare for college or how to financially support their college tuition. Having their child go to college occurred at a time when parents were wondering whether or not having their child go into debt was worth a college education. This study found that some parents did not encourage their child to go to college based on their fear of their child
accruing debt, as well as doubting their child’s ability to do well in college. Going to college does not guarantee a job for any student. The parent’s fear was rooted in their knowledge of others in their community who went to college and could not find better paying jobs that they could have received without a college degree. Some parents’ believed their child needed to graduate high school and get a job. The parent’s fear, coupled with the fact that some students do not fully understand the relationship between higher education and desired careers might have kept some first-generation students from going to college, but not this group of individuals.

Getting a job out of high school and making money was a temptation for some, but positive influencers in their lives helped them realize that a college education was their pathway for a prosperous future. Support for these subjects going to college came from many different directions. This support came from high school teachers and coaches who wanted to see these students go further in life. Support also came from high school friends, coworkers, neighbors, and the friend of a sibling who knew they could do better than staying in their neighborhood and working in retail or factories. The subject’s main support and reason they were able to persist was due to the love and support they received from their parents, siblings, and in one case the support of a girlfriend who was not going to marry someone without a college education. However, the help and support they received from institutional agents or institutional services inspired some to work through a multitude of barriers.

For those parents or family members who did not agree with the subjects’ decision to go to college, their doubt and negativity motivated the subjects to prove them wrong. The parent’s fear of accruing debt or receiving an unusable college degree did not
deter the subjects from doing what they felt they needed to do. These students knew their pathway to a better life laid in the foundation of a college degree.

Other findings in this report found that although there is much conversation about the racial climate or racial stereotypes in college, this was not something that was experienced by any of the subjects. The one exception was one possible act of microaggressions towards one of the subjects in which he was called by a common Spanish name even though there was no one on the roster with that name. While Antonio was not the target of any act of discrimination or microaggression, it did not stop him from feeling as if others questioned whether or not he belonged in college since he is Hispanic.

I know I do (belong in college), but there’s some people that make me think I’m not. I don’t… there’s not like a lot of Hispanics and stuff like that going into schools. So (they) just make me feel like I’m at the bottom sometimes. I have to show them that I’m up there, you know. Just because I’m Hispanic or Latino doesn’t mean I’m not as good as them. Just like the… when it comes to like getting into groups, we’ll get into groups and I’m trying to talk and I feel like they (White people) don’t really care about what I’m saying sometimes. Maybe I’m correct or what I’m saying is helping, but I feel like they don’t care what I have to say.

Of bigger concern in these findings is the fear and trepidation that was being felt by the two students who were attending college under the DACA program. There was much national debate and talk about ending the DACA program and deporting this group of individuals back to their country of origin. While it may be difficult to generalize the findings of any study across the nation, I believe the fear and trepidation felt by these subjects can easily be generalized especially in a time when so much nationalist anger and racism is being focused on those who come from a Latin American country.

DACA Concerns

The undocumented subjects thought about dropping out of college at one point or another. Antonio was having money issues especially since he was a DACA student who
was not eligible to receive financial aid. It caused Antonio to work a lot and question what he was doing. When Antonio first started college, he was not a part of the DREAM Act. He lived with the fear that since he was an undocumented student he could be picked up by the Immigration agents at any time and sent back to Mexico for any reason. He tried to not attract attention to himself for fear of being discovered as being undocumented. He still lives with the fear that he will not be able to get a job after graduating from college since he will still be an undocumented individual in the eyes of potential employers. Antonio has an extremely smart cousin who was undocumented and graduated from Dominican University. After she graduated, she could not get hired, so she moved back to Mexico. Even though he knows this, he is trying to stay positive and finish college. He is hopeful that his DACA status will lead to a pathway of being able to live in this country legally. Helping him stay positive is his family and not wanting to give up. His mom raised him to never give up, so he refused to do so.

Carlos is also a DACA student who questioned the fact that he was in college at a time his family needed him to earn money to help them pay bills. He thought about dropping out of college to get a job and help support his family.

There were several occasions for me when I would be just in class and think, “This is not worth it. This is not going to lead me nowhere. This is not going to make me money.” There were some times I felt like that, but I was able to overcome that and graduate from community college. I always thought to myself that I was already half way and not just give up and not graduate and not gain nothing from it after wasting a lot of money, time, and effort. I was just not going to give up in that moment knowing that I had like a year left for me to graduate and obtain my degree. Having those thoughts in mind helped a lot for me to keep going.

Carlos was excited when President Obama began the DACA program. DACA opened a door for him that he never thought he could pass through. He knew this would
allow him to attend college and get an education. Carlos has faith that the American
government will not deport him and the thousands of other DACA students who are
working hard to get their college degrees. Had DACA not been an option for him, he
would not have gone to college. Instead, he would have found a job after high school and
just worked.

**College Racial Climate**

Much has been said about the racial climate and “onlyness” on predominantly
white college campuses, but in this study, all but one subject attended community
colleges that are considered a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). In the state of Illinois,
there are currently 11 community college HSI’s, 13 private college HSI’s, and two public
colleges that are HSI’s (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2018). The
subjects attended community colleges with many other students who looked just like
them. John stated he experienced one covert act of racism at Delta College. Although
John made this observation, he also felt comfortable there and could not recall any
negative or hostile acts towards him or others. Cesar attended Beta College as did Carlos
with a 27% Hispanic population. While Cesar did not experience any negative racial
incidents, he does recall feeling out of place often being the only Mexican in his classes.
He thought that assimilating into this new world was a little rough but not because they
did not like him, as far as he knew.

Oz transferred from Zeta College that had a 76% Hispanic population to attend
Epsilon College with a Hispanic population of 21%. Once he was in his classes at
Epsilon, he saw fewer minorities in the same room, which made him feel like an outcast.
While he did not experience any negative racial incidents, he felt as if he always had to
prove himself to the others in his class. It was not that anyone treated him differently; it was just the way he felt in that situation.

**Racial Stereotypes**

For the most part, four of the six subjects did not experience any type of racial stereotypes. Cesar was still angry about the time a faculty member calling him by the name of Juan when that was not his name, and there was no one by that name in the class. He also witnessed racial stereotypes aimed at students from India. Cesar recalls when a student of Indian descent walked by a group of students and they made loud sniffing sounds and said, “Curry!” as well as other comments. He also saw others target Mexicans and overheard them say, “I can’t believe they’re going to college! What are they doing here? They don’t even speak English.” When it came to black students, he heard students make comments about basketball but never heard anyone use the N-word. Oz had heard other students make goofy comments or bad jokes about other people but not any seriously racist comments. The one that stands out in his mind is the time students in his Social Gender class started whispering dumb remarks about an African American female who was talking a little loudly.

**Summary**

This chapter represents the key findings resulting from in-depth interviews with six subjects conducted over two sessions. Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement model was used as a basic theoretical framework for this study. The themes remained focused on the subjects experience with institutional agents and student services personnel that helped the students succeed as well as aspired them. This study was not originally intending to use Harper’s segment on Pre-College Socialization and Readiness as a foundation for this
study, however it emerged as a major factor that influenced the subject’s aspirations more than nearly all other factors.

Subjects described a wide range of circumstances that helped them transition into their community college and then to their four-year university. The pilot interviews for this study revealed the real inspiration for going to college and persisting towards graduation: family and friends. The results of the pilot interviews necessitated the inclusion of Harper’s Pre-College Socialization and Readiness column, otherwise only a part of the story would have been presented.

The first theme focused on how community college transfer students experience the institutional agents while they were in college. After all the interviews were coded, the only theme that emerged for this research question was the student’s interactions and experience with their faculty.

The second theme focused on how services provided by student services offices affect their progress. The main themes that emerged for this research questions were new student orientation, academic advising, financial aid, and tutoring. Most of the subjects utilized all these services in one way or another. While these services were available to the students, some of the students were not willing to ask for help or seek out the services.

The third theme took a different look at some of the services the students utilized, in particular, how did services provided by student services offices affect their aspirations attributed to their persistence. Examples were revisited from prior conversations, but they did add a different perspective when asked this question. This question elicited responses about their academic advisor, counselor, tutor, and the TRiO program.
There are common themes among the subjects as to why they decided to attend college and who encouraged them. Subjects in this study equated a college degree with an opportunity to progress beyond a minimum wage job. By going to college and being successful, the subjects see themselves as someone their family can be proud of and they also see themselves serving as a role model for others. The subjects discussed a variety of issues that influenced their decisions to go to college as well as what kept them focused and able to persist over the barriers they faced. They identified agents of the college that encouraged them to succeed as well as others who inspired them. Services and programs from the student services division also played a role in their success. The services and assistance needed to be successful were there as long as the subjects were willing to seek help, but as was evident in this chapter, the subjects were not aware of how to best use or ask for these services. More critical was the fact that some were not willing to ask for help based on their own admission of being stubborn and wanting to be successful in college without anyone’s help.

John’s words were very insightful as a high school dropout who just wanted to make a life for himself. One can only imagine how many students feel the same way he does in regards to their path to college and their reluctance to ask for help or assistance. Machismos in the Mexican culture is one that needs to evolve in order for Mexican American students to succeed since it will prevent many from asking for much-needed help for fear of looking weak or incompetent.

So when I look at it, because my life is kind of like a slightly...I don’t know if it’s kind of abnormal the way I got here. I like to think that every single thing that I kind of failed at, which is high school, my classes in Gamma, stuff like that, it was just like a stepping-stone for me. For me to succeed, I had to fail first. I believe that for you to succeed in anything, for you to be good at anything, you have to know how to fail and come back from that. I feel like a lot of the problem
is people are so afraid of failure. That was my fear. Like one of my greatest fears when I went to school was, “I’m gonna fail.” So I finally did fail and I was like, “Okay. That’s out of the way. I’m going to keep going.” So definitely I don’t wanna say that it held me back. I say what held me back was the fear of failing, not actually failing. Because failing, it’s just like okay. I have to do better. I have to try hard. It kind of molded me into a better student.

I’m very ignorant when it comes to that. I don’t like asking for help. I don’t like feeling like I need help, even though when I really do need it. It’s kind of a bad habit. I’m trying to break that, I promise. Machismo. I get that from my dad. He’s a farmer, so…

Many of the questions asked during the interviews were asked to crosscheck the subject’s experiences. A question may have been asked one way and obtained one response. When asked differently, I found it elicited a different answer or the subject was able to add more detail to their response. Through the student’s own voice, I hoped to capture their strengths, fears, and aspirations about being a first-generation college student. Considering the racial climate we live in today, questions regarding the students DACA status were added as I was concluding the final interviews.

How students experience their community college support structure provides critical information on whether or not the community colleges are affecting positive change that will help students persist and succeed. When students are not aware or are not using these services, administrators and staff must ask themselves why. The next chapter will discuss recommendations for administrators and staff, based on the findings of this study.
CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how first-generation Mexican American male students experienced their community college support structure and successfully transferred to a public four-year university. Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement model was used to develop a similar framework. The overarching question for this study sought to understand what students attribute to their success and how this helped them succeed. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do community college transfer students experience the institutional agents while they were in college?
2. How did the services provided by the institution affect student progress?
3. How did the services provided by the institution affect their aspirations?

Introduction of the Study

Colleges fail the students when they are treated with a cattle call mentality of “get’em in and get’em out” as they go from office to office seeking information or assistance. The treatment of the subjects in this study exemplifies what occurs when students receive both good and bad service. Of course, the burden of seeking assistance does not fall solely on the college staff, but rather the students need to visit the college before classes start with an open mind and accept the assistance they are offered. The services colleges have for new students may eventually help them complete their degree in a timely manner.

Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement model was used to develop a framework that is focused on first-generation male Mexican American community college students. Harper’s
Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework identifies (1) pre-college socialization and readiness, (2) college achievement, and (3) post-college success as the three phases for student achievement. As shown in Figure 2.2, the eight researchable dimensions of achievement include (1) familial factors, (2) K-12 school forces, (3) out-of-school college preparatory experiences, (4) classroom interactions, (5) out-of-class interactions, (6) enriching educational experiences, (7) graduate school enrollment, and (8) career readiness. This study’s main focus was on college achievement, particularly the successful navigation of transferring to a four-year university.

While this study did not initially seek to study pre-college factors, it became evident early in this study how essential the pre-college socialization and readiness phase was to the subject’s success in their college persistence and success. Because of this, the initial research questions were expanded to review how family, friends, and other K-12 factors influenced the subject’s college aspiration and persistence. By categorizing the questions and responses beyond the initial grouping of Harper’s college achievement category, I was able to place the remaining responses into the pre-college socializations and readiness category. I did find that experiences of the subjects at the pre-college stage played a major role on their decision to attend college and to remain in college and persist toward their goal of obtaining a bachelors degree.

Given the recent unstable economic conditions in the U.S., a college degree has turned into a necessary commodity for individuals nationwide, particularly those of Hispanic descent. This necessity calls for consideration of what constitutes a successful experience that will likely lead to graduation. First-generation male minority students, who have the lowest likelihood for college graduation (CITE), identifying the positive impact on
their college experience is particularly important. As Shapiro and Dundar (2014) state, in order to understand how “students complete college, we need to identify their patterns and practices that lead to successful completion. Not lost in this process is our ability to identify college practices and policies that assist students along the path of college completion that have led to their ability to succeed” (p. 265). By using an anti-deficit approach to study how and why at-risk students succeed and persist to degree attainment, we find a framework that can be used to help other first-generation college students. Quantitative data tells us who does not succeed and the characteristics they share, but qualitative data tells the story of how they can succeed.

**Overview of the Findings**

No study or article claims to have a single strategy that will result in a 100% retention rate of any student population. Services to increase retention of first-generation students and enhance their college experience include a long list of actions that need to be put into practice. In order to have a positive affect on students, these services need to have the support and commitment from the institution. As new services are created, they will gain institutional support if the services incorporate the core values of the institution.

The major findings of my study follow. (1.) Finding 1 addresses the need for colleges and universities to communicate early and effectively with their future students, well before the start of their first semester in college. (2.). Finding 2 addresses students’ experiences during pre-college activities or using the services offered to help students succeed in college. (3.) Finding 3 addresses the need for institutional agents such as faculty to incorporate flexibility in the classroom.
**Student Services**

One of the goals of this study was to determine what compelled the subjects to take advantage of campus resources, clubs, and student organizations. This study specifically asked the subjects about their experience with eight typical standard services provided by community colleges. The eight standard programs includes new student orientation, academic advising, financial aid, TRiO program, first-year experience class, learning communities, tutoring, counseling, student organization/club. As noted in Table 3, the subjects did not use most of the programs. At best, one subject used four of the services while four used three of the services and one only used one of the services.

Santa Rita and Bacote (1996) discussed how summer bridge programs help retain and graduate the high-risk, low-income, and minority students. Hall (2010) found that new student orientations work by easing the student’s transition to college life and providing information about services that help with adjustments to college. Torres et al., (2006) states that an academic advisor is key to the students’ early college success since they are trained to help the student chart a path that will help them reach their goal. In the end, the subjects regret not taking advantage of these services when they first started. They acknowledge the role these services could have played in making their transition through college much easier. Subjects’ discussed their knowledge of resources available to them and why or why they did not use them. Unfortunately, most of the subjects in this study did not get involved in pre-college programs such as new student orientation or meeting with an academic advisor because they did not know the programs existed or the subjects did not want to “waste their time” attending these programs or speaking with these college agents. Colleges and universities need to learn how to communicate early and effectively with this
population. Communication does not only have to be timely, more importantly, it also has to be done early.

**Tutoring and Counseling**

Of the four subjects who used their tutoring center, three had great experiences and feel the center had a positive impact on their progress. For the subjects who used their tutoring centers, it was essential for these students to hear that they can succeed academically and that the college cares about their success. The subjects benefitted from having a well-staffed tutoring center with late night hours. They received academic help and extra encouragement to complete their college education successfully.

One subject was dealing with a family issue that concerned their family finances. While at his community college, he did worry about his parents but once he moved away and started attending Public University, it helped him stay focused on his education. While the other five subjects struggled with personal issues through their time in college, none felt the need to speak with a counselor. For most, they found help from someone else they could talk to such as a faculty, advisor, or friend. Counselors are better trained but some of the students were not aware that colleges had mental health counseling and that it was free. Better marketing of services could help students find their way to a counselor for any array of issues and break the stigma of counseling being used only by those with mental issues or severe depression.

**New Student Orientation**

Half of the subjects attended their new student orientation. I will not use the term “participated in their new student orientation” because only one of the three subjects listened throughout the entire program. One took the opportunity to tour the campus while
the second subject started to block out some of the information because he felt it was too long of a program. The third subject listened intently and was able to recall available services and how to access them as needed. As expected, the one subject who went through their orientation with an open mind recalled the information they needed when they sought certain services.

As the other subjects’ transitioned to college, they had difficulties navigating the college campus. Some college staff would give instructions on steps the subjects needed to complete and expected them to know where the offices were located. Subjects’ had a difficult time making their way to these offices since they were unfamiliar with campus or did not recall the information shared at the orientation. This led to some frustration, which at times felt a bit overwhelming. Orientations are created with the student’s needs in mind. This is a great opportunity for first-generation students to build cultural capital and learn more about the college going process. Those who did not attend failed to learn these lessons and were forced to figure out processes and services on their own, often too late such as the case with a subject and the tutoring center.

*Academic Advising*

Research presented in this study points to the vital role both academic advisors and faculty plays in the success of community college students. Students, especially first-generational students have many factors that can contribute to their failure rate in college before ever stepping into their first classroom. Meeting with an academic advisor on a regular basis gives the students a better understanding of which classes they need to take in order to graduate in a timely manner. Every community college has hired and trained staffs to ensure college students receive the information and support needed to be successful.
Using developmental counseling and intrusive advising techniques do help assure maximum retention (Hall, 2008). As expected, the subjects who met with their academic advisor on a regular basis made a strong connection and were able to receive crucial information in a timely manner. Unfortunately, academic advising is not mandatory at many colleges nor are students assigned to a particular advisor. This can create confusion, as it is possible the student may get different responses to the same question if he were to ask different advisors.

**Financial Aid**

The odds of completing a college degree begin to diminish when a student is a part-time student or when the student is working over 20 hours a week (Jenkins, 2009). Even though the state and federal government continue to increase funding for financial aid programs, the reality is that the percentage of the state and federal aid increase is not keeping pace with the tuition rate increases that are being passed on to the students.

This group of individuals faced limited funding resources and in some cases poverty, but they were still determined to persevere regardless of the odds against them. Their determination to succeed and graduate from college greatly outweighed any concerns they had with paying for college. Financial aid was helpful to half of the group. The other half just found other ways to pay for their tuition and other costs associated with college such as books, transportation, and meals. All students in college should complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid application since they may be eligible for some grants or loans. Failure to do so is like leaving cash on a table and walking away for someone else to grab it.
TRiO Program

Preparing for college can be a major life decision for many first generation college students since they have little to no support from their family who may not be able to help guide them on the college-going process. Depending on their high school, lack of rigorous coursework in high school or lack of teacher support may have set students up for failure at the college level.

Fortunately there is a TRiO Student Support Services program at many community colleges. For one subject, TRiO played an important role in helping him find the right college to transfer after completing his community college degree. While the agents did not play a major role in his success, the services had a positive impact. This program could have served as a positive force in their success had the other five students used these services.

Student Organization/Club

Research by Kuh (2010) and Tinto (2012) identify the importance of students getting involved in student extracurricular activities on a college campus. In this study, only one student got involved in a college organization. For this subject, getting involved in this organization changed his outlook on life in the manner in which a man should treat a woman. The opportunity to interact with females on a professional and social level gave him a new perspective in which he came to respect women for who they are rather than as a possible target for his affection. Unfortunately, when it comes to the other subjects, they had other obligations at home or work, which made it difficult to return to campus for evening programs or events.
Learning Communities

Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005) review of learning communities found they “foster development of supportive peer groups, greater student involvement in classroom, learning and social activities, perceptions of greater academic development, and greater integration of students’ academic and nonacademic lives,” (p. 422). Kuh et al. (2010) research show that learning communities “encourages students to study more and help them make friends more easily, form study groups, work closely with faculty, and connect ideas across courses,” (p. 199) thus increasing their engagement. For Carlos, the only positive takeaway he took from this experience was learning how to manage his time a little better.

Carlos had a difficult time separating the two linked classes since he would confuse what he learned in one class with the linked class. The fact that learning communities share common themes between two classes made it more difficult for him to keep the classes separate from one another and focus. Since only one subject in this study participated in a learning community, I am not able to make any positive conclusions on whether this concept would have been beneficial for this population. Studies have shown the benefits of a learning community, but this was not the case for the subject.

Faculty Experience

Too often, faculty members confuse equality with equity. Subjects in this study did have some positive experiences with faculty who were flexible and allowed them to submit assignments after the imposed deadline. This experience allowed the subjects to succeed in these classes, which had a positive affect on their progress. To treat all students the same might be seen as a disservice for students who are struggling to succeed in the face of
competing personal priorities and who may just need someone to extend a little compassion and understanding. At times, it may be permissible to treat students with some degree of equity rather than treating them all equally (See Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1: Equality Versus Equity**

*Watching a baseball game representing the difference between equality and equity. Created and permission for use granted by Craig Froehle.*

All but one subject sought help from at least one of their instructors after a class if they did not understand something or needed extra assistance. When discussing the role faculty had on their aspiration, two subjects discussed how instructor(s) had affected their college and career aspirations. Faculty who engaged the students served as mentors and inspiration for them to continue their education. Some subjects in this study identified faculty as integral to their retention and persistence.

Most of the subjects encounter in asking for assistance outside of classroom had been positive with the exception of one student who had two instructors that did not make time for him. What some community college students do not realize is that many community colleges rely on adjunct faculty who are not contractual obligated to hold office hours. If the adjunct faculty is on their way to another job, they will not have time to talk to
the student after class. Since many adjunct faculty have additional jobs other than the adjunct work, responding to emails may not occur in a timely manner.

**Implications and Recommendations for Practice and Policy**

The findings from this study suggest a number of recommendations for policy and practice. I direct my suggestions to high school staff, and college faculty, staff and administrators. Regardless of how much a student desires to go to college, inadequate preparation for college will compromise their chances of being successful. Research continues to show that early intervention is crucial to identifying problems students are encountering in order to correct it before the student gets to the point of failing or dropping out of college.

**High School Preparation**

Long before starting college, high school students will need proper note-taking strategies or skills for test taking, writing, and using online resources. Further, a deep understanding of one’s strengths and challenges – coupled with self-advocacy contribute to academic success. Having these skills will allow first-generation students to adapt to their new environment. First-generation students do not have to be the smartest kids in the class, but they have to be able to adapt and have the ambition and determination to succeed. Many of these subjects did not know what to expect when they started college. Basic information about college was a mystery to some. High school administrators need to recognize they can play a larger role in providing opportunities for students to hone their skill or learn about college life in preparation for college beyond the testing matrix to comply with federal testing standards.
**High School Teacher Support**

First-generation high school students also need encouragement from high school staff members. High school teachers are in the best position to help students build self-efficacy. As college graduates, high school teachers understand the importance of a college degree. Knowing that first-generation students often do not have anyone to turn to for college advice, a high school teacher can be the person a student turns to for support and guidance. While it should be the responsibility of a guidance counselor to talk about college opportunities, the reality is that a guidance counselor does not know all students well. The student’s teacher is well aware of their capabilities and potential. Focusing on a student’s successes can build self-efficacy, and a word of encouragement can go a long way in helping build up their student’s self-esteem. The knowledge a teacher has about college can serve as a roadmap for the student since first-generation students will not be able to get this information from their parents.

This study has found that positive relationships formed with high school teachers or coaches encouraged the subjects to attend college, especially for Jose. After Jose told his teacher he did not want to go to college, his teacher told him he understood. The teacher told him that college was not meant for everyone but in the off chance that Jose would change his mind, he encouraged Jose to do it to have a better life. His teacher told Jose that he (Jose) was just as smart as him (the teacher). He also wanted Jose to prove to others that he was just as smart as the other students. This conversation has stayed with Jose since that day and inspired him to go to college.

Carlos also stated that high school teachers were key in helping him learn more about going to college. He credits his teachers with giving him an idea of where to go,
adding, “Obviously my mom wasn’t informed too much about that.” With the potential lack of role models who understand the college onboarding process, especially for many first-generation students, this relationship offers a supportive mentor to whom they can turn for information, long before the college application process begins.

**High School Guidance Counselor Support**

Like teachers, high school guidance counselors can play a vital role in encouraging first-generation Mexican American male college students to attend college and how to navigate the college selection and application process. However, the amount of time a guidance counselor may have to spend with students depends on their student caseload. Colleges usually target information to juniors or seniors. Unfortunately, the student/counselor ratio in high schools often exceeds the American Counseling Association’s recommendation ratio of 1:250. According to the American Counseling Association, the average ratio of student to counselor in Illinois was 1:672 (2011) but had improved to 1:482 by 2017 (Fuschillo, 2018). This ratio is a good barometer of how much “extra” attention can be given to students outside of class. Because of this, high school guidance counselors can play a pivotal role in the lives of first-generation male Mexican American college students.

There are websites such as FirstintheFamily.org that can help guidance counselors provide a step-by-step guide to college for students and their families with their online handouts or videos. While guidance counselors may not have time to go in-depth with every student on their caseload, the least they can do is provide every child and their family a college planning checklist like the one found on the FirstintheFamily.org website (see Appendix G). The checklist can provide a template for progress toward college and as a
guide for discussion with families. Guidance counselors and teachers should be direct but
tactful about college choices and not be dismissive with students or discourage him or her
from going to college. Setting up mentoring partnerships with local college students is
another way to bridge the dearth of counselors available.

**Recommendations for Community College Faculty**

Research discussed earlier in this study points to the fact that faculty can play the
most significant role in student retention by helping students understand the relationship
between their class and the student’s desired careers. Based on this study’s findings, faculty
can facilitate student success by helping students identify study partners (sharing a class
roster, for instance), posting and meeting accessible office hours for walk-in help, and
encouraging use of tutorial services early in the course. Giving frequent, specific, and
encouraging feedback on assignments and exams will also help students develop efficacy.
Some community college students may struggle to make it to class on time due to work,
transportation issues, as well as personal family issues. Remaining flexible on a case-by-
case basis will demonstrate to a student that if life gets in the way, they will not be
punished for it by receiving a failing grade for an assignment.

Adding tutoring information to one’s syllabus and website may be helpful for
students. More often than not, faculty gets to know the student better than most other
college staff members. If the faculty member sees that a student is struggling, they may
want to have a conversation with the student to see if there is a problem. Offering
assistance after class or during office hours can help the student feel supported. If the hours
do not work for the student, refer them to the tutoring center. Subjects in this study who
used their tutoring offices in a timely manner reported positive interactions and results due
to their usage of these offices. Having faculty members remind students on a regular basis
of these free services could result in a higher rate of use in a timelier manner. Having faculty serve a portion of their office hours in the tutoring center will also make it easier for students to see their faculty as someone who is willing to help and not as someone who is bothered by having their office time interrupted by students.

Some faculty members do not give students the opportunity to gage their progress early enough in the semester to be able to make changes in their study habits. Students need to be able to gage their progress in a class as early as possible. Having small assignments due in the first couple weeks will help the faculty offer helpful feedback to student so the student can determine how to study or prepare for future assignment before it is too late to turn a bad grade around.

Feelings of isolation for first-generation students are not uncommon. A faculty member’s practice of not checking attendance may lead to a student missing class. If a student begins to miss class because they feel this way, it could start them on a downward spiral that will magnify their feeling of isolation and alienation. If these first-generation students feel they do not belong in college, this may lead to their self-fulfilling prophecy of dropping out.

College faculty can help students operationalize expectations about out-of-class effort by being clear about expectations. Students often admit that a large part of their failure when receiving a less than expected grade is the amount of time spent preparing for the class or on an assignment. According to Collier and Morgan (2008), even if students do spend significant time preparing for class and the test, their grades may still suffer if they do not understand what the professor is looking for or the level of work they are supposed to turn in. They suggest that students who do well in high school and have developed
positive study habits and time management skills will typically do well in college regardless if they are a first-generation college student.

Employing active learning practices in the classroom can enhance retention of first-generation students (Braxton, Jones, Hirschy & Hartley, 2008). Active learning means cultivating discussion that relies on higher-order thinking and engaging in the application of classroom materials for solving practical “real world” problems. In short, the student must be able to apply classroom theory to everyday practice. Proof of learning can come in the form of capstone projects or organizational involvement based on their major area of interest such as a business organization or a criminal justice club. Baxter Magolda & King (2004) state that if community colleges are serious about promoting the development of students, then they need to rethink how to teach and challenge students since the previous lecture style with little to no participation from the students may not be effective with each new generation of students.

Learning communities can enhance learning and retention. One learning community model places small cohorts of students together in two or more thematically linked courses, with additional support such as tutoring. Working in a small group with classmates, students can find the support they need to adapt to college. For Carlos, the only positive takeaway he took from his learning community experience was learning how to manage his time a little better. Carlos had a difficult time separating the two linked classes since he would confuse what he learned in one class with the linked class. By creating learning communities for first-generation students, faculty can provide supplemental instruction in a format that enhances the students’ comprehension and supports the different learning style, thus increasing retention.
Since faculty members interact with students regularly, they are also in a great position to recognize behavioral changes that characterize a student in need of assistance. The assistance can be a matter of additional instructional assistance or the need to be referred to the counseling office. A student’s behavior, especially if it is inconsistent with their previous observations, could be a cry for help. The faculty’s ability to recognize the signs of emotional distress can be a significant factor in their successful resolution of the student’s problem. If a faculty member sees a student is struggling, he or she should reach out and offer assistance or direct the student to the tutoring center.

**Recommendations for Student Services Offices and Staff**

Being perceived as a college where staff is open, caring, and accessible will go a long way toward getting students in the door. But so is being knowledgeable about how best to support students. Student Services job is to provide the services a student needs to be successful outside of the classroom. The goal of student services is to help develop the student holistically. Student services are there to help students during a very formative and vulnerable time in their lives. All students have the right to a good education. If they do not know about their option for higher education, we need to educate them. Once they are in college, they need to know what tools we offer in order for them to succeed. College personnel need to treat all students as follows:

- Treat everyone with respect. They may not be polished or refined, but they still deserve respect.
- Open our mind to the diverse culture we live in. We need to let go of the notion that a student is going to fail and not be successful based on the color of their skin or their socio-economic background.
• Be just and fair. Very often, student’s futures are placed in limbo because our manuals
tell us what to do if a particular situation exists. There are times when students need a
third or fourth chance. It is an investment in a human being, and it will pay off in the
future.
• Provide service that is equitable for all and appropriately developmental for each.

Reach out to high school students earlier than their junior year

The high school counselor should be someone that can give students college advice.
When the student does not get this advice from the counselor, they are forced to turn to
someone who may have little about the college-going process. It is necessary for
community colleges to have multiple yearly college open houses where students can go to
get any advice on college on a regular basis. Since the community college is supported by
local taxes, the community college should be willing to answer questions about going to
college regardless if the student is no going to attend their college.

Make early alert and early intervention a priority

Based on the research and interviews conducted for this study, an early alert
intervention program may be beneficial for a community college to employ for all students,
regardless of background. Traditionally, early-alert-and-intervention programs have relied
upon mid-term grades and/or referrals made by faculty and staff. At that point in the
semester, it may be too late to intervene appropriately. Early alerts must occur at the first
sign of a problem or concern. This will require a paradigm shift of all faculty since this
needs to be a college-wide effort supported with sufficient staff to deal with the referrals.

More effective early-alert plans can be developed using data known about the
student at the time of admission, historical persistence patterns, first-semester, and mid-
year assessments, and course completion and success rates. For example, if students are not persisting at the median benchmarks set as goals, then further early-alert-and-intervention strategy development may be worthwhile.

*Make new student orientation mandatory and accessible*

It has often been said that students “don’t do optional.” Because of this, new student orientation must to be made mandatory or at least provide an incentive for attending such as early registration. Fear of seeming like a failure may keep first-generation students from asking for help until it is too late. New student orientations are meant to relieve some of this stress by providing the names of the appropriate offices’ students may need for assistance. If students do not attend new student orientation and fail to seek the assistance of the proper office, they may struggle and fall further behind from which they may have difficulty recovering.

Making an early connection is key for seeking assistance. A crisis can be avoided if college official and staff are proactive and provide first-generation students with either the summer bridge program or mandatory new student orientation. New student orientation programs will give students an opportunity to meet new people who are in the same situation as they may be. While community colleges rarely have mandatory new student orientation, it is highly recommended students attend this to learn about the college resources available to help the students be successful in their academic pursuit. Since there is an abundance of research that supports the value of new student orientations, staff need to work with administrators to secure funding and support, especially since most student do not go to programs perceived as optional.
Require a first-year student success class

One reason why none of the subjects in this study enrolled in a first-year experience class can be explained by the fact that the class was not required or was not available. Since research shows how first-time, full-time students entering college who successfully complete a study skills course are more likely to be retained from fall to fall than students who do not take the course, I would recommend that all new incoming freshman be required to take a first-year experience class.

Since not all students need the same level of support to succeed, classes can be created to meet the needs of the different sectors of students. One example would be to have a FYE class for military veterans taught by a college counselor or member of the psychology faculty. Classes can be created for students based on their ACT or SAT scores so those with higher scores would have their classes cover mostly college resource information while those with the lower scores would focus on skills needed to be successful in class such as test-taking, note-taking, or other similar skills. Those with higher ACT/SAT scores could be placed in a one credit hour class while those with the lowest scores could be placed in a two or three hour credit class. Since it is a credit bearing class, student should be required to pay for the class but it would count as an elective so the credit is not wasted.

Require academic advising

Research presented in this study points to the vital role both academic advisors and faculty plays in the success of community college students. Students, especially first-generational students have many factors that can contribute to their failure rate in college before ever stepping into their first classroom. Meeting with an academic advisor on a
regular basis gives the students a better understanding of which classes they need to take in order to graduate in a timely manner. Every community college has hired staff and trained them to ensure college students receive the information and support needed to be successful. Using counseling and intrusive advising techniques do help keep students on track to graduate on time.

Receiving effective advising is a successful strategy that may lead to completing a degree among first-generation students. Information about class selection and programs of study options (program major or minor) may be incorrect if the student fails to discuss this with a trained academic advisor. Advising for students that wish to transfer to a four-year institution needs to focus on taking the correct classes for the transfer institution and not on completing a degree for the community college completion. If the student is advised to focus on completing the community college’s graduation requirements and not the needs of the transfer institution, a student might go down the wrong class requirement pathway and end up with classes that do not count toward their desired degree, wasting time and money in the process. Marketing advising services with a pathway to the students transfer institution may be helpful.

First-generation students may also find themselves paying for unnecessary classes if they do not know the difference between an associate of applied science and an associate of arts or associate of science. By meeting with an academic advisor on a regular basis, the student can be guided into taking only the classes necessary for their degree completion. If the student is placed on academic probation due to poor grades, an academic advisor can help the student set their schedule for the following semester so the student is not overwhelmed with classes that may place them at risk of being academically dismissed.
Create a mentoring program

Implementing a mentoring program provides the student another perspective of college. A mentor can be the difference between a student staying or leaving the institutional (Jenkins, 2009; Folger et al., 2004; Derby & Smith 2004). Peer and adult co-leaders should facilitate these groups. Mentors can help introduce the first-generation students to key people on campus but should take care not to “pathologize” their identity as a first-generation student. These connections may help develop relationships with other learners within the college setting.

Plan for academic recovery: Work with the academic side

The data in this study indicate that fewer students are placed on probation during term two compared to term one. Effective programs that require students to participate in the development of their academic recovery should be implemented at the end of the first semester. The programs can come in the form of student success courses, individual counseling, academic support testing such as Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), TRIO programs, or a combination of these services. The LASSI is both a diagnostic and prescriptive tool used to provide students with a diagnosis of their strengths and weaknesses. It is prescriptive in that it provides students feedback on areas where they may be weak and need to improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and beliefs. If a student is not earning the required GPA to graduate at the end of term one, then participation in such academic recovery programs must be expected. Institutions that are losing students during the first term at higher rates may need to strengthen advising processes, use their most student-centered faculty to teach gateway courses that could otherwise prevent students from progressing to the next sequenced course, and identify
proactive, non-punitive ways to support and engage entering students who are less prepared or needing remediation early in the first term.

Although the first year has been an essential focus of student retention programs, as this is where the most significant loss of students occurs, the findings show that significant losses of students also occur during the second year, so it is essential to pay attention to both years. Also, the data show that attrition continues during the second term of the first and second year, so it is essential to provide ongoing and relevant student transition support beyond the first terms. Analyzing data along with data on the amount of time students spend working, the number of classes they enroll in at other institutions, current GPA, and amount of time spent studying can inform appropriate strategy development and highlight potential impacts on student success.

**Recommendations for College Administrators**

College administrators and leaders can implement policies and practices that can help student succeed.

*Recognize and remove barriers*

Some of the stresses a student endures could be lessened if institutions of higher education would recognize barriers students encounter and work to remove, reduce, or minimize them. For many first-generation students, this is important because they want to know they matter and that someone is listening to their concerns and frustrations. Knowing who the students are, their issues or concerns, as well as what services are made available to help them succeed can help the college allocate their resources more effectively.

*Collect data*

Creating programs without proper data can waste resources. Having many different programs in place will not necessarily help students succeed. To reinforce the literature and
data being provided to the upper administrative leaders, creating buy-in from them can
enhance chances for support. By the same manner, failure to collect and analyze data prior
to creating a program and again after the program is completed fails the students as well as
wastes the resources allocated to these programs.

Support students

Some colleges fail to address the need for additional support once the student
arrives on campus. This problem includes support for students in the area of academic
support and/or advising, social aspects, and financial aspects to help the students stay on
campus. They want to be able to do just about anything necessary to ensure that the
students enrolled stay in college at their respective colleges or universities, within reason.
Administrator need to come out of their offices and learn how the typical college students
progresses through college to understand how the students are dealing with administrative
guidelines or college practices that are serving as barriers for their timely or successful
progression towards graduation. Once they understand the problem and concerns students
face, they should support programs or institutional policy changes that will help retain the
students.

Support a paradigm shift

According to this study, many of the subjects were not aware of the services
provided by the college. Since they were unaware of the services, they were not able to use
them. Other subjects did not use the services since they did not understand the importance
of using them. Subjects of this study benefitted from colleges who had extended hours in
the library and tutoring centers beyond 5:00 p.m. Extended hours allowed subjects to use
these services after they finished their day job and refocus on getting assistance with their
homework. This option was not available for all subjects. Administrators need to access the needs of their student population and financially support the services that will help all students receive the assistance they need at times that are convenient for the students. The median age of community college students is no longer between 18-22. Because of this, a shift in hours of operations must occur to accommodate those who need help beyond the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. This requires commitment from administrators to hire additional staff that is able to work the later hours or support staff that may need to shift their work hours.

**Implications for Future Research**

A review of dissertation research studies over the past 20 years show how little qualitative research has focused on the Mexican American college students. Only four qualitative dissertations based on the Mexican American population could be found with an additional study using mixed methods. The findings of this study, in relations with other research on this topic, have significant implications for the retention of first-generation male Mexican American community college students. The framework for many past and current programs are aimed at helping retain students and focused on the general student population or the overall minority population such as Black, Hispanic, or Asian. These frameworks are not focused on any specific nationality such as Mexican-American. It is difficult to take into consideration the individual needs of students since Mexican Americans differ from Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Researchers need to be more mindful of the terms we use for students of Latino descent. While this study used the term Hispanic, in some areas of the country, students prefer to be referred to as *Latinx* students.
Another implication for future research involves the use of comparison groups. A comparison group of community college dropouts could reveal the lengths to which they sought services or agents to help them succeed yet they still failed. Identifying the issues they faced from a qualitative standpoint could provide greater insight as to whether or not these students could have been retained by additional services or agents. Research has pointed out the many outside distractions community college students face on a regular basis. Contributing dropout factors could provide additional insight for college staff in order to provide proactive services.

While much has been written on the topic of nature versus nurture, the use of an anti-deficit approach focuses on the nurture aspect, which leaves little room to explore the nature aspect. Male students have a lot to say about which agents or services they credit for their success but more research may need to be completed on the nature aspect of how they succeeded. Future research may need to focus on how the student adjusted their habits or personality to help them succeed, as well as the tools they used.

**Conclusions**

Over the past 23 years of working in higher education, I have seen many students enter college lacking the capacity to properly deal with the stress of culture shock and new social life as well as the rigor of the college’s academic requirement. Watson stated “efforts aimed at helping first-generation college students to persist in their pursuit of an education are compounded by academic hurdles that students must overcome, social issues that students encounter in trying to fit into college, and cultural factors that often leave students feeling marginalized, isolated, and not well understood by their peers, faculty, and college personnel” (2004, p. 7). These hurdles can be overwhelming for a student to handle and
eventually lead to students leaving college after their first year of school (Pascarella et al. 2004). Because of this, colleges are being told they need to create new programs to help retain students but where to begin can be overwhelming for smaller colleges with limited budgets and staff. There is also no guarantee that new programs will help retain all students. Providing the service does not translate into usage by a student. However, there is a possibility that colleges will be held accountable for a students success in the form of recently proposed federal guidelines in which performance-based funding will be tied to students’ successful completion of a college degree.

I have seen many student discouraged and dejected by staff, faculty, and administrators because they do not take the time to listen or help. Staff has heard the same question hundreds, if not thousands of times but for that student in front of them, that is the first time they are ever asking that question.

As for students attending college under the DACA program, allowing undocumented individuals to come out from the shadows and become a part of society needs to begin with post-secondary education in order to prepare them for life beyond minimum wage jobs. Whether the student is undocumented or is born in the United States to undocumented parents, the dilemma remains the same. Even though these children lack the correct paperwork, they will still need to be college educated in order to prepare themselves for a job in today’s labor market.

For students who allow their machismo to get in the way of seeking assistance when they need help, much can be said for swallowing your pride and asking for help. Mexican American boys are taught from a young age to respect their elders, be a gentleman to women, yet to be a man and not appear weak. It is in this translating of appearing weak
that serves as a barrier for some students, including some subjects in this study. Mexican American male students need to check their machismo attitude and beliefs at the college entrance and pull out the other traits that are very important to this community – familismo. Familismo is a Latino cultural pillar that is family centered and a sense of responsibility for others (Arredondo, Gallardo-cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014). Mexican American male college students need to recognize there are people hired by the college to help them succeed. Using these services their tuition dollars pay for is not a sign of weakness but rather an example of resourcefulness that will serve them well after they graduate college.

The six subjects shared many traits and characteristics that identified them as high-risk students with statistical odds showing they would not likely complete their college degree and graduate. In spite of the odds against them, they found a way to be successful on their terms, and at times, with the assistance of institutional agents or services along the way. The support and love they received from their family kept them moving forward since failure was not an options. What these subjects had that those who failed may not have had was a combination of the following:

- ambition to change their way of life
- determination to succeed and persevere through college
- adapt when their way was no longer working, including seeking help
- ability to cope when times were difficult and they started to doubt themselves
- the willingness to endure the stresses of family life when their family was struggling
While not all the subjects were ready for college when they started, they saw an opportunity to go to college and they took it. The first step is always the most difficult step to take since some fear the next step may lead to failure. These students may have been unsure, scared, or hesitant at first but they took full advantage of the opportunities that were in front of them. Because of this, colleges need to focus on what helps students succeed and replicate this as much as possible while recognizing those who fail and determine if there was something they could have done differently that would have kept them in college.
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL
Dear Student,

My name is Luis S. Moreno and I am doctoral student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Doctoral Program at the University of Iowa. I am sending this email to invite you to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this study is to determine how first-generation male Mexican American students navigated and persisted through the college-going process and successfully transferred from a community college to a four-year university. Participants will be asked to participate in one interview that will last approximately one hour and a second follow-up meeting that will last approximately 30 minutes.

There are no known risks or benefits to participating in this study, however you may experience some psychological discomfort as we discuss some difficulties you encountered during your time at your community college in the interview. However, your participation and results may be helpful to others in the future.

If you have specific questions about the research study, please contact Luis S. Moreno at Luis-moreno@uiowa.edu.

If you would like to participate, please click on the following link:

https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_26kCRMOQUQ3ew7P or copy and paste the link into your browser.

Again, thank you very much for your time and consideration of this research study.

Luis S. Moreno, M.A.

Doctoral Student of Higher Education and Student Affairs
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
University of Iowa
Higher Education and Student Affairs
Iowa City, IA 52242
APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA'S QUALTRIC STUDENT SURVEY
University of Iowa
College of Education
Invitation to participate in a research study

Dear Student,

My name is Luis S. Moreno and I am a doctoral student conducting research for my dissertation in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at the University of Iowa. I am writing you in order to ask for your assistance in completing my dissertation on ways first-generation male Mexican-American transfer students experienced their community college.

I invite you to participate in a research study that may help identify how students navigate the college process and successfully transfer to a four-year university. You are being invited to join this study because you have been identified as a first-generation male Mexican-American college student who has transferred from a community college in Illinois.

Your participation in this study is both confidential and voluntary. Your identity will be known only to me. If you choose to participate, your contribution to this study may help community colleges address barriers students face and replicate services that assist students succeed. The questions in the survey and interviews have been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at both the University of Iowa and Illinois State University. There are no known risks to you in this study.

Your commitment to this research study will consist of one interview and a follow-up. The interview will take approximately one - two hours during the spring semester of 2018. After the interview, you will be asked to keep a journal and write down anything you may have forgotten to mention in the interview that pertains to the questions asked. You will also be given a copy of the interview questions to refer to as you write in your journal. I will follow-up with you to discuss your journal entry. All interviews will be conducted at location of your convenience.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please continue to the next page and complete a brief demographic information form. This information will help me determine the eligibility of potential participants. I will follow-up to advise you of your status for this study and arrange a time for the interview. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at luis-moreno@uiowa.edu or my advisor, Dr. Debora Liddell, Debora-liddell@uiowa.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Luis S. Moreno
Doctoral Student
The University of Iowa
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
This is a research study. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you have been identified as a first-generation male Mexican-American college student who has successfully transferred to a four-year university from a community college in Illinois.
The purpose of this research study is to understand how first-generation male Mexican American students experienced their community college’s policies, practices, and institutional agents that ultimately led to your successful transfer to a four-year university. In addition, this study will seek to understand how these experiences affected your progress and aspirations. It is important to understand the perceptions of first-generation male Mexican American community college students as they relate their personal and academic experiences from high school to their four-year higher education institution. The focus of this study is to identify and highlight these experiences during the time at their community college that facilitated their success.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?
If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for approximately two hours for the interview.
The first interview will take approximately 90 minutes. The researcher will follow-up with the participant to make sure the information provided is consistent with the participants intent. The interviewers will be transcribed and returned to the participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?
You may experience one or more of the risks indicated below from being in this study. In addition to these, there may be other unknown risks, or risks that we did not anticipate, associated with being in this study.
While there are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study, there is a possible risk for emotional or psychological trauma, or embarrassment as you recall your pathway to college. As a reminder, you may always skip any question you prefer not to answer.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?
You will not benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because the implications of finding possible commonalities may help first-generation male Mexican American community college students receive support to overcome barriers, including the tools and resources needed to prevail. The results of this study may give community colleges information and strategies to use, pertinent to male Mexican American students. This new information may assist colleges’ in creating an environment conducive to helping students succeed and retaining them through graduation. In the end, this may help identify possible programs that can be used by other community colleges to assist these students as well as other first generation students succeed in their quest for degree completion.
IS BEING IN THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?
Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won’t be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?
You will be compensated based on completing both interviews and reviewing the transcripts. We wish to determine how cash incentives affect your decisions and actions. If you leave before the interviews are completed, you will forfeit all of your earnings.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at luis-moreno@uiowa.edu (309) 235-5602, or my advisor, Dr. Debora Liddell, Debora-liddell@uiowa.edu (319) 335-5343.

Do you wish to continue?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Please enter your first name and last name in the form below.
First Name
☐

Last Name
☐

What is your gender?
☐ Male
☐ Female

What is your year of birth?
Year of Birth
☐
What is your email address?

Email Address

What is the best daytime telephone number to reach you at?

Daytime Telephone Number

What is the best evening telephone number to reach you at?

Evening Telephone Number

Are you of Mexican descent?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Which Illinois community college did you attend?

☐

How many semesters did you attend your community college?

☐

What was your community college GPA?

☐

Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend any college?

☐ Yes
☐ No
What is your college level status?

- [ ] Sophomore
- [ ] Junior
- [ ] Senior

Are you eligible to apply for financial aid at your university?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

End of Survey

Qualtrics.com
Contact Information
Legal
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Exploring the Ways First-Generation Mexican American Transfer Students Experience Their Community College Support System

Principal Investigator: Luis Moreno

Research Team Contact: Luis S. Moreno
luis-moreno@uiowa.edu
309/235-5602 (cell)

This consent form describes the research study to help you decide if you want to participate. This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the study, about the risks and benefits of the study, and about your rights as a research subject.

- If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the research team for more information.
- You should discuss your participation with anyone you choose such as family or friends.
- Do not agree to participate in this study unless the research team has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This is a research study. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you have been identified as a first-generation male Mexican-American college student who has successfully transferred to a four-year university from a community college in Illinois.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how first-generation male Mexican American students experienced their community college’s policies, practices, and institutional agents that ultimately led to your successful transfer to a four-year university. In addition, this study will seek to understand how did these experiences affected your progress and aspirations. It is important to understand the perceptions of first-generation male Mexican American community college students as they relate their personal and academic experiences from high school to their four-year higher education institution. The focus of this study is to identify and highlight these experiences during the time at their community college that facilitated their success.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Six people will take part in this study at the University of Iowa.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for approximately two hours for both interviews.
• The first interview will take approximately 90 minutes.
• The second interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes
  o There will only be two meeting times.
  o There will be about a two week gap between interviews in order to allow the
    interviewer to transcribe the interviews and return them to the participant to
    confirm the accuracy of
    the transcripts.
• After the second interview, a second set of transcripts will again be sent to the
  participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.
• Both interviews will be conducted in a student services office area.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

• A face-to-face interview will be conducted during the first meeting time. The
  following steps will occur at the interview:
  o Introduction of both the interviewer and participant.
  o The interviewer will ask the participant for permission to use a digital
    recorder in order to facilitate the transcription of the interview.
  o The interviewer will explain the participants rights to withdraw from the
    study at any time or to stop the interview for a period of time, as needed by
    the participant.
  o The interviewer will obtain a written consent from the participant to proceed
    with the interview.
  o The interviewer will give an overview of the interview and the different
    topics to be discussed.
• The participants will be asked to recall their educational ambition and how they
  navigated and experienced this process as it relates to their familial and friend
  support network, their high school network, the community college network, as
  well as their personal motivating factors. The interview questions will seek to
  answer the following questions:
  o How do community college transfer students experience the institutional
    agents while they were at their community college?
  o What service did students participate in at the community college? Where
    they helpful?
  o What resources proved most effective in helping first-generation male
    Mexican American community college students succeed?
  o How did the level of service provided by key student services offices affect
    their aspirations?
• The interviews will take place in an office/room on campus.
• During the interview process, the subject is free to skip any questions that he would
  prefer not to answer.

Audio/Video Recording or Photographs
One aspect of this study involves making an audio recording of you. The digital recordings
will be used solely for the accurate transcription of the interview. They will be stored on an
encrypted password protected file for the duration of the study. The audio recordings will
be destroyed at the earliest possible time, as allowed by the University of Iowa’s policy.

If you do not wish to be recorded, the interview can still occur but it may take more time as I will need to pause to catch up or ask questions to ensure my notes are accurate.

[ ] Yes [ ] No I give you permission to make an audio recordings of me during this study.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

You may experience one or more of the risks indicated below from being in this study. In addition to these, there may be other unknown risks, or risks that we did not anticipate, associated with being in this study.

While there are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study, there is a possible risk for emotional or psychological trauma, or embarrassment as you recall your pathway to college. These interview questions were developed and tested by five people who were used as pilot subjects for this study. None of the pilot subjects reported any trauma or concern with the questions being asked. However, there is always a possible risk of an uncomfortable feeling based on the questions being asked. As a reminder, you may always skip any question you prefer not to answer.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

You will not benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because the implications of finding possible commonalities may help first-generation male Mexican American community college students receive support to overcome barriers, including the tools and resources needed to prevail. The results of this study may give community colleges information and strategies to use, pertinent to male Mexican American students. This new information may assist colleges’ in creating an environment conducive to helping students succeed and retaining them through graduation. In the end, this may help identify possible programs that can be used by other community colleges to assist these students as well as other first generation students succeed in their quest for degree completion.

**WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will be paid for being in this research study. You will need to provide your social security number (SSN) in order for us to pay you. You may choose to participate without being paid if you do not wish to provide your social security number (SSN) for this purpose. You may also need to provide your address if a check will be mailed to you. If your social security number is obtained for payment purposes only, it will not be retained for research purposes.
You will receive a $50 gift card after the final/second transcript has been reviewed and approved by you.

**WHO IS FUNDING THIS STUDY?**

The University and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people such as those indicated below may become aware of your participation in this study and may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

- federal government regulatory agencies,
- auditing departments of the University of Iowa, and
- the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies)

To help protect your confidentiality, we will save all forms and audio recordings on an encrypted password protected file in a locked safe. All paper copies will be shredded after they have been copied electronically. These files will be kept for seven years, per University of Iowa guidelines. If we write a report or article about this study or share the study data set with others, we will do so in such a way that you cannot be directly identified.

**IS BEING IN THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won’t be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at luis-moreno@uiowa.edu (309) 235-5602, or my advisor, Dr. Debora Liddell, Debora-liddell@uiowa.edu, (319) 335-5343. If you experience a research-related injury, please contact my advisor, Dr. Debora Liddell, Debora-liddell@uiowa.edu, (319) 335-5343.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject or about research related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu. General information about being a
research subject can be found by clicking “Info for Public” on the Human Subjects Office web site, http://hso.research.uiowa.edu/. To offer input about your experiences as a research subject or to speak to someone other than the research staff, call the Human Subjects Office at the number above.

This Informed Consent Document is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name (printed):

__________________________________________________________

Do not sign this form if today’s date is on or after $STAMP_EXP_DT$.

(Signature of Subject) (Date)
2. **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

**Contingent Monetary Payoffs**

You will be compensated based on completing both interviews and reviewing the transcripts. We wish to determine how cash incentives affect your decisions and actions. If you leave before the interviews are completed, you will forfeit all of your earnings.
APPENDIX D

FIRST INTERVIEW SCRIPT
First Interview Script

Prior to Interview

1. Thanks student for participating
2. Introduce myself
3. Introduce the purpose of this research study
4. Explain Informed Consent (*Have student sign consent form*)

   You have agreed to participate in this study to gather information on ways you experienced your community college support structure. You will be asked to recount your experiences as a first-generation male Mexican American community college student. I will be taking notes as well as using a digital recorder that will only be used by me to ensure I accurately transcribe our interview. The recording and transcripts will be secured in a password-protected file and will not be shared with anyone. May I have your permission to record this interview?

   Please take your time when answering a question and feel free to ask for clarification if you are unsure what is being asked. We will meet again in 2-3 weeks for a follow-up interview so if you need time to think about a question, we can always revisit it at that time. I would like to discuss your decision to go to college as well as your experiences. I would like to discuss the different policies, practices (programs/services), and people that led to your educational success. I will elaborate what I mean by these three topics later in the interview. I will start with questions that will allow me to get to know you better.

First thing we are going to talk about is you and why you decided to go to college. Then we are going to talk about your college experience that led to your success. Once we get to the heart of this interview, I will allow you to choose where you would like to start next.

FIRST INTERVIEW

Student Introduction: *Get to know the student and make them feel at ease.*

Tell me a little about yourself.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

PRE-COLLEGE SOCIALIZATION AND READINESS

Early Educational Aspirations (*Getting to know the student*)

1. When did you decide you wanted to attend college?
   a. What contributed to your decision to attend college?
   b. Who encouraged or inspired you to go to college?
   c. Was your family able to help you with any information/money you needed to start college? If so, how?
   d. What is your family’s approximate income range?
e. How did you decide on which colleges to apply?
f. Why did you decide to attend your community college?
g. Why did you decide against starting your freshman year at [Blank]?
h. Why did you choose to attend [Blank]?

2. What did your high school friends think about you going to college
   a. Did they have similar plans?
   b. Did you feel supported by them? Tell me about it.

3. Tell me about your high school.
   • If a predominantly white high school, what was most helpful to you in negotiating "onlyness" and underrepresentation in courses with predominantly white students"?
     (Historically and predominantly white racial composition)

4. Tell me about your current major?
   a. How did you decide on this major?
      i. Did someone help you with this decision?
      ii. Did someone explain the career potential for this major?
   b. Have you changed your major since your graduated high school? If so, how many times?

Now I want to turn our framework to some of the actual college experiences you had so I am going to ask you some questions about three different aspects. One is the practices and programs that community colleges have, one will be about the policies/rules/institutional guidelines, and the other will be about the people who have made a difference.

**Policies/rules/institutional guidelines**, also known as procedures, refer to a college’s perspective on many important issues and how the college manages and governs students’ rights and responsibilities. They provide a context for action and decision-making. Specific procedures for implementation are usually included in the student handbook, college catalog, and class syllabi.

**Practices**, which includes programs and services, refers to the opportunities created for academic development, to assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their college education.

**People** refers to the college staff, faculty, and administrators who demonstrate a high level of personal and professional commitment to students and higher education in order to ensure student success.

Which topic is easiest for you to start with? Do you have a preference where we start?
COLLEGE ACHIEVEMENT

Practices: Overarching Question – How did they contribute to your success? What were your overall thoughts on …?

1. Can you identify and discuss any community college programs or services that contributed to your success and ultimate ability to graduate and transfer?
2. Which teaching methods (pedagogical) best engaged you in your college courses?
3. Summer Bridge Program - Did you attend a college summer bridge program prior to starting your freshman year in college?
   a. Did the college require you to attend the summer bridge program?
   b. How did this experience contribute to your success?
4. Academic Advising – Did your meet with your academic advisor prior to the start of classes?
   a. Did the college require you to meet with an academic advisor?
   b. How did this experience contribute to your success?
5. Financial Aid - Did your choose to attend your community college prior to Illinois State University based solely on affordability?
   a. Were you dependent on free grant aid? If so, how did this contribute to your success?
   b. Was the staff in the financial aid office helpful to you? Please explain.
6. Did you participate in a New Student Orientation?
   a. Was the orientation required by the college?
   b. Once the semester began, were you able to recall the services discussed at the orientation?
   c. How did the orientation help you be successful?
   d. What was your overall thoughts of the orientation?
7. First-Year Experience Class - Did you participate in a first-year experience class?
   a. Was the class required by the college?
   b. How did the class help you be successful?
   c. What was your overall thoughts of the class?
8. Learning Community - Did you participate in a learning community?
   (Learning Community refers to a situation in which the same students are registered for two or more courses that are, in some way, linked. This linkage may be very loose, with little or no coordination between instructors, or it may be quite extended, with instructors teaching parallel units or even occasionally changing or swapping classes. Sometimes, linked courses may deliberately be scheduled back-to-back to facilitate extended assignments)
   a. Did the college require the learning community?
   b. How did the learning community help you be successful?
   c. What were your overall thoughts of the learning community?
9. Tutoring Services - Did you utilize any tutoring services offered by the college?
   a. Were you required to use the tutoring office or did you seek it out on your own?
   b. How did the tutoring help you be successful?
   c. What were your overall thoughts of the tutoring center?
10. Job - Did you work on campus while in college?
a. Was your job a work-study job or were you a student worker?
b. Did you see any benefit of working on the college campus versus working a job outside the college?
c. What were your overall thoughts of working on campus?

11. Did you join any student clubs or organizations
   a. Which campus clubs or organizations did you join? Please list.
   b. How did you become aware of these clubs or organizations?
   c. Who encouraged you to join?
   d. Did joining the club/organizations play any role in your college success?
   e. Would you recommend joining these clubs or organizations to others? Why or why not?

12. Did you participate in any college-sponsored conferences?
   a. How did you learn about the conference?
   b. How did you benefit from attending the conference?
   c. What were your overall thoughts of the conference?

13. What other resources were you aware of to help you succeed at your community college (i.e., disability support office, counseling, career services, etc.)?
   a. Which campus resources did you utilize? Please list.
   b. How did you become aware of these resources?
   c. How were these resources useful?
   d. Would you recommend these services to others? Why or why not?

14. What resources proved most effective in helping you succeed at your community college?

15. Were there any college programs or services that assisted you in securing a summer job or internship in your field of interest?

**People:** As we discuss this section, I want to identity individuals who contributed to your college success.

**Overarching Question - How did their assistance contribute to your success?**

1. Did your family support your decision to go to college?
   a. If yes, tell me how they supported your decision?
   b. Were they helpful?
   c. If not, tell me how you were able to succeed without their support.

2. Did anyone (high school teacher, counselor, community member, etc.) assist you with the college process while in high school?
   a. If so, who was it and what assistance did you seek from them?
   b. Were they helpful?

3. **Ask only if conversation led to this:** Were there any college staff members that helped you get a job or internship in your designated major? (i.e., part-time job at tax service provider if accounting major, internship at police department if criminal justice major, teachers aid if elementary education major, etc.)

4. Did you ever seek out the instructor for additional classroom assistance before/after class or during office hours?
   a. What was the purpose of your visit?
   b. Was the meeting helpful?
5. Did you ever seek out a prior/past instructor for additional college assistance after semester ended?
   a. What assistance did you seek from your former instructor?
   b. Was the instructor helpful?
6. Did you seek assistance from any employee (non-faculty) at the college to help you navigate the college-going process?
   a. If so, who or what services did you seek out?
   b. Were your interactions what you expected? Please explain.
   c. Were the interactions helpful?
   d. Was the interaction positive or pleasant? Please explain.
7. As a racial minority, tell me about the racial climate at your community college? Is there an incident that stands out in your mind, either positive or negative?
   a. If positive, please tell me about how you were supported as a male Mexican American student?
   b. If negative, please tell me how you responded to negative racial climate? What affect did this have on you?
8. Did you experience any racial stereotypes in the classroom?
   a. How did you craft productive responses to these experiences?
   b. Did anyone else intervene?
9. Did you witness any racial stereotype that was directed at someone else?
   a. What was your reaction?
   b. Did anyone else intervene?
10. Did you have a college friendship that you found valuable at your community college?
    a. How did this friend encourage you to do well and complete college?
    b. How did your friend help you succeed in college?
11. Thinking back to all the student services offices you worked with at your community college, did anyone provide you with a positive or negative service that affected your aspiration to complete college?
    a. Did the service or advice they gave you affect your career aspiration?

**Policies: Overarching Question - How did you persist through these “challenges?”**
1. This question will have multiple parts as it relates to the application process;
   a. Were you required to pay an application fees for any college you applied to? If yes, did this present a challenge for you or your family? Tell me about it.
   b. Were you required to write an essay for any college you applied to? If yes, did this present a challenge for you? Tell me about it.
   c. Which entrance placement exam did you take for placement at your community college (i.e., ACT, SAT, AccuPlacer, Compass)?
      i. Were you placed at the level you thought was appropriate with your prior learning achievement? If not, please explain.
      ii. Did you test into any developmental classes that were below the 100-college level?
         1. If yes, were you given an opportunity to retest if you thought this was not the appropriate placement?
2. How many developmental classes were you placed in?
   iii. Did this present a challenge for you? Tell me about it.
2. Were you familiar with your community college’s payment due date policies?
   a. Did the “payment due dates” policy create any challenges to your successful completion?
3. Were you familiar with your community college’s drop for non-payment policies?
   a. Did the “drop for non-payment” policy create any challenges to your successful completion?
4. Were you familiar with your community college’s tuition refund policies for getting a refund on a class you may have dropped after the refund deadline?
   a. Did the “tuition refund” policy for dropped classes create any challenges to your successful completion?
5. Did you experience any “grading procedures” policy challenges?
6. Did you experience any “grade appeal” policy challenges?
7. Did you experience any classroom policies challenges? (Some examples include attendance policy, tardiness policy, required group projects, etc.)
8. Did you experience any student code of conduct challenges?
9. Were there any college program policy requirements that necessitated an internship in your program of study? (Nursing, teaching, business, criminal justice, etc.)
   a. If so, how did this contribute to your desire to continue in this field of study?
10. Can you identify and discuss any other community college policies that contributed to your success and ultimate ability to graduate and transfer?

Closing Questions
1. Now that I have asked you many questions about your community college experience, tell me in your own words, who or what do you credit with promoting your success in deciding to go to college and making it through your community college (It can be more than one reason)?
2. When you look back on your community college experience, were there times you had a crisis of confidence?
   a. If so, tell me about it
   b. How did you manage this?
3. When you think about your pathway through college, what was your scariest moment?
   a. Tell me about it
   b. How did you manage this?
4. Was there ever a time you thought about dropping out or stopping out of college?
   a. If so, tell me about it?
   b. What made you decide to stay in college?

Prep for next meeting:
Prior to our next meeting, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript from our notes. I ask that you read this over to ensure I correctly captured what you said. If there are any
clarifications, please note it next to the transcript and we can discuss this the next time we meet.

I am providing you with a journal along with a copy of the questions I have asked today. Please take time to review the questions and record any additional information you wish to share or forgot to mention. Also, think about what worked for you that help you be successful in college as well as what you tried that didn’t work. Give examples of this. **Please bring the journal to our next meeting.**

When we meet again, we will also discuss additional information you recalled in order to get a clear picture of your experiences.

Thank you for your time. Please call me if you have any questions or concerns.
APPENDIX E

SECOND INTERVIEW SCRIPT
Second Interview Script

Prior to Interview
1. Welcome. Thank you once again for participating in this study.
2. Reconfirm Consent

Follow-Up from First Interview
1. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?
2. Let’s review the transcript I sent you and confirm its accuracy. Are there any corrections or clarification that needs to be made?
3. What kind of things have you been thinking about since our first interview?
4. Have you been thinking more about your community college experience? Tell me about it.
5. As you think about the support you received from your peers, what did you really gain from them?
6. Is there anything we didn’t cover in the first interview that you want to discuss?
7. Is there anything you think I should have asked you or that you would like to add?
8. As you look back on your community college experience, would you do anything differently?
9. How do you feel about your sense of belonging in college?

Journal Discussion
1. As you reflected in your journal, how did the level of service provided by key student services offices affect your progress?
2. Please share the thoughts you wrote in your journal

Wrapping Up/Closing Questions
1. On a scale of 1-100 with 1 representing “There is no way are you going to finish college” and 100 represents “You have absolutely no doubt you will successfully graduate from [ ]” where would you place yourself on this scale.
   a. Tell me why you chose that number.
   b. How confident are you that you will succeed?
   c. What do you think you need to do to improve your odds?
2. What advice would you have given to yourself now if you could talk to yourself as a high school senior?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years?

DACA Only Questions
1. Do you think being a DACA student has affected you or makes you feel different than any other students?
2. Being a DACA student has some uncertainties. Do you have faith in our federal government to keep it in place or do you fear deportation?
3. What keeps you going/motivated from the standpoint of being in college and a DACA student?
4. Do you think you would have gone to college without DACA?

Please choose an alias first name by which you want me to refer to you in my study.
APPENDIX F
DATA COLLECTION PROCESS
Recruitment
Email to all who identified as:
1) Mexican American
2) Male
3) Parents did not attend college
4) Attended a community college in Illinois
5) Currently attending a four-year university

Screening
Interested students redirected to the University of Iowa’s Qualtrics survey
1) Review and sign the Rights and Responsibility form
2) Complete the Biographical Data form

Invitation
Biographical data forms reviewed to ensure students qualified for this study.
1) Student contacted via email to set date for initial phone interview
2) Information on their Biographical Data form discussed to confirm student eligibility
3) Student notified they qualified for the study and were selected
4) Initial email sent to each student and included:
   (a) Summary of the purpose of the study
   (b) Length and location of interviews
   (c) Description of participants compensation
   (d) Contact information for:
       • Researcher
       • Faculty advisor
       • University of Iowa’s IRB office

Interview 1
Interviews scheduled at University
1) Conducted in University Library
2) Researcher reviewed IRB Consent form
3) Student signed consent form
4) Requested and received permission to use digital voice recorder
5) Explained $50 Visa Gift card compensation after interviews completed and transcripts reviewed
6) Interviews started and breaks were offered
7) When finished, students given a journal and copy of Consent Form
8) Once interview was transcribed, copy sent to participant for member checking
9) Participant allowed to make corrections or clarify a response
10) Corrections made and final review conducted
11) Data analyzed for proper coding

Journal
Purpose of journal explained
1) Instructions and expectation provided for journal entry
2) Option to type responses in email also allowed
3) Copy of questions provided to use as guide for journal entry
4) Requested journal submission in ten days

Interview 2
Follow-up
Interview scheduled
1) Conducted in University Library
2) Researcher again reviewed IRB Consent form
3) Student acknowledged understanding of their rights
4) Requested and received permission to continue using digital voice recorder
5) Interviews started and breaks were offered
6) Visa Gift card compensation provided to student and student signed form acknowledging receipt ($50)
7) Interview was transcribed, copy sent to participant for member checking
8) Participant allowed to make corrections or clarify a response
9) Corrections made and final review conducted
10) Participant thanked for their time
11) Data analyzed for proper coding
APPENDIX G

PARENT CODES
Open Coding

**People (Support Structure)**
Family/Friends
   - Information Provided
   - Financial Assistance
   - Supportive of Decision
   - HS Friend Support
   - College Friend Support
   - Peers
College Staff
   - Instructor
   - College Staff
Who they credit for their success

**Practices (Programs)**
Programs
Resources
Summer Bridge
Clubs/Organizations
College Sponsored Conferences
Academic Advisor
Financial Aid
Learning Community
New Student Orientation
First-Year Experience Class
Tutoring

**Policies**
Application Fees
Payment Due Date
Tuition Refund
Grading
Classroom
Code of Conduct
Developmental Education/Remedial
Internship
Other

**Pre-College Socialization and Readiness**
High School Experience
   - High School Teacher/Coach/Staff
Help with making decision to go to college
Why College
Community College Choice
Major
University Choice
**Self-Awareness**

*Negative*
- Crisis of Confidence
- Scariest Moment
- Thoughts of Dropping Out

*Positive*
- Self-confidence to Graduate
- Advice to their high school senior self
- Where students see themselves in five years
- Would students change anything

**DACA**

College access
DACA status and feeling different
Fear of deportation
Motivation to continue

*A Priori Coding*

**Pre-College Socialization and Readiness**
- High school experience
- Any assistance they received from high school staff
- Decision for attending college
- Which individual(s) helped them make the decision to attend college
- Why they chose a community college over a four-year institution of higher education
- Why they chose their major program of study

**College Achievement**

*Classroom Interaction*
- How did the student negotiate “onlyness” and underrepresentation at their community college?
- What compelled the student to persist in college despite academic challenges and previous educational disadvantages?
- Which pedagogical practices engage one at their community college?
- How did the student craft productive responses to any racial stereotyped they may have faced in the classroom?

*Student Services*
- What compelled one to take advantage of campus resources, clubs, and student organizations?
- How did the services provided by student services offices affect their progress?
- How did the services provided by student services offices affect their aspiration?
- How did college programs or services contribute to ones success?
Institutional Agents
- How did faculty contribute to one's success?
- How did faculty contribute to one's aspirations?
- In what ways did faculty encourage one to participate outside the classroom?

Self-awareness
- Potentially negative experiences they encountered
- Crisis of confidence they may have encountered,
- Scariest moment they had in college
- Any time they thought about dropping out of college.
APPENDIX H

HIGH SCHOOL PLANNING CHECKLIST: GRADES 9-12
Your Planning Checklist

From First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

- Let your teachers know that you plan to go to college.
- Are your courses considered “college prep”? If you don’t know, ask your guidance counselor to make sure they are.
  - **Tip:** Colleges like to see challenging courses on your record, even if you get lower grades in them.
  - **Tip:** If you want to play sports in college, you should know that college athletic teams have requirements about what high school courses you take.
- Let your teachers get to know you better. For a start, write down the names of the ones you trust or admire most:
  1. _____________________________________________________________
  2. _____________________________________________________________
  3. _____________________________________________________________
  4. _____________________________________________________________
- Do you know other students like you who are planning to go to college? It helps to share your ideas and plans with them.
  Write down the names of the ones you trust or admire most:
  1. _____________________________________________________________
  2. _____________________________________________________________
  3. _____________________________________________________________
  4. _____________________________________________________________
- Read as much as you can this year. It will give you new ideas, make you a better thinker, and build your vocabulary.
  Start a list of things you enjoy reading:
  1. _____________________________________________________________
  2. _____________________________________________________________
  3. _____________________________________________________________
  4. _____________________________________________________________
- Get involved in activities you care about—at school and after school (including sports, clubs, community service, church group, jobs, etc.). List the ones that most appeal to you:
  1. _____________________________________________________________
  2. _____________________________________________________________
  3. _____________________________________________________________
  4. _____________________________________________________________
- Think about your current interests. What career fields might match up with them? As you get new ideas, write them here:
  **YOUR INTEREST** | **CAREER FIELDS CONNECTED WITH IT**
  1. _____________________________________________________________
  2. _____________________________________________________________
  3. _____________________________________________________________
  4. _____________________________________________________________
  5. _____________________________________________________________
Start to look for information about colleges that fit with your interests. The guidance office will have books, catalogs, and posters, or you can check out colleges on the Internet. (Just type “college search” into Google or any search engine.) If you find any that appeal to you, write their names on this list, using extra space if you need it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF COLLEGE</th>
<th>CAREER FIELDS CONNECTED WITH IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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Make a folder or large envelope marked “Grade 9 Portfolio” and save your best work in it, so it won’t get lost. This should include class assignments, but don’t forget to include poems, artwork, or evidence of other things you do outside of school.

Use your summer to have fun while you learn. Ask your guidance office about enrichment programs (camps, summer courses) that help students like you prepare for college.
Your Planning Checklist

From: First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

☐ Keep taking the most challenging courses you can.

☐ If you are having trouble with your schoolwork, ask for help. If the teacher doesn’t have time for you, ask another adult or a student who is doing well in that class.

☐ Which teachers do you connect with best this year? Write their names here:

1. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________

☐ Stay involved in the activities you most care about—at school, after school, and in the summer. Which ones do you most care about this year? List them here:

1. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________ 4. ____________________________

The more you care about your extra activities, the more they matter to college admissions. Don’t do things just to make a longer list—better to do a few things well.

☐ Go to www.collegeboard.com and sign up for a free student account. Once you do this, go to “My Organizer” and it will help you get through your “to-do” list for tests and applications. Take it step by step—it’s easier than it looks!

☐ Early in September, ask your guidance counselor to help you sign up for preliminary college admissions tests like the PSAT. Your scores on these will not count when you apply to college, and they are good practice for later.

Many college entrance tests like these charge a fee. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your counselor to help you apply for a waiver, so you can take the test anyway.

When you get your test results, ask your guidance counselor or a teacher to explain how to make sense of the scores. If you hope to do better next time, ask about what kind of extra preparation you will need.

☐ In April, ask your guidance counselor to help you register for the SAT Subject Tests, given in June. These one-hour exams test you on academic subjects such as biology, chemistry, math, physics, and foreign languages. Take SAT Subject Tests soon after you complete a course in that subject. (Select the “score choice” option. This way, you can take more Subject Tests in eleventh and twelfth grades, and then send colleges only your best results.)

Many colleges require three SAT Subject Tests. Some colleges recommend or require Math Level 1 or Math Level 2. Not all SAT Subject Tests are given on every test date. Check the calendar carefully to determine when the Subject Tests you want are offered, and plan using “My Organizer” on www.collegeboard.com.
☐ Keep making notes about how your interests and passions might connect to college or careers later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR INTEREST</th>
<th>RELATED CAREER FIELDS</th>
<th>POSSIBLE COLLEGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</table>

☐ Ask your counselor about summer enrichment opportunities like Upward Bound. If you can’t find one in your area, go to www.google.com and search for “youth college readiness summer programs.” (Add the word “minority” if it applies to you.)

☐ Look at this list and check any other summer activities you could explore:
   _Volunteer at a workplace that interests you (like a library, a radio station, a YMCA)_
   _Sign up for a career exploration course or program at a local community college_
   _Participate in music, art, theatre, or dance offerings in your community_
   _Take a course that will help you do better on college admissions tests_
   _Practice computer skills at your public library_
   _Write your own ideas here:_

☐ Get together with several classmates and talk about what you have been doing to explore your college plans.

☐ Keep reading as much as you can. Make a list of all the books you read this year. Put a star next to the ones you liked the best, and make a note as to why.

1. ____________________________________________ 2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________ 4. ____________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________ 6. ____________________________________________

☐ Make a folder or large envelope marked “Grade 10 Portfolio” and save your best work in it, so it won’t get lost. This should include class assignments, but don’t forget to include poems, artwork, or evidence of other things you do outside of school.
Your Planning Checklist

From: First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students –
Your High School Years, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

☐ At the start of the year, make a special folder marked "College." Keep everything connected to your college planning here—information, schedules, forms, and anything else.

☐ Check test schedules for PSAT, SAT or ACT, and register yourself for tests on “My Organizer” at www.collegeboard.com. Many college entrance tests like these charge a fee. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your counselor to help you apply for a waiver, so you can take the test anyway.

☐ Find out where “test prep” courses are given, and sign up for them. The more familiar you are with college admission tests, the better you will do on them. Take practice tests as often as you can.

☐ Attend a college fair to get more information about colleges. You can also write, telephone, or use the Internet to ask colleges to send you materials.

☐ Don’t delay college planning because your family cannot afford to pay for college. Low-income students receive funding—from the government and sometimes the college—to help meet college costs.

☐ Colleges want to see demanding courses on your grade 11 schedule. Use this space to list the most challenging courses that you can take this year:
  1. ______________________________________________________________
  2. ______________________________________________________________
  3. ______________________________________________________________
  4. ______________________________________________________________
  5. ______________________________________________________________
  6. ______________________________________________________________

☐ Junior year grades are very important in college admissions. If you are having trouble with your schoolwork, ask for help. If the teacher does not have time for you, ask another adult or a student who is doing well in that class.

☐ At the end of your junior year, you will need to ask two teachers to write you a letter of recommendation to go in your school file. Choose the teachers who know you the best (even if you didn’t have them this year), and write their names here:
  1. ______________________________________________________________
  2. ______________________________________________________________

☐ Don’t be shy about asking for a recommendation. Just say, “You were an important teacher for me, and I wonder if you would consider writing me a college recommendation and giving it to my guidance counselor.” (Only the college and the guidance office, not you, are allowed to see the recommendation.)

☐ Stay involved in the activities you most care about—at school, after school, and in the summer. Which ones do you most care about this year? List them here, along with any leadership role you have in them:
  1. ______________________________________________________________
  2. ______________________________________________________________
  3. ______________________________________________________________
  4. ______________________________________________________________
Colleges also will look at recommendations from adults who know you through your job or other out-of-school activities. If you know someone like this, write his or her name here. Ask that person to send a letter to your guidance office, too.

1. __________________________________________

☐ Keep reading as much as you can. Make a list of all the books you read this year. Put a star next to the ones you liked the best, and make a note as to why.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
6. __________________________________________

☐ Narrow down your list of colleges to six—two "safety schools" that you think will probably accept you, two "top choices," and two in between. If possible, talk over your choices with your parents at this point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOP CHOICES</th>
<th>IN BETWEEN</th>
<th>SAFETY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ___________</td>
<td>2. ___________</td>
<td>3. ___________</td>
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<td>1. ___________</td>
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<td>3. ___________</td>
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</table>

☐ Look for summer opportunities that give you a taste of the college experience. One of the colleges on your list might have a program for high school students—call and ask! (Don’t forget to tell them that you will be the first in your family to go to college.)

☐ Ask your school if they arrange a "college visit" trip for juniors and seniors. If they don’t, plan your own with family or friends over the summer.

☐ Make a folder or large envelope marked "Grade 11 Portfolio" and save your best work in it, so it won’t get lost. This should include class assignments, but don’t forget to include poems, artwork, or evidence of other things you do outside of school.
Your Planning Checklist

From: First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

☐ Your “College” folder will become quite large this year, so keep it organized! If you want, turn it into a file box, containing separate folders for testing documents and score reports, applications for admission, applications for financial aid or scholarships, copies of your income tax forms, notes for your application essay, completed planning checklists from grades 9 through 11, and so forth.

☐ Choose challenging courses this year, and work hard in them. Your performance senior year shows admissions people that you can go on to succeed in college.

☐ Register for the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT tests given in the fall or early winter. Don’t forget to ask for your scores to be sent to the colleges on your list.

☐ In fall of senior year, attend another college fair to gather information about colleges and talk to their representatives. If you find new ones that interest you, use the chart below to revise the list you made on your Grade 11 planning checklist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOP CHOICES</th>
<th>IN BETWEEN</th>
<th>SAFETY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. __________________________________</td>
<td>2. __________________________________</td>
<td>3. __________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

☐ Take every chance to actually visit the colleges that interest you. Call the admissions office and see if you can arrange an interview—colleges do not require them, but it can help your chance of getting in.

☐ Find out your Social Security number (and/or your green card number, if you are a legal immigrant), which you must have for your college applications. If you do not have a Social Security number, but you qualify for one, contact the closest Social Security office (www.ssa.gov) as soon as possible to obtain a number. Write your number here:

1. ______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

☐ Decide six colleges you are actually going to apply to. Write their names in the chart below, and check whether you will apply online, use the Common Application (www.commonapp.org), or send in a paper application. Then write the deadline for each college—not all colleges have the same deadline!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE NAME</th>
<th>Apply online?</th>
<th>Mail in paper application?</th>
<th>Use common application?</th>
<th>DEADLINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. __________________________</td>
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<td>2. __________________________</td>
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<td>3. __________________________</td>
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<td>4. __________________________</td>
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<td>6. __________________________</td>
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</table>
Most colleges charge you an application fee, but some colleges waive that fee if you apply online using the Common Application. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your guidance counselor for a fee waiver, or call the college admissions office yourself and explain the situation.

For each college on your list, make sure you complete all applications for financial aid. Every college requires the FAFSA (www.fafsa.ed.gov), and some colleges also require a form called CSS Profile (find it at www.collegeboard.com). Many colleges even have another form of their own to fill out. Use the chart below to keep everything straight, including the deadline for each different application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE NAME</th>
<th>FAFSA Deadline</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>CSS Profile Deadline</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>College fin. aid app Deadline</th>
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In January, you and your parents should file your income taxes, because you will need them in order to fill out the FAFSA and other financial aid forms. If your family does not file taxes because its income is too low, indicate that when you complete the FAFSA application. Then telephone each college's financial aid office to request a waiver form, which you can send them instead of your income tax forms.

Financial aid applications always ask for your parent's signature. If your situation does not permit this for any reason, call the college financial aid office to explain, and they will tell you what to do.

Apply for as many scholarships as you can find. (Use www.fastweb.com, and ask your guidance counselor for local scholarships from businesses or organizations.) On the chart below, write down the names and deadlines for the ones you qualify for, and keep track of deadlines:

<table>
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<th>ORGANIZATION THAT GIVES THE SCHOLARSHIP</th>
<th>DEADLINE</th>
<th>COMPLETED</th>
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Meet with your guidance counselor to go over your grades and other information you will need to fill out the college applications. Ask your counselor to check if the teachers who said they would write recommendations have done it yet. (If not, go back and ask them again—they probably just forgot.)

Write thank-you notes to those who write recommendations and keep them informed of your decisions.

Get together with a friend who is also applying to college, and spend a day filling out application forms. If possible, meet in a place with access to a copy machine. Bring fine-tipped black pens, white-out to cover up any mistakes, and extra paper for making drafts and notes. Use your best printing when you fill out the forms. You should complete the “personal essay” section on another day—it is a project in itself. (See next page.)
From your “College” folder, pull out the lists you made in grades 9, 10, and 11 about your activities, reading lists, etc. They will help you as you fill out your applications.

Take a few hours to prepare for writing the personal essay you will need on your college applications. Think back on your whole life up to this point, and make a list of moments that you remember especially well. Whether they were happy or difficult times for you, write down notes about each of them here. (Use extra space if you need it.)

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
4. ____________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________
6. ____________________________________________

Take another hour or two to yourself, and pick just one moment from the list you made of life memories. Then write down everything about it—what it felt like, what it looked like and sounded like, who was there, what felt important about it. Write freely, not stopping to worry about grammar or form, as if you were writing in your private journal. Then save those pages. Later, they will help you write the actual essay.

Set aside a day or two to write the personal essay for your applications. (You can use the same essay for most applications.) Using some of the free writing you did about your life memories, describe one important moment to you in essay form. Use as many concrete details as you can—the college really wants to see how you notice and think about things. After you have something written, show it to your English teacher, your mentor, or anyone else you trust, and ask for feedback. Then revise, revise through many drafts.

Some colleges ask for more than one essay. Usually one of them is more personal, and the other asks about your reading, your activities, or why you want to go to that college. For the second essay, look back at your list of memories, but also look through your Portfolios for grades 9, 10, and 11.

Somewhere in one of your application essays, let the reader know that you will be the first in your family to go to college. If it doesn’t fit anywhere else, put it at the end, connecting the experience you describe to your hopes for college.

Once you start getting letters accepting you to college or putting you on a waiting list, you do not need to decide right away. Use this chart to compare the offers you receive:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COLLEGE NAME</th>
<th>Accepted or waitlisted?</th>
<th>Total costs for the year</th>
<th>Total financial aid offered (grants + loans)</th>
<th>Subtract your financial aid from the total costs, to get your actual costs for the year</th>
<th>College notified of your decision (by May 1)</th>
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If your first-choice college puts you on its waiting list, write another letter to the admissions office, making clear that they are your first choice and that you would attend if they accept you. If you have any new activities or accomplishments since you sent in your application, describe them, too.

By May 1, make your decision about what college you will go to, and let that college know. Also notify other colleges whose offers you are turning down.

Celebrate! You are going to be the first in your family to go on to college!
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