

2015

# Why Latino American Community College Students Drop Out After One Semester

Rosa Delia Smith  
*Walden University*

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Why Latino American Community College Students Drop Out After One Semester

by

Rosa Delia Smith

MA, Azusa Pacific University, 2007

BA, St. Lawrence University, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2015

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate why many Latino American students at an urban community college in the state of Maryland who were enrolled at least part-time and were U.S. citizens or permanent residents did not continue their education into the second semester. Guided by Tinto's model of student integration and student persistence, this study explored the reasons these students dropped-out using the students' words to describe barriers to success, factors that influenced their decisions not to return for their second semester, and what they believed could have made a difference in their decisions. Five Latino American first-generation community college students were selected for interview. The life history calendar was used, emerging themes were coded, and a peer reviewer added perspective and stimulated further inquiry. The findings reflected the following key themes that influence persistence: family responsibility and influence, processing the college steps, lack of confidence, paying for college through family members, reliable resources, interacting with staff employees, and creating a friendly and nurturing environment. The findings allowed the development of a curriculum plan project study entitled PODER that may help college leaders devise plans to improve student persistence from the first to second semester. The potential for social change from this study could steer educators to create programs beyond the study setting to increase persistence rates of Latino American college students. This issue was important not only for the educational growth of Latino American students but also for the economic growth of the nation's workforce.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research study to all the students who have allowed me to be a part of their educational journey. This includes all the students who participated in this study, to the students I currently help, and to those students who I have yet to meet--thank you for trusting and believing in me.

I would also like to dedicate this research study to my two pillars, my mother, Ms. Felipa Marin and my grandmother, Ms. Rosa Delia Qunitanilla, who continue to watch over me from heaven. My mother and grandmother instilled in me the values of hard work, determination, and perseverance.

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Table 1. Key Themes Found to Influence Persistence.....	87

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to learn from a sampling of first-generation Latino American nonreturning students what they perceived as the reasons for not returning to their second semester of college. More than 15% of the current U.S. population is Latino, and it is projected that this proportion will grow to almost 30% by 2050 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2008). Community colleges will be affected by this demographic shift because Latinos who enroll in postsecondary education are more likely than other groups to attend community colleges. Forty-six percent of Latinos who go to college directly after high school enroll in community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). “Accessing higher education in postsecondary institutions is not enough; the key is persisting in order to complete a college degree” (Arbona & Nora, 2007, p. 247).

Researchers who have studied Latino students who were beginning their postsecondary education at the community college level found that they are “less likely than their White counterparts to complete an associate degree” (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O’Brien, 2007, p. 174). Addressing the poor persistence rate of Latino college students is priority. There are many factors that contribute to Latino college students’ dropping-out and not completing a degree. The number of Latino students in the educational system can sometimes mask the problems of poor success rates in college. Smith and Wolf-Wendel (2005) revealed that although numbers of Latinos in higher education have “increased, the increase is simply a function of the

greater...[number of Latinos] graduating from high school, rather than a reflection of an increased percentage going on to college” (p. 4). Fry (2002) stated that “Latinos are products of under-funded, under-staffed, and under-performing high schools, and as such have not had an adequate preparation for college work” (p. 12). Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, and Ruder (2006) established that “early in the educational process, Latino students are often singled out [by teachers] as not having the ability to succeed in college” (p. 66). There are several factors that researchers have found relevant for Latino students when dealing with motivation: lack of experience in educational goal-setting, becoming parents themselves, dealing with children, and balancing work with school (Torres Campos et al., 2009). Educators can help Latino community college students learn to deal with these factors to increase their persistence from one semester to another.

### **Definition of the Problem**

Although the number of Latino students enrolling in higher education has increased, the college-completion rate for Latino students has not demonstrated the same positive outcomes. After 6 years of attending community college, only 11.7% of Latino students attain an Associate’s degree (Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, & Shepard, 2010). In spite of the fact that 46% of Latinos enroll in community colleges after high school, Fry (2002) noted that United States Latino population is the most poorly educated group. If community colleges can build a framework of support to enable Latino students to complete their studies, they will benefit not only the students but also the country as a whole. Having Latinos become educated increases the quality of the nation’s workforce.

The purpose of this project study was to learn from a sampling of first-generation Latino American nonreturning students what they perceived as the reasons for not returning for their second semester of college.

### **Local Problem**

I identified that a suburban community college is experiencing significant dropout rates of Latino American students in the State of Maryland. During the fall semester of 2006, an estimated 100 Latino American students who were either U.S. citizens or permanent residents enrolled for their first time with at least a part-time status. Of those students, an estimated one-third had stopped attending by the second semester of Spring 2007 (Setting Administrator, personal communication, July 27, 2011). It is not known why many Latino American community college students do not come back for their second semester. The following criteria were used to select a homogenous group of Latino study participants: 18-21 years of age, enrolled at least part-time, first-generation college student, and financial aid recipient. A full list of the participant selection criteria appears in Section 2 with specific references to the problem and informed by the scholarly research. The purpose of this project study was to learn from a sampling of these first-generation nonreturning students what they perceived as the reasons for not returning for their second semester of college. Through a case study approach, the goal was to identify factors that influenced students not to return for their second semester of community college study and explore what could have been the reasons they decided to leave after the first semester.

## **Rationale**

A sampling of first-generation Latino American nonreturning students was used to find-out what they perceived as the reasons for not returning to their second semester of college. With the assistance of the college's Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research, a pool consisting of approximately 100 Latino American students who did not return after their first semester was identified. From that pool, five participants were selected for individual, 1-hour, audio-recorded, semistructured interviews. A full description of the participant selection process appears in Section 2. A peer reviewer read the transcripts. I also created reports using NVivo 10 software to add clarification of themes. The peer reviewer, who is also fluent in Spanish, added an important additional perspective and stimulated further inquiry through discussion of the transcripts to clarify and confirm the themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews.

Through the interviews, various stages of the semester were explored (i.e., first week of class, midterm, and final week) to help students recall the factors that influenced their decisions to stop attending. I was the researcher of the study. I am fluent in Spanish and was able to conduct the interviews in Spanish if participants so chose. All the interviews were in English, although a few participants used some Spanish words during the interviews. The life history calendar, which Geiger (1986) described as a biographical form of writing for collecting personal life events, was used to help the participants recall information by using significant time periods during the college semester that the student would most likely remember, such as first week of school, midsemester, and final exam

week. The life history calendar is described in more detail in Section 2 and found in Appendix D.

Participants were provided with project study information, and each signed a consent form before the interview. The information focused on the problem statement, the guiding questions, and the description of participation in the study. The consent form contained a brief introduction to the nature and purpose of the project study, the procedures, and the confidentiality information. A copy of the consent form is located in Appendix B. If project study participants so chose, they had the option of being interviewed in a closed room within a public library or an office space at the setting college. All the participants were interviewed in my office space at the setting college. The words spoken during the interviews were transcribed within one week after the interview took place to ensure the transcripts' reliability and quality.

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The setting for this project study was a large, suburban public community college chosen for several reasons. This campus population is comprised predominantly of students of color. The degree or certificate-seeking student population was comprised of 77.0% Black students and 19.4% Latino students in the Spring 2011 semester (Prince George's Community College, 2012). The majority of students attend college on a part-time basis, and 50% of the students enrolled are under the age of 24 years (Prince George's Community College, 2012). This community college has a significant number of immigrant students, with 56% reporting that they were born outside the United States (Prince George's Community College, 2012). The purpose of this project study was to

learn from a sampling of these first-generation nonreturning students what they perceived as the reasons for not returning for their second semester of college.

Among the possible factors behind the low persistence rate highlighted in the literature are lack of preparedness in those coming from poor K-12 experiences (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004), issues related to the home environment (Toews & Yazedjian, 2007), part-time enrollment in college (Goldrick-Rab & Roksa, 2008), and economic factors (Hurtado, Nelson, Thomas, & Perorazio, 2003). Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) reported that there is a need to study the factors of institutional support and the college experience which lead Latino students to withdraw before graduating. This case study contributed to the body of knowledge on factors Latino American students perceive as causes of their not returning for their second semester at the community college

### **Factors Found to Influence Nonreturning Students**

The fact that community colleges provide the greatest opportunity for many Latino students to pursue higher education can be both rewarding and challenging for the institutions and their students. Community colleges are known for having an open-admissions policy, allowing students to take remedial courses that they are not likely to take at four-year institutions in order to begin their studies with a high school degree or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. The open-admissions policy, found predominantly among community colleges, gives Latino students more accessibility to a higher education. However, the idea that community colleges have an open-admissions policy can create a sense of academic inferiority among Latino students. Cox (2009)

conducted a qualitative study interviewing thirty-four students in six sections of English to obtain their understandings of the college process. Cox assessed students' prior academic experiences, perspectives of the college, and assessments of coursework. Although the study did not reveal how many participants were Latino students, Cox did affirm that a majority of students in two of six sections interviewed were Latino or Black. Through the interviews, the study revealed that students' past failures and doubts were factors that influenced their success in college (Cox, 2009). Students felt that attending a community college affirmed their academic inadequacies. The predictors described below and in the literature review served as an overview of factors that influence nonreturning students.

**College readiness.** Arbona and Nora (2007) and Wassmer, Moore, and Shulock (2004) found that college readiness has been a predictor of persistence for Latino community college students. Students who come to college academically prepared from high school are less likely to be overwhelmed by the demands of college work.

**Family involvement.** Family involvement plays a critical part in the college success of Latino students. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) found that Latino students were more likely to state that family and friends were the main reason for enrolling in a particular institution. Programs are being developed that take advantage of this fact. Futures and Families is an example of a successful program developed in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles, to ensure that the public school system's focus is on teaching the parents of the students and helping them to understand the college process through various interactive and nontraditional presentations (Brown,

2008). Understanding the role that family plays in college success may lead to improving degree-completion rates for Latino students in community colleges.

**Financial aid opportunities.** The financial aid opportunities for Latino college students have a direct effect on retention and persistence rates. Zarate and Burciaga (2010) found that Latino families lack sufficient knowledge of college financial aid to make decisions to apply to college. Understanding how Latino students seek funding for their education will help institutional decision-makers meet students' financial educational needs.

**Language.** Language is a concern for the success of Latino college students. Researchers who focused on the academic success of Latino undergraduates, particularly students learning English as a second language, suggested that programs geared toward meeting the linguistic needs of Latinos will produce positive outcomes (De la Cruz, 2008). The increase in immigrant populations in the United States provides opportunities for educators to begin to think of innovative ways to teach a growing diverse population.

**Socioeconomic status.** Latino students tend to be financially disadvantaged (Kurlander, 2006). As a result, Latinos attend community colleges rather than 4-year institutions due to the lower tuition offered by community colleges and the flexibility in course scheduling, which allows them to maintain employment while going to college. Kurlander (2006) found that Latinos with both low and high socioeconomic status preferred to begin their higher education at a community college in comparison to other groups of the same economic status.

**Institutional/Organization culture.** For Latino community college students, it is imperative that policymakers and decision-makers in higher education institutions understand the needs of the fast-growing Latino student population enrolling in higher education. Shulock and Moore (2007) stated that community college educators have nationally build responsibility to help students succeed. Administrators and policymakers can change the organizational cultural of the institution and have the ability to create an atmosphere that promotes success for all students.

### **Definitions**

*Attrition:* “A student who enrolls at an institution one semester but does not enroll the next semester, and has not completed his or her formally declared program of study” (Bean, 1985, p. 489).

*Dropout:* “One who has left before graduating from either or both high school and/or postsecondary studies” (NCES, 2005).

*First-generation college student:* Student whose parents did not graduate from college. For the purpose of this project study, a first-generation college student is a student for whom neither parent enrolled in (Nuñez, 2011) or graduated from college (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). Pérez and McDonough (2008) found that first-generation Latino college students relied heavily on siblings, peers, relatives, and high school contacts when considering making their college choices.

*Hispanic:* Hispanic is a term that describes a person of Spanish origin and excludes persons from Portugal, Italy, and Brazil. The term was made official by U.S.

Census in 1980 through the work of a Hispanic bureaucrat, Grace Flores-Hughes, who wanted to count accurately Hispanic people of America (*The Hartford Guardian*, 2009).

*Latino*: The term *Latino* was officially adopted in 1997 by the U.S. government in the ethnonym *Hispanic or Latino*, which replaced the single term *Hispanic* “Because regional usage of the terms differs – Hispanic is commonly used in the eastern portion of the United States, whereas Latino is commonly used in the western portion” (The White House, 1997, p. 6).

*Latino American*: For the purpose of the study, Latino students who are either U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization or who are U.S. permanent residents are referred to as Latino Americans.

*Postsecondary education*: Describes a formal educational level designed primarily for students beyond high school (NCES, 2012).

*Retention*: Following Crawford’s (1999) definition, ‘retention’ means “maintenance of continued enrollment for 2 or more semesters, especially from fall term to spring term and/or completion of a degree/certification or transfer to a four-year college” (p. 13).

*U.S. permanent resident*: An immigrant admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d).

*U.S. naturalized citizen*: “Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013, para. 1).

### **Significance**

The project study's findings provided a foundation for comparing, synthesizing, and building on successful research findings to address the educational needs of Latino community college students. This topic is significant to the field of education because Latinos are a fast-growing population. The majority of Latino students begin their postsecondary education in community colleges (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Fry, 2002; Kurlaender, 2006; Wassmer & Shulock, 2004), and the educational success of Latino students impacts the success of the future American workforce. Recent data reflecting all admissions to community colleges indicated that 58% of Latino students enrolled in community colleges compared to 42% of White students (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2006). The importance of this concern is summarized best by Gándara (2005), "The future of this country is very dependent on how well Latinos fare in the workplace, the society, and the schools" (p. 296).

The implications for positive social change resulting from a better understanding of why Latino college students are dropping-out of college are many. Identifying the causes that lead to Latino community college students' leaving will provide information to better equip educators on how to help these students. Like all groups, Latino college students need to graduate in order to be equipped to enter the workforce and increase American society's prosperity.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

The following questions were used to guide the project study to determine what factors Latino American college students perceive to be the causes of their not continuing their academic programs after their first semester:

1. What barriers prevented Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
2. What factors influenced Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
3. What do Latino American community college students feel could have helped them continue with a second semester of study?

This descriptive and narrative case study captured testimonials from Latino American students. From semistructured interviews, themes emerged that described the perspective of participants. After the information was compiled, themes were analyzed and organized into categories. Possible factors revealed in the scholarly research findings indicated a lack of preparedness resulting from poor K-12 experiences, issues related to the home environment, part-time enrollment in college, economic factors, and institutional support.

### **Review of the Literature**

Learning about Latino community college students and their persistence rates in college is important to higher education faculty and administrators, but unfortunately empirical research pertaining to this group of students is still very limited. Flores, Horn, and Crisp (2006) confirmed that “empirical research about Latino college students in

community colleges remains scant, even though they are the group most likely to attend community colleges” (p. 71). Finding empirical research that pertains to the barriers to first semester persistence in community college is a challenge because most assessments follow persistence calculations for 3 to 6 years.

Several Boolean searches were used to obtain information about Latino students and their persistence rates in community college after the first semester. In order to maintain relevancy and accuracy, an intentional focus was given to key words such as *Latino, dropout, community college, early departure, and first semester*. Searches included *Latino students and community college, Hispanic students and community college, Latino students and persistence, early withdrawal and Latino students, drop out and community college, drop out and Latinos, early departure and Latinos, and dropout and Hispanic*. One indicator that saturation has been reached in the review of literature was that searches resulted in repetition of the same authors and articles related to Latino community college students and persistence, which was the present search’s result.

Various search engines were used to find empirical research related to community college Latino students who dropout after their first semester. These search engines consisted of the following: *Education Research Complete, Education from Sage, Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest Central, and ProQuest Educational Journals*.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As educators address the needs of Latino students, it is important to seek understanding in the areas of retention, persistence, and developmental and cognitive theories. For this project study, the conceptual model guiding the theoretical framework

is established using Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) model of student integration and model of student persistence. Tinto established the importance of both social and academic factors, that is, how welcome a student feels both socially and academically, in student success. Nora's (2002; 2004) model of student engagement built on Tinto work through research significantly related to Latinos at the beginning stages of development. Crisp and Nora (2010), while noting that there is no inclusive theory that can explain the various factors that influence success for Latino community college students, provided a framework to understand how Latino college students adapt and integrate into the college environment as well as their college-engagement processes and how these factors impact rates of persistence.

Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) theoretical models indicated that students bring various characteristics to the college environment, and these differing characteristics impact the educational commitment that students will have to achieving their goal. To persist in college, students must integrate into the academic system early in the first semester. Students' decisions to dropout will depend on their integration (Nora, 1987). Museus and Quaye (2009) conceived Tinto's model to influence undergraduate students' academic commitment and likelihood of persisting, depending on their level of integration into college. Similarly, Nora's (2002; 2004) student-engagement model also implicates institutional experience as important in the success of Latino college students and identified the following six major components: "(a) precollege/pull factors, (b) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance, (c) academic and social experience, (d) cognitive

and noncognitive outcomes, (e) goal determination/institutional allegiance, and (f) persistence” (p. 70).

### **Demographics of Latinos in Community Colleges**

Latinos are the fastest growing racial/ethnic minority group in the United States (Ennis et al., 2011). These numbers have implications for higher education and especially for community colleges. It is well-established that community colleges are the primary entry point to higher education for Latino students (Bailey et al., 2005; Kurlaender, 2006; Wassmer & Shulock, 2004). This preference is reflected in the percentage of Latino students who choose community colleges over other options after high school graduation. Of recent high school graduates entering college, 46% of Latino students chose to enroll in community colleges compared to 30% of Blacks, 28% of Whites, 25% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 24% of those of more than one race (NCES, 2008). In the same year, 31% of Latino students were enrolled at public four-year colleges and universities.

Researchers have demonstrated attrition rates as high as 80% for Latino community college students (Rendón & Nora, 1989). The *Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study of 1996* produced data demonstrating that students who were enrolled in community colleges typically took 6 years to complete their program (Wine et al., 2002). In the same report, Latinos had the lowest attainment rates of any group. Those in certificate programs had a completion rate of 6% compared to 8% of students overall. Those in associate’s degree programs had a rate of 12% compared to 14% overall. Latinos in bachelor’s degree programs completed at a rate of 8% compared to a 12% rate

overall. By the end of the 6 years, 53% of Latino students had dropped-out altogether compared to 46% overall. Shulock and Moore (2007) stated that the Latino population is the least likely group to complete their studies in a community college and then to move to a 4 year college. The data demonstrated an imperative need to look closely at Latino community college students and their persistence rates.

### **The Role of the Community College**

Community colleges have been the entry point to higher education for many students. This is particularly true for Latino students. Zell (2009) found that 2-year colleges play a critical role in teaching Latino students. In part, this is due to the core objectives of community colleges. From the beginning, the mission of community colleges has been to teach all students who come through their doors.

Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, and McLain (2007) confirmed that the great democratization of American postsecondary education is due in large part to the community colleges “with their open-door access and comprehensive curriculum” (p. 74). The programs offered by community colleges include academic and transfer programs and certificate programs for workforce training. Focusing attention on increasing success among Latino students has not only become a concern for educators but also a bipartisan concern among federal policymakers.

In 2000, the White House released a report by the Council of Economic Advisors highlighting the Latino retention gap, the low rate of completion, and its implications on the cost to the economy (Fry, 2002, p. 1). In 2001, President George W. Bush formed the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans to

concentrate on the concerns about college completion (Fry, 2002, p. 1). President Obama expressed similar concerns about Latino completion and closing the gap in education, highlighting the fact that community colleges are essential to the success of higher education with the following statement: “That’s why I urge the Senate to follow the House and pass a bill that will revitalize our community colleges, which are a career pathway to the children of so many working families” (Obama, 2010, para. 5). By initiating the Achieving the Dream program, President Obama put community college leaders on notice that they will be held responsible for student retention and completion. The success of the Latino student population has not been consistent even though community colleges have provided them this avenue to a college life (Hagedorn et al., 2007)

### **Focusing on Latino Community College Students**

Teaching Latino students is in the national economic interest and a role for which community colleges will need to prepare. Goldrick-Rab and Shaw (2005) showed that more than two-thirds of the emerging jobs in the U.S. economy required an education beyond high school. That fact, coupled with Latinos’ being the fastest growing demographic group in the United States, makes their success crucial to the national economy.

Many Latino students pursuing postsecondary education, particularly at community colleges, are immigrants. “The majority of immigrants in the United States [are] from Latin America and Asia” (Conway, 2010, p. 211). Conway (2010) confirmed that “immigrants are our future labor force or, alternatively, a drain on our social welfare

resources if they cannot support themselves and their families” (pp. 211-212). With education, these immigrants can not only help themselves but also the national economy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Bergman, 2005), the completion of educational degrees from high school through the completion of a professional degree resulted in an increase in average earnings. Preparing Latino students to become part of the economy and its workforce is essential to economic growth and moving the United States in a positive direction.

While the opportunities exist and Latino students enroll, they fall behind in retention/completion at community colleges. Cox (2009) mentioned that “although community colleges provide access to higher education for many students, it is also a place where these students were least likely to succeed” (p. 53). Many students who enroll in community college fail to achieve a college degree. The data on community college enrollment and completion rates demonstrate discouraging outcomes despite the high number of students who begin studies at community colleges (Perez & Ceja, 2010). Barely more than a third of community college students complete their credentials after 6 years according to Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2006). This is evident as early as the sophomore year. According to the ACT (2008), the freshman-to-sophomore persistence rate was 78.2% of full-time freshmen at public 4-year colleges returning for the sophomore year and 60% of full-time freshmen at public 2-year colleges returning for the sophomore year.

### **Factors Related to Educational Persistence in Community Colleges**

**College readiness.** College readiness is defined as having the academic skills and achievement to be successful in coursework at the college level. College work is rigorous, and college students need to have a strong academic background (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). It is important for institutions to implement programs that work closely with families throughout all stages of students' academic progress to ensure that students are ready for college. Cabrera et al. (2006) indicated that the most complex process that begins around 7<sup>th</sup> grade or earlier is to work with Latino students toward making a decision to attend college and secure a postsecondary education.

Hagedorn and Lester (2006) asserted that programs to assist students must start early: "When students lag in elementary and high school, it is nothing short of praying for a miracle, to assume community colleges will turn students into academic athletes in a short time" (p. 846).

Fry (2002) noted that much attention has been given on the Latino high school dropout rate, although the college dropout rate is equally important. "Many Latino high school students enroll in community colleges directly after high school. When Latino high school students are unprepared for academic rigor in high school, it makes it harder to be prepared for the demands encountered at the college level. High school educators need to address college expectations with Latino students early because, if these expectations are not addressed, they will be at a disadvantage compared to other students (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Torres Campos et al. (2009) found that low family income and lack of parental higher education are factors that contribute to low academic

performance among Latino students. This latter point is critical because obtaining information and insight into college processes is a challenge for Latino community college students.

It is important that Latino students are encouraged to enroll in college upon completion of high school to avoid gaps or delays in their postsecondary education. According to Adelman (2006), Latino students who enroll in college directly after completing high school have greater completion rates in community colleges. Adelman found that the completion rate for these students was 18% higher. One important reason to start talking to students about college early is to build a culture of moving directly from high school to college, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will obtain a degree. Fry (2004) indicated that 40% of Latino students delay entering community college for 2 years compared to 32% of White students. Shulock and Moore (2007) reinforced Adelman's finding that there is a strong correlation between age and completion for Latino community college students. These researchers found that 27% of Latino students completing their programs were between the ages of 17 and 19 years, 21% were students in their 20s, 18% were in their 30s, and 16% of Latino students were aged 40 years and older (Shulock & Moore 2007). Avoiding delays in beginning higher education for Latino students will help increase persistence and completion rates.

Another challenge Latino college students face is acquiring the necessary resources from institutions to become academically ready for college-level courses after high school. "Factors such as institutional history, their sociocultural context, and college policies may determine the impact of a Latino student's level of college preparation and

readiness” (Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenez, 2010, p. 129). Students need to be surrounded by a college-going culture where they are embedded in academic rigor, have access to timely and relevant information, and have adequate support structure (The College Board, 2006). The support of family and school working together to support first-generation and urban students in becoming college-ready begins by working with the K-12 school and postsecondary systems to ensure placement of curriculum (Reid & Moore, 2008). Higher education institutions play an important role in the completion of college for Latino students.

**Part-time status.** A related factor is that Latino students usually choose to attend community college part-time. According to the NCES (2009), 48% of Latino college students were enrolled part-time compared to 37% of White, 41% of Black, 38% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 40% of Native American/Alaska Native students. Part-time students are usually older, female, Latino, financially independent, and first-generation students (Radford et al., 2010). Attending part-time has had an undesirable effect on degree-completion by Latino students. Fry (2002) found that part-time students simply could not complete a 2-year degree in 3 years; moreover, many part-time students eventually dropped-out altogether.

**Diversity.** According to Longerbeam et al. (2004), studying those students and the variables that influence their retention and persistence is challenging because Latinos as a group are extremely diverse. Latino college students, like other college students, possess many characteristics that contribute to their successes or failures in college. It is essential for educators to continue conducting research to determine how effectively

colleges are meeting the needs of this rapidly growing student population. As stated by Flores, Horn, and Crisp (2006), “Empirical research about Latino college students in community colleges remains scant, even though they are the group most likely to attend community colleges” (p. 71).

Highlighting the gap between academic research and demographic reality, Torres et al. (2006) called for more research aimed at understanding the experiences of first-generation college students with diverse backgrounds; and Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) found that better research is needed to understand student departure at residential and commuter institutions. Stein (2005) also noted that research findings about the methods that work for White and Black students cannot be used to justify assumptions about what works for Latino students.

Research about retention and persistence rates of Latinos is still evolving. Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) argued that an attempt to “refine traditional paradigms of student retention is scattered and unconnected . . . [and a clear] vision of minority-student persistence has failed to evolve” (p. 130). The parents of middle-class, affluent, White and Asian students understand the process of college through personal experiences and economic resources (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In contrast, “poor and working-class Latino families come to college with preparation that is relatively late in students’ careers with fewer resources and more obstacles” (Auerbach, 2004, p. 127). A few institutions are beginning to use data to create effective programs to meet the needs of Latino students. A proven program can be found at Northern Virginia Community College in its Pathway to the Baccalaureate Program. With 70% of Latino students

remaining in good academic standing after their first year, this program focuses on increasing access and success in higher education for Latino students in community colleges with a developmental advising model using a case-management approach (Santiago, Lopez, & Skoloda, 2009).

Another example of success is found at the University of California. The Puente Project, founded in 1981 at Chabot Community College in Haywood, California, has provided Latino students with resources such as tutoring, seminars, and field trips focused on the successful transition into college (Puente, 2012). The significant aspect that many of these students experience is a two-course English sequence in which 81% of the Latino students have participated (Santiago et al., 2009). The students work closely with their academic counselors, and the program involves the parents in the process of college (Puente, 2012). Although these are excellent examples of programs that help Latinos students complete their college programs, there is still much work to be done to address the low retention and persistence rates of Latino college students.

**Family culture/Latino role.** The family role has been described as both a positive and a negative influence on the success of Latino college students. “*Familism* is a term used to characterize Latino families’ social capital” (Toews & Yazedjian, 2007, p. 892) as well as loyalty to family, representing a strong sense of responsibility to the greater system (Kane, 1998). As noted in Marin and Marin (1991), the familial obligations and significance placed on collectivism tend to dominate Latinos’ aspirations in attaining a higher education.

Although the support of family is very important to the success of Latino students, family members are often unable to explain the college process to the student. For example, Latino college students are much more likely than their non-Latino counterparts to report that primary social contacts and friends from their own ethnic group is a reason for choosing where to enroll in college. (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006 ). Educators working with this population need to create programs that provide the information clearly to parents as well as students during the process of choosing, exploring, and filtering through an abundance of college information. Programs that market to traditional students have very little interaction with family members. In a study conducted by Perez and McDonough (2008), the researchers found that Latino students single-out parents, siblings, and other relatives and also peers, school counselors, and other school staff to speak with about college planning. The college-planning information was even more valuable when Latino students received the information from someone who had college experience or was a trusted friend of the family (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Zalaquett (2006) recognized that the minimal adult supervision and poor information are factors that influence Latino students in making poor decisions about higher education. Fry (2004) stated that Latino students differ from White students in that they tend to “delay enrollment in college, have greater financial responsibility for family members [than other students], and live with family while in college rather than in campus housing” (p.16). To effectively increase Latino retention, the familial component needs to be incorporated.

Parental education level is another important predictor of success for college students. Nuñez, Cuccaro-Alamin, and Carroll (1998) reported that parents who have some college experience had children who adjusted better to the college environment. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) noted that Latino students were higher achievers when they received encouragement from parents, and parent representation increased the number of Latinos meeting academic proficiency. This Project's findings highlighted that "family involvement predicts academic achievement and social development as children progress from early childhood programs through K-12 and into higher education" (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006, p. 2). All students do better with encouragement, but without prior educational background and experience, this encouragement is not so common.

The role of the maternal parent may be especially important. A study conducted by Noeth and Wimberly (2002) of Black and Latino students reported that 84% of the students indicated that their mothers were very helpful in planning for college. However, many Latino students feel compelled to stay close to home to assist the family financially and avoid any disruption in the social culture of the family. This value is founded in Latino culture and presents high school educators with obstacles when they seek to encourage Latinos to pursue higher education (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

**Financial assistance.** Latino community college students and their families struggle to find tools and information on how to pay for college. This struggle becomes even more stressful as Latino students begin to seek financial aid. Nuñez et al. (1998) reported on the financial and academic struggles that Latino college students bring to the

college experience; this is happening at a time when, as Gándara, Horn, and Orfield (2005) noted, “challenges to affirmative action, declining funding for higher education, and (declining) outreach efforts have exacerbated a situation that was already reaching crisis proportions” (p. 256). For Latinos who also have challenges in other areas such as language and low socioeconomic status, obtaining financial aid becomes an imperative area of concern when enrolling in college and completing a degree. Latino students tend to enroll in community colleges and study part-time. This means that as a group, they benefit from a relatively smaller piece of the nation’s financial aid than do other groups. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), part-time students qualify for less financial aid. Many Latino community college students enroll on a part-time basis because they have many personal responsibilities. According to the federal funding formula, which identifies how much funding the recipient will receive, students attending college on a part-time basis are entitled to significantly reduced aid, which leaves students with low-income jobs absorbing the cost of college (Goldrick-Rab & Roksa, 2008). The result is that these students still lack the funding needed to pay for school and to persist in college.

The types of financial aid include grants (Federal Pell and state-aid grants), loans, work/study, and private funds. Nearly 60% of Latino undergraduates receive some form of aid to pay for college (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Latino students receive the lowest average amount of financial aid awarded to any ethnic group even when controlled for part-time student status (Santiago & Brown, 2004). The fact that Latinos receive the lowest average amount of financial aid may be correlated with factors such as being part-

time, being underprepared academically, and not seeking funding information. An example of low levels of funding for Latino college students is found in an article by Donald Heller (2003), Associate Professor and Senior Research Associate at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University, which highlights the discrepancies of funding for both Latino and Black students. “Public Subsidies for Higher Education in California: An Exploratory Analysis of Who Pay Benefits” shows significant financial differences in state aid across the state, for Blacks and Latinos compared to Whites and Asian Americans (Heller, 2003). The author noted that Asian Americans who represent 17% of enrollments received 22% of the state’s aid, and Latino students, representing 25% of the students enrolled, received only 21% of the appropriations, in part due to part-time enrollment status (Heller, 2003).

**Language.** It is important to acknowledge that there are differences in culture and language among Latino students and that proper assessment, program development, and institutional policies are essential. Institutions need to be sensitive to the issues that this dynamic group brings to the educational setting. The first semester of the community college experience is fundamental to the academic success of the student (Driscoll, 2007). According to Bunch and Panayotova (2008), one group of particular importance is the children of recent immigrants. The backgrounds and educational needs of recent immigrants are unique and tend not to fit the traditional model tested and developed by the colleges’ assessment and placement levels for first-semester students. These students, also known as *Generation 1.5*, struggle in part because they demonstrate characteristics of both first-generation and second-generation immigrants.

Challenges faced by Generation 1.5 students include limited prior educational experience, limited language proficiency in their mother tongue and English, questions of language dominance, and lack of academic literacy (Harklau, 2003). An example of these consequences can be found in California, where Latino students are underrepresented in college-level courses but overrepresented in courses of English as a Second Language (ESL). The California study found 70% of Latino students placed at the remedial mathematics level and 42% placed in remedial English (Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, 2005). However, it is also worth noting, according to Brown and Niemi (2007), that there are questions about the placement tests themselves. Their ability to accurately place students, particularly Latinos, has been a concern.

*Generation 1.5* is the term used to describe the Latino developmental English learner who has been taught in the United States. “Although the research on language development is extensive, limited research has been conducted to understand how writing instruction for Generation 1.5 affects the completion of a degree in higher education” (Salas, Portes, D’Amico, & Rios-Aguilar, 2011, p. 127). Choosing whether to test the student using the ESL test or the test for native English speakers has not been easy for colleges. Valdés and Figueroa (1994) stated that “a student cannot be viewed as a language ‘learner’ simply because her production in one or both of her languages is not identical to that of a monolingual speaker” (p. 39).

The decisions that educators make affect the attrition rate of Latino community college students. The demographics in many areas of the United States, and particularly in the South, have been influenced by a growing Latino immigrant population. According

to Spanier (2004), it is predicted that ethnic minority groups, predominantly Latino and Asian populations, will account for 65% of the growth of the U.S. population through the year 2020. This concentration of Latino immigrants contributes to the increase in enrollment of community college students for whom mastery of English is an issue. “U.S. educated Latino students will enroll [in community colleges] and be identified as ‘underprepared,’ and placed in remedial coursework” (Schuyler, 1999, p. 7). If Latino community college students predominantly fill ESL courses and developmental courses, educators need to begin to assess course outcomes to determine the impact on college-program completion.

**Socioeconomic status.** Socioeconomic status and educational achievement are closely linked. “Education has a direct impact on socioeconomic status” (Becerra, 2010, p. 9). Kurlaender (2006) found that Latino college students are “more likely than their White peers to be financially disadvantaged” (p. 11). However, Battle and Pastrana Jr. (2007) stated, “Hispanic students receive less return for increase in socioeconomic status than do their White counterparts” (p. 44). Given the factors mentioned above (family culture, college readiness, organizational culture, financial assistance, and language), which are already challenging, it is even more overwhelming for Latino students to stay motivated in the college process knowing that the return in earnings may be less than that received by their peers.

To keep up with the demands of Latino students’ needs, recruiters, educators, and policymakers will need to provide outlets that deliver college information to Latino students as well as their families. For Latino students with low socioeconomic status,

parents play an important role in the college-choice process (M. J. Smith, 2008).

Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) conducted research at the Tomás Rivera Center which illustrated that Latino students can overcome the effects of low socioeconomic status in college if they are exposed to high academic achievement, an intellectually challenging curriculum, and strategies for gaining college admission while in high school. When working with Latino college students, educators need to be aware of the challenges of socioeconomic status as they relate to higher education in order to begin to see positive changes in retention and persistence rates.

**Institutional/organizational culture.** To understand how organizational culture affects Latino community college students, it is essential to define its meaning in higher education. Institutional history and policies directly and indirectly influence how well students fare in the first semester in college. These policies need to be directly aligned to meet the needs and success of students (Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). There is an understanding that organizational culture is the values and beliefs in the internal components of the institution. As said by Tierney (1988), “Researchers and practitioners alike often view culture as a new management approach that will not only cure a variety of organizational ills but will serve to explain virtually every event that occurs within an organization” (p. 2). Institutional constituencies need to value Latino students and believe they are an integral part of the college’s environment with a goal of increasing persistence rates. An example of this dedication to Latino success is found at Northeastern Illinois University where an early intervention program was established by

the institution to reduce by almost half the percentage of Latino students on probation after one semester (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003).

Lastly, Latino educational achievement is obtainable through conscious institutional leadership. It is essential for leadership to establish student success as the goal, regardless of ethnicity (Brown et al., 2003). A study by Strauss and Volkwein (2004) found that campus environment was a stronger predictor of institutional commitment than student-entry characteristics. As the number of Latino college students continues to increase at community colleges, it is a necessity for institutions to look for best practices and change programs to meet the needs of these students. Tinto (1982) found that the “inability to adapt to the new environment often causes students to withdraw from [college] during or after the first year or to perform at a lower level than expected” (p. 692). According to research on student persistence, the majority of student departures from the institution occur during the first year and before the second year (Crissman Ishler & Upcraft, 2005).

Institutions need to secure Latino students’ attention at the beginning of the first semester to begin a culture of persistence on their campuses. The new college environment for students needs to be one in which the administration, faculty, and staff at the institution are welcoming and engaging. Masterson (2006) stated that “Specific cultural values that can impact the college success of Generation 1.5 [Latino] students are family relationships, cultural immersion at home and at work, and perceptions of college versus reality” (p. 2). Latino college students need to become part of the culture of the institution to embrace academic success.

An example of organizational cultural beliefs was found in a recent effort to use data to make decisions about performance at community colleges in California. Petrides and McClelland (2007) found that it was the existing culture and not the data system that prevented the shift to a more proactive culture around data use. Importantly, organizational culture will ultimately move the institution to a new direction or prevent it from any change at all. Olivia (2008) affirmed that change needs to occur among policymakers and postsecondary educators to meet the needs of Latino and other underrepresented students in higher education. If not attended to, institutions will continue to have “underachievement as well as the unacceptable and inordinately high dropout rates” (Olivia, 2008, p. 127). For a college to shift its institutional culture to support Latino students, the shift must be “understood as a learning experience for all instead of a burden to be borne by some” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 7). The ability of an institution to respond effectively is vital to address the challenges of these students.

Latino college students and their rapid growth rates in higher education present a test of adaptability of institutions’ organizational culture. Without the presence of positive values, beliefs, and attitudes in the institution’s organizational culture, Latino college students’ chances of persisting will most likely continue to stagnate if not decrease. Kuh and Love (2000) confirmed that institutions place a “disproportionate amount of responsibility on students to adapt” (p. 198). In other words, institutions are not accepting responsibility for modifying or adapting to the changes and needs of the student population but rather expect the students to adapt to them. Yet, it is understood that an initial orientation to a college’s social, academic, and physical environment is

imperative to a student's sense of belonging at the institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Stage and Hossler (2000) also found that “minority students, particularly at White institutions, are less likely to persist, have differing experiences, and demonstrate more behaviors leading to attrition than their White peers” (p. 34). Institutional and organizational culture must provide a comfortable environment for all students, including Latino students, if colleges expect to increase persistence at the institution.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this project study was to identify factors that influenced students not to return for their second semester of community college study and to explore what could have influenced them to make the decision to leave after the first semester. Using qualitative case study through interviews, the participants' testimonies were categorized into themes that guided the project study. Testimonies of students determined what program or action plan can be implemented to increase the persistence rate of Latino American students attending community colleges. The program study consisted of developing a college student development program. This program included components needed to increase persistence and retention rates tailored for Latino students.

### **Summary**

Research and data indicate that the Latino population will become a significantly large population in the United States. For the educational system, this means many Latino students will seek to increase their education beyond high school. Community colleges continue to be a postsecondary fountain of opportunities for Latino students seeking to achieve degrees. However, many obstacles—the demand of family responsibilities, lack

of English fluency, poor preparation in secondary schools, a less welcoming institutional culture, and the need for financial assistance—are faced by Latino college students when attempting to complete a college degree.

A large suburban, public community college is experiencing persistence concerns about Latino American community college students not continuing from first to second semester. Community colleges are an entry-point for higher education for many Latino students. Using Tinto's framework, this study resulted in findings that contributed to the body of knowledge on factors Latino American student perceive as causes of their not continuing onto their second semester. This project study provided information to stakeholders working with these students. The Latino American student in this case study needed to meet the required participant criteria. Section 2 will provide more detail in the areas of research design, context of the study, measures of ethical protection, role of the researcher, criteria for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project study was to learn from a sampling of first-generation Latino American nonreturning students what they perceived as the reasons for not returning to their second semester of college. For the purpose of the project study, the participants were referred to as Latino Americans. The Latino American students are U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents. Unraveling why Latino American students choose to leave community college will assist educators in understanding how to increase their persistence rates.

Latinos continue to be the fastest-growing population with Hispanics projected to “make up 29% of the U.S. population in 2050 compared with 14% in 2005” (Passel & Cohn, 2008, p. 1). With such increasing numbers, the importance of helping Latino students persist in college is a crucial concern for educators. This study contributes to existing empirical research and help educators design programs that can lead to greater persistence rates among Latino American community college students.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The low rate of degree completion is a problem being faced by community colleges across the nation. Specifically, a significant number of Latino students are not completing a degree program in spite of the abundant opportunities for higher education. Many Latino college students choose not to return after their first semester. Among the possible factors contributing to this problem are a lack of preparedness resulting from poor K-12 experiences (Longerbeam et al., 2004), issues related to the home environment

(Toews & Yazedjian, 2007), part-time enrollment in college (Goldrick-Rab & Roksa, 2008), and economic factors (Hurtado et al., 2003).

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on Latino American students' persistence by identifying and understanding factors perceived as reasons that prevented these students from returning and which of these factors influenced their decisions not to continue to their second semester at the community college. The study enables these Latino American students not only to share their reasons but also to discuss what could have helped them persist from the first to second semester.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative method was used to investigate why Latino American students did not persist after their first semester at the community college. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that the qualitative research approach offers numerous advantages when seeking answers to a problem from the perspective of those dealing with the issues. The qualitative approach seeks extensive interpretation of thematic concepts while remaining sensitive to the social identities that shape the study. "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social and human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). A qualitative case study design was used to achieve a deeper understanding of why Latino American students chose to dropout.

This model followed a qualitative approach, drawing on multiple techniques and focusing on context with emerging issues. These multiple techniques were created during the interview process by having a conversation, drawing pictures, or acting-out scenes.

The naturalistic approach focuses on having participants express their views in a neutral and comfortable setting while “gathering information by observing and by talking and listening carefully to the people who are being researched” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 2). By having participants explain their concerns in a natural setting, these issues become more significant to them. The qualitative approach and an extensive interpretation of the concerns stated by the participants provided a framework to answer the questions posed in this project study.

In addition to naturalistic and qualitative approaches, the study was also conducted as a case study. I used the personal narratives of individual Latino American community college students to explore their decisions to dropout. Using participants’ descriptions of their own experiences, I explored various stages of the semester (i.e., first week of class, midterm, and final week) at which students began to think about the possibility of not attending and the factors that influenced the decision.

Semistructured interview questions were used to capture the participants’ narratives. “Semistructured interviews combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte 1999, p. 149). The open-ended questions allowed the participants to describe their point of view through their personal meaning, values, and feelings of the experiences during the first semester in college.

### **Qualitative Method**

The following description provided by Creswell (2007) encapsulated the approach taken in this study:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social and human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (p. 37)

Inquiring about what these participants experienced during the first semester captures moments in which the experiences were rewarding, informs what made these experiences influential, and sheds light on the underlying factors which led them to dropout of college. Participants' experiences during the first semester were the prime focus-point of this qualitative-project study.

### **Guiding Questions**

For this project study, the conceptual model guiding the theoretical framework is established using Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration and model of student persistence. The following questions were based on the literature reviewed and are used to guide the interview to investigate the factors first-generation Latino

community college students perceived as keeping them from continuing their academic program after the first semester:

1. What barriers prevented Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
2. What factors influenced Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
3. What do Latino American community college students feel could have helped them continue with a second semester of study?

### **Context of the Study**

The student profile of the college studied was ideal for answering the guiding questions of persistence about why Latino American community college student do not return for their second semester of study. The information that follows reflects data taken from a 6-year cohort study completed in 2010-2011 and produced by the College's Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (Prince George's Community College, 2012). According to the findings, 6.6% of the students graduated with an associate's degree or certificate. The median time for graduation with an associate's degree of a first-time student was 6 to 7 years. These data reflect some of the extreme challenges faced by students, including the fact that many students entering this community college take development courses, which causes a delay in completing their degree.

In this same cohort, 17.8% of the students participated in three or more developmental courses. Focusing on first-semester outcomes, 59.3% of students passed a

few classes and failed or withdrew from a course. The full-time retention rate for this community college was 61%, and the part-time retention rate was 7%. Currently, Latinos are among a growing student population at the college. The graduation rate for this community college was 5%. The latest data from the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research showed that the student body increased 11% for Latino students compared to -5% for Whites, -6% for Blacks, -9% of Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 7% of American Indians (Prince George's Community College, 2012). As data indicate, the need to pay close attention to this fast growing Latino student population is important in order to increase the persistence and graduation rates.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Participant Selection**

Latinos as a group are diverse. Latino college students, like other college students, possess many characteristics that contribute to their successes or failures in college. Hatch (2002) suggested that studying a group of students who share common characteristics, or a more homogenous sample, was useful in providing answers to the guiding questions of this project study. Creswell (2007) also affirmed that a researcher needs to establish a rationale for creating a purposeful sampling when gathering the information, and Merriam (2002) stressed the importance of intentionality in setting the parameters of the study in order to avoid subsequent selection bias.

The Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 semesters were used as the date that the participants first entered college. The following criteria were used in identifying the population for the study, which was conducted at a Maryland suburban community college:

1. Students aged 18-21 years. This age-range was chosen in order to focus on the most typical group of Latino Americans at community colleges, those entering directly from high school. The range was chosen because high school students typically are 18-21 years of age after graduating from high school. According to the NCES, approximately 60% of Latino high school graduates enter directly into college, and 46% of those Latinos who go to college directly after high school enroll in community colleges (NCES, 2008). At the setting college, 25.6% of the entire student population fall under the age of twenty (Fact Book, 2012).
2. Began college studies as freshmen in Fall 2012 and Fall 2013. Focusing on Latino American students who recently stopped attending facilitated access to current information about the students. Additionally, the participants were more likely to remember the information from a recent semester (Fall 2012 or Fall 2013) than trying to remember information from three or four semesters ago.
3. Must take at least one developmental course. The rationale for this criterion was to ensure that the selected participants are representative of the typical Latino American student. According to the latest data from the setting institution, 93.7% of first-time college students who took the placement tests placed into at least one developmental course (Prince George's Community College, 2012).

4. Did not enroll in the subsequent semesters Spring 2013 and Spring 2014.  
The purpose of the study was to identify the reasons that Latino American students dropped out and to investigate what barriers prevented them from continuing to their second semester of study.
5. Born in the United States or are permanent residents. In order to keep the Latino American student group as homogenous as possible, the focus was on Latino American students who are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents. However, it is important to understand that this case study was not focused on issues of immigrant status and undocumented students because these students provided a different set of challenges. This is in part because participants must be financial aid-eligible and in part because of myriad other issues raised by immigration status.
6. Enrolled in at least six credit hours. Focusing on students who are enrolled in at least six credit hours ensures that the study population could benefit from federal financial aid if eligible; six credits is the minimum allowed. Full-time students will not be used in order to maintain a homogenous group. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), part-time students qualify for less financial aid. At the same time, this criterion recognized that a great many students in the target population studied part-time. According to the NCES (2009), 48% of Latino college students were

enrolled part-time compared to 37% of White, 41% of Black, and 38% Asian/Pacific Islander.

7. First generation college student. For the purpose of this case study, a first-generation college student is a student for whom neither of whose parents graduated from college (Nuñez, 2011; Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). During the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately half of all Latino college students had parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or less (Santiago, 2011). This case study focuses on first-generation because the majority of Latino students attending community colleges are first-generation students.
8. The criteria made participant eligible if the student received financial aid. The financial aid opportunities for most Latino college students have direct effect on student access and success in postsecondary education (Santiago, 2013). This study explored, in part, the role of financial aid in the participants' decisions to drop out.
9. Hispanic or Latino (self-identified). For the purpose of the study, Latino students are referred to as Latino Americans. Latino American students are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents. "Hispanic or Latino are [terms that] describe a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011, p. 2).

10. Not worked or working with researcher. No students who have worked with or are currently working with me in my capacity as student services coordinator were eligible.

### **Number of Participants**

At the time of the proposal, the most current available data from the setting college were from Fall 2006. In that semester, an estimated 100 Latino American students enrolled for their first time with at least a part-time status. Of those students, an estimated one-third of Latino American students had stopped attending by the second semester in the spring of 2007 (Setting Administrator, personal communication, July 27, 2011). Latino enrollment has increased each year since 2006.

The participants for this case study consisted of a group of five Latino American community college students. This case study was focused on five cases to investigate the reasons Latino American students decided to dropout. Creswell (2007) recommended “not including more than 4 or 5 case studies in a single study” (p. 128). In gathering this information, interviewing five students was a priority to begin to see shared patterns and categories that are meaningful to students. I could have chosen to increase the number of participants in order to reach the point of saturation for the case study. I did not increase the number of participants for the research study because many participants who qualified for the interviews opted not to interview. Creswell (2007) called this “coming to a point at which the categories are saturated, and the researcher no longer finds new information that contributes to the understanding of the research” (p. 240). Creswell also suggested that the researcher will need “to set boundaries that adequately surround the case” (p. 76).

In order to set boundaries, the minimum number of participants was set at five with a specific set of criteria as previously stated.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

In gaining access to participants, proper procedures were followed throughout the stages of the project study. Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures were followed. The Walden IRB approval for the study is 11-06-13-013040 (sample Fall 2012) and #2014-01-29225270600 (sample Fall 2013). The request for data form (Appendix E) and the request to conduct the project study (Appendix F) were submitted to the setting college's Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research using its IRB. The information requested provided access to the list of names using the designated criteria for the participants. Once the pool of prospective participants was identified, a letter was sent explaining the purpose of the study and inviting recipients to join the study. After the interested participants from the Fall 2012 sample were identified, the potential participants were called to confirm participation, establish e-mail contact, and set-up an interview appointment. Of the 19 participants from the Fall 2012 who met the criteria, one person replied. Since only one Fall 2012 prospective participant confirmed participation in the case study, a letter was sent to the Fall 2013 sampling and followed the same procedures as the sample from Fall 2012. The Fall 2013 sampling had 14 possible participants, and six were interviewed. Of the six, only four persons met the criteria of the research study. No remaining interested participants were asked to become an alternate.

The interviews took place December 2013 through February 2014. The information requested by the college's research IRB office consisted of the project title, sources of funding, details of the proposed project, description of the scientific purpose of the investigation, description of the methodology, potential benefits of the project study, anticipated risks, and how participants were recruited. The participants also signed a consent form that included the same type of information as requested from the setting community college. The consent form for participants is included in Appendix B, and the IRB forms for the setting college are included in Appendix E and F.

### **Methods of Establishing Relationship with Participants**

Five possible participants were provided a letter asking them to participate in an interview. The letter was sent via e-mail. Several telephone calls were made to confirm interview times and details. More details regarding the participant-selection process are explained in the data collection section. The participants' addresses and contact information were provided by the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research at the setting college after completion of the IRB process for Walden University since it is a requirement of the setting IRB. The letter contained the purpose of the project study, the description and relevance of the project study, the estimated time required, and the potential benefits and risk of the procedures. The project study participants were interviewed in my office at the setting college. The participants signed a consent form on the day of the interview. A pseudonym was assigned to protect the identity of the participant. Identities were not disclosed in the final study. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The participants were informed before

the interview started that the interview was audiotaped. Participants were also given an opportunity to ask questions during the interview. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described that “interviewers should have superb listening skills and be skillful at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration” (p. 102). As a result of interpersonal communication and personal skills, the information to each participant was delivered in a comfortable and friendly environment.

My professional role and relationship with participants may convey to participants the notion that I already know everything about their college experiences and that they do not have anything new to tell me. One of the main challenges was to let participants know that I needed to learn from them and by their telling their stories about why they dropped-out, they would help college educators better serve students in the future. More details about my professional role are found under the data collection subsection.

### **Measures for Ethical Protection**

To ensure that all measures of confidentiality, beneficence, dignity, and fairness were afforded, the participants were familiarized with the requirements of the study. The recording of each interview was transcribed within one week of the event. The tapes and transcripts of the interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home.

### **Pseudonym**

Participants were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could stop the interview process at any time. In addition, participants were informed of procedures, benefits of the study, and the freedom to ask any questions during or after the interview. As cited in the criteria for participant selection, the

interviews required the names of students in order to invite them for the study. However, their identities were not used in the final study. A pseudonym was assigned to protect the identity of the participants.

### **Beneficence**

Beyond the study's contribution to existing research on Latino persistence, the project study's interview format offered an opportunity for participant self-examination through the interview questions. According to Flores, Horn, and Crisp (2006), "empirical research about Latino college students in community colleges remains scant, even though they are the group most likely to attend community colleges" (p. 71). The participants of this project study provided information that educators can use to make better decisions for other Latino community college students.

### **Dignity**

The participants signed a consent form on the day of the interview. Participants did not experience emotional discomfort and were comfortable in sharing their stories. An audiotape to record the interviews and a notepad to write observational notes were used during the interviews. Only the participant and I were in the interview room. The interviews, conducted only by me, took approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The tapes, observational notes, and the transcripts of the interviews were kept in a locked location in my home. Also, the interview data were examined and compared several times by me to identify concrete themes and patterns. The peer reviewer had access to the transcripts and reports of themes assigned by me using NVivo software. Using the software allowed an organized way to produce several reports to show the peer reviewer for further analysis of

the data. I analyzed the data from February 2014 to June 2014 and met the peer reviewer about the NVivo 10 reports and transcripts several times during this period for discussions about the themes being formulated. The peer reviewer has conducted more than 21 years of extensive research using qualitative methodology, speaks fluent Spanish, holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern University, and currently works as the research and planning director for the setting college.

### **Fairness**

Only the participant and I as the researcher were in the room at the time of the interview. All the materials used in this project study--audiotapes, observational notes, and transcripts--were kept in my home under lock-and-key. Records will be kept for 5 years; and all tapes, observational notes, and transcripts will be destroyed after that period. The National Institutes of Health policy mandates that records need to be kept for 5 years after the end of the project (National Institutes of Health, n.d.). Lastly, the participants received my contact information as well as the contact information of my doctoral chairperson should they have any questions or concerns.

In summary, each participant was given the following written information about the nature of the study: explicit guidelines for their participation, an opportunity to choose a different name at the time of the interview, an explanation of the purpose and benefits of participating in this study, and information about confidentiality and secured storage of the data.

### **Data Collection**

The data analysis methods used in this study incorporated the elements required for a qualitative case study. The interviews provided an opportunity for participants to share in detail personal experiences about their college experiences. The interview questions, shown in Appendix C, were used to guide conversation during the interview process, and follow-up questions were given to students when clarification was necessary. The interview questions were translated into Spanish in case the participant felt more comfortable speaking Spanish. However, the interviews were conducted in English with the option to restate the questions in Spanish as well as for a participant to respond to questions in English, Spanish, or a mix of languages. Participants chose to respond in English, occasionally adding a Spanish word in their conversation. According to the reviewed literature, language is an important factor for the success of Latino college students (Stevenson, 2009). The researcher is fluent in Spanish and able to conduct the interviews in Spanish if a participant so chose. Translations of the interview questions were provided when necessary using the interview guide with the Spanish language translation of the English language questions.

### **Choice of Data**

Concepts, themes, and events were found, refined, and elaborated. The interviews were coded to identify what the participants said about those concepts, themes, and events as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005). As described by Creswell (2003), questions in a qualitative project study begin with such words as *what* or *how* to express an open and emerging approach. This case study also used questions that addressed what

and how as students pursued their postsecondary education and became acclimated to the first semester in college.

### **Data are Appropriate**

The semistructured interview model was used to capture commonalities and emergent themes. Semistructured interviews encourage conversation by generating questions to participants. The participants responded to “the social contexts being researched and the level of rapport with each participant” (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). In addition, open-ended questions were used to allow participants to express their thoughts. To keep data organized and retrievable, a file-folder system and colored highlighters were used. In addition to using the highlighters, I used the NVivo 10 software to color-code themes.

Once I completed the reports, I was able to print the themes in color for easy reference. As themes emerged from the data, a color was assigned to each theme to categorize and identify the theme. Lather (1986) described the challenges of organizing the patterns in qualitative research as “data [that] must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of an a priori theoretical framework, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured” (p. 267). The data were collected and analyzed to find common themes in the areas that affect Latino college students in the pursuit of a second semester of study.

### **A Specific Plan**

The specific number of nonreturning students during the Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 semesters was available upon request from the setting college's Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research once the Walden University IRB gave approval as required.

During the fall semester of 2006, an estimated 100 Latino American students who were either U.S. citizens or permanent residents enrolled for their first time with at least a part-time status. Of those students, an estimated one-third had stopped attending by the second semester, Spring 2007 (Setting Administrator, personal communication, July 27, 2011). The Latino college student populations increased 11.2% between 2011 and 2012 (Prince George's Community College, 2012). Given the steady increase in Latino enrollment at the institution in the years following 2006, the pool of potential subjects for this project study included as many as 200 people. However, this project study focused on the latter years, specially the Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 semesters, with a pool of 33 students so that the study participants were more likely to recall their decisions for not returning after their second semester. The Fall 2012 semester had 19 possible participants. Only one of these participants interviewed for the case study. Due to the lack of participants from this sample pool, I submitted a request to the Walden University IRB department to receive permission to obtain data from Fall 2013. The approval was granted.

Once the pool of prospective participants had been identified, a letter was sent to all of the potential participants explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to

join the study. After receiving interested parties from the Fall 2012 sample and Fall 2013 sample, I called participants to confirm participation, establish e-mail contact, and set-up an interview appointment.

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder with each participant. The recorded interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and saved as a password-protected file in a personal laptop computer. A pseudonym was assigned to protect the identity of each participant. A copy of the transcript was printed and used to find, refine, and examine concepts, themes, and patterns and was stored under lock-and-key in my home.

The students were selected from the list using the above criteria. Each participant was interviewed in a 45-minute-to-an-hour semistructured interview. The recording of each interview was transcribed within one week of the event. The participants were not provided with any monetary compensation for their time in the case study but were provided assistance with the cost of bus transportation to the interview location.

### **Data Collection and Recording**

Participants were notified of their scheduled interviews a week in advance. Each participant was reminded of the interview the day before and the day of the interview with a telephone call and an e-mail message. The project study participants were interviewed at my office space at the setting college. Participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) prior to the interview. In addition, a life history calendar was used during the interview process primarily to improve the participants' "ability to place different activities within the same time frame" (Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, & Young-

Demarco, 1988, p. 39), in this case, the first semester of college. Using the life history calendar (a sample is provided in Appendix D), participants were asked to recall information, connect ideas from one event to another, and visualize the connections of events through a color-grid tailored to obtain the information required. The combination of life history calendar as a visual along with semistructured interview questions tried to help participants gain better access to long-term memory of events that occurred during the semester. As the interviews developed, the chart was used to help the participants recall the information. However, all of the participants were very comfortable in recalling the information and felt comfortable talking about their experiences without filling-in the life history calendar.

At the end of the interview, I used the life history calendar to encourage the participant to speak about the different stages in the semester. The columns represent the semester weeks divided by the following three primary categories: 1<sup>st</sup> week of school, yellow; mid-semester, blue; and final exam week, white. The rows represent abbreviated words from the interview questions. The semistructured interview questions are found in Appendix B. A preliminary life history calendar is found in Appendix C using the semistructured interview questions as guide for the assigned categories. The interviews took place in approximately December 2013 through February 2014.

### **System for Tracking**

Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions during the interview. An audiotape to record the interviews and a notepad to write observations were used during the interviews. The interviews took approximately 45-minutes-to-an-hour. The language

used from recorded in interviews was transcribed within one week of the event. The audiotapes were kept in my home for confidentiality. A locked cabinet was used to store the tapes and printed transcripts. Also, the interview Nvivo 10 reports and transcripts were examined and compared several times by the peer reviewer and me to identify concrete themes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am a Latina who has been recruiting and working with Latino community college students for the past 12 years. As a result, I bring biases to this case study. As a first-generation college student, I have personally experienced many of the challenges that Latino students face in higher education institutions. I can understand the challenges Latinos may encounter both as students and as family members.

As a student services coordinator, I have presented workshops, advised students, participated in seminars, and interacted with students and parents in the community. In this role, I have engaged with students in areas of academic advising, financial aid, transfer services, and career planning. Although I now live outside the service area of the college where the study was conducted, I grew-up in that area and graduated from the school system that the study participants attended. Every attempt to provide an objective perspective was made in the project study. No students who have worked or are currently working with me as a student services coordinator were eligible to participate in this case study.

Understanding the students' experiences allowed the opportunity to reflect in deeper meaning since I can relate to their experiences and ask probing questions to

engage in a richer dialogue. I have directly engaged in academic advising, new student orientation, and other college-related activities. I have been working and currently work at this particular College for the past 12 years. According to Creswell (2007), “the researcher’s personal views, thoughts, and interpretations will change the way the project study takes shape because the researcher is the person who gathers the information from the participants” (p. 38).

According to Creswell (2007), it is inevitable that the researcher’s personal views, thoughts, and interpretation will change the way the project study takes shape. He argued that researchers need a deep understanding of their subjects’ experience. Researchers need to guard against over-identifying with their subjects; and because of my personal background and experiences, I need to be vigilant so that I remain open to understanding participants’ own decisions, views, and trajectories rather than reading my own story into theirs. LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks, and Singer (1999) recommended the process of continuous self-reflection by a researcher “who constantly hold his or her own opinions, conclusions, and beliefs...for inspection to ensure that they are valid” (p. 66). A qualitative researcher “systematically reflects on who the researcher is in the inquiry and is sensitive of their biography and how it shapes the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 3). An extensive reflection was conducted to identify forms, patterns, and themes in participants’ accounts, synthesizing the information to capture a comprehensive understanding of the personal interviews.

No students who have worked or are currently working with me in my capacity as student services coordinator were eligible to participate in this case study. I have directly

engaged in academic advising, new student orientations, and other college-related activities. My work in the College presents advantages and disadvantages for the data collection process. One of the main advantages was to let participants know that I need to learn from them, and by telling their stories about why they dropped out, they were helping colleges to better serve students in the future. The participants felt comfortable in talking with me about their experiences as students. As LeCompte et al. (1999) stated, qualitative researchers “must be learners, and as such, they must position themselves so that people in the community feel comfortable teaching them” (p. 21). Following that advice, I expressed to participants that I was there to listen and learn from their experience.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was approached seeking patterns, themes, and relationships in the transcripts for analysis. Hatch (2002) stated that “data analysis means organizing and interpreting data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (p. 148). As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005), I used “the same focus in answering the guiding questions as a method of refining the data” (p. 209). Using the semistructured questions, observational notes taken during the interview, the chart from the life history calendar, and the transcript, the data analysis was refined several times to ensure that all the information was coded properly. The observational notes taken during the interview, the chart from the life history calendar, and the transcript were kept in the setting college’s work office for security.

A locked cabinet was used to store the tapes. Also, member checks were used to ensure accuracy of the information obtained from the participants. According to Merriam (2002), member checks are conducted by summarizing findings back to the participants who were interviewed and asking whether the interpretations of the researcher “ring true” (p. 26). Participants were asked to spend between ten and fifteen minutes reviewing these findings. The findings were given to the participants through e-mail. Four of the five participants replied with positive comments and clarifications of the research study. One participant did not reply.

The organizing, interpreting, and refining process revealed common themes found in participants’ interviews. In order to refine common themes, NVivo 10, a software package that supports qualitative research by organizing content from interviews (QRS International, n. d.), was used. I spent from February 2014 to June 2014 working with NVivo 10 to organize, interpret, and refine common themes. Discrepant or negative cases were highlighted to enhance credibility of the project study and to challenge the study’s findings. Creswell (2003) recommended that “discrepant or negative information be used to discuss contrary information, which adds credibility to an account for a reader” (p. 196).

### **Validity and Reliability**

The methods for ensuring validity and reliability in this qualitative case study are consistent with established research. In this case, the participants’ stories were analyzed to uncover factors that may have adversely influenced Latino American college students in their decisions not to persist in college after their first semester. Validity and

credibility should be established by the researcher as noted by Patton (2002). Lincoln and Guba (2000) expressed similar beliefs with regard to establishing quality and validity. These authors insisted that methods be focused on piloting, probing, integrity, and peer examination to ensure validity and reliability.

The data from the recordings and audio notes were also a part of the validity process. The transcripts were read and analyzed by me. I was the only person who transcribed all the tapes and analyzed the data collected. The peer reviewer did not need to review the tapes, transcripts, observational notes, and life history calendar. The peer reviewer added an additional perspective and stimulated further inquiry through discussion of the NVivo 10 category reports and transcripts to clarify and confirm the themes that emerged during the interviews. The life history calendar was used to stimulate memory of the participants. Although field observational notes were not used for the project study, observational notes during the interview process were handwritten during the interview. Observational notes reflected on how the participants felt, described their body language, and recorded the reactions of participants during the interview process. These notes were used as a memory aid and to capture the testimonials of each participant when analyzing the transcripts. Also, verification of responses through member checks was used to add validity to the project study. "Different words could have been used for interpretation; however, the participants should be able to recognize their story and ideas and add comments to enhance their perspective through member checking" as detailed by (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). After various attempts to get

participants to reply, four of the five participants made positive comments and clarifications of the research study summary. One participant did not reply.

From the list of recipients given by the setting college, contacts were made by using the recipients' date of birth starting from the youngest to the oldest in order to reach five participants for the case study. After five interested participants from the Fall 2012 sample were identified, they were called to confirm their participation, establish contact, and set-up an interview. A letter was given to the participant on the day of the interview explaining the purpose of the study. Each participant signed the letter before the interview. In addition, the participants received a copy of the letter to take with them after the interview appointment.

The following measures provided validity and reliability in this case study:

1. Inductive analysis
2. Member check
3. Audiotaped recordings
4. Peer reviewer
5. Transcripts of interviews
6. Life historical calendar
7. NVivo 10 software

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The qualitative case study was confined to interviewing participants in a suburban community college in the State of Maryland. The study was conducted at a community college because the focus is to explore the causes of Latino American community college

students' choosing to discontinue their studies in their second semester. The number of participants used in this study was five Latino American community college students. This sample included students between the ages of 18 and 21 years who enrolled in at least six credits for their first semester and who did not reenroll the following semester.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of this project study, the assumption was made that the suburban community college was the best place to study the problem of Latino attrition levels because community colleges are the institutions of choice for most Latinos. Additionally, an assumption was taken that the students who are the subject of this study represent a significant resource for understanding the barriers to success; and through the interview process, these individuals were able to identify and articulate those barriers. Lastly, the assumption was made that there are external barriers that could be lifted to provide assistance for Latino American college students to complete their degrees.

### **Limitations**

The participants for the case study were five Latino American community college students. They were Latino American community college students who dropped-out after attempting at least six credit-hours in Fall 2012 and Fall 2013. Although the literature presented various views about retention, it did not provide a comprehensive plan to address the needs of Latino students in higher education.

The participants did not use the life history calendar to recall the information because they did feel very comfortable in recalling what happened during their semester. The life history calendar is used to stimulate memory of the participants.

Because I have 12 years' previous experience in recruiting and advising many students, I brought certain biases to this study. These biases consisted of having interacted with students as student services coordinator and having participated in programs, activities, workshops, or classroom presentations in which the students also participated. I also have been a staff member at the College the students stopped attending. Keeping an open mind through constant reflection, recording an accurate transcription, extensively reviewing the observational notes, providing a summary of the findings to the participants, and discussing themes and patterns with the peer reviewer provided an objective perspective on the project study. The proposed purposeful sampling also decreased the ability to generalize the findings.

Categorizing Latinos as one group has created challenges because of the complexity in the diversity of this group. Longerbeam et al. (2004) stated that the "differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, [and] national origin contribute... [to this] complexity" (p. 538). An example of such diversity is noted by Torres (2004), who described "Latinos from the Caribbean and South and Central America [as varying even] in their experiences in the United States" (p. 7). Torres (2004) also stated that "the size of the [population] varies significantly, as does their economic and educational attainment, including college-participation rates" (p. 7). This project study did not query particular differences but rather grouped all Latino American community college students together.

The project study addressed only students who received financial aid during the first semester at the community college. However, it is important to note that financial aid

choices for students are complicated and not clearly defined for students when they enter college for the first time. Many students are lost in the abundance of information about colleges and universities that is received during their last year of high school. In addition, the transition from high school to college also clouds the students when making adult-like decisions when they just have graduated from high school. Exploring all the financial situations that Latino students go through when applying to college captured a true picture of the financial challenges they encounter during the first semester of college.

The project study was initially proposed as using data from Fall 2012. However, I received only one participant from this pool. The prospective participants' contact information had changed and the phone numbers were not available. I increased the participant pool to Fall 2013, which provided an opportunity for more prospective participants. The Walden IRB approval for the study is #11-06-13-013040 (sample Fall 2012) and #2014-01-29225270600 (sample Fall 2013).

Lastly, this project study focused on Latino students who were permanent residents or United States citizens. However, there are growing immigrant student populations who also have similar concerns as those presented in the study. Researching all Latinos regardless of immigration status will provide valuable information to help increase persistence rates among Latino students.

### **Qualitative Findings**

Of seven participants contacted for this case study, five met all the criteria for selection. All the names of the participants used and identifying information such as name of programs in the project study are pseudonyms. Two participants did not qualify

for the case study because they did not receive financial aid, one of the criteria. Of those two who did not receive financial aid, one student could not apply for aid due to his parents' immigration status, and the other student qualified but did not know how to follow-up with the requirements in order to receive the financial aid loan disbursement. While these two students were not part of the data analysis of the case study, they provided rich information to better understand why Latino community college students dropout after their first semester. The stories of the participants call for further exploration and may lead educators to seek an understanding of why Latinos do not persist beyond the first semester in community colleges. The three guided questions were used to discover the project study themes to determine what factors Latino American college students perceive to be the causes that kept them from continuing their academic programs after their first semester.

Answers to the three guided questions revealed the following eight themes:

1. Family responsibility and influence
2. Processing the college steps
3. Lack of confidence
4. Paying for college through family members
5. Reliable resources
6. Interacting with college employees
7. Creating a friendly and nurturing environment
8. Feeling cared-about and receiving personal attention

The findings of the case study were derived from the multiple questions that were asked of each participant. Detailed analysis of the findings was incorporated in each theme and supported by the participants' responses. The case study as described by Creswell (2007) may consist of between four and five lenses to examine a case. After the interviews were conducted and tapes were transcribed, I analyzed the data using NVivo 10 software to help identify themes and subjects. Lastly, the themes were reviewed by the participants and a peer reviewer in order to provide validation and consistency with my examination.

**Question 1: What Barriers Prevented Latino American Community College Students From Continuing to Their Second Semester (On-Going Barriers)?**

This section will address three barriers according to the participants interviewed that prevented them from continuing to their second semester. The barriers identified were family responsibility, family influence, and processing the college steps.

**Family responsibility.** The themes of family responsibility and influence resonated among all participants in the case study. For the participants in the study, family was an important part of the college process. Participants explained that family is directly involved in the decision of going to college, choosing what college to go to, paying for college, and finding ways to get more information to understand the college process. Ojeda, Navarro, and Morales (2010) discovered that “familismo positively predicted parental encouragement for pursuing education which in turn positively predicted college persistence intentions” (p. 223). The participants indicated that family

members such as parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, godparents, cousins, and close relatives influenced them along the college process.

All five participants were concerned about their families' well-being and expressed the need to be responsible to help the entire family. For Latino students, family represents a "profound sense of solidarity, loyalty, reciprocity, interdependence, and collaboration" (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004, p. 407). In a study conducted by Gloria and Castellanos (2012) on educational experiences and coping responses of first-generation college Latino students, the parents and families needed to be reassured by the student that going to college was for the betterment of the family in order to have family members support the student. According to that study, the support for Latinas from their parents and family was critical to their staying in school (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Alex, a participant in this study, shared that his family originates from the Dominican Republic. For example, from Alex's story, the family unit extends beyond the household. He emphasized how he needed to help his family financially during his first semester because they had two major family events occur. The first event was the wedding of his older brother, and the second was the unexpected passing of his grandmother. Both of these events took place in the Dominican Republic. Alex said,

So my family is kind of struggling with money. And we had to go to our brother's wedding out of the country, and that was a lot money that was gone; so, we had to save up for the wedding, and you know, I had to do something to get money for the books. I had to sell some of my personal property, some of my things, you know, because I didn't want to fail any classes, and I had to borrow money from

my brothers; so, we are five brothers, after three days that we came from DR [Dominican Republic], we got news that our grandmother passed away. So we had to invest money and buying tickets again to go see her for the viewing. And to be honest, I am a guy who does not like to see my parent struggle at all. So, I honestly did not want them to spend money for school on me.

**Family influence.** The participants reported that family influence had a significant effect on their persistence in college. For the participants in this study, parents, siblings, and close relatives were usually their first point of contact when obtaining information about college. Alex explained this idea in response to influences.

My siblings, most definitely, they all did. As a family you motivate one another, you know, you push one another because you don't want anyone from family to do wrong. You don't want to see them fall. Since you care so much about that person, you help them out. Yeah, they had a lot to do with it [coming to college].

Kathy, another participant in the study, mentioned that taking full responsibility for the demands that a baby brought into her life was her priority. Kathy also faced many family responsibilities. She needed to be responsible for her baby, be a role model for her younger sister, and support her immediate family because she was living with her mother and father. Kathy, who would like to study something related to medicine or nursing, said,

I had a baby, and my responsibilities as a parent are important. The baby takes lots of time, and I need to be responsible in taking care of my baby. Education is important to my parents. I am the older sister. I also need to set the example. My

parents were helpful and supportive. They encouraged me to finish school even after having the baby.

To demonstrate a strong sense of family responsibility participants described their commitment to family, a sense of being responsible to help provide for the family, and a strong desire to continue to push forward with education for the sake of the family. Each participant indicated that the path to college was an important personal goal in her/his life; but most importantly, a college education provided a better life to support families.

**Processing the college steps.** According to the comments made by the participants, the college process can be difficult for them because of the lack of exposure to a college-going environment. Higher education preparation begins early in a student's schooling (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The influence and the lack of exposure to a college-going environment have been due, in part, to existing segregation and unequal resource allocation among Latinos, who have distinctive and inferior school experiences (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Moreno, 1999; Valencia, 2002). Applying for admission, applying for financial aid, signing-up for orientation, incorporating a social life, knowing how to study for college rigor, knowing where to get assistance, learning how to communicate effectively with college employees, navigating through the first semester, making a career choice, registering for classes, selecting a major, taking the placement test, using an academic advisor for guidance, working through personal feelings during the college transition process—these are just a few critical steps identified in the literature about the college process (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Boden, 2011; Castellano, 2012; Crosta, 2013; Nuñez, 2009; Santiago, 2013).

An example of the process of the college steps is found with Diana, a participant in the study who explained her experience registering for college the first time. Diana registered late, which created a negative experience her first semester. She said,

I registered late. It was last minute. Okay, I should go to school [college]. I need to go now. I need to sign up now. So, it was either too late or start class late or sign up now and get it done. Umm, lots of people are doing it at the last minute [registering for college]. So, it's pretty packed [the waiting room to see an academic advisor]. And you have to wait. I had to make sure my schedule was clear for the day. No work. People looking for people. Advisors looking for students. And it would take time. So it took a couple of hours.

Diana did not know what program of study she wanted to enter. Diana indicated she was very active in high school, involved in student government and sports, and was class president for 2 years. Nevertheless, she expressed feeling confused because she was not sure what she wanted to study in college. She explained,

That was pretty hard. Okay, so I still was unsure, still a little iffy. I wanted to go into the military, but I wanted to go into the medical field. But, I didn't know exactly what to do. So, maybe take some classes going toward the direction, and umm, hopefully, I would figure out what to do.

Diana also experienced a problem with the college bookstore's not having enough books available for the first day of class. She said, "Books kind of pushed me back because I got them late, and the store [campus bookstore] ran out. I got them maybe 1 or 2 weeks later."

Another example of a participant's registering late was Jared. He said, I registered late. Not late but at the last minute. That's why I went here to ABC College, to Town College, and to City College. I registered late because I took the placement test late. I don't remember why I took the placement test late.

In addition to the many steps in the college process, sometimes the tools themselves can be daunting. Two participants expressed their frustration with technology services while trying to register for classes. Technology is used by students when they register for their classes. Alex explained this story when registering for classes:

All I had to do was go online and registered. That's where I had problems, registering online. So when, I went online to register, it said I had to take some other classes prerequisites, for those classes as well. Every time I would hit register, it would not go through; so, I guess that was one thing that was important in my decision [why I did not come back second semester].

Ronnie, who attempted to register late for the start of his second semester, experienced complications using technology services to register. As he described it,

The registration was not helpful for me this time. It was complicated. The classes that were provided for me were not in my criteria [academic plan]. It wasn't meeting my requirements because I couldn't put it in [college registration system]. I would put in the classes, and the time, and it would give errors. In the system, in [college registration system] tried to register for classes in March but those [courses that I needed] were already unavailable. I came to register in January kind of late. I came late because I started my new job.

Registering for classes and choosing a major are also complex college processes. Latino students are less likely to know what they would like to study if they are not exposed at an early age to the concept of college majors and their relationship to careers (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Jared, who stated his major more confidently now that he had been out for a semester, said,

Since I did not know about the college life. I decided to take general studies. But, now that I know about college life, like I told you, I want to switch that in order to, basically, I want to get into the nursing program to start working to pay for my stuff, and keep going to college and transfer.

Ronnie, who was eager to take courses during the summer semester to catch-up, also described difficulties when registering for classes that related to his major. He said,

It was hard and complicated. I wish it could be simple, like in high school. They just give it to you what you want need. I know here you have to pick your time schedule and everything but the classes should be provided like, this is what you need to do but sometimes when they give it to you, [you] can't register. I guess was stuck.

## **Question 2: What Factors Influenced Latino American Community College Students From Continuing to Their Second Semester of Study (Immediate Factors)?**

This section will address two significant factors that influenced the participants interviewed from continuing to their second semester. The two factors were lack of confidence and paying for college through family members.

**Lack of confidence.** All the participants were comfortable talking about the difficulties, challenges, and barriers that they experienced during their first semester. Alex, who already had a brother and cousins attending the college, reflected on how shy he was when he arrived at college. He struggled in his first semester because the course required that students conduct many oral presentations. While he had received much guidance from his older brother and cousins who attended the College, he still faced difficulties dealing with the transition from high school to college. Alex said,

To me it's kind of hard because our grades were mostly based on those presentations; so, most of the time, man, do I really want to do this and am I really confident enough. That's something else that I did not have was confidence.

Thank God, that class helped me build my confidence. As well as this program called [orientation program].

The idea of having confidence to handle the academic rigor was mentioned by three participants. These experiences were expressed by Jared, who is the older of two brothers and emigrated to the United States from El Salvador at the age of ten to reunite with his parents. Jared said,

So a lack of information and a lack of confidence. Hmm, the fact that you have someone to guide to, for what you need to do and what you need to look for and what you need to have, is really frustrating because you need to look for it on your own. And seeing your parents frustrated because they can't help you either. Definitely is hard. And that is what is hard for me the most, the lack of a guide.

The participants all shared the importance and excitement of attending college. All the participants wanted to excel in college and were greatly influenced by the parents, family, and friends. However, they continued to encounter barriers.

**Paying for college through family members.** Finding ways to pay for college was a popular topic of discussion among all participants. All five participants found, in retrospect, that knowing where to obtain the necessary resources to apply for financial aid was probably the single most important issue for them. Of the five participants, two worked part-time jobs, and three did not work at all.

All of the participants applied for financial aid at various times when enrolling in college. However, when students do not apply by the financial aid deadlines, apply for admissions late, or do not follow-through with financial aid requirements, they are most likely to fall behind with the college process, which creates a snowball effect as they move through the semester. According to Santiago and Stettner (2013), federal financial aid is important to student access to and success in college for many students, including most Latinos. This was the case for Alex, Diana, and Kathy, each of whom registered late for financial aid and, in some cases, registered late for their courses. As a result, they did not have Pell Grants in-place by the time their tuition bills were due. They were eligible to use the College's payment plan until the grants were activated, but they struggled to find the financial resources. The process of applying for financial aid is cumbersome and can take many weeks for students to complete. Diana, who had trouble applying for financial aid because her father did not want to assist, said,

My aunt paid for it. Humm, not that close but she is pushing me to go to school and making sure that I get school done. My mom won't be able support me in school, and my dad doesn't really care.

Alex reported that he had trouble with the financial aid process because the department could not locate his documentation. He said,

I went to the financial aid center, and we had to go back and forth a couple of times. And they helped me get the process through, and they helped me get the money. There were just a couple of problems where they just needed some papers, which supposedly they [financial aid office] did not receive it. So, we had to do that process again. Thank God, they helped out!

Kathy said,

I did not receive financial aid early because my social security number was wrong. I did come to see a counselor many times to fix it. The lady next door solved the problem. But, I did not know the problem was my social security number, no one told me, and I kept checking my student account.

All the participants expressed belief that they would need to take full responsibility of the cost of the education and avoid having their parents or family members take-on the burden of paying for college. In addition, the participants all expressed that they did not want to burden their families with helping them pay for college. While the participants did not want to burden their families, all of them did receive support from their family members in various ways, such as financial assistance until they received the financial aid and money for books, food, and transportation. This

notion of taking money away from the family was difficult for Latino students to deal with because they felt responsible for adding more financial stress to their families. Despite financial aid covering tuition, these participants also needed to pay for incidentals such as transportation, gas, meals, school supplies, and books. All the participants expressed deep struggle with financial resources. Alex, who was affected by the fact that he could not purchase his books, said,

Hmm, I'm being completely honest. I will put it this way. Since, my experience from my first semester which was not having the books, I felt embarrassed because every time I went to that course, yeah, I stated to the instructor that I had the book and would say, I got it [book] but left it [book] at home or I'm getting it in the next class, and that's one thing that I don't want to do again.

Ronnie said,

If it was not for financial aid, I would not be in school. I went to see the person that helps, [name], she also works with the gentlemen. My sister recommended me to him. My sister went to college, med tech about 3 years ago but she dropped out after one semester. I was happy to find out that I could go to school because I was receiving financial aid. My experience for finding financial aid was great. I was happy and thankful because I was starting school like a new beginning. I could not have done this by myself. [Became emotional].

The participants perceived themselves as being capable of handling the college rigor with assistance from college employees such as faculty and advisors. While all of them stressed that *college is hard work*, it was apparent that persisting in college was

what they wanted to do. All of the participants wanted to know how they could enroll in the next semester and asked me to help them. In addition, they felt that the time-off taken during the second semester served as an opportunity for reflecting, maturing, and organizing to come back better prepared than when they entered the first semester.

**Question 3: What do Latino American Community College Students Feel Could Have Helped Them Continue With a Second Semester of Study (Ways to Improve the College Experience)?**

This section will address four helpful suggestions given by the participants interviewed as strategies that could help them continue with a second semester. The strategies and recommendations are having access to reliable resources, interacting with college members, creating a friendly and nurturing environment, and feeling cared-about and receiving personal attention.

**Having access to reliable resources.** While all the participants described finding the money paying for college as challenging, they also expressed ways to improve the college experience not only for Latino students who are entering the college for the first time but also for all students who may be attending college.

Diana, a participant who wanted to join the military after college, was excited when she shared that she would like to see similar programs to the ones in her high school to help Latino students through the college process. Diana described the early phrase of the college experience by stating that,

At our high school, we would go to the gymnasium to do like a Spanish night or I'm not sure what exactly it was called. But Latinos would come out, and they

would talk about college, financial aid, and talk to them about everything. I went because I would help with set up. We would all be in the gymnasium, and parent and students were there, and you would have the principal. It would be like a big conference. College is important. They had this a couple times in the year for juniors and seniors so they can get started.

According to the participants, knowing where to get reliable information, understanding the college process, and having resources easily accessible are critical to providing a positive start to their first semester in college. “Information functions are paramount; advisors must give all students accurate information about degree requirements and help them understand how things work at the institutions with regard to timelines, policies and procedures to successfully navigate the educational landscape” (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013, p. 41). Alex expressed this concern with his frustration about understanding the college financial aid process and easy accessibility of the information: “You know, financial aid usually takes up weeks, waiting two weeks, three weeks, four weeks and nothing came in. So at least a text message or e-mail could have been sent, which we did not received at all.” According to College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010) and Kantrowitz (2011), not obtaining accurate and timely information when planning for college may result in not receiving financial aid, mainly as a result of not filing the financial aid form.

In the following examples, the students expressed how they felt at times when they were seeking assistance for the resources on campus during the first semester. If social resources are available to make the students feel welcome, it will make it easier to

persist to the second semester. This feeling was expressed by Alex and Jared when they shared the following thoughts:

Alex: I guess we feel like a minority. We tend to be afraid of people.

Jared: ¿Quién podrá ayudarme? [Who would help me?] I would feel like someone would not understand.

Boden (2011) found that Latino students' "beliefs such as 'alone,' 'independent,' and 'all on your own' demonstrate students' feelings that nothing or no one may be available to support their success" (p. 104).

**Interacting with college employees.** Interacting with faculty members, advisors, and other staff of the college was also a popular discussion-point among the participants. In this case study, college employees were advisors, faculty, and staff employees. The students described the following five characteristics of positive interaction with college employees: approachable by students, friendly attitude towards students, give accurate information, provide individualized attention, and open to interaction.

Navigating the college process was challenging to the participants without proper guidance. As stated by Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blancard, and Aguilar (2011), the guidance of faculty and university support were major sources of assistance found in their study with Hispanic students. The guidance was described by the participants as being delivered in the following ways: approaching faculty during class time, meeting with an advisor about course selection, attending the new-student orientation in a group setting, and attending workshops by the different guest speakers who presented in the classroom.

Jared, who would like to be a family doctor one day, had a negative experience with his instructor, which led to him to drop the course. Jared shared,

I had the type of instructor that he felt beyond. I felt that he was not able to reach [the students]. Even though he would be able to tell you, you have my number, you my e-mail but if you did not understand anything in class, he would take it as, you're challenging him. And I felt like he would embarrass you in the class.

Because he would go into challenging you in front of the class by saying, "Oh, do you think I am wrong about this." So, I dropped the class.

**Creating a friendly and nurturing environment.** Alex, who would like to study psychology, mentioned that a friendly attitude toward students is important to him when approaching a college employee. Having a feeling like at home provides a sense of caring and family orientation in college. Alex recommends,

I know you [advisors] have a difficult life, and I know sometimes, you might come to work with an attitude, or might come in mad or sad or whatever, but I guess just to put that aside in the work environment you know, more friendly.

Some of participants talked about struggling to obtain accurate information. These participants expressed concerns about not knowing where to go for information, and they felt they received inaccurate information because they were sent from one location to another location or from one person to another. Two examples below demonstrate this concern among the participants interviewed. Ronnie described how he wants to be treated by the advisor, staff member, or faculty so he can understand the course sequence of his

program. He wants to get accurate information and wants structure with his college journey. Ronnie, who would like to major in computer engineering, suggested,

Be truthful. Be true to word. If you said you going to do this, this, and this, if you take this class you will finish by this time. I want people to tell me what I am going to do, when I am going to finish, and when I am going to finish or this is going to happen and this is not going to happen. I want structure.

Diana, who was an undecided major, stated,

I guess having an advisor. Maybe having like a personal advisor. And maybe having someone who is constantly seeing you and knowing what you are doing. Someone that really connects to that student and knows what they are going to do, what classes they are going to take, and they are going to take a break. Someone who asks how is everything going. Outside of school as well.

**Feeling cared-about and receiving personal attention.** The participants also mentioned that they wanted to feel cared-for as an individual. It is believed by Karp (2011) that students who feel their institutions care about their success are more likely to persist. They wanted to feel that there was someone to go to for individualized attention and assistance. When Diana was called for the study interview, she felt happy to know that someone wanted to talk to her about college even though she dropped-out. She suggested that advisors, faculty, and staff should do the following:

Well, I like what we are doing right now. This is great. One on one time, interviewing, calling me; this is good. It makes me feel that someone cares. Just to know that someone is interviewing me for school. People need that extra person.

You know parents are busy, they're working, friends are busy, you are already here, and you give us an opportunity.

Ronnie suggested, "I rather do one-one assistance than the list of classes." Kathy recommended, "I would like the getting in your business or getting personal. I like this, one to one advisor, I would have solved my financial aid problem sooner because I was dealing with someone one on one." According to Arana et al. (2011), having "one-to-one atmosphere encourages pursuit of educational goals among Hispanic students" (p. 244).

### **Interpretation of Results**

The participants' voices are captivating and cover many different areas of the college-going process. First, the participants were able to talk about their feelings, challenges, barriers, and processes about their first experience in college. To reflect on these ideas was difficult for these participants because they felt embarrassed, frustrated, and sad. Perhaps this is one reason why studies of Latino American community college students still remain limited (Flores, Horn, & Crisp, 2006). Although it is important for educators to recognize how to help Latino college students, it is even more important to begin to intentionally make an effort to conduct research about this student population that is enrolling in high numbers, particularly in community colleges. Watt, Butcher, and Ramirez (2014) stated that more Hispanic students are enrolling in postsecondary education, and institutions are also starting to emphasize initiatives that improve education for this population. The themes described above demonstrate the excitement and pride that Latino American community college students experience combined with

feelings of being overwhelmed, lost, scared, unprepared, embarrassed, and sad in their first semester in college.

### **Project Study Rationale**

The purpose of this project study was to find why some Latino American community college students are not returning after their first semester. The findings of the project study incorporated the themes presented in the literature reviewed and interviews conducted regarding family responsibility, financial aid, college understanding, navigating the college experience, and motivation. Findings highlighted areas that could be improved and used to design a professional development workshop series to help the Latino American community college students, parents, and educators better understand the needs of this student population. These themes were produced from the conversations that I had with the participants of the study. Each of them expressed the need to incorporate the following topics into the workshops: the tools, strategies, techniques, tips, and connections needed by Latino college students to succeed in the first semester and continue into the second semester in community college.

### **Conclusion**

All the participants in the case study discussed the importance of obtaining a college education to pursue their dreams in various careers, such as computer engineering, psychology, pre-med, nursing, and the military. These Latino college students indicated being inspired by thoughts of having rewarding careers in prominent areas. With such high aspirations and enthusiasm demonstrated by these students, it is

imperative that educators and policymakers engage in providing resources that will help members of this fast-growing population achieve their academic goals.

The project study explored the reasons the participants dropped-out using their words to describe barriers to success, factors that influenced their decisions not to return for their second semester, and what they believed could have made a difference in their decisions. After conducting a data analysis using coding and the NVivo 10 software, I was able to formulate the themes from the questions and responses given by the participants. The findings were organized by the following three main research questions: on-going barriers, immediate factors, and ways the College could have helped to keep these students from dropping-out. The three main questions revealed the following eight themes: family responsibility and influence, processing the college steps, lack of confidence, paying for college through family members, reliable resources, interacting with college employees, creating a friendly and nurturing environment, and feeling cared-about and receiving personal attention.

This study used the qualitative case study methodology. It focused on understanding the *what* and *how* behind the choices Latino American community college students made in deciding to stop attending college after the first semester. Section 3 will provide more details in the areas of introduction of the project, literature review, discussion of the project implementation, discussion of the project evaluation, and discussion of project implications and conclusion.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

This section is a discussion of the project resulting from the research findings. It includes a description of the goals, a rationale for the project, a current review of the relevant literature, and a defense and definition of the project design while making meaningful connections to the literature review in Section 1 as to what Latino American nonreturning students perceived as reasons for not returning for their second semester of college. Several discussions are presented related to the project's needed resources, proposal for implementation, roles and responsibilities, types of evaluations, and implications for social change for local stakeholders and the community at large.

### **Description of the Project**

The project is a 4-day student development program for Latino students conducted over the course of their first semester. The program is titled PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility. The design of PODER emerged from the issues raised during interviews discussed in Section 2. Those interviews explored the reasons why these individuals dropped-out, factors that influenced their decisions not to return for their second semesters, and what they believe could have made a difference in their decisions.

### **Project Goal**

The goal of the project is to increase the persistence rates of Latino students from first to second semester. The project addresses the needs and concerns of Latino community college students through a student development program targeting the needs

and challenges revealed by participants during the study. The developmental workshops in the PODER program capture the essence of the research findings and bring into focus for program participants the issues and challenges they may face as new students.

Using the personal narratives described in the findings, the student development program identifies and provides key workshops and presentations to assist and stimulate the Latino community college students specifically related to the first semester's college experience while walking them through what to expect during the second semester in order to increase persistence. Researchers have found that engaging the family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012), providing economic and cultural analysis and direction (Sáenz, Bukoski, Lu, & Rodriguez, 2013), and offering support and structure to Latino students as they navigate through the college system (Carter, 2005) are key to Latino student success. The interviews in this case study confirmed those themes, and the project builds on them to increase the tools available to colleges as they strive to increase persistence.

### **Scholarly Rationale of Chosen Project Genre**

This project incorporates key themes developed from what the study participants shared in the interviews regarding why they did not continue to their second semester. In addition to the selected best practices, strategies, and techniques already proven successful in obtaining college completion for Latino students, the literature also reveals the themes that are incorporated in the project. These include assistance with the steps to enrolling, 101 college tips, steps to success, the first-year college experience, financial information, exploring a major, how to organize for college, academic advising for course selection, planning for a major, using technology, time management, effective

communication skills, developing college study skills, college life activities, tutoring services, counseling services, career exploration, transferring services, internship opportunities, motivation and cultural awareness, and registration. According to Sáñez, Bukoski, Lu, and Rodriguez (2013), who conducted research on Latino community college males at Texas Community College, “step-by-step academic advising and career planning can guide students through the process of understanding which courses to take each semester and align those courses to their career goals” (p. 94). The PODER student development project is designed to be intentional, explicit, and align the themes explored in the research study to the training offered in this student development program.

Learning from the participants’ personal experiences and hearing from the students in their own words provided relevant and meaningful information that is used in developing valuable content covered in each student development workshop. The data analysis revealed key themes listed in Table 1 that were found to influence persistence for these participants. The themes listed in Table 1 intentionally align with the workshops, presentations, and information delivered in order to provide purposeful support to Latino students.

Table 1

*Key Themes Found to Influence Persistence*

On-Going Barriers	Immediate Factors	Ways to Improve the College Experience
family responsibility and influence	lack of confidence	reliable resources
processing the college steps	paying for college through family members	interacting with staff employees creating a friendly and nurturing environment

**Scholarly Rationale for Content of the Project**

Crosta (2013) noted that “more students dropped out en masse after the first term than at any other time” (p. 1). The timing and content of PODER purposefully provide and deliver information, resources, techniques, guidance, and tools that will help the transition of Latino college students into the first semester in order to increase persistence. The use of this approach is supported by Komives and Woodard (2001), who found that one of the most powerful influences on student persistence processes is individual attention and the relationships that result.

The student development program will offer a variety of presentations focusing on academic preparedness, skills-building, and cultural engagement to fully walk them through each phase of the first semester (i.e., preenrollment, first week of college, midterm, and end-of-semester preparation for second semester) from the initial thoughts of coming to college to successfully completing their first semester. These students will register and plan for the second semester using a combination of individualized advising,

presentations, and small group approach. This approach is consistent with the finding of Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011), who noted that

Although progress is being made in developing rigorous academic standards and assessments to prepare students for college and careers, less attention has been paid to the academic and social developmental supports that students may need to reach these standards. Such support includes accessible advising and counseling, mentoring, workshops that teach study skills and financial literacy, learning communities, tutoring, and college and career exploration and planning, all of which can help students reach for and meet high expectations. (p. 16)

According to the research conducted on perceived academic preparedness of first-generation Latino college students by Boden (2011), “these students have a strong connection with family, and they tend to rely on family members and other acquaintances as guides” (p. 104). Rather than encouraging students to seek-out the help of academic advisors, Boden’s research challenged higher education to improve freshman orientation programs and to recognize the importance of family involvement. “Individuals who understand that Latinos bring a strong cultural sense to college and who provide them with access and knowledge of resources are contributing to their educational successes” (Gloria & Castellano, 2012, p. 93).

The 4-day student development program for Latino students provided by PODER exposes them to a variety of useful workshops, presentations, and topics related to challenges they are likely to encounter during their first semester in college. Parents will be invited to one of the presentations given during each of the 4 days to ensure family

involvement. Jared, a participant in the study, suggested “Instructing the parents to know what to do and what’s next. The most frustration [of the first semester] is the beginning. The most important part is teaching the parents how to help their kids start.”

The PODER student development project will encourage parents to attend one session of each of the training days. According to Barbatis (2010), participants in his study credited their success in college to the support they received from friends and family. Barbatis also found that “friends and teachers from school age years had an influence in their decision to attend college and persist” (p. 17). Barbatis also suggested that the most influential parent was the mother.

The following are the topics for the first day of the program that will be introduced to the students:

Day-1 (10 weeks from the first day of classes)

- Enrollment Process
- The First-Semester Experience
- Steps to Success
- How to Pay for College
- What Is My Major?

Day-1 focuses on precollege and freshmen orientation information. During this session, parents, students, and academic advisors are present. Latino students tend to be the first in their families to attend college, which can make orientation overwhelming, compounded by the abundance of information typically given at these events. Santiago (2011) noted that this “initial introduction to college is often difficult for parents and

students to understand” (p. 12). An invitation will be sent to the students inviting them and their parents to participate in the initial precollege information session and to learn more about the PODER student development project.

The precollege session is open to all interested Latino students who meet the requirements of the PODER program. The participant requirements for enrollment into the PODER program are as follows: Attend the all-day information session, participate in all scheduled activities, identify as Latino or Hispanic, and be enrolled in the College part-time or full-time. Advertising is conducted at the beginning of May at local high schools. Advertising is conducted for new, incoming college students at the college setting. The deadline for the completed application is two weeks after the preinformation meeting. The selected cohort will be notified 3 weeks after the deadline date. A cohort of 20 students is admitted into the program at the beginning of the fall semester.

The preinformation session covers the following key topics that students should know before enrolling in college as listed above. This session covers the overview of the PODER student development project, signing the PODER contract, the assignment for PODER participants, and an evaluation. The steps to enroll in community college will cover the admissions process, the placement test requirements, important deadlines and forms, and how to begin the registration process for courses using the technology. Using new college technology can be cumbersome for new students. This day will provide time for students to interact with the computer to complete the admissions application online and obtain a college student account. Using the online tutorial programs created by the college to help students through the navigation college process, this workshop will

present an interactive learning environment, discover new tools used by college students, such as planning guides for their majors, and explore other areas of special interest, such as how to check the status of their financial aid and how to pay for college using a credit card or the payment plan.

This day will cover financial assistance, a session that is of great importance to students and parents. The financial aid process can be confusing because it requires multiple steps in order to obtain the financial assistance provided by the colleges or universities. There is a large body of evidence indicating both the importance of financial aid to Latinos and that Latino students tend to get lost and not follow-through in this process.

Crosta (2013) noted that early dropouts tend not to complete the financial aid paperwork in time, and as a result, they are enrolled in few courses. According to Santiago (2013), financial aid was important to academic success in higher education especially for most Latinos. Mendoza, Mendez, and Malcolm (2009) affirmed that receiving grant aid is significantly related to persistence for community college students. In conformity with financial aid concerns, Gross, Zerquera, Inge, and Berry (2014) found that receiving aid has a positive and significant effect on degree completion; but, the effect decreases over time for Latino students. Financial aid was a topic that many students struggled to understand because of the various options that institutions offer to students. McKinney and Robert (2012) found that with high Latino populations, two-thirds of counselors agreed that their students did not understand what financial aid means. Lastly, McKinney and Novak found that filing for financial aid and persistence

among part-time students were important to study because so many community college students who were eligible for need-based aid do not file the application. Financial aid was an important topic to address in order to increase persistence rates among college Latinos.

The first-semester experience section of the program will address the expectations of college rigor, how to select a schedule for courses, where to go to obtain assistance with academics, and emotions and attitudes about the first semester in college. As documented by Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2013), community college students rated advising that assists in choosing among various general education courses and advising that assists with deciding what program to study were among significantly important factors to succeed in college.

Steps to success will address tools, techniques, and best practices that students need to know during the first semester. The tools will briefly address study skills, time-management, part-time and full-time enrollment, and balancing college, family, friends, and work. These topics will be briefly introduced in Day-1 and will be covered more deeply during future training sessions throughout the program.

The presentations used in the PODER student development project will be interactive to provide opportunity for conversation and relationship-building among the students, presenters, advisors, and parents. Parents will be asked to attend one of the day's presentations. The session that parents will be invited to attend is the First-Year Experience, which will be conducted during lunch time. As stated by the participants in the study and by Borrero (2011a), showing the connection between school and home life

was important to academic success of Latino students. Day-1 will end with the signing of the PODER student development project commitment contract, an evaluation form for students to complete, and an assignment to be presented at the Day-2 meeting. The assignment given to students will be an organizer sheet that will be completed and ready to discuss during Day-2. The handout works to organize the student's time using a weekly format. The organizer sheet will be used to transfer the information into the student planner (college planner given by the institute).

The following are topics that will be introduced to the students during the first week of classes:

Day-2 (after 1 week of classes)

- Check-in (Pros and Cons of the First Week)
- Getting Organized
- Time-Management
- Finding Help
- Effective Communication
- Creating an Academic Plan

Day-2 focuses on the first week of college, also known as the most important week of college. This week can seem a bit crazy and unorganized as students are trying to find their way around campus, meeting faculty and friends, and balancing personal life with academic life. Borrero (2011b) conducted a study in Bay City, California, with eight Latino high school seniors. Borrero focused on the following five main areas: college/future plans, greatest successes and greatest challenges, key factors to academic

success, and community/cultural connections. “Going to college is not an individual, personalized endeavor that they [Latino students] have thought about but something they want for themselves, their school, their family, and their community” (Borrero, 2011b, p. 28). This week will focus on many concerns pertaining to transition from high school to college and feelings of confidence, anxiety, excitement, and happiness all combined together. Students will have a time to reflect on these emotions through an interactive discussion about how they feel about college. They will write, draw, or create a sculpture that will best reflect these concerns. In small groups, best practices and strategies will discuss to cope with being overwhelmed with college as first-semester college students.

This training session will take place on the Friday of the first week of college and cover the following topics: checking in (pros and cons of the first week), getting organized, time-management, finding help, effective communication, and creating an academic plan. The session will start with a group exercise of pros and cons that students experienced during their first week. The presenter will discuss how to use an organizer and provide the students with a student planner to keep track of all their assignments, deadlines, and appointments. Students will be asked to print the syllabi for their classes and copy-down in their planners when they have exams, papers, and projects. The program coordinator will also incorporate the assignment given to the students during Day-1. This assignment will directly involve organizing for college, tips on how to plan appropriately for assignments and projects, how to avoid procrastination, and how to stay focused.

In addition to the tools for success discussed above, Day-2 will also address the development of an academic plan. The academic plan covers topics such as what courses the student is taking and why and an introduction to creating an academic plan. The students will be asked to identify and mark which courses fulfill distribution requirements, which ones are prerequisites or developmental courses, and which ones are required for their majors. Martin, Galention, and Townsend (2014) related that when students have clear goals and a high level of motivation to succeed, they manage external demands that could prevent them from achieving their goals in community college. The session on Getting Information on College Resources covers various programs, such as tutoring, mentorship, career development, and job placement. Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, and Rund (2011) stated that providing Latino students with support from faculty and staff as mentors in the early stages of college was significantly important to their success. The topics of Day-2 will address these critical areas of concern for Latinos.

The lack of academic readiness from high school is an important concern when working with Latino students. In “2007-08, nationwide, 45% of Hispanic students had taken remedial courses compared to 38% of all students” (Santiago, 2011, p. 9). Day-2 is particularly important because the cohort will be meeting for the first time as a group of enrolled college students. At this stage, now that they have seen the syllabus for each of their classes and have a sense of what will be expected of them, they need to be reminded of the support systems available to them. For example, Got Help is an information sheet that focuses on providing tutoring information to students particularly in the areas of academic advising, developmental mathematics, developmental English, science tutoring,

speech tutoring, and the writing center. In addition to the descriptions of each these resources offered by the institution, the presentation will also emphasize the importance of successfully passing these courses because of financial aid implications. The notion of academic standing and its short- and long-term consequences for the students will be discussed. The materials will also specially address developmental mathematics because the great majority of community college students require remediation in mathematics, as did all the participants in the study. The program coordinator will end the session with a tour of a variety of tutoring offices and resources locations to get to know the people working at these locations and break any barriers of communication that the students may encounter.

During Day-2, parents will be encouraged to attend the time-management workshop with their students. An example of an effective program involving Latino parents and their roles in the academic process was found in LPFAST and Juntos programs. These programs helped “promote parental involvement in schools and promote academic achievement with Latino families” (Behnke & Kelly, 2011, p. 8). While the program focused on high school students, a few key partners that made their program successful in delivering valuable college information to the parents were community college representatives and university college student mentors (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). “Ninety-three percent of parents said that they felt they had the information they needed to help their teenager successfully complete high school” (Behnke & Kelly, 2011, p. 8). Finally, Day-2 will end with an assignment, review of the day, and an evaluation. The assignments are the PODER and Academic Planning Worksheets. Instructions will be

given on how to complete these assignments. The worksheets will be completed by the students and discussed on Day-3.

The following are topics that will be introduced to the students during the middle of the semester, or around the eighth week of the semester.

#### Day-3 (Midterm)

- Checking-in on exams
- Checking-in on your major
- College Life
- Let's Talk, counseling session

Day-3 focuses on the midterm period of the semester. Midterm is a busy time for students. While most courses run for a full semester, students have the option to take courses during the first or second part of the semester. This is particularly true for college preparatory courses, which are designed in order to enable students to move into transferable coursework as quickly as possible. Half-term courses are also known as accelerated courses because they enable students to take two sequenced classes in the same semester. In addition to selecting midterm courses, students are taking midterm exams. This time is particularly important because it lets the students know how they are performing in a particular subject.

Day-3 will start with a pro and con session reflecting on the semester so far. The first session will address any concerns that students have about grades, progress in their courses, and study concerns. The session on checking-in on the major continues with conversations about selecting a major, where to go to get additional information about the

major, and how to obtain internships. There will be two presentations on how to deal with taking mathematics courses and how to get help with personal and family problems affecting college life. The session on counseling, Let's talk, will focus on dealing and finding effective strategies with all the negative emotions that are likely to happen to college students. Parents will be invited to the Let's talk about math session. Boden (2011) suggested that "connection with family coupled with advisors needs to be enhanced in freshmen orientation programs to strengthen the relationship for Latino first generation college students" (p. 104). The day will end with a review, an assignment, and an evaluation. The assignment will be the PODER worksheet to be completed by the student and reviewed at the last training day. The PODER worksheets will direct students to attend and participate in various workshops, tutoring visits, and club meetings, activities, trips, events, or internships. In addition, the worksheet will require students to visit with an academic advisor to discuss issues such as low grades, missing assignments, changing study habits, ways to communicate with instructors, program majors, and concerns that the student may have. The student will be required to attend four sessions with an advisor during the first semester.

The following are topics that will be introduced to the students during the week before final examinations.

Day-4 (1 before final exams)

- Checking-In
- Career Exploration
- Thinking of Transferring?

- How to Stay Motivated
- Registering for the Second Semester
- Certificates and Celebration

Day-4 will be the last day of the series of the PODER student development project. It will take place a week before final exams to provide Latino students with a few final exam study tips. This period is stressful for students as they try to complete assignments and projects. Day-4 will begin with a pros and cons session reflecting on final exams and strategies to best prepare. Latino students will also turn in the PODER worksheet as evidence of their participation in workshops, presentations events, clubs, meetings, and tutoring programs. The PODER worksheet will also identify the student's major, the assigned advisor, and any recommendations made by the advisor to the student's areas for career exploration, student development, academic progress, and/or improvement.

The session will consist of the following topics: focusing on your major, career coach website, thinking about transferring, staying motivated, and a closing ceremony. Parents are encouraged to attend the motivation workshop and the closing ceremonies.

Upon successful completion of the PODER student development project, the Latino students will receive a certificate of completion to add to their personal credentials. Before the closing ceremonies, the students will register for next semester, complete the final evaluation form, and take a group picture. Lastly, a small celebration with light refreshments will conclude the event.

### **Review of the Literature**

The following are the Boolean search words and phrases used to obtain literature information on this topic: *Latinos in community colleges, Latinos and community college, Latinos what works, Latinos and first generation, Latinos and persistence, Latinos dropout in 2-year institutions, programs that work for Latino community college students, professional development and Latino community college students, workshops for Latinos in higher education, seminars for Latinos in community college, and programs for Latinos in community college.* The search engines were *Education Research Complete, Education from Sage, Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest Central, and ProQuest Educational Journals.*

#### **Analysis of Research and Theory Explaining Appropriate Genre**

Tinto (1975) found that students need to disengage from their past relationships and familial cultures in order to adapt to new college beginnings, a process he referred to as *integration*. In contrast to Tinto's theory of integration, however, this project study found that family and friends were influential in students' success in college. All the participants in the study mentioned that family was a significant reason to attend college, to choose the college that they were going to attend, and to have their parents be active in the college process.

Jared, a participant in the study, described the importance of keeping families informed:

The first semester is a transition. It is a transition from high school to college but, also transition from teenager to an adult. You just don't just become an adult;

someone needs to guide you how to go about doing that. The first semester you are going to go through those transitions. You don't have teachers to say do that, do that, but your parents can do that for you.

Integration is important, however. Various scholars have noted that integration theory implies that students of color need to adapt to the ways of the university in order to succeed (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992). Nuñez (2009) affirmed that "Integration can influence students' decision to complete their degree at the institution, transfer to another institution, or discontinue their college enrollment" (p. 24) as was true in the case of many participants in this project study.

The literature review in Section 1 and the literature review with the current case study on how Latino community college students are doing are strongly coherent and consistent. In the earlier literature review, I pointed to possible factors behind the low persistence rate, such as lack of preparedness for those coming from poor K-12 experiences (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004), issues related to the home environment (Toews & Yazedjian, 2007), part-time enrollment in college (Goldrick-Rab & Roksa, 2008), and economic factors (Hurtado, Nelson, Thomas, & Perorazio, 2003). In addition, Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) reported that there is a need to study the factors of institutional support and the college experience, which lead Latino students to withdraw before graduating.

Similarly, the most recent literature has a direct alignment with factors that influence Latino community college students' decisions not to return to college. Borrero (2011a) demonstrated the connection between home and academic success, Crosta (2013)

suggested that completing financial aid paperwork is important, and Santiago (2013) stated that developing partnerships to improve college readiness is a key factor to increasing college success among Latino students. Lastly, Barbatis' (2010) study on factors contributing to persistence emphasized that parents and extended family are significant influences in the lives of underprepared and ethnically diverse students.

As noted by various scholars and theorists, Latino college students need a wide range of services to provide them adequate information needed to be successful in the first semester (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Santiago, 2011; Shulock & Moore, 2007; Nora, 2000; Tinto, 1975). PODER provides these services using a model that intentionally follows the recommendations made by scholars and by the testimonies provided by the participants in this case study. The PODER student development project, a four-day student development program for Latino students in their first semester, will meet the demands to assist Latino community college students to persist to their second semester.

### **Interconnected Analysis Supporting Content of the Project**

All five participants in the case study were eager to come back to the community college. All of them stated they would be back in the fall of 2014 and asked for assistance with the reenrollment process. This expressed desire to return is notable because, according to Crosta (2013), in a study on returning students, 84% of early dropouts ended their higher education studies after one term of study at a community college. Therefore, creating intentional programs that provide the necessary information to help Latino American students persist would help in decreasing this percentage and increase

persistence and completion rates. “Explicitly targeting Latino students for services increases the institutions’ visibility in the Latino community and demonstrates their commitment to serve Latino students” (Santiago, 2013, p. 8).

Another connection that was made from the analysis is that the study participants did not focus their attention on academic difficulties in terms of writing, reading, and other academic abilities. Rather, the participants focused on how going to school was going to create a better life to support their families and how they were eager to continue pursuing their goals. This sense that academic readiness is not the underlying issue was reinforced by Early (2010), who found that that Latino college students possessed strong writing skills because their parents provided the resources and attention when they were younger.

While Latino college students benefit from the assistance of professional advisors, the participants indicated that they were also afraid to meet with the advisors because they might feel rejected or misunderstood in front of experts. Advisors need to develop a trusting relationship with first-generation Latino students, which can be established through frequent contact and time invested (Torres et al., 2006). The project is designed to track a cohort of Latino students through the first semester while exposing them to an array of resources to increase persistence. An advisor will be assigned to each student in the PODER student development project.

Connecting the project to meet the needs of Latino first-generation college students takes careful planning and sensitivity. In this case study, the participants indicated that they had the opportunity to meet with an advisor, but few of them chose to

follow-up. They described finding it difficult to meet with the advisor due to long lines, not knowing where to meet with the advisor, and feeling intimidated by the advisor.

When asked what advice they would give to an advisor or a faculty or staff member of the College, participant Ronnie said, “Be true to word. If you said you are going to do this, if you take this class you will be finished by this time. I want structure.” Ronnie was referring to visiting an advisor and getting different information at different times.

Establishing connections through individual attention is key to student persistence (Komvies & Woodard, 2011).

Frequent meetings with the same advisor will build a relationship of confidence for the student in the first semester, which is a key component of this project. Two of the five participants talked about not being confident when enrolling in their first semester in college and stated, “I didn’t have confidence,” and “I lacked information and confidence.” The program will deliver information and workshops to expose Latino college students to resources that develop a sense of knowledge, opportunity, and confidence as they navigate through their first semester of college. These workshops focus on skills development, roles of advisee-advisor relationships, and academic planning.

Finally, the PODER student development project will incorporate a family component. Latino students in this case study engaged their families and close friends in the college process. As a result, the initial connections with the College were made by conversations with friends and family members who were attending college. Barbatis (2010) recommended that family and extended family members are significant in the

success of underprepared, ethnically diverse students in community colleges. He mentioned that educators involved in working with this population should consider developing programs and strategies to engage parents and family members. Therefore, parents will be invited to attend one workshop on each of the four-day series.

### **Discussion of the Project**

Planning and implementation of the project involves several stages. The first key component involves obtaining approval from the director and dean of student services for its implementation and delivery to Latino students. Once approved, the second step will be to gather a group of college employees who can assist with the implementation for the project. The last stage is to implement, deliver, and assess the program.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The timetable for the four-day student development program will begin in early May and end in the middle of December. Each session will last six hours with a detailed schedule of activities, assignments, presentations, and workshops for each day. The project is divided into four critical time periods where students are most likely to need assistance with college orientation. These periods consist of *PreCollege Orientation Information*, *First Week of College*, *MidTerm Week*, and *End-of-Semester Preparation*.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

The roles and responsibilities of the students are to successfully complete the entire PODER student development program. The project consists of four-day, six-hour workshop series focusing on various topics related to navigating the college process and themes explored during the project case study. The students will be responsible for

attending all workshops and must commit to participating in the entire student development program, doing the classroom and homework assignments, and providing feedback of their overall experiences after each workshop. Upon successful completion of the program, Latino students will receive a certificate of completion to add to personal credentials.

The roles and responsibilities of the researcher and the presenters will consist of various assignments according to their specialty or presentation. The roles and responsibilities of the researcher will be to implement the student development program, including contacting presenters, preparing the materials for the program, and assessing the program upon completion. The presenters, guests, and speakers will be responsible for presenting on their designated specialty and assigned topic. They will prepare to give their presentations on the assigned date and location, provide a PowerPoint presentation and/or handouts in order to provide a visual tool for the participants, and provide feedback after their presentation to the program coordinator for further review via the evaluation forms.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

#### **Evaluation Type**

Pre and posttest surveys will be given to the participants at the beginning and end of the workshop series. This approach was selected to examine changes and evaluate outcomes of learning from the participants. According to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), pre and posttests are effective when evaluating changes in behavior.

The surveys contain six questions related to the college process. These questions and learning outcomes are as follows:

1. List the steps to enroll in college
2. Describe those steps or processes based on the information that you know
3. Identify, compare, and contrast at least three ways you can pay for college
4. Explain at least four factors that can influence your course and major selection process
5. Identify the purpose of at least four campus resources that you need to connect to in college
6. Provide at least four effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.

A rubric has been developed to evaluate the skills the program seeks to instill. Evaluating learning outcomes can help educators shape a new program as students are going through it and determine its effectiveness for future development.

The second form of evaluation used in the program will provide immediate feedback at the end of each training day. These evaluations will measure satisfaction and efficiency of the training sessions, presenters, facilities, and schedule using a Likert-type scale. The questions will be answered using a four-point Likert-type scale ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'). According to Suskie (1992), Likert scales are familiar to many people, efficient, and permit comparison among answers within the scale.

The training day evaluations will also contain one open-ended question in order to capture more information on the participants' thoughts and feelings over the course of the

semester. It will also give participants the opportunity to suggest areas of improvement for future programming. According to Suskie (1996), open-ended questions can best be used “when many answers are possible, when a multiple choice question might bias responses by steering respondents, and when a question is interesting enough that people want to answer it” (p. 41).

### **Justification for Using this Type of Evaluation**

The justification for using both pre and post tests and the open-ended questions is that they provide all key stakeholders with thorough assessment of measurable outcomes of the PODER student development project. Designing and implementing a rubric for the program’s outcomes is an effective method to measure learning throughout the program. The program coordinator develops the rubric by assigning a grade to learning outcomes and techniques that need to be measured. In this case, a number value will be assigned to five skills that students will know after completing the PODER student development project (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). The rubric provides a description for each of the number values. ‘Four’ is the highest value that demonstrates an excellent learning comprehension of the material covered during the four-day student development project. These skills, or learning outcomes, are listed in the rubric in Appendix A.

In addition, a quantitative assessment will be completed at the end of the third week of the second semester in college. At most institutions, the third week of the semester marks the time when the student can drop courses without penalties. A comparison assessment will be done between students who completed the PODER

program (intervention group) and those who did not enter the PODER program (control group) in regard to registering and persistence for the second semester.

Initially, the PODER student development project will need to be piloted by the College in order to determine its effectiveness. Therefore, assessment instruments that can demonstrate the effectiveness of the program are an essential component of the program. According to Suskie (1996), “open-ended questions are useful in pilot studies for drafting more specific questions for the final study” (p. 41). In this case, the program has the following three assessment tools that will capture its effectiveness: pretest and post-test, training evaluations (satisfactions and open-ended questions), and quantitative analysis. In addition, these assessments will capture areas that are most effective and areas that need improvement. Lastly, the assessment tool will demonstrate effectiveness and practicability in order to scale the project to a large group while maintaining the integrity and success of the program.

### **Overall Project Goals**

The overall project goal is to assist Latino students with the first semester experience in college in order to increase persistence into the second semester.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals**

The overall goal of the program’s evaluations is to effectively demonstrate that the information delivered through the PODER student development project along with the research data gathered from the participants in this study will help Latino community college students persist into the second semester in college.

**Key Stakeholders**

The key stakeholders involved with the semester student development program for Latinos are college employees, Latino students, and parents. A list of titles of key college employees, the topic of expertise, and the name of the PODER student development project presentation are listed below in Table 2. Latino first-semester college students will be the participants in the project. Lastly, parents will also be invited to the program on each training day throughout the trajectory of the program.

Table 2

*Key Stakeholder Topic PODER Presentations*

Department	Theme	Title of the Workshop/Presentation
Program Coordinator	Academic Advising and Referrals	Steps to enroll in college College Steps to Success Let's get acquainted: Bingo Let's Play <i>Jeopardy</i> : College vocabulary terms How to pay for college How to pay for college Certificates Email, online software, online library resources, online academic tools Evaluations Getting organized. Student Planner: How do I organize my college life? Got Help? Where can I find the help that I need? Introduction to the Academic Evaluation Plan Introduction to the Academic Evaluation Plan Let's have fun! Board games, crafts, and music Pledge: I will graduate, How to stay motivated about college? Registration for second semester Time Management What courses am I taking and why? What courses am I taking and why? What is my major?
Dean of College Life Services	Activities, clubs, organizations	College Life: What are you doing for fun?
Dean of Student Services	Implementation, funding, and assessment	The First Year Experience Counseling: Let's talk The Art of Communication
Director of Advising	Implementation, funding and assessment	Thinking of Transferring Let's talk about Math
Director of Career and Job Services	Career Development and internships	Career Coach software Kuder Exploration Career software How can I get an internship
School Counselors/Program Coordinator	Advertising and recruitment	Introduction of the PODER student development project to students

## **Possible Implications**

### **Possible Social Change Implications**

This research study focused particularly on Latino college students and understanding why they did not continue into the second semester of college. This is important to social change because Latinos are significant contributors to the economic growth of the nation and closing the gap of highly educated individuals. Santiago (2011) emphasized how Latino college students are more targeted than other groups in closing this gap:

1. The Latino population is growing rapidly and will make up a greater percent of the U.S. population by 2020;
2. Latino educational attainment is currently lower than other groups (only 19% of Latino adults have earned an associate or higher degree); and,
3. Many economically competitive jobs in the U.S. will soon require education beyond a high school degree. (p. 7)

### **Importance to Local Stakeholders**

The success of Latino college students is important to local stakeholders because it will directly affect the communities where they live, go to school, and work. According to Santiago (2011), “school districts and higher education institutions should develop partnerships in order to improve college readiness and participation rates” (p. 4).

### **Importance to Larger Context**

In order to accomplish this goal, everyone will need to work together to provide a quality education for all students. “The nation cannot reach its degree attainment goals

without substantially increasing Latino college completion” (Santiago, 2011, p. 4). In 2009, President Obama set the nation on high alert for the U.S. to become the top country in the world with college degree attainment by 2020.

According to Reyes and Nora (2012), experts and professionals in the area of higher education for diverse student populations, stated that “research on Hispanic first generation college students is of utmost importance” (p. 29).

The phrase *it takes a village* is best used to describe the dilemma regarding the Latino dropout rate in higher education. As a result, it will take a concerted effort from all members of the community in order to positively influence the success of Latino students in persisting and graduating with a college degree. Two research scholars studying Latino students, Velez and Sáñez (2001), commented that “improving educational opportunities for Latino youth will require significant cooperation among different key players including students, families, teachers, administrators, policymakers, community and business leaders, researchers, and governmental officials” (p. 465).

### **Conclusion**

The PODER student development program is designed to meet the demands on students during the first semester in college. The content arose from the testimonies of the participants interviewed for the case study. This program is strengthened by key assessment tools, empirical literature, engaged stakeholders, and purposeful presentations. Section 4 will provide reflections and conclusion.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on the process and findings of this project study. The themes explored in this section cover the project's strengths and limitations. Recommendations for alternative ways to approach the problem are also addressed. Lastly, I will analyze my own learning and what I believe the project contributes to the field. Finally, I present implications and applications for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

I have come to believe that the most significant strength of the PODER student development project is that it creates a virtual cycle of engagement and understanding among the participants, their families, college staff, and administrators, which will make both the individuals and the institution more successful. The project's focus is on increasing persistence among Latino community college students from the first to the second semester. Creating a positive atmosphere where Latino students will receive individualized attention, accurate and timely information regarding college processes, and on-going guidance during the first semester will set the tone for a successful first semester and continuation to the second semester. Cerezo and Whirter (2012) affirmed that having a peer support network aware of the challenges faced by Latinos in the institutions will improve social adjustment to the college environment among Latino college students. Having a contact person to whom students can go to get answers to their questions and meeting with other students who may have similar concerns, problems, and

difficulties will provide an effective and positive environment to build a nurturing support group for these students.

The project incorporates an advising component that requires students to meet at least four times with their assigned academic advisor. The continuous interaction and communication help the student build a sense of college family and begin to establish social networks, a key aspect of increasing the persistence rates among college students during the first semester. Last, the collaboration of various college departments playing a key role in the development of the training project allows for educators to create a stronger unity and avoid duplicated efforts across the college campus community. Too often, many departments create the same training programs, have poor student attendance, and have spent funding with little or no positive outcomes. This student training program is designed to engage various departments while providing assessment of their involvement that can be used to evaluate the program.

### **Project Limitations**

A number of factors could limit the successful implementation of the project. Perhaps the most obvious of these are time and money. Implementing the project will take time away from the already full workload of many staff. Finding time to recruit, interview, and organize the cohort will be challenging with many colleges and universities already having limited resources.

Having funding to support the project, materials to give to the students, and support from the administration to effectively implement the project will be challenging. A few items listed in the budget are composition books (\$25.00), chart (\$5.00), color

markers (\$5.00), and binders (\$25.00). Lastly, the project requires the cooperation of many key stakeholders from the community college. Without buy-in on the part of colleagues in student services (college life, advising, counseling, financial aid), the success of the program will be limited. Finding the support of student services staff members may provide a challenge because staff members have other work-related responsibilities.

### **Recommendations Addressing the Problem Differently**

The PODER student development project may begin as a pilot training program for the College. The project is designed to maximize the resources already in-place without adding burdens or diminishing institutional funding. Finding presenters and community leaders who already contribute to the success of students is recommended to avoid spending time looking for qualified people. Last, because the project has clear outcomes and four evaluation components, it will be possible to make data-driven decisions about future programs. Assessment of the extent to which the learning outcomes have been met is key when implementing a new program. It is also worth noting that while PODER focuses on addressing the concerns of Latino community college students, this program can be easily tailored to address the needs of all community college students.

### **Scholarship**

Scholarship in the area of Latino persistence in college contributed greatly to my understanding of the issue. The themes in the literature were consistent with those found in this project study. My data analysis revealed the following themes: family

responsibility and influence, processing the college steps, lack of confidence, paying for college through family members, reliable resources, interacting with college members creating a friendly and nurturing environment, and feeling cared-about and receiving personal attention. Each of the themes reflected in the study's findings is echoed in the scholarly literature, and applying them to program addresses the concerns of Latino community college students with regard to increasing their persistence rates from first to second semester.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

The student development program and evaluations were created by the responses from the participants in the project study. The participants' testimonies transformed the development of the 4-day series student development program for first-time Latino community college students. The key activities incorporated in the 4-day program were developed by reflecting on key ideas shared by the participants.

The evaluations process selected for the project is suited for the development of a new program. There are four evaluations used to assess the effectiveness of the project. The three assessment methods are an evaluation for the participants before the program starts (pretest), an evaluation after each training day, an evaluation after the completion of the program, and a quantifiable count of how many students returned at the end of the semester. All of the assessments are created to measure the effectiveness of the training program to determine if it meets the goal of helping Latino community college student persist to the second semester.

### **Leadership and Change**

Leadership and change are key factors in addressing the dropout problem of Latino community college students. Institutional leadership must make certain that Latino students have the proper resources and services in college to help them persist. Crosta (2013) conducted a study of characteristics of early community college dropouts and found that “after analyzing six years of transcript data on 14,429 first-time college students who in 2005 and 2006 enrolled at one of five community colleges in a single state, 28% never returned to the same college after their first semester” (p. 1). It is important to note that Crosta’s search included part-time students who usually enroll in community colleges, as stated in the literature review found in Section 2. The author defined *early dropouts* as students “who enrolled for one term but never returned to the college for another term” (Crosta, 2013, p. 1). In order to create change to effectively assist Latino community college students, the institutional leadership will need to be actively involved in creating and researching programs that are equipped to help these students. Changing times will also play a critical part in pushing educators to be more vigilant of how Latinos are doing in community colleges. The rapid growth of the Latino student population will force change to take place among community colleges and their leadership.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

As a scholar, I have experienced an enormous amount of growth through this project. I have also developed an appreciation for and much deeper understanding of the role of qualitative research. The process has been intense, meaningful, and rewarding as

both researcher and practitioner. I have learned to appreciate the structures and rigors of scholarship while maintaining the personal integrity of my beliefs and values. I have developed as a scholar through each stage of the project study process. Lastly, I am eager to continue to develop my scholarly interest in carrying-out meaningful research that will contribute to a changing society and to live into my passion to explore solutions to concerns in the field of higher education.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

As a practitioner, I have learned to be mindful of understanding various points-of-view in research. I've also realized that if I am to become a voice of change, I must keep current with changes in the field of higher education. In addition, I have learned how to put research into practice in the workforce. Research empowers me to provide testimony and validates my voice as I join in the many exciting conversations that are taking place in the area of higher education across the nation.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

As the project developer, I experienced many feelings throughout the project. The initial stages of my research study were challenging because I needed to focus on narrowing my topic so that I was able to capture, in this case, why Latino community college students choose to not return after the first semester in college. In the middle stage, I focused on finding quality literature that would provide evidence of the problem. The most personally gratifying part of the project came in carrying-out the research. I was excited to have an opportunity to interview the students. Bringing the project to a conclusion is also extremely satisfying and rewarding.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change and Importance of the Work**

While the strengths of the direct effects of the project are evident, it is important to note the indirect strengths. The project study was conducted at a time when the nation is dealing with the complexities of persistence rates among Latino and Black students. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge to assist in finding ways to help students complete their degree programs. According to Slate (2011), "Increasing Hispanic education levels is crucial to the U.S. to meet future societal and workforce needs" (p. 63). The academic success of Hispanics will raise their future social and cultural capital (Ortiz, Valerio, & Lopez, 2010). While this project study focused on the Latino student population, the findings can also relate to other minority student groups that face similar barriers and challenges. Lastly, studying how to help Latino students increase their persistence in college is a key to increasing the nation's economic workforce. Latinos are the fastest-growing population in the United States (Bergman, 2005). Last, community colleges play a critical role in teaching Latinos because they are usually the first-choice for Latinos pursuing higher education (Zell, 2010).

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The project study revealed several key themes that were found to influence persistence by the participants. According to the frequency of testimonies among these participants, family involvement and finding ways to pay for college are key concerns that need further exploration by educators in order to continue to understand how to improve the persistence rate of Latino community college students. The findings indicated the need to provide information to the families of Latino students. Additionally,

more research is needed in the area of developing positive interactions between students and faculty and staff. Finally, I believe that more work is needed to highlight the challenges faced by these families as they struggle to find the resources to pay for college.

According to Gloria and Castellanos (2012) in a study focusing on first-generation college Latina students, “families need earlier and more consistent and comprehensive college information which consist of establishing personalismo (interactions of rapport and concern), confinaza (trust and confidence) and an ongoing relationship” (p. 89). This project study intentionally incorporated the concerns and needs participants shared during their interviews as strategies that would have helped them persist into the second semester.

Implications from the literature review indicated that further research is needed to understand how to focus on the needs that Latino college student have. As reviewed by Reyes and Nora (2012), “No studies have been conducted which closely examine Hispanic first-generation college students’ persistence until graduation” (p. 18). It is believed by Watt, Butcher, and Ramirez (2013) that as the number of Hispanics entering educational institutions rapidly increases, these institutions are starting to focus on initiatives to improve persistence. This project study demonstrates that educators need to begin to pay close attention to research about Latino students in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Improving the persistence rate of Latino American college students is vitally important not just for the individual students and their families but also for our nation as a

whole. According to Slate (2011), “Motivation can range from personal gratification in the learning process to expectations of financial gains, and in many Hispanic Americans, the desire to live a better life than their parents were able to provide” (p. 64). The research indicates that I know what it would take to make great progress in this area, and I am proud to think that PODER not only will help the program participants but also has the potential to move the conversation forward nationwide.

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Appendix A: The Project

Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

*Immersing the lives of Latino Students in the first semester in college*

Training Plan

by Rosa Smith, Program Coordinator

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## **The PODER Student Development Project**

Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility  
*Immersing the lives of Latino Students in the first semester in college*

### ***About PODER***

The PODER student development project is an immersion program for first-semester Latino students through a 4-day-long semester series program. The institution is committed to the success of students particularly in the first semester. This program gives Latino students the opportunity to address their needs and concerns in order to increase the persistence rates from first semester to second semester.

This program uses workshops and presentations to assist and stimulate the Latino community college students with the first semester's college experience while walking them through the second semester in order to increase persistence. The PODER student development project will also have several important workshops for parents designed to assist their students with the college experience and transitioning from high school to college.

### **Vision**

The vision of the PODER student development project is to immerse Latino community college students through a specialized program to increase persistence rates.

### **Mission**

The mission of the program is to prepare the Latino community college student to persist into the second semester.

### **Participant Requirements**

- ✓ Identified as Latino or Hispanic
- ✓ Complete the PODER application and essay
- ✓ Enrolled in part-time or full-time status at the college
- ✓ Completion of the PODER program, assignments, worksheets, and educational goals
- ✓ Attend all mandatory 4-day-long training days with the program coordinator

- ✓ Meet with the academic advisors at least 4 times per semester.
- ✓ Attend a minimum of 4 workshops, presentations, and events recommended by academic advisor, tutor, or program coordinator
- ✓ Inform and invite parent to attend special parent workshops
- ✓ Complete all evaluations

### **Presentation Topics**

- Step it up: Steps to Enrolling in Community College
- College 101: How can I get there?
- College Steps to Success
- I'm a parent, can how I HELP?
- Double Dosage: The First Year Experience and The First Semester Experience
- The Million Dollar Question: How to Pay for College?
- How to select my major? An Overview of the Academic Departments
- Student Planner: How do I organize my college life?
- What courses am I taking and why?
- Introduction to planning for your major
- Got Resources
- Technology Tools: Student e-mail, blackboard, student's college account
- Time Management: Why is it so important?
- The Art of Communication and Cultural Awareness: How to communicate with your faculty, academic advisors, and others on campus effectively.
- Why am I choosing this major?
- Study Skills: What is this?
- College Life: What are you doing for fun?
- Academic Advising: Why is it so important?
- Losing the fear of Math: How to be successful in your math course
- Counseling: Hablemos, (Let's talk)
- Focusing on my major: Kuder Exploration, a career assessment software
- Career Coach, a career exploration software
- Thinking of Transferring: How do I start?
- How can I get an internship?
- Si, se puede: I will graduate....

### **Contact Information**

**The PODER Student Development Project**  
**Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**  
*An immersion program for first semester Latino college students*

**Application and Contract**

**Deadline: Two weeks after the PreInformation Meeting (Day 1)**

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Middle Name</b>
<b>Address</b>		
<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip Code</b>

<b>Student email address</b>
<b>Personal email address</b>

<b>Home Phone number</b>			
<b>Cell Phone number</b>			
<b>College's Student ID</b>	<b>Intended Major</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>male / female</b>
#			

**Requirements:** I have read and agree to the following items:

- ✓ I am aware that I must meet College requirements for admission before I am admitted to the PODER student development project.
- ✓ I am aware that I must attend all required events and do all the assignments of the program.
- ✓ I am aware that I must commit for one academic semester.



**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

**Information Session**

**Day 1 (Ten Weeks from the beginning of the first semester)**

8:30 am to 9:00 am	Continental Breakfast Registration Welcome Students and Parents
9:00 am to 10:00 am	Presentation: <b>Steps to Enrolling in Community College</b>
10:00 am to 11:00 am	Presentation: <b>College Steps to Success (Video)</b>
11:00 am to 11:15 am	Break
11:15 am to 12:00 pm	Presentation: <b>Let's get acquainted: activity.</b> Bingo activity.
12: 00 pm to 1:00 pm	Lunch Presentation: <b>The First-Year Experience (parents are invited) and Student Panel Discussion</b>
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	Presentation: <b>The Million Dollar Question: How to Pay for College</b>
2:00 pm to 2:15 pm	Break
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	Presentation: <b>What is my major? An Overview of the Academic Departments</b>
	<b>Overview of the PODER</b> <b>Packet Review (invitation letter, application, requirements, special projects, and certification)</b> <b>Special Project for Day 2 (organizer sheet)</b> <b>Signing of the PODER contract</b> <b>Evaluation</b>

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

**First Week of Classes**

**Day 2 (first week of classes)**

8:30 am to 9:00 am	Continental Breakfast
9:00 am to 10:30 am	<p><b>Overview of the first week of school: Pros and Cons.</b></p> <p><b>Reflections: How do you feel about college?</b></p> <p>Presentation: What courses am I taking and why?</p> <p>Presentation: Introduction to the Academic Evaluation Plan</p>
10:30 am to 10:45 am	Break
10:45 am to 12:00 pm	<p>Presentation: <b>“Got Help?” Where can I find the help that I need?</b> various technological resources: early alert, student account, student e-mail, blackboard and tutoring information</p> <p>Presentation: <b>Let’s Play Jeopardy: College vocabulary</b></p>
11:00 am to 12:00 pm	<p>Lunch</p> <p>Presentation: <b>Time Management: Why is it so important?</b></p> <p>Project Review: <b>Getting organized. Student Planner: How do I organize my college life?</b></p> <p>Parents are welcomed</p>
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	<p>Presentation: <b>The Art of Communication: How to communicate effectively with your faculty, academic advisors, and others on campus</b></p>
2:00 pm to 2:15 pm	Break
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	<p><b>Special Project Assignments (PODER worksheet and Academic Plan)</b></p> <p><b>Review and Evaluation</b></p>

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

**MidTerm Week**

**Day 3 (eight weeks into the semester)**

8:30 am to 9:00 am	Continental Breakfast
9:00 am to 10:30 am	<b>Overview of MidTerm Week: Pros and Cons</b> Project Review: <b>Completing your Academic Plan</b> Presentation: <b>Why am I choosing my major?</b>
10:30 am to 10:45 am	Break
10:45 am to 12:00 pm	Presentation: <b>College Life: What are you doing for fun?</b> Presentation: <b>Let's have fun! Board games, crafts, and music</b>
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	Lunch Presentation: <b>Let's Talk about Math</b> Parents are welcomed
1:15 pm to 2:15 pm	Presentation: <b>Counseling: Let's talk</b>
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	<b>Project Assignment (PODER worksheet)</b> <b>Review and Evaluations</b>

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

**Final Semester Preparation**

**Day 4 (1 before final exam review)**

8:30 am to 9:00 am	Continental Breakfast
9:00 am to 10:30 am	<p><b>Overview of Final Exam Week: Pros and Cons</b></p> <p>Presentation: <b>Focusing on your major: Career Exploration (career exploration software) and Career Coach (career website)</b></p> <p>Project Review: <b>What is on my PODER Sheet?</b></p>
10:30 am to 10:45 am	Break
10:45 am to 11:45 am	<p><b>Presentation: Thinking of Transferring: How do I start?</b></p> <p><b>Presentation: How can I get an internship?</b></p>
11:45 am to 12:00 pm	<p>Break (pictures)</p> <p>Reflections: <i>In your own words,</i></p>
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	<p>Lunch</p> <p>Presentation: <b>¡Si, se puede!</b></p> <p><b>Pledge: I will graduate from college in 20xx</b></p> <p><b>How to staying motivated about college</b></p> <p>Parents are welcome</p>
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	<p>Registration for second semester</p> <p>Evaluations</p>
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	Certificates and Closing Ceremony

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

<b>PODER's Activity Organizer /Budget</b>				
<b>Day</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Materials Needed</b>	<b>Handout/ Power Points</b>	<b>Estimated Expenses</b>
1	Continental Breakfast	Pick up donuts, bagels, cream cheese, juice, and cups for 60 students and parents	purchase	\$65.00
1	Registration and Welcome Students and Parents	Sign-in sheet Name tags	Attached purchase	\$10.00
1	Steps to enrolling in community college	PowerPoint and handouts	Attached	\$0
1	College steps to success (video)	Video	Attached	\$0
1	Let's get acquainted	20 Bingo handout 1 gift for the winner, item is recommended to be purchased at the College bookstore (i.e., hat, book bag, T-shirt)	Attached purchase	\$20.00
1	Lunch	Sandwich platters, bottled water, cookies	purchase	\$ 150.00
1	The first year experience	PowerPoint and handouts	Provided by presenter	\$0
1	The million dollar question: How to pay for college	PowerPoint and handouts	Provided by presenter	\$0
1	Overview of the PODER program	Packet Review (letter) Special Project: Organizer sheet Signing the PODER contact	Attached Attached Attached	\$0

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

(Table continues)

Day	Activity	Materials Needed	Handout/ Power Points	Estimated Expenses
2	Continental Breakfast	30 donuts, bagels, 2 cream cheese containers, 5 juice jugs, and cups for 20 students	purchase	\$50.00
2	Overview of the first week: pros and cons	1 White chart to make lists using different color markers and tape to hang on walls	purchase	\$20.00
2	Reflections: How do you feel about college?	20 reflection articles for each student. Black and white composition journal and pens to write reflections	Attached Purchase	\$ 25.00
2	Getting organized	20 student planners provided by the College, 20 Organization sheets given to students during Day-1 filled-out to add to a small 1 ½ blinder to build a portfolio Students should have their course syllabi for their classes	Provided by the college Attached  Provided by the student	\$0  \$60.00
2	What courses am I taking and why?	20 printed copies of the student's test scores	Provided by the student	\$0
2	Introduction to the academic evaluation plan	20 academic evaluation sheets printed from the College's webpage showing course sequence PowerPoint and handouts provided by presenter	Provided by the student  Attached	\$0

(table continues)

<b>Day</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Materials Needed</b>	<b>Handout/ Power Points</b>	<b>Estimated Expenses</b>
2	“Got Help?” Where can I find the help that I need: various technologies resources	PowerPoint and handouts	Attached	\$0
2	Let’s play <i>Jeopardy</i> : College vocabulary	Create 4 groups of 5 students PowerPoint game presentation with <i>Jeopardy</i> board 4 gifts for the winning team	Attached Attached purchase	\$60.00
2	Lunch	14 assorted pizzas, bottled water for students and parents 60	purchase	\$100.00
2	Time management: Why is it nonreturning so important?	20 worksheets on time management PowerPoint and handouts	Attached Attached	\$0
2	The Art of Communication: How to communicate effectively with your faculty, academic advisors, and others on campus	PowerPoint and handouts provided by presenter	Provided by the presenter	
2	PODER worksheet and Academic Evaluation Plan	Academic Evaluation Plan is the program major.	Printed copies from the student catalog or student account system	\$0
3	Overview of MidTerm: Pros and Cons	1 White chart to make lists using different color markers and tape to hang on walls	Purchase	\$20
3	Why am I choosing my major?	PowerPoint and handout provided by presenter	Provided by the presenter	\$0
3	Completing your Academic Plan	20 Academic Plan Worksheets attached	Attached	\$0
3	College Life: What are you doing for fun?	PowerPoint and handout provided by presenter	Provided by the presenter	\$0
3	Let’s have fun! Board games, crafts, music, and more	PowerPoint and handout provided by presenter	Provide by the presenter	\$0
3	Let’s Talk about Math	PowerPoint and handouts; Parents are welcome	Provided by the presenter	\$0
3	Lunch	60 assorted sandwiches and bottled water	purchase	\$100.00
3	Counseling: Let’s Talk	PowerPoint and handout	Provided by the presenter	\$0

(Table continues)

<b>Day</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Materials Needed</b>	<b>Handout/ Power Points</b>	<b>Estimated Expenses</b>
4	Overview of Final Exam Week: Pros and Cons	1 White chart to make lists using different color markers and tape to hang on walls and 20 binders	Purchase	\$25.00
4	Focusing on your major: Career Exploration and Career Coach	Online presentations and handouts	Provided by the presenter	\$0
4	What is on my PODER worksheet?	20 students turn-in the PODER worksheet for evaluation and feedback from the coordinator	Provide by students	\$0
4	Thinking of Transferring: How do I start?	PowerPoint and handouts provided by presenter	Provided by the presenter	\$0
4	How can I get an internship?	PowerPoint and handouts provided by presenter	Provided by the presenter	\$0
4	Reflections: <i>In your own words...</i>	20 Journal entries	Provided by students	\$0
4	¡Si, se puede! Yes, we can!  How to stay motivated about college ...	20 Pledges: I will graduate from college in 20xx PowerPoint and handouts provided by presenter Parents are welcomed	Attached  Attached	\$0
4	Registration for second semester	20 registration forms handouts	Attached	\$0
4	Evaluations	20 post evaluations 20 satisfaction evaluations	Attached Attached	\$0
4	Certificates	20 certificates	Attached	\$0
4	Closing Ceremony Reception	60 persons - light refreshments	Purchase	\$250.00
	Estimated Total Expenses			<b>\$955.00</b>

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

Day 1 Handout: Bingo Activity: Let's get acquainted!

<b>B</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>O</b>
Is a work study student	Has traveled to another country	Has held a leadership position	Was born outside Maryland	Is Liberal Arts major
Is an only child	Plays an instrument	Loves math courses	Has a birthday in August	Plays a sport
Is a biology major	Sings in a choir	Can say the Pledge of Allegiance	Has a brother or sister	Blue is favorite color
Is taking a math class this semester	Wears eye glasses	Has a motorcycle	Speaks another language	Is undecided about a major
Knows how to cook	Is a business major	Has applied for a scholarship	Enjoys eating spinach	Does not eat breakfast

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

Handout Day 1: College Budget

Instructions: Complete all sections of the budget sheet and discuss it with your advisor.

### College Budget

Monthly Income		Student Name	
Item	Amount		
Estimated monthly net income			
Financial aid award(s)		Guardian	
Other income			
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	School/College	
Monthly Expenses		Semester Expenses	
Item	Amount	Item	Amount
Rent		Tuition	
Utilities		Lab fees	
Cell phone		Other fees	
Groceries		Books	
Auto expenses		Deposits	
Student loans		Transportation	
Other loans		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
Credit cards			
Insurance			
Laundry			
Hair cuts			
Medical expenses			
Entertainment			
Miscellaneous			
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>		
		Discretionary Income	
		Item	Amount
		Monthly Income	\$0.00
		Monthly expenses	\$0.00
		Semester expenses	\$0.00
		<b>Difference</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

Day 2 Handout: Time Management

Instructions: Write down your assignments for the entire semester.

PODER's Master to do list					
No.	What do I need to do?	Due by?	Due Date	Time Duration	Done
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					

1, 2, and 3 must change study skills.  
Ex. Do all work, study 2 hours in math.

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

Day 2 and 3 Handout: PODER Worksheet

Due Date: Day 4

Instructions: Complete the entire form as you attend each session.

<b>PODER WORKSHEET</b>		
<b>GRADUATION DATE:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Advisor:</b>	<b>Advisor e-mail:</b>
<b>Major:</b>	<b>Student's e-mail:</b>	
<b>Undecided major:</b>	<b>Student's cell phone:</b>	
<b>TEST SCORES</b>		
<b>Reading:</b>	<b>Sentence Skills:</b>	<b>Elementary Algebra:</b>
		<b>Arithmetic :</b>
		<b>College-level Math:</b>
<b>ESL Reading:</b>	<b>ESL Writing:</b>	<b>Speech:</b>
<b>WORKSHOPS</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>DATE ATTENDED</b>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
<b>TUTORING</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>TUTOR'S SIGNATURE</b>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
<b>CLUBS/ACTIVITIES/TRIPS/ EVENTS</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>ATTACHAED FORM</b>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
<b>ADVISING SESSION</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>ADVISOR'S SIGNAUTRE</b>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

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Day 4: Pledge Card Handout

Instructions: Look over each heading and complete the statement.

**Pledge for graduating in the Class of \_\_\_\_\_**

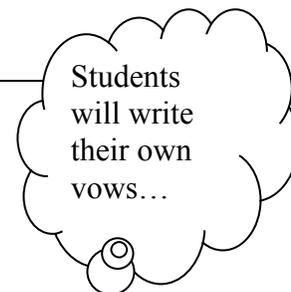
**I am...**

**Vowing to...**

**Vowing to...**

**Vowing to...**

**I will succeed in completing my degree in \_\_\_\_\_**



## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

### PODER Student Training Evaluations

**Instructions:** Please give us your honest reactions and comments. Your comments will help us to evaluate this program and improve future programs.

1. How appropriate was the subject to your needs and interest? (Topics, concerns about college, etc.)

**Excellent**

**Very Good**

**Good**

**Fair**

**Poor**

2. How do you rate presenters? (In stating objectives, knowledge of subject matter, ability to communicate, keeping the session alive and interesting, using aids, maintaining a friendly and helpful attitude, etc.)

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Program Coordinator					
Steps to Enrolling in Community College					
First Year Experience					
Million Dollar Question					
What is my major?					

3. How do you rate the facilities? (Comfort, convenience, etc.)

**Excellent**

**Very Good**

**Good**

**Fair**

**Poor**

4. How do you rate the training schedule?

**Excellent**

**Very Good**

**Good**

**Fair**

**Poor**

5. What would have improved the PODER program?

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

### PODER Student Training Evaluations

**Instructions:** Please give us your honest reactions and comments. They will help us to evaluate this program and improve future programs.

1. How appropriate was the subject to your needs and interest? (Topics, concerns about college, etc.)

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

2. How do you rate presenters? (In stating objectives, knowledge of subject matter, ability to communicate, keeping the session alive and interesting, using aids, maintaining a friendly and helpful attitude, etc.)

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
How do you feel about college?					
What courses am I taking and why?					
“Got Help?”					
Time Management					
The Art of Commination					

3. How do you rate the facilities? (Comfort, convenience, etc.)

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

4. How do you rate the training schedule?

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

5. What would have improved PODER program?

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

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- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

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	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Why am I choosing my major?					
What are you doing for fun?					
Let's have fun!					
Let's talk about Math					
Counseling: Let's Talk					

3. How do you rate the facilities? (Comfort, convenience, etc.)

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

4. How do you rate the training schedule?

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

5. What would have improved PODER program?

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

### PODER Student Training Evaluations

**Instructions:** Please give us your honest reactions and comments. They will help us to evaluate this program and improve future programs.

1. How appropriate was the subject to your needs and interest? (Topics, concerns about college, etc.)

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

2. How do you rate presenters? (In stating objectives, knowledge of subject matter, ability to communicate, keeping the session alive and interesting, using aids, maintaining a friendly and helpful attitude, etc.)

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Focusing on your major: Career Coach					
Thinking of transferring?					
How can I get an internship?					
How to stay motivated about college					
Registration for second semester					

3. How do you rate the facilities? (Comfort, convenience, etc.)

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

4. How do you rate the training schedule?

- Excellent**
- Very Good**
- Good**
- Fair**
- Poor**

5. What would have improved PODER program?

## PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility

An immersion program for Latino community college students

Evaluating Learning: PODER Rubric for Pre/Post Tests Evaluations						
Skills want them to have	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Unsatisfactory	
List the steps to enroll in college. Describe those steps or processes base on the information that you know.	4 Comments explain all the steps to enrolling in college and describes each steps in a detail.	3 Comments explain all the steps to enrolling in college. Comments does not describe the steps or processes in detail.	2 Comments explain all some of the steps. Comments describe some steps or processes with few details.	1 Comments explains 1-2 steps. Comments describe steps or processes with little description	0 Comments explain 1 step. Comments does not provide any descriptions or processes.	
Identify, compare and contrast at least three ways you can pay for college.	Comments identify, compare and contrast three ways you can pay for college.	Comments, identify, compare and contrast two way to pay for college.	Comments identify, compare, and contrast one way to pay for college.	Comments identify one way to pay for college but did not compare and contrast.	Comments do not identify ways to pay for college.	
Explain at least four factors that can influence your course and major selection process.	Comments explain 4 factors that can influence your course and major selection process.	Comments explain 3 factors that can influence your course and major selection process.	Comments explain 2 factors that can influence your course and major selection process.	Comments explain 1 factor that can influence your course and major selection process.	Comments do not explain any factors that can influence your course and major selection process.	
Identify the purpose of at least four campus resources that you need to	Comments identify the purpose of 4 campus resources that you need to	Comments identify the purpose of 3 resources that you need to connect to in	Comments identify the purpose of 2 resources that you need to connect to in	Comments identify the purpose of 1 resources that you need to connect to in college.	Comments did not identify the purpose of any resources you need to connect to in college.	

connect to in college.	connect to in college.	college.	college.			
Provide at least four effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	Comments provide 4 effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	Comments provide 3 effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	Comments provide 2 effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	Comments provide 1 effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	Comments provide 1 effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.	

**PODER: Planning, Opportunity, Direction, Education, and Responsibility**

An immersion program for Latino community college students

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**Day 1 and Day 4 Pre/Post Evaluation**

1. List the steps to enroll in college.  

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2. Describe those steps or processes based on the information that you know.  

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3. Identify, compare, and contrast at least three ways you can pay for college.  

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4. Explain at least four factors that can influence your course and major selection process.  

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5. Identify the purpose of at least four resources that you need to connect to in college.  

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6. Provide at least four effective ways to communicate with staff, faculty, and parents while in college.  

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**PODER PowerPoint Slides**



**P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION,  
EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY**

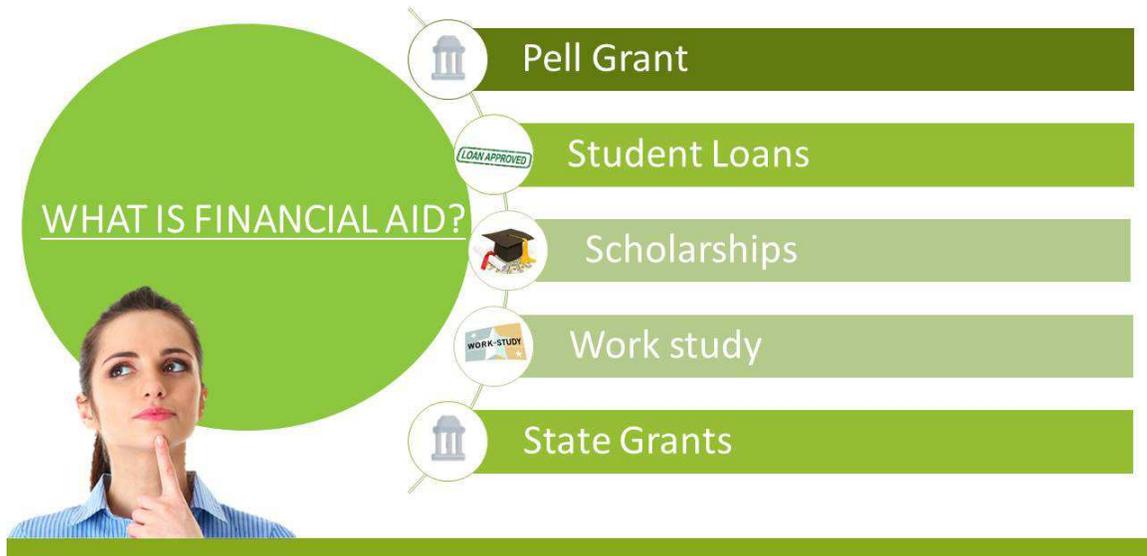
**AN IMMERSION PROGRAM FOR LATINO COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION:  
HOW DO YOU PAY FOR COLLEGE?**



## WHAT ARE THE WAYS A STUDENT CAN PAY FOR COLLEGE?

- ❖ Financial Aid
- ❖ Payment plan
- ❖ Credit Card
- ❖ Money Order
- ❖ Employer or other organizations



## HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID?

- ❖ *You will adapt this page to your own institution.*
- ❖ Step 1 Go to [www.pgcc.edu](http://www.pgcc.edu) and login into your owl link account.
- ❖ Step 2 Click **Credit Student**. Next check **My College Documents** for any forms that are begin requested.
- ❖ Step 3 Submit any necessary documents from **My College Documents**.
- ❖ Step 4 Go to [www.SSCwp.org](http://www.SSCwp.org) . Login as a student and complete the verification interview. Upload any documents requested
- ❖ Step 5 within 48-72 business hours your document will be reviewed and processed
- ❖ Step 6 Log back into Owl Link account to read and review you award letter.
- ❖ Step 7 Login to Owl Link and **Accept or Reject** the award.



## HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR THE PAYMENT PLAN?

- 1. Apply for the payment plan at your institution. Each institution as a different way to log- in.
- 2. Ask questions about the payment plan such as: interest, payment arrangements, and fees.
- 3. Ask about any contact numbers to the payment plan in case you need to call: cancellation, change of account information, lost or stolen card.



## HOW DO YOU GET SCHOLARSHIPS?

### 1. Application

- ❖ Most applicants require general information about you for example: name, address, grade point average, income information, social security number, and a description of you as a person.



## HOW DO YOU GET SCHOLARSHIPS?

### 2. Essays

- ❖ Write your own essay. Sample of essay questions can be as follows: why should you receive the scholarship, describe your goals if you become a recipient of the scholarship and why are you the best student for this scholarship.
- ❖ Organize and support your main points to your thesis.
- ❖ BE SPECIFIC AND BE HUMAN!!!
- ❖ Edit your essay carefully.



## HOW DO YOU GET SCHOLARSHIPS?

### 3. Letter of Recommendation

- ❖ Letters of recommendations are letters from either previous teachers, supporter such as a pastor or a mentor.
- ❖ These letters describe your character and academic goals .



Question  
and  
Answer



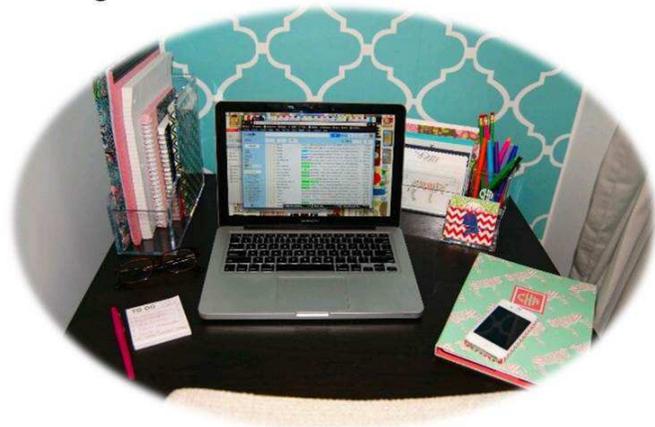
## P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION, EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY

### BUDGETING FOR COLLEGE

## HOW DO YOU BUDGET FOR COLLEGE EXPENSES?

Here are some examples of college expenses to think about?

- Books
- Cell phone
- Computer
- Food
- Gas
- Parking permits



Monthly Income	
Item	Amount
Estimated monthly net income	
Financial aid award(s)	
Other income	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

Monthly Expenses	
Item	Amount
Rent	
Utilities	
Cell phone	
Groceries	
Auto expenses	
Student loans	
Other loans	
Credit cards	
Insurance	
Laundry	
Hair cuts	
Medical expenses	
Entertainment	
Miscellaneous	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

Student Information	
Student Name	
Guardian	
School/College	

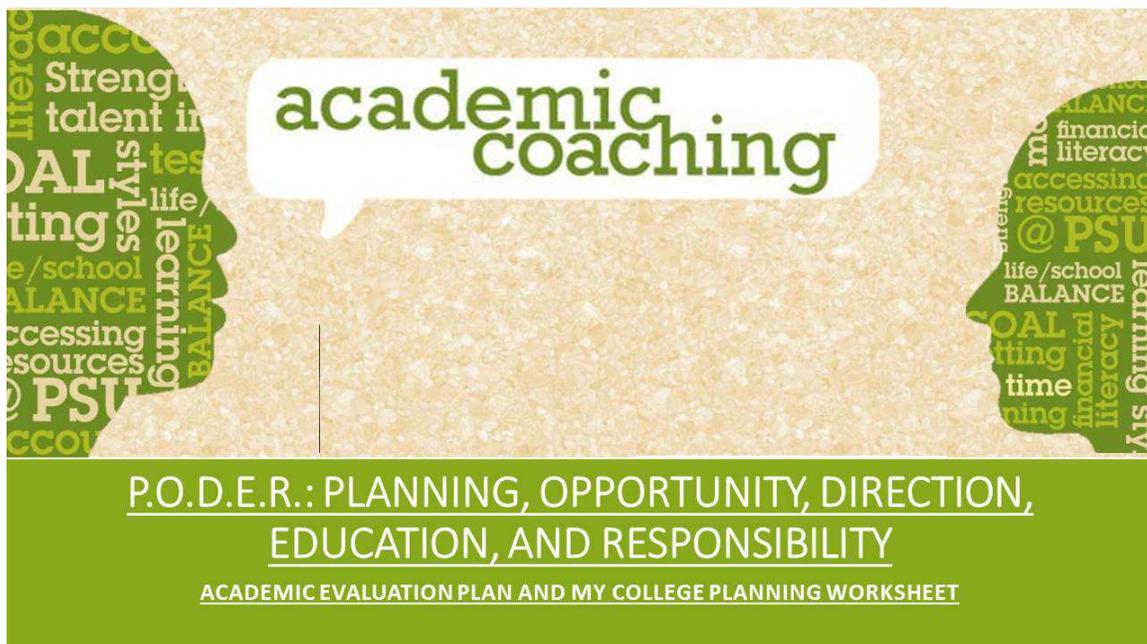
Semester Expenses	
Item	Amount
Tuition	
Lab fees	
Other fees	
Books	
Deposits	
Transportation	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

Discretionary Income	
Item	Amount
Monthly income	\$0.00
Monthly expenses	\$0.00
Semester expenses	\$0.00
<b>Difference</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

## HOW DO YOU BUDGET FOR COLLEGE EXPENSES?

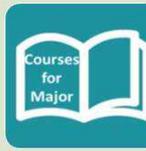
## Question and Answer



academic coaching

P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION, EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY  
ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET

				
Take all required prerequisites:	Take mathematics	Take general studies courses within the first two semester	Take courses towards your major as soon as possible	Take courses that you want to explore

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET



### **1. Take all required prerequisites:**

- Development courses, English as a second language course, and other college preparation courses



### **2. Take mathematics.**

- Taking math may be challenging
- Don't avoid taking a math course
- Don't be afraid to take math courses
- Attend all free tutoring sessions
- Attend meeting with your professor during office hours
- Arrange a peer tutoring session with your friends
- Try to teach the information to other as it will help you understand it yourself

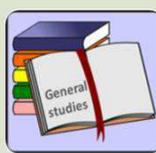
## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET



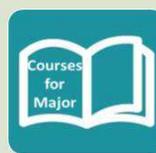
Take all  
required  
prerequisites:



Take  
mathematics



Take general  
studies  
courses  
within the  
first two  
semester

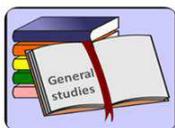


Take courses  
towards your  
major as soon  
as possible.



Take courses  
that you want  
to explore

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET?



### **3. Take general studies courses within the first two semester.**

- Take as many general education as your can fit into your schedule
- Take courses in the areas of general studies: Math, Science, English
- Take courses in the Social Science area such as: Psychology, Philosophy, and Sociology
- Take courses in the Humanities area such as: Foreign Language, Art, Literature and Music

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET



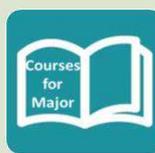
Take all  
required  
prerequisites



Take  
mathematics



Take general  
studies  
courses  
within the  
first two  
semester s

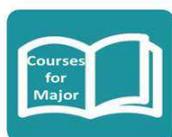


Take courses  
towards your  
major as  
soon as  
possible.



Take courses  
that you  
want to  
explore

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET



### **4. Take courses towards your major as soon as possible.**

- Explore your major
- Talk to individuals who are working in your major
- Talk to a career advisor or academic advisor about you why you want to choose your major
- Read the classified section in the newspaper to review the job opening for your major



### **5. Take courses that you want to explore**

- Participate in an internship that focus on your major
- Take a career test to discover your major
- Seek website specifically targeting careers and your major

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC EVALUATION PLAN AND MY COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHEET



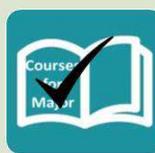
Take all  
required  
prerequisites:



Take  
mathematics



Take general  
studies  
courses  
within the  
first two  
semester



Take courses  
towards your  
major as soon  
as possible.



Take courses  
that you want  
to explore

Question  
and  
Answer



P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION,  
EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY

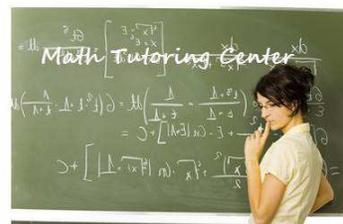
## “Got Help” Themes....

Academic Advising



1. Writing Center
2. Math Tutoring Center
3. Academic Advising
4. Career Advising
5. Transfer Advising

Transfer  
Advising  
Career Advising



Question  
and  
Answer



P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION,  
EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY

TIME MANAGEMENT

Time Management:  
Why is this so important?

1. Create a calendar and organize your schedule
2. Prioritize your assignment, activities, and appointments
3. Seek out campus resources that will help you become a better student
4. Avoid procrastination and accept setbacks: learn how to bounce back
5. Work hard and play hard



Question  
and  
Answer



P.O.D.E.R.: PLANNING, OPPORTUNITY, DIRECTION,  
EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIBILITY

MOTIVATION

## HOW TO STAY MOTIVATED IN COLLEGE?

1. Talk to counselor or advisor
2. Talk to friends
3. Talk to your parents
4. Think of your goal: YOUR DEGREE
5. Think about your time: Time is money



Question  
and  
Answer



## WHY AM I CHOOSING MY MAJOR?

1. I want this.
2. I have the skill, attributes and motivation to get this major.
3. My parents, relatives, and friends recommend that I get this degree.
4. I am passionate about my major because...
5. I want to make income to live a life style like...



## FOCUSING ON MY MAJOR

1. Think about your passion, interest and values
2. Think about your favorite subjects and classes
3. Think about what job you would like to do
4. Think about your degree:
  - BA degree normally includes liberal arts and social majors like political science, foreign languages, international relation, English, art history, sociology and cultural anthropology
  - BS degree normally includes science and math majors like engineering, anthropology, and economics



## Appendix B: Study Setting Consent Form

### You are invited to take part in a research study entitled **Why Latino American Community College Students Dropout After One Semester?**

This form is part of a process called “**informed consent**,” which allows you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named **Rosa D. Smith**, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as the Student Services Coordinator at Prince George’s Community College, University Town Center, but this study is separate from that role. The researcher is inviting students who meet the criteria below to be in the study. No students who have worked with or are currently working with the researcher in her capacity as Student Services Coordinator are eligible.

#### **Selection criteria**

✓ Students aged 18-21 years	✓ Began college studies as freshmen in fall 2012
✓ Must have taken at least one developmental course	✓ Did not enroll in the subsequent spring 2013 semester
✓ Born in the United States or are permanent residents	✓ Enrolled in at least six credit-hours
✓ Mother or father did not graduate from college	✓ Received financial aid
✓ Hispanic or Latino (self-identified)	✓ No students who have worked with or are currently working with the researcher in her capacity as Student Services Coordinator are eligible

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn from the students what their reasons were for not returning to their second semester of college.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to agree with the following:

- The study will take place at the researcher’s office at Prince George Community College, University Town Center, Hyattsville, MD, Suite #200, or a local public library office space.
- The one-time interview will take approximately 45 minutes.
- An audiotape recorder to record the interviews and a notepad to write observations will be used.

- A life history calendar will be filled-out during the interview process to help participants recall their experiences of the semester.
- All information pertaining to the study will be kept under lock-and-key in the researcher's home.
- A week after each interview, the participants will be asked to verify the information from the interview via email.

***Here are some sample questions:***

1. Were there any barriers preventing you from succeeding in your first semester? What were they? *¿Hubo obstáculos que le impidió tener éxito en su primer semestre? ¿Cuáles fueron?*
2. How did you manage other responsibilities and going to school when you were a student at this college? *¿Cómo te arreglabas las otras responsabilidades como ir a la escuela cuando eras un estudiante de este colegio?*
3. Describe how you made the decision not to enroll for classes the second semester at this college? *Describe cómo te tomó la decisión de no inscribirse para las clases del segundo semestre en este colegio?*

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Prince George's Community College will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as embarrassment, stress, or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risks to your safety or wellbeing.

The interview will offer an opportunity for participants' self-examination through the interview questions. Participation in this project study will provide information for educators to make better decisions for the other Latino community college students.

**Payment:**

The researcher will provide compensation of **\$5 for the cost of bus fare or transportation to the interview site.**

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. In order to protect the participants' identities, a different name will be assigned during the interview process.

The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher for five years in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via **Rosa D. Smith, researcher, 301-455-1271 and e-mail at rosa.amo@waldenu.edu** If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

**The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep at the time of the face-to-face scheduled interview.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and feel that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this e-mail with words "**I consent,**" I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

***Preguntas de la Entrevista***

**Questions pertaining to the decision to attend college.** *Preguntas relacionadas con la decisión de asistir a la colegio.*

1. When did you decide to apply? *¿Cuándo decidió aplicar?*
2. Why did you decide to apply? *¿Por qué decidió aplicar?*
3. What were your goals? *¿Cuáles eran sus objetivos?*
4. When was your last day for attending this College? *¿Cuándo fue su último día para asistir a este colegio?*

**A. Questions pertaining to barriers to success.** *Las preguntas relacionadas con las barreras para el éxito:*

1. Were there any barriers preventing you from succeeding in your first semester? What were they? *¿Hubo obstáculos que le impidió tener éxito en su primer semestre? ¿Cuáles fueron?*
2. How did you deal with your barriers? What kind of help did you seek to deal with these barriers? *¿Cómo lidiar con los obstáculos? ¿Qué tipo de ayuda que trato de hacer frente a estos obstáculos?*
3. Whom did you talk to about your barriers inside the College environment? How helpful were these conversations? *¿Con quién hablo acerca de sus barreras dentro del proceso al colegio? ¿Qué tan útiles fueron estas conversaciones?*

4. Whom did you talk to about your barriers outside the college environment? How helpful were these conversations? *Con quién hablo acerca de sus barreras fuera del proceso del colegio? ¿Qué tan útiles fueron estas conversaciones?*

**B. Questions related to themes that students may encounter as barriers in college (working, time management, knowing how to get help from others, navigating through college, and knowing how to study). Preguntas relacionadas con los temas que los estudiantes que pueden encontrar como barreras en el colegio (de trabajo, gestión del tiempo, saber cómo obtener ayuda de otros, navegar a través al colegio, y saber cómo estudiar).**

1. Were you working while you were a student at this College? *¿Estabas trabajando mientras tu eras un estudiante de este colegio?*

2. How did you manage other responsibilities and going to school when you were a student at this College? *¿Cómo te arreglabas las otras responsabilidades como ir a la escuela cuando eras un estudiante de este colegio?*

3. Describe your steps for studying for your exams. *Describe los pasos para estudiar para los exámenes.*

4. Describe your steps for completing projects and/or homework assignments. *Describe los pasos para terminar los proyectos y/o tareas.*

5. Did you have trouble understanding what the instructor taught in class? If so, what did you do? *¿Has tenido problemas para entender lo que el instructor enseñaba en clase? Si es así, ¿qué hiciste?*

6. Whom did you go to when you had problems with coursework? How helpful were they? *¿A quién acudiste cuando tenias problemas con los cursos? ¿Qué tan útil fueron estas personas?*
7. Describe your experience finding the way to pay for college. *Describe tu experiencia de encontrar la manera de pagar el colegio.*
8. Describe your experience finding which classes you needed to take. *Describe como te fue experiencia en la búsqueda de las clases que usted necesita tomar.*
9. Describe your experience in deciding which program of study you wanted to do. *Describe tu experiencia para encontrar la manera de pagar el colegio.*
10. Describe your experience in registering for classes. *Describe tu experiencia en registrarse para las clases.*
11. Was there anything not mentioned here that influenced your decision about attending college? *¿Hubo algo que no he mencionado que lo hizo influir en su decisión de volver a ir al colegio?*

**C. Questions pertaining to factors that influenced the decision not to return.**

***Preguntas relativas a los factores que influyeron en la decisión de no regresar.***

1. Describe how you made the decision to not enroll for classes in the second semester at this College? *Describe cómo te tomó la decisión de no inscribirse para las clases del segundo semestre en este colegio?*
2. Did you have any main responsibilities after you stopped attending this College? If so, what were your responsibilities? Describe your responsibilities?

*¿Tuvo algunas responsabilidades después de dejar de asistir a este colegio? Si es así, ¿cuáles eran tus responsabilidades? Describe tus responsabilidades?*

3. Did you talk to anyone about your decision not to enroll in the second semester at this College? (for example: family member, friend, instructor, classmate, advisor)

What did they say about your decision? How important was their input in making your decision about college? *¿Has hablado con alguien acerca de su decisión de no inscribirse en el segundo semestre en el colegio? (Por ejemplo, un familiar, amigo, maestro, compañero de clase, asesor) ¿Qué es lo que dicen acerca de tu decisión?*

*¿Qué tan importante fue su aporte en la toma de su decisión sobre el colegio?*

4. How did you feel when you decided not to enroll in classes at this College for the second semester? How do you feel *now* about that decision? *¿Cómo te sentiste cuando decidió no inscribirse en las clases en este colegio para el segundo semestre? ¿Cómo te siente ahora acerca de esa decisión?*

5. How do you feel about coming back into college? *¿Cómo te sientes de volver al colegio?*

6. Describe how important money was in your decision not to enroll in the second semester. *Describe cómo el dinero era importante en su decisión de no inscribirse en el segundo semestre.*

7. Describe how important the following areas were: lack of time to attend courses, family opinion, lack of transportation, understanding coursework, fluency in English, difficulty with math. *Describe que importante fueron las siguientes áreas:*

*falta de tiempo para asistir a cursos, la opinión de la familia, falta de transporte, la comprensión de los cursos, con fluidez en Inglés y dificultad con las matemáticas?*

**D. Questions about what could have been done to help to keep you in college.**

***Preguntas sobre qué podría haber hecho para mantenerte universidad.***

1. What could this College have done to improve your experience as a student? *Qué podría haber hecho el colegio para mejorar su experiencia como estudiante?*
2. What type of help could have assisted you to stay for the second semester at this College? *¿Qué tipo de ayuda podría haberte ayudado a pasar el segundo semestre en este colegio?*
3. If you had to enroll again at this College, what would you do differently? *Si tuvieras que inscribirse de nuevo en este colegio, qué harías diferente?*
4. What advice would you give to a friend who is about to start classes at this College? *¿Qué consejo le darías a un amigo que está a punto de comenzar las clases en este colegio?*
5. What advice would you give to (an instructor, an advisor, a staff member, and an administrator) at the College to help Latino America students? *¿Qué consejo le darías tu a (un profesor, un consejero, un miembro del personal, y un administrador) en la universidad para ayudar a los estudiantes Latinos?*
6. What type of advice would you give Latino students in high school so that they can prepare to enter college? *Qué tipo de consejo le darías tu a los estudiantes Latinos en la escuela secundaria para que puedan prepararse para entrar a la universidad?*

7. What would you recommend to President Obama to make it easier for Latino American students to attend college? *¿Qué le recomendaría al Presidente Obama para que sea más fácil para los Latinos de asistir al colegio?*

Appendix D: Life History Calendar

Name	1st Week of School				Mid	Semester	Final Exam Week
Other notes							
Barrier Questions							
Barriers							
Help with Barriers							
College People Helping w/Barriers							
Outside people helping w/Barriers							
Maybe encounter as barriers							
Working							
Time Management							
Knowing how to get help							
Navigating through							
Knowing how to study							
Other responsibilities							
How did you manage the responsibilities							
Understanding instructors							
Go to person for problems w/coursework							
Influence the decisions							
family member							
friend							
instructor							
classmate							
advisor							
Could have done							
Improve experience							
Types of help							
Would do differently							
What advice to give to a friend							
advisor							
instructor							
staff member							
administration							
Latino student							

## Appendix E: Request for Data Form

**Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research****1. Anticipated Date of Submission:** Mid-spring 2013

**Project Title:** Why Latino American Community College Students Dropout  
After One Semester.

**List of variables request:** The following criteria will be used in identifying the population for the study, which will be conducted at an urban community college in Maryland:

1. **Students aged 18–21 years.** According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 46% of Latinos who go to college directly after high school enroll in community colleges (NCES, 2008b). I will use this age group because most Latino college students will be entering community college between the ages of 18 to 21 years.

2. **Began college studies in the fall of 2012 and fall 2013.** It is not known why many Latino American community college students do not come back for their second semester. I will use the fall semester that the Latino American student enrolled in community college for the first time.

3. **Did not enroll in spring 2013 and 2014 when enrolling in the previous fall semester.** This case study is focusing on those Latino American students entering the community college during fall semester but did not return for the spring semester.

4. **Born in the United States or are permanent residents.** The backgrounds and educational needs of recent immigrants are unique and tend not to fit the traditional model tested and developed by the colleges' assessment and placement levels for first-

semester students. These students, also known as *Generation 1.5*, struggle in part because they demonstrate characteristics of both first-generation and second-generation immigrants. In order to keep the Latino American student group as homogenous as possible, I will focus on Latino American students who are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents.

5. **Enrolled in at least six credit-hours.** According to the *Digest of Education Statistics*, (NCES, 2009), 48% of Latino college students were enrolled part-time compared to 37% of White, 41% of Black, 38% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 40% of Native American/Alaska Native students. Part-time students are usually older, female, Latino, financially independent, and first-generation (Radford et al., 2010).

6. **First generation** (parents did not graduate from college). The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) noted that Latino students were higher achievers when they received encouragement from parents and that parent representation increased the number of Latinos meeting academic proficiency. All students do better with encouragement, but without prior educational background and experience, this encouragement is not as common.

7. **Received any financial aid** (Was the student receiving financial aid during the time they were enrolled in their first semester?). The financial aid opportunities for Latino college students have a direct effect on retention and persistence rates. Kurlaender (2006) found that Latinos with both low and high socioeconomic status preferred to begin their postsecondary education at a community college in comparison to other groups of

the same economic status. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), part-time students qualify for less financial aid.

**8. Hispanic or Latino (self-identified).** *Hispanic or Latino.* Hispanic or Latino are terms that describe a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). *Latino American:* for the purpose of the study, Latino students will be referred to as Latino Americans. Latino American students are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents.

**3. Dates/Semester range for data: Begin date: Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 did not return for their second semester.**

**4. Any criteria** (Health Sciences majors only) Students who self-identify as Latino American and who began college in fall 2012 and did not return in second subsequent semester and took at least one developmental course.

**5. Request date for delivery of data:** Mid-Spring 2013

## Appendix F: IRB Form for the Study Setting

1. **Project Title:** Why Latino American Community College Students Dropout after One Semester
2. **Source of Funding** (if any): There are no sources of funding for this research project.
3. **Dates of proposed project (cannot be retroactive):** Fall 2012 and 2013
4. **Describe the Scientific Purpose of the Investigation:**

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze factors perceived as obstacles to successful college completion by Latino American students. The study focuses on Latino American students who enrolled in six or more units at a community college but did not attend college after the first semester of enrollment. The research seeks to understand the barriers faced by Latino American students in their first semester of college from the perspective of the students themselves. The research process will be guided by the following questions:

1. What barriers prevented Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
  2. What factors influenced Latino American community college students from continuing to their second semester of study?
  3. What do Latino American community college students feel could have helped them continue with a second semester of study?
5. **Describe the research methodology in non-technical language ( the IRB needs to know what will be done with or to all research participants):**

The research design is a qualitative case study aimed to understand how students themselves experienced community college. Data for the study will be gathered through twenty to thirty semistructured interviews with Latino American community college students. Semistructured interviews rely on a predesigned interview guide which can be modified in the course of the interview. Participants will be selected because they were enrolled in their first semester at the college in fall 2012 and were taking six or more credits. The participants will volunteer to participate in the interviews. The participants will need to meet all of the requirements (using the criteria list from the Data Request Form) for the interviews. The researcher will contact the participants in three ways: phone, email, and letter. A letter will be sent to the participants to explain the purpose of the case study, provide information about the researcher, and invite them to participate in the case study. The participants will be notified of their scheduled interview a week in advance. They will be also reminded of the interview the day before the interview and the day of the interview by a telephone message and email. If research participants so choose, they will have the option of being interviewed in a closed room within a public library or an office space at my College. The participants will sign a consent form (Appendix B) on the day of the interview. The questions found in Appendix C will be used to guide/facilitate conversation during the interview process and follow-up questions will be also given to students when clarification is necessary.

**6. What are the potential benefits of this research (either directly to the participants, or to the body of knowledge being researched)?**

More than 15.1% of the current U.S. population is Hispanic, and it is estimated that this proportion will grow to almost 25% by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Among the areas that will be heavily affected by this demographic shift, community colleges will play a particularly important role. Hispanics who enroll in college are more likely than other groups to attend community colleges. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), among Hispanics beginning higher education immediately after high school, 47% enroll in community colleges, compared with 30% for Blacks, 28% for Whites, 25% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 24% for students of more than one race. However, Hispanics fall behind other groups in attaining a community college degree (Fry, 2002). This is part of a larger problem: as Fry noted, “Latinos are now the most poorly educated major population group in the United States” (2002, p. 1). Addressing the poor persistence rate of Latino community college students is therefore an increasingly urgent challenge.

This study provides a foundation for synthesizing, comparing, and building on successful research to address the educational needs of Latino American community college students. Identifying the obstacles to Latino American community college persistence will provide information to better equip educators to help these students. As do other groups, Latino American community college students need to persist and graduate in order to better prepare themselves to enter the workforce and increase their communities’ prosperity. Beyond the study’s contribution to existing research on Latino persistence, the research may offer an opportunity for participants’ self-examination and self-reflection. As part of

this process, participants may feel inclined to return to community college and complete their degree. In the event that participants express an interest in returning, the researcher will offer the necessary information for them to pursue their educational goals.

**7. What are the anticipated risks (risks include, physical, psychological, or economic harm; be certain to describe the steps taken to protect participants from these risks).** Participants may experience emotional discomfort when talking about challenging experiences. If this situation arises, the researcher will communicate to participants that they are free to stop the interview at any time.

▪ **Describe how participants will be recruited (must include total number and age of all participants to be recruited and any compensation participants will be provided):**

The researcher will need to obtain a list from the community college's database containing the names of Latino students (using the criteria list from the Data Request Form) who enrolled in fall 2012 and fall 2013 and did not return in second subsequent semester. I will interview five Latino American community college students to volunteer for an semistructured interview. The researcher will not provide the participants with any compensation for their participation in the case study. Transportation will be given up to the cost of \$5.00, if needed.

**9. Describe why it is necessary that the Primary Investigator (s) and/or Supervisor know the identity of the participants (not required for Exempt Reviews):**

The Primary Investigator needs the names of the students in order to invite them to participate in the project study.

**10. Describe how the data collected for this project will be securely stored and how and when it will be destroyed:**

The researcher will use audiotape to record the interviews, and use a notepad to write observations. The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The recording of each interview will be transcribed within 1 week of the event. The tapes and the transcripts of the interviews will be kept in a locked location in the researcher's home. Also, the interview transcripts will be examined and compared several times by the researcher and a peer reviewer to identify concrete themes and patterns. A summary of the main key themes of the study will be provided to the participants for their review and accuracy of the information. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after 5 years the project study is completed.

**11. Describe the informed consent process:**

**Data collection, recorded and access to participants**

I will contact the participants in the following three ways: by phone, by e-mail, and by letter. A letter will be sent to potential participants to explain the purpose of the case study, provide information about me, and ask them to confirm their participation in the case study. Participants will be notified of their scheduled interviews a week in advance. They will also be reminded of the interview the day before the interview and the day of the interview with a telephone message and e-mail. If research participants so chooses, they will have the option of being interviewed in a closed room within a public library or an office space at the focus college. Participants will sign a consent form written in Spanish or in English prior to the interview. In addition, a life history calendar

was primarily to improve the recollection of the participant's "ability to place different activities within the same time frame" (Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, & Young-Demarco, 1988, p. 39), in this case, the first semester of college. Using the life history calendar, participants will be asked to recall information, connect ideas from one event to another, and visualize the connections of events through a color grid tailored to obtain the information required. I plan to conduct the research approximately mid-spring 2013.

### **System for Tracking**

Participants will also be given an opportunity to ask questions during the interview. I will use audiotape to record the interviews and use a notepad to write observations. The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The recording of each interview will be transcribed within 1 week of the event.

### **Data Analysis**

I will approach the data analysis seeking patterns, themes, and relationships in the transcripts. Hatch (2002) stated that "data analysis means organizing and interpreting data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques or generate theories" (p.148). As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005), the researcher uses the same focus in answering the research questions as a method of refining the data (p. 209). Using the semistructure questions, observational notes taken during the interview, the chart from the life history calendar and the transcript, the data analysis will be refined many times to ensure that all the information was coded properly. To keep data organized, retrievable, and manipulable, a file-folder system and colored highlighters will be used.

The organizing, interpreting, and refining process reveals common themes found in participants' interviews. In order to refining common themes, NVivo 10, a software which supports qualitative research by organizing content from interviews (QRS international, n.d.). was used to find analyze themes. Discrepant or negative cases was used to enhance credibility to the project study and to challenge the research's findings. In project study, two participants interviewed did not meet all the criteria requirements. As a result, these participants were not included in the findings. Creswell (2003) recommended that discrepant or negative information is used to discuss contrary information adding credibility of an account for a reader (p. 196). Interviews, observational notes, audiotaping, life historical calendar analysis, analysis software and a peer reviewer will be used to establish consistency and credibility in the findings.

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## Appendix G: Certificate of Completion

Protecting Human Subject Research Participants

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## Appendix H: Letter of Cooperation from the Study Setting

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**Rosa D Smith**

**From:** William A Richman  
**Sent:** Friday, August 30, 2013 10:12 AM  
**To:** Rosa D Smith  
**Cc:** William A Richman; Janet L Dinkins  
**Subject:** IRB Acceptance

Ms. Rosa Smith,  
I have received your IRB application for the project entitled "*Why Latino American Community College Students Drop After One Semester.*" I am pleased to inform you that this project has been approved pending final IRB approval from your degree granting institution. Please provide a copy of this approval letter before beginning your project. If you wish to make any changes in this protocol, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the IRB can assess the impact on your project. In addition, you must report to the IRB chair, W. Allen Richman, any unexpected complications arising from the project that affect your participants. If data collection or other direct contact with participants will not be completed within one year of the date of this letter, please notify the IRB chair, W. Allen Richman, to request a continuation of this project.

Thank you and good luck with your research,

Allen

**W. Allen Richman, Ph.D.**  
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Appendix I: Data Use Agreement from Study Setting

1. **Anticipated Date of Submission:** Mid-spring 2013
2. **Project Title:** Why Latino American Community College Students Dropout  
After One Semester

**List of variables request:** The following criteria will be used in identifying the population for the study, which will be conducted at an urban community college in Maryland:

The fall 2012 semester will be used as the date that the participants first entered college. The following criteria will be used in identifying the population for the study, which will be conducted at a suburban community college in Maryland:

- **Students aged 18-21 years.**

This age range has been chosen in order to focus on the most typical group of Latino Americans at community colleges, those entering directly from high school. The range was chosen because high school students typically are 18-21 years of age after graduating from high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 60% of Latino high school graduates enter directly into college, and 46% of those Latinos who go to college directly after high school enroll in community colleges (NCES, 2008b). At the setting college, 25.6% of the entire student population fall under the age 20 years old (*Fact Book*, 2012).

- **Began college studies as freshmen in fall 2012 and fall 2013.**

Focusing on Latino American student who have recently stop attending will facilitate access easier to current information about the student. Additionally, the participants will be more likely to remember the information from a recent semester (fall 2012) than trying to remember information from three or four semesters ago.

- **Must take at least one developmental course.**

- The rationale for this criterion is to ensure that the selected participants are representative of the typical Latino American student. According to the latest data from the setting institution, 93.7% of first-time college students who took the placements placed into at least one developmental course (Prince George's Community College, 2012).

- **Did not enroll in the subsequent semester spring 2013 and spring 2014.**

The purpose of the study is to identify the reasons why Latino American students drop out and to investigate what barriers prevented them from continuing to their second semester of study.

- **Born in the United States or are permanent residents.**

In order to keep the Latino American student group as homogenous as possible, the focus will be on Latino America students who are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents. However, it is important to understand that this case study will not focus on issues of immigrant status and undocumented students as these students provide a different set of challenges.

This is, in part, because participants must be financial aid eligible and in part because of myriad other issues raised by immigration status.

- **Enrolled in at least six credit-hours.**

Focusing on students who are enrolled in at least six credit-hours ensures that the study population could benefit from Federal financial aid if eligible, as six credits is the minimum allowed. Full-time students will not be used in order to maintain a homogenous group. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), part-time students qualify for less financial aid. At the same time, this criterion recognizes that a great many students in the target population will be studying part-time. According to the *Digest of Education Statistics* (NCES, 2009), 48% of Latino college students were enrolled part-time compared to 37% of White, 41% of Black, 38%.

- **First-generation college student.**

For the purpose of this case study, a first-generation college student is a student for whom neither parent enrolled (Nuñez, 2011) and graduated from college (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). During the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately half of all Latino college students had parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or less (Santiago, 2011). This case study focuses on first-generation because the majority of Latino students attending community colleges are first-generation students.

- **The criteria make the participant eligible if the student received financial aid.**

The financial aid opportunities for most Latino college students have a direct effect on student access to and success in postsecondary education (Santiago, 2013). This study will explore, in part, the role of financial aid in participants' decisions to dropout.

- **Hispanic or Latino (self-identified).**

For the purpose of the study, Latino students will be referred to as *Latino Americans*. Latino American students are either U.S. citizens, U.S. naturalized citizens, or U.S. permanent residents. "Hispanic or Latino are [terms that] describe a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011, p.2).

- **No students who have worked with or are currently working** with the researcher in her capacity as Student Services Coordinator are eligible.

**3.Dates/Semester range for data: Began in Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 and did not return for second semester.**

**4. Any criteria** (Health Sciences majors only,) Students who self-identify as Latino American and who began college in fall 2012 and did not return in second subsequent semester and took at least one developmental course.

**5. Request date for delivery of data:** Mid-Spring 2013