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Barriers That Prevent Adult Latino Students from Attaining a College Degree

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College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Laly J. Rodriguez

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2013

MS, Walden University, 2005

BSW, Methodist College, 2000

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The U.S. Latino community is underrepresented among those with college degrees, and high college dropout rates among Latinos have contributed to that underrepresentation. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why Latinos are at increased risk for dropping out of college compared to their White counterparts. Tinto's theory of student integration and the geometric model of student persistence and achievement were used to guide the study. Data were collected from 12 Latino students at risk for dropping out at a college in the northeastern United States who were enrolled in a degree program but were considering dropping out before completion. through semi-structured individual interviews and from documents that addressed retention efforts to increase students' persistence and degree completion at the study site. Analyses included manual coding, open coding, and computer-assisted coding with NVivo 11. Findings indicated several barriers to college completion: (a) financial difficulties, (b) familial responsibilities and financial support, and (c) lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. Results and recommendations were compiled as a white paper to distribute to school administrators and stakeholders. Findings may be used by administrators and stakeholders to increase Latino students' retention and graduation rates. The project recommendation was to implement a Latino support program in the northeastern U.S. colleges led by Latino mentors who were college graduates. The possible implications of this support program for Latino students are increased retention rates and opportunities to expand their social network with students going through similar struggles.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to God and my special angels. A special feeling of gratefulness to my awesome husband, Alexander, and my wonderful daughter, Krizzia. Thanks for those words of reinforcement and push for tenacity ringing in my ears, and for never leaving my side during this long journey. I also dedicate this study to my parents, sisters, nieces, and special friends who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done and for being there for me throughout the entire doctoral program. All of you have been my best cheerleaders.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Bishop &
Surfield, 2013; Motel, 2012; Stepler & Brown, 2016). There are about 55 million Latinos
in the United States, or 17% of the general population, compared to Whites who compose
64% of the general population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014;
Stepler & Brown, 2016). Latinos are not currently the dominant ethnic group in the
United States; however, their numbers are rapidly increasing at a rate of 44.1% (Bishop
& Surfield, 2013), and researchers have expected that the Latino population will expand
to 129 million by 2060, representing 30% of the projected population (U.S. Census
Bureau, 2012). Latinos are also the youngest ethnic group in the country, with around
32% being 17 years old and younger, compared to 26% of Blacks, 20% of Asians, and
19% of Whites (Patten, 2016). The percentage of Latinos enrolled in college has
increased over the years, from 4% in 1976 to 16% in 2013 (NCES, 2014).

The dropout rates for Latinos in college remain disproportionately large relative
to other ethnic groups in the United States (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).
Researchers have found that Latinos exhibit lower rates of degree completion and higher
rates of dropping out compared to other ethnicities, with only 29.2% of Latinos who
started college in 2006 graduating within 4 years, compared to 46.3% of Asians and
42.6% of Whites (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The low graduation rates for
Latinos are a concern because they have the highest number of college enrollees among

all ethnic groups in the United States (Fry & Lopez, 2012; NCES, 2014). Adding to this concern is that Latinos are also a large, rapidly growing, and youthful population that represent an untapped resource for the U.S. workforce (Hinojosa, Rapaport, Jaciw, LiCalsi, & Zacamy, 2016; Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013). By 2020, researchers expect that at least 65% of all jobs in the country will require postsecondary education and training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013); it will be difficult to meet this demand without increasing the number of Hispanics with college educations.

According to data gathered in 2012, 29.2% of the U.S. population ages 25 years and above possessed a bachelor's degree or higher; of these individuals, 13.9% were Latino; 50.6% were White; 19.9% were Black; and 15.6% were Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and other races (NCES, 2014). Latinos represent a substantial part of the future U.S. workforce (Bishop & Surfield, 2013). The problem of underrepresentation of Latinos in the college graduate population exists nationwide, particularly in the northeastern United States, which was the site chosen for this study.

The Local Problem

According to data collected in 2014, the northeastern United States has 3,596,677 residents, 540,224 (15%) of whom are Latinos (Stepler & Brown, 2016). The northeastern United States has the 18th highest Latino population in the United States (Stepler & Brown, 2016). According to data collected during the academic school year 2012 to 2013, 21,815 Latinos were enrolled in colleges across the northeastern United

States (Santiago, Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). Overall, this number represented 13% of the total U.S. collegiate undergraduate population; however, this 13% is not considered when determining the graduation rate of Latinos in the northeastern U.S. school, which is 15% (Santiago et al., 2015). The possible association between low percentages of enrollment and graduation for Latino students has not been considered. In 2013, 37.5% of northeastern U.S. residents 25 years and older had attained at least a bachelor's degree, which was higher than the national rate of 29.6% (NCES, 2014). However, only 15.3% of northeastern U.S. Latinos 25 years and older had at least a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2014). This percentage was slightly higher than the overall national average for Latinos, which was 14%, but still well below the overall national average of 29.6% (NCES, 2014).

Regarding raw numbers, 61% more Latinos graduated with a bachelor's degree in school year 2012 to 2013 (2,977 Latino students) compared to the school year 2008 to 2009 (1,850 Latino students; Santiago et al., 2015). However, graduation rates of Latinos in the northeastern United States have not increased proportionally to Latino students enrolling in college. In the school year 2008 to 2009, only 7.2% of northeastern U.S. Latinos received an undergraduate degree, while in the school year 2012 to 2013, this number increased to only 9.6% (Santiago et al., 2015). These numbers included "certificates below the baccalaureate level, associate degrees, and baccalaureate degrees from degree-granting, public, private non-profit, and private for-profit institutions" (Santiago et al., 2015, p. 14). At the local community college, the assistant research coordinator (personal communication, August 28, 2016) estimated that the graduation

rates in the northeastern United States were 33% for Latinos and 55% for Whites; however, these numbers were not definitive because these could include degree attainment other than a bachelor's degree.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE, 2013) found that, in 2012, only 57.7% of Latinos enrolled in college during their first years after graduating from high school, which was low compared to rates for Whites (76.7%), Asians (82.9%), and American Indians or Native Alaskans (67.6%), multiracial students (66.1%). The rate was higher compared to Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (52.4%). Researchers also found that over 50% of Asian and White students in the northeastern United States graduated within 6 years compared to 21.5% of African Americans and 19.6% of Latinos (CSDE, 2013). This finding indicated that Latinos were taking longer to graduate and were often not graduating at all.

At the study site of a public state school located in the northeast, the graduation rates for Latinos were lower than those of other ethnic groups (Assistant Research Coordinator, personal communication, August 28, 2016). According to the assistant research coordinator for the research department located at the study site, Latino students dropped out more often than did students of other ethnicities, and the reasons for this were complex and difficult to identify. According to the coordinator (personal communication, August 30, 2016) of the college's Latino and Puerto Rican programs and associate professor of sociology, her school enrolled 10,000 students, 20% of whom were ethnic minorities, including 8% African American, 7% Latino, 3% Asian, and 2% other.

The school enrolled disproportionately lower numbers of Latinos (7%), which was less than half of the 15% Latino population in the northeastern United States.

The school's Latino population steadily increased, with 963 Latino students during the Spring 2011 semester and 1,353 Latino students during the Spring 2016 semester (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). However, college dropout rates for Latinos in this school remained disproportionately high, as 48% of Latino students dropped out every year, which was more than double the dropout rate for Whites (21%) and African Americans (20%; Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Based on internal surveys conducted among students at the study site, some factors for the low graduation rate of Latinos included financial problems, lack of family support, and the existence of language barriers (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

Researchers have shown a continued underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education both nationally (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013) and at the study site (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016; see Santiago et al., 2015). Latino enrollment at the study site has increased steadily, but dropout rates have largely remained the same (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). The constant growth of the Latino population in northeastern United States represents an opportunity to teach and train the future workforce in this region. However, the dropout problem was present at the study site, as

48% of its Latino students drop out every year (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

Researchers have examined the possible barriers faced by Latinos in different times of their lives in the United States and possible interventions and policies that leadership can develop to remove the barriers (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Molina & Pedraza, 2012; Nuñez et al., 2013). However, there remains a gap in the literature in understanding the barriers faced by Latinos in their pursuit of higher education, notably from the viewpoints of Latinos who have dropped out (Molina & Pedraza, 2012). The purpose of the current study was to explore the perceptions of Latino students to provide a clearer understanding of their needs in higher education.

Rationale

Latinos are the largest, fastest growing, and youngest ethnic minority group in the United States (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Patten, 2016; Stepler & Brown, 2016). However, Latinos are underrepresented among those with a college degree (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013). Only 14.4% of Latinos age 25 years and above have a bachelor's degree or more, compared to 63% of Asians, 41% of Whites, and 22% of Blacks (NCES, 2014).

At the study site, Latinos remained underrepresented in higher education despite having a large number of college-age individuals who enrolled in a college. At the study site, the dropout rate for Latinos was 48%, compared to 21% for Whites and 20% for African Americans, and only 14% of Latino students were graduating within 4 years

(Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). The reasons for disproportionate dropout rates for Latinos at this college were unknown, although they likely included financial difficulties, lack of family support, and language barriers (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Given the lack of understanding of why Latino students were dropping out, the underrepresentation of Latinos at the study site was likely to persist. This issue would have negative effects on the county and state, as leadership would lack capable and qualified employees to serve in the workforce.

Latinos represent a large pool of potential future college graduates who will enter the workforce and fill a gap in needed skilled labor. Given the large and rapidly growing population of Latinos in the United States, they must be highly educated and qualified for future jobs in the nation (Mesa, Torres, & Smithwick, 2016), most of which will require postsecondary education and training (Carnevale et al., 2013). Latinos who do not have college degrees in the United States represent an untapped resource that can be utilized for the nation's future workforce to compete more effectively in the global economy (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2012; O'Keefe, 2013; Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011).

I gathered perceptions of adult Latinos ages 18 to 34 years who were at risk of dropping out of college regarding the barriers that they faced. Researchers have studied possible barriers faced by Latinos in their pursuit of undergraduate degrees; however, few have focused on understanding the issue from the viewpoints of Latino dropouts (Molina

& Pedraza, 2012). Findings from the current study may be used by policymakers and school administrators to develop interventions designed to address the underrepresentation of Latinos among those with a college degree.

Definitions

Foreign born/first generation/immigrant: Interchangeable terms that refer to people born outside of the United States as noncitizens, including Puerto Ricans (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Hispanic/Latino: Interchangeable terms that have been used by leaders in the United States to refer to Americans whose roots can be traced back to any of the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, regardless of race. Such countries include Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, Passel, & Lopez, 2012). The term *Latino* was used throughout this study for consistency.

Native born: People who are citizens of the United States at birth, which includes people who were born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories, and those born in other counties to at least one U.S. citizen parent (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Second generation: People born in the United States, with at least one first-generation parent (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012).

Third generation: People born in the United States to parents who have also been born in the United States (Taylor, Lopez, et al., 2012).

Significance

Latinos are underrepresented among Americans with at least a college degree, both nationally and in the northeastern United States, which was the setting for the present study (Fry & Lopez, 2012). According to data gathered in 2012, 29.2% of the U.S. population ages 25 years and above possessed a bachelor's degree or higher, of which 13.9% were Latinos, well below the 50.6% rate for Asians, 32.6% rate for Whites, and 18.8% for Blacks (NCES, 2014). By exploring the experiences and perceptions of Latinos from the northeastern United States who dropped out of college regarding the barriers they faced, I provided a more detailed understanding of the needs of Latinos in pursuing higher education. Findings may be used to develop interventions and policies in northeastern U.S. colleges to address the Latino underrepresentation among those with college degrees and to mitigate barriers that Latinos face when pursuing higher education. Findings from this study may also be used to guide studies in other states related to the underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education and to shape interventions aimed at increasing graduation rates of Latinos.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this qualitative project study. These questions were formulated to identify barriers that Latinos from the northeastern United States face when pursuing their college degrees. The data collected were used to address the problem of Latino underrepresentation among those with college degrees in the northeastern United States.

RQ1: What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out of college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled?

RQ2: What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The following theories were used as the conceptual frameworks for this study: Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration and the geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Tinto's theory of student integration. Tinto (1975) developed the theory of student integration to understand a student's decision to continue or drop out of school, outside of simple academic reasons (Sidelinger, Frisby, & Heisler, 2016). Tinto (1993) estimated that more than 60% of student dropouts were motivated by reasons that were not academic in nature, such as financial burdens, social and cultural difficulties, language difficulties, and lack of motivation. These factors could influence the pursuit of academic goals. Tinto (1993) also noted that being an immigrant and/or being part of a largely immigrant family had an effect on dropout rates; this concept was applicable to the present study, as many Latinos fell into those categories.

A student's commitment to academic goals generally comes from experiences before college, such as familial supports and personality types, as some families and

personality types value academic achievement more than other kinds of achievement (Young, Klossner, Docherty, Dodge, & Mensch, 2013). However, once a student enters college, this commitment may be strengthened or weakened depending on how he or she achieves academic and social integration within the college (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014). Without academic or social integration, students feel disengaged and tend to drop out more often (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014).

Institutional leaders can influence the educational and social integration of students by embracing or developing measures to facilitate the process (Carpi, Ronan, Falconer, Boyd, & Lents, 2013). Both kinds of integration can be experienced through formal and informal means. The institutional leaders can bring about formal academic and social integration by promoting extracurricular activities and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment, while informal academic and social integration can occur through student interactions with peers, teachers, and school staff (Carpi et al., 2013).

Tinto's theory was one of the first to underscore the importance of factors beyond academic achievement in a student's decision to continue or drop out of college (Carpi et al., 2013). Carpi et al. (2013) studied a college retention program designed by John Jay College of Criminal Justice, which was based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. The college leadership developed a number of institutional interventions to increase minority retention rates of undergraduates (Carpi et al., 2013).

The interventions included advisement materials, peer mentoring programs, departmental student science awards, and research symposiums to address the barriers related to knowledge about college and career (Carpi et al., 2013). The intervention of 2+2 voicing with community colleges addressed the barriers related to work and family commitments and financial stress (Carpi et al., 2013). The interventions of the math and science resource center, the paced science courses, the faculty development sessions, and the math/science curriculum alignment addressed the barriers related to school preparation and financial stress (Carpi et al., 2013). The interventions of programs for research initiatives of science majors and undergraduate research course credit addressed barriers related to knowledge about college and career, as well as work and family commitments and financial stress (Carpi et al., 2013).

Carpi et al. (2013) found that the interventions the John Jay College of Criminal Justice developed based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student intervention were substantially effective, although these data were only preliminary. Another factor that might have contributed to the results obtained by Carpi et al. (2013) was the focus on science and technology courses. Leadership-developed interventions might not have the same effects on minority students in non-STEM courses; for example, Latino students with pronounced accents might have a harder time integrating with their nonaccented peers if their course of study is more reliant on verbal communication (Carpi et al., 2013). Stereotypes and biases against Latinos might be harder to overcome if judgments about

their capabilities are meted out in more subjective courses, such as those in the humanities (Carpi et al., 2013).

The question of how to integrate Latino students academically and socially may depend on the degree program. Given the importance of academic and social engagement for students from ethnic minority groups in their pursuit of academic success, I explored how Latino students achieve this goal. Academic and social factors influence all college students and their desires to continue their education; however, these factors might be more pressing for minority students, and their cultures at home might differ from the social and academic environments at school (Tinto, 1993). If the goals and values espoused by the school are different than the goals and values the student is taught at home, the student may feel isolated and may fail to engage in his or her education (Tinto, 1993). For example, if a student comes from a family background that values collectivism, he or she may feel that an education that emphasizes individualism and competition is out of touch with his or her needs, and therefore may not engage as strongly in college, which may lead to dropping out of school.

Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, and Burgos-Cienfuegos (2015) conducted an exploratory study to reveal how first-generation Latino college students navigated the conflict between family obligations and their drive to excel academically. The results indicated it was difficult to attain a perfect balance between obligations at home and school, which resulted in tension arising from choosing one over the other. One result of this issue was the inability of certain students, such as Latinos, to integrate fully within

their schools because of internal stress, inability to handle tension at home, or feelings of unworthiness as they compared themselves to the achievements of their nonminority peers. Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration revealed a multitude of factors that influenced students' sense of integration outside their academic capabilities and effects on student retention. Without interventions to address tensions that arise in Latino students from factors outside of the academic achievement, the high rates of Latino student attrition may continue.

The theory of student integration might be limited due to recent advances in understanding student achievement. Most noteworthy were the limitations generated from how Tinto's (1993) model was developed, which was from research on full-time, 4-year college students, most of them European-American in origin (Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, & Deil-Amen, 2014). Given the changing demographics of the United States, 2-year colleges have become more common to accommodate the large numbers of students who cannot attend 4-year colleges (Stuart et al., 2014). Research has shown that factors other than academic and social integration are just as important, especially in community colleges, where more low-income students and ethnic minorities enroll, and rates of social integration among students are generally lower than for universities (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010). A significant number of community college students have jobs or other personal responsibilities they must balance with their schooling, which means they commonly spend less time socializing with their peers.

Moreover, completion rates are significantly lower in community colleges than universities (D. Jenkins & Rodriguez, 2013). Among low-income students and minorities, institutional factors play a larger role for student retention, such as policies enacted by administrators, capabilities of faculty and staff, and legislative support by the government (Karp et al., 2010; Stuart et al., 2014).

Swail et al.'s geometric model of student persistence and achievement. According to Swail et al. (2003), three primary factors determine whether a student continues or drops out of school, namely cognitive, social, and institutional factors. The most important part of the model is the base where the institutional factors are found; these factors provide support to students to realize their academic and social success (Sanford & Hunter, 2011). Many different forces act within these three factors to influence the student's experience in education.

Swail et al.'s (2003) theory provided another perspective regarding why Latino students might drop out of college. Tinto (1993) underscored the influence of cultural differences, while Swail et al. discussed cognitive, social, and institutional factors. These factors might be culturally influenced; similarly, cultural differences highlighted by Tinto could be altered, modified, exacerbated, or mitigated by Swail et al.'s cognitive, social, and institutional factors. I considered the two theories in conjunction for the present study.

For cognitive factors, there are the following forces: "academic rigor, quality of learning, aptitude, content knowledge, critical-thinking ability, technology ability, study

skills, learning skills, time management, and academic-related extracurricular activities" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77). For social factors, there are the following forces: "financial issues, educational legacy, attitude toward learning, religious background, maturity, social coping skills, communication skills, attitude toward others, cultural values, expectations, goal commitment, family influence, peer influence, and social lifestyle" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77). For institutional factors, there are the following forces: "financial aid, student services, recruitment and admissions, academic services, and curriculum and instruction" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77). By understanding the multiple forces acting within the three factors of the student experience, a clearer idea might be gained on how to understand the barriers perceived by Latinos regarding higher education. This improved understanding would be a useful starting point in developing policies and interventions to mitigate factors perceived to limit Latinos from pursuing and completing college degrees.

An example of how Latinos can be handicapped academically compared to their European-American peers can be seen in the large numbers of first- and second-generation Latino families. As opposed to their nonminority peers, Latinos, especially those from the first generation, may feel alienated from American culture and rely on their children or other younger family members to assist them in navigating the new culture, which is called parentification (Titzmann, 2012). Parentification is included in many of the Latino students' social factors. The added responsibility may result in higher levels of self-efficacy for Latino students, which may help them achieve academically;

however, parentification could also prevent them from fulfilling their potential by undermining the parental authority that traditional Latino families value and placing undue stress on Latino children (Titzmann, 2012). Through interventions based on the three factors outlined in Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, an educational system that caters to the specific context of Latino students in the United States might be developed. Latinos are expected to become the ethnic majority group by 2060; therefore, leadership should take steps to ensure that the next generation of Americans is highly educated and ready for the challenges that U.S. society will present.

Review of the Broader Problem

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority population (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Motel, 2012; Stepler & Brown, 2016), the fastest growing population (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and the youngest population (Orchowski, 2014; Patten, 2016) in the United States. However, despite their large numbers and rapid growth rate, Latinos continue to be underrepresented in higher education (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013) and overrepresented in remedial courses (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). Moreover, researchers have revealed that Latinos exhibit lower rates of degree completion and higher rates of dropping out despite having the highest number of college enrollees among ethnic groups in the United States (Fry & Lopez, 2012; NCES, 2014).

A number of challenges remain for Latinos to pursue higher education effectively in the United States. Latinos represent a large pool of resources for the nation's future

workforce that leadership can use to compete more effectively in the global economy (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2012; O'Keefe, 2013; Passel et al., 2011) in which most jobs will require at least a college degree (Carnevale et al., 2013). Addressing this problem requires a thorough understanding of the barriers faced by Latinos regarding their pursuits in higher education. Based on the literature reviewed, the underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education may be an effect of barriers that Latinos face in the United States based on differences in culture and the existence of structural racism. Scholars have provided evidence of the effects of these factors. In this literature review, I discuss specific barriers that Latinos have faced in their pursuits of higher education based on research conducted in the United States.

The following online databases and search engines were used to identify the texts reviewed for this section: EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, PsychArticles, and ScienceDirect. The search terms used to find articles included *Latinos*, *higher education*, *Hispanics*, *educational barriers*, *academic barriers*, *community college*, *Latinos in community college*, *Latinos in undergraduate education*, *Latinos in the United States*, *Latinos in secondary education*, *Latino students*, *student retention*, *Latino barriers*, *structural racism*, *theory of student integration*, and *geometric model of student persistence and achievement*. I chose these terms because these were closely related to the problem of this study. Of the literature reviewed, 87.5% of sources were published between 2012 and 2016, while 12.5% were published earlier.

The rest of the review is organized around four main topics. First, there is a discussion on Latino culture in the United States, as per Tinto's (1993) perspective. Second, there is a discussion on the barriers that Latinos have generally faced in the United States, especially structural racism (again, per Tinto, 1993). Third, there is a discussion on the barriers that Latinos have faced regarding education in the United States (these relate to both Swail et al. [2003] and Tinto [1993]). Fourth, there is a discussion on the implications of the study (relating to Swail et al., 2003). Finally, a summary and a short transition for the next section is also provided.

Latino Culture

I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of Latino culture because, as seen in the theories put forward by Tinto (1993) and Swail et al. (2003), the culture from which students came could influence their academic experiences and whether they succeeded academically or dropped out. The term Latino, which was used interchangeably with the term Hispanic, was used to denote peoples whose ancestors originated from any one of the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, et al., 2012).

The concept of a traditional Latino culture was well established in the literature, although the degree with which an individual or family adhered to it varied depending on other variables, such as levels of acculturation (Fraga et al., 2010). The current understanding of traditional Latino cultural values was helpful in describing the various norms and practices shared by most Latinos (Organista, 2007) and was employed by

scholars as an explanation for the differences in perception between Latinos and other groups in the United States.

According to Organista (2007), Latino culture emphasizes five values, namely, *familismo, personalismo, simpatia, respeto,* and *collectivismo.* Individual cultures may privilege certain emotions and viewpoints that can be passed down from generation to generation (De Leersnyder, Kim, & Mesquita, 2015; VanderWege et al., 2014). Ethnic minorities must understand and value their cultures of origin as they journey toward adulthood to have a strong support system (Unger, 2014). Minorities should be familiar with American culture, as this familiarity helps them succeed (Unger, 2014). Ethnic minorities should value their cultures of origin to ground themselves in a traditional support system at home and reduce tensions between their families and communities, while assimilating with American culture to succeed. According to Unger (2014), the best scenario for ethnic minorities, such as Latinos, is brought about by appreciating both cultures at the same time.

Familismo is a value based on close relationships with the entire family, nuclear and extended (Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Olson, & Soto, 2012; Organista, 2007). *Personalismo* is a value based on developing personal relationships with other people that are not just based on benefits (Holvino, 2008). *Simpatia* is a value based on advancing pleasant interactions with everyone and avoiding conflict when possible (Holvino, 2008). *Respeto* is a value based on respecting those with higher authority, age, or social power (Holvino, 2008; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012).

Collectivismo is a value based on placing importance on the welfare of the group over the needs of any one individual (Holvino, 2008). Most Latinos are influenced by these five cultural values, though researchers have shown the degree with which Latinos are influenced by cultural values can change with higher levels of acculturation (Fraga et al., 2010).

Researchers have viewed cultural values as diametrically opposed to *traditional American values*, which are based on individualism, self-reliance, and a strong sense of personal responsibility (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Hence, American institutions, which are based on cultural values that may no longer be applicable to the nation's current demographic, may underperform. This underperformance may weaken the U.S. position in the global market.

Scholars have noted that American institution leaders have failed to include minorities, specifically Latinos, adequately. These include diverse fields, such as business (Avery, Mckay, Tonidandel, Volpone, & Morris, 2012; Hofacker, 2014; Knouse, 2013), health care (Cheng & Mallinckrodt, 2015; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Lorenzo et al., 2015; Shaw & Pickett, 2013), and politics (Carey, Matsubayashi, Branton, & Martinez-Ebers, 2013; Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013). Whether due to lack of awareness of lack of support structures, the underrepresentation of minorities represents a pressing issue for the United States. For example, Radanovich (2014) revealed factors behind the underrepresentation of Latinos in the field of public relations; Radanovich demonstrated that most Latino public relations professionals did not begin wanting to pursue that career path; instead,

they came on the field through other ways. In the participants' recollections of their academic histories, many did not feel that public relations work would be an apt career choice for a Latino (Radanovich, 2014). Instead, most simply chanced on their careers through other ways, such as fortuitous encounters with public relations professionals and faculty who encouraged them and helped them with that choice.

Radanovich (2014) identified the following types of barriers for Latinos in the field of public relations: misconceptions, provincialism, and language. There are few Latino practitioners of public relations; therefore, current professionals in the field may hold certain misconceptions about Latinos not being suitable for the field. Because Latinos emphasize the values of *familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto*, they may be less open to communicating with and learning from international sources that may be far away, which promotes provincialism (Moglen, 2014). Moglen (2014) defined provincialism as Latinos tending to follow the career paths of their parents, thus depriving them of new opportunities.

Teaching Latinos early on regarding the numerous possibilities for their careers can prevent the provincialism that may be engendered by the Latino culture's emphasis on the values of *familismo*, *respeto*, and *personalismo*. Latinos must be made aware of new and exciting possibilities early in their lives, so they do not rely solely on the career advice of predominantly European-American faculty and staff, who may not be able to offer them culturally sensitive or applicable advice (Murakami & Nuñez, 2014), or on their families, who may not be aware of the opportunities available for U.S. Latinos.

Recognizing the numerous benefits of being integrated into one's own Latino culture is important; however, if undue influence is exerted by this culture, Latinos may not assimilate with the rest of the country. Latinos and other ethnic minorities must belong to both their ethnic groups and their nations to be productive citizens engaged in both their personal histories and the future of their countries. Thus, Latinos can use cultural values and coping strategies from both cultures (Unger, 2014).

Latinos and the Barrier of Structural Racism

The underrepresentation of Latinos in different fields in the United States is evident. One of the fields where the underrepresentation of Latinos is most apparent is the field of business, where the American cultural values of individualism, self-reliance, personal responsibility, and straightforward communication are often promoted by organization leaders (Chambers et al., 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Tensions can arise between Latino values and the average American workplace environment, which may be instrumental in understanding how Latinos can feel excluded and choose not to enter certain fields, resulting in their underrepresentation (Chambers et al., 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Researchers have explored the underrepresentation of Latinos in business organizations, especially in professional settings, and many of the problems have emerged from the literature (Chambers et al., 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015).

Latinos still face continued stereotypes and biases in the workplace, based on color of their skin or their accents when speaking English. In the past few decades, it has become rare to encounter a self-avowed racist in the workplace, as public opinion has

strengthened social stigma against overt racists (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). A less obvious form of racism has been left over and continues to operate, sometimes without the knowledge of those who perpetrate it. For instance, in the case of African Americans, the use of such words as *thug*, *hood, shady,* and *ghetto* serve the same function, which is almost universally unacceptable in today's society, and using such words can be seen as coding racial hate speech (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

In the case of Latinos, racism can emerge in the conflation of ethnic origins and immigration statuses; for example, when U.S. Latinos are Mexican, then all Mexicans are seen as immigrants, and Mexican immigrants are seen as illegal immigrants who must be deported (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, & Abdulrahim, 2012). Sabo et al. (2014) studied the mistreatment suffered by Latinos at the U.S.-Mexico border; Sabo et al. revealed the existence of structural racism that justified ethno-racial profiling and mistreatment by treating all Latinos as immigrants. Viruell-Fuentes et al. (2012) noted similar findings, suggesting a normalization of racism under the guise of protecting borders.

This kind of racism, which can be hard to identify as it happens, continues to exist even for Latinos who have become American citizens. Vallejo (2015) examined how the class background of 59 Mexican American professionals in white-collar workplaces influenced their experiences of racism in their jobs. Participants were all from first- and second-generation Mexican Americans. The results indicated that those who came from poor backgrounds experienced more instances of subtle racism than their counterparts from richer backgrounds (Vallejo, 2015). This finding might indicate richer people were

often treated better than poorer people (McCall, 2013), the finding could also indicate that Mexican Americans who came from richer backgrounds were more likely to dismiss or underreport instances of subtle racism.

Richer Mexican Americans generally have access to better schools, which may alleviate certain markers of Mexican American descent, such as their accent or provincialism. While useful for interactions with the current dominant ethnic group in America, this finding can also be an instance of acting White to distance themselves from their ethnic groups and ingratiate themselves into American culture (Stuart et al., 2014; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). "Acting White" can result in a more successful professional life; however, it could also introduce tension and lead Latinos to feeling shunned in their familial and communal lives (Unger, 2014). Richer Latinos who have acculturated more into American life and left behind more of their original ethnic cultures may be treated better. Structural racism is more harmful than individual racism as these racists operate by claiming objective factors.

Proving the existence of structural racism is a difficult undertaking, as compared to identifying individual racists who can be singled out by their use of hate speech. As individual racists are pushed farther away from public discourse and shunned from scholarly discourse, structural racism continues to exist, perpetuating much of the same racial disparities as before (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). In the past, African Americans were denied service in food establishments based solely on the color of their skin; in recent times, African Americans were discriminated on by insisting on standard or

mainstream American English and denigrating African American English as improper, rather than a different dialect (Rickford et al., 2015).

In a study of structural racism in the workplace, Wiececk and Hamilton (2014) identified and described the following six factors of structural racism: (a) lack of intent, (b) individuality, (c) belief in structural impartiality, (d) White advantage and White normativity, (e) color blindness, and (f) invisibility. These components are in other American institutions, such as universities. To understand how each of these components contributes toward a climate of subtle racism, I have provided a closer examination.

Lack of intent. The key difference between individual racism and structural racism is the presence and function of intent (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). For example, a racist individual may use epithets that denigrate Latinos to hurt dehumanize them based on skin color and ethnicity. In structural racism, a relatively well-meaning individual can be racist without recognizing the fact simply by perpetuating routine acts of subtle racism based on ideas that they may have grown up with and have not questioned. For example, a White person could persist in asking a Latino person where they are from, not accepting the Latino person's initial answer of being American. Another example could be the preference for a certain accent in hiring situations, as seen by Hosoda, Nguyen, and Stone-Romero (2012); applicants with pronounced Latino accents were judged less favorably than those without noticeable accents.

Individuality. Generally understood as a basis of the American character, a strong belief in individualism plays a large part in the understanding of social phenomena

as an aggregation of actions enacted by individuals (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). The

long tradition of this belief in American culture is the public sentiment that Americans

favor individual shortcomings as explanations for the poverty and underrepresentation of

minorities, instead of social and economic structures (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). The

perpetuation of this idea can lead to unrealistic solutions to racial disparities, such as

claiming these disparities will disappear when White people stop being racist or when

individuals from minority ethnic groups become more "ambitious, most hard-working,

more ethical" (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014, p. 1120). Misunderstanding or ignoring

structural causes of racial disparities will lead to misunderstandings or ignoring structural

solutions that might be most effective in addressing these issues (Wiececk & Hamilton,

2014).

Belief in structural impartiality. Social structures may appear neutral or

impartial to most Americans while influencing ethnic minorities negatively (Wiececk &

Hamilton, 2014). Seemingly neutral acts or acts that were neutral in previous times might

become detrimental toward minorities. Because of the U.S. history of racial

discrimination, the policy of funding public schools through local private property taxes,

while neutral at first glance, can influence minorities disproportionately, given the

economic disparities between taxing districts (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014).

Business decisions based only on economic considerations can result in racial

disparities, such as when grocery chains are built mainly in richer neighborhoods with

fewer minorities, thus leaving them to rely on stores with fewer healthy choices; this

issue makes them vulnerable to higher risks of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). The issue of unconscious biases and prejudices influences everyone, and these may come up when employers use their subjective opinions to determine which of their employees deserve a promotion, cloaking them in criteria that are purportedly objective but have innate racial components (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). For example, managers may use the word *articulate* to mean speaking in a standard White English dialect, excluding those who use other dialects from being called articulate.

White advantage and White normativity. White people may struggle to see the status of White people as having numerous advantages and being treated as the norm for other ethnic groups can be difficult; the advantages they have experienced all their lives may lead them to believe that those advantages are normal (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). Several examples for this are seen in the seemingly normal ways that minorities interact with European-Americans in their daily lives. For instance, White employees must never suggest their coworkers were hired due to affirmative action (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014).

Color blindness. The term *color blindness* refers to all people interact acting with others without regarding the color of their skin. Color blindness is a positive aspiration but only at the individual level (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). At a structural level, color blindness perpetuates racial disparities because of the following reasons: (a) the evidence from current psychology has indicated that this conscious willingness to disregard race is

subsumed by unconscious programming; and (b) the aspiration of color blindness keeps

people from questioning the racial status quo and blinds people to actual racial

disparities, therefore preventing people from acknowledging the real issues faced by

minorities in the United States and continuing the patterns of structural racism (Wiececk

& Hamilton, 2014).

Invisibility. Invisibility refers to the status of structural features that are

embedded in the U.S. social infrastructure that becomes impossible to see unless people

know precisely what to expect (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). Because of segregation in

housing and workplaces, Whites are not exposed daily to racial inequalities. Therefore,

White people may disregard the concerns raised by minorities who experience these

inequalities often (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014).

These components of structural racism all contribute toward the perpetuation of

racism in the United States. A belief in individualism helps people ignore racism in social

structures (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014). A belief in the neutrality of those structures

allows the continuation of racially adverse outcomes, the normativity and advantage of

the White perspective blinds people toward these realities (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014).

Moreover, color blindness lulls people into complacency, falsely trusting that race-based

decision making or solutions are no longer needed (Wiececk & Hamilton, 2014).

In a study on Latinos who hoped to enter the field of public relations as a career,

Radanovich (2014) found that similar language problems existed for Latinos. While

applicants were no longer judged and dismissed based on the color of their skin, their

accents might play a role in whether they were hired. Stereotypes might be held by coworkers and clients against Latinos with a pronounced accent, and they might be judged less competent than their peers without accents. Hosoda et al. (2012) viewed this phenomenon and revealed that biases held against those with pronounced Latino accents still existed, and hiring managers continued to prefer Latinos without accents.

Hosoda et al. (2012) found that hiring managers judged candidates with a Mexican-Spanish pronunciation as less competent than candidates with a standard American-English pronunciation, although no real link existed between having an accent and actual ability for the job. This bias might help form a public perception that established a mistaken connection between the lack of a Latino accent and a person's aptitude for the job (Hosoda et al., 2014). This public perception might then strengthen the biases held against Latino accents in the workplace, creating a circle (Hosoda et al., 2014).

Radanovich (2014) identified three interventions that could be utilized to bring more Latinos to the field of public relations that might also be applicable for workplaces in other fields. These interventions included inspiring increased awareness, having a support infrastructure for Latinos, and teaching Latinos about the cultural relevance of a career path (Radanovich, 2014). Increased awareness necessitated that those in power, such as hiring managers, accepted the existence of a problem (in this study, underrepresentation of Latinos in their field); therefore, this problem must be remedied.

Leadership should develop a support infrastructure to hire Latinos; they need increased awareness that stereotypes and biases may influence the decisions of hiring managers who are mostly European-American in descent. By acknowledging this issue, organization leaders can develop interventions to support hiring Latinos, thus bypassing the barriers that have traditionally limited Latinos from being hired (Radanovich, 2014). As more Latinos are hired in diverse fields, the stereotypes and biases for Latinos may be overcome by succeeding generations. The failure of American education to include Latinos will influence all Americans in the near future.

Education of Latinos in the United States

U.S. Latinos face several challenges in their daily lives, and these difficulties are most apparent in their experiences in the American education system. Latinos are underrepresented in higher education academic achievements (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013), despite being the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Motel, 2012; Stepler & Brown, 2016), having the youngest population (Orchowski, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and having the highest number of college enrollees (Fry & Lopez, 2012; NCES, 2014).

According to Carpi et al. (2013), public institutions are underfunded, and are thus limited in what they can do to support their students; these underfunded, limited institutions are the institutions populated mostly by students who need the most support. Researchers have theorized that students from different ethnic groups may vary widely in terms of what they require for academic success. For Latinos, educational interventions

not designed specifically for Latinos may falter and perpetuate the underrepresentation of Latinos in both higher education and professional employment, which can only mean further challenges for the United States as the Latino population continues to grow. Poor academic performance is harmful both to individuals, in terms of their future lives, and society, in terms of higher rates of delinquency, violence, poverty, intermittent employment in low-paying jobs, and higher welfare costs from taxpayers (Roosa et al., 2012).

Scholars have presented that the tension generated between students who may not subscribe to the institutional priority of American colleges have an individualistic frame of reference (Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Conflicts may arise when a student who has been taught collective values at home is placed in a situation where individualistic values are rewarded (Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013). Students may feel confused and overwhelmed, especially when they compare themselves to their peers who do not go through the same challenges. Burgos-Cienfuegos, Vasquez-Salgado, Ruedas-Garcia, and Greenfield (2015) revealed that a slim majority of participants, who were first-generation Latino college students with a collectivistic approach to relations, felt conflict when faced with roommates who had a more individualistic approach.

Vasquez-Salgado et al. (2015) studied Latino first-generation college students and conflict between family obligations and educational achievement; they found that students experienced tension when facing a situation where they had to choose one side.

One participant related the difficulty that she faced in competing with her classmates. Her mother expected her to come home every weekend despite the long commute, which caused her less time to study compared to her peers who did not value *familismo* to the same degree, thereby resulting in lower grades (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Some respondents felt guilt; for example, one respondent choosing to accede to her family's wishes that she attended a community college closer to their home got a job so that she could help the family, instead of going to University of California, Los Angeles and planning for medical school (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). The inculcation of a close relationship between family members can lead to homesickness for Latino students who study far from home, which can influence their academic lives (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Latino students have fewer options for mentors than their European-American peers, and Latino students may have to face their academic concerns alone, for fear of being misunderstood or trivialized (Murakami & Nuñez, 2014). Latinos are underrepresented in academic mentorship positions, which may lead to the continued prevalence of negative stereotypes, biases, and discrimination (Busey & Russell, 2016; Museus & Neville, 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2015).

Roosa et al. (2012) explored Mexican American adolescents' academic success and the influence exerted by their family and their own individual factors. Roosa et al. theorized that eight potential factors influenced the academic success of Mexican Americans: "human capital, residential stability, family role models, family structure, externalizing, bilingualism, gender, and immigrant status" (p. 307). This theoretical

model differed from similar models because of the emphasis that Mexicans and other Latinos placed on close familial relationships, even to their extended families, compared to European-Americans. Positive role models from a student's family often acted as a positive influence toward a student's academic success (Roosa et al., 2012); however, this finding might be a stronger factor for Latinos, given their cultural values of *familismo, paternalismo,* and *respeto* (Cupito, Stein, & Gonzalez, 2015; Hsu, Hackett, & Hinkson, 2013; Rajesh, Diamond, Spitz, & Wilkinson, 2015; Stein et al., 2014). Roosa et al. (2012) posited Latino students must have stability, both at home and at school, especially because they were more likely to move neighborhoods than European-Americans.

Roosa et al. (2012) found that externalizing factors, such as adolescent conduct, disorder, and opposition, negatively influence academic achievement among Mexican Americans. Ethnic minorities are less likely to receive the institutional help they need to overcome such symptoms; instead, they are often relegated to remedial classes, juvenile halls, or mental health institutions as part of a *zero-tolerance policy* that disproportionately affects ethnic minorities. Such students are labeled as troubled students, left undiagnosed and untreated, and they face alienation (Cannon, Gregory, & Waterstone, 2013; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014; Moreno & Segura-Herrera, 2013, 2014; Moreno, Wong-Lo, & Bullock, 2015; Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2015; Skiba, 2014). These problems faced by Latino

adolescents can then be carried over to Latino college students, where it becomes more difficult to undo habits and perceptions ingrained from a young age.

Crisp, Taggart, and Nora (2014) conducted a systematic review aimed to understand the accumulated knowledge on the factors that related to Latino academic success at the undergraduate level. They found the following nine factors contributed toward the outcomes of Latino undergraduates, namely (a) sociocultural physiognomies, (b) educational self-assurance; (c) principles, ethnic/racial individuality, and managing styles; (d) precollege experiences with education; (e) experiences in the college environment; (f) obligation and drive internally; (g) communications with sympathetic persons; (h) insights of the grounds environment; and (i) established type/physiognomies (Crisp et al., 2014). A number of these factors were influenced by structural racism (Murakami & Nuñez, 2014). These factors may influence ethnic peoples' success in academics. However, Crisp et al. (2014) observed that the aforementioned factors should be kept in mind by future researchers and policymakers if they aimed to remedy the underrepresentation of ethnic groups in general in higher education. At the time of this study, this underrepresentation presented a serious problem for the United States.

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Implications

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There were a number of implications for the anticipated findings of this study. First, the anticipated findings of this study could be used to develop intervention programs, training curriculums, and detailed policy recommendations to help Latino students graduate at a rate proportional to their peers in college. Second, the data

generated on the barriers that Latinos faced to obtain a college degree in Northeastern United States might be used to develop or modify intervention programs or policies to address the problem of underrepresentation of Latinos among those with college degrees. Lastly, the data generated might serve as an addition to the lack of scholarly literature on Latino underrepresentation among those with college degrees in the United States, specifically data from perspectives of Latinos.

Summary

Based on the reviewed literature, a number of serious challenges remain for Latinos to achieve academic success in the United States. First, there is a lack of understanding regarding Latino culture and how this issue affects Latinos entering American institutions. Second, Latino culture emphasizes different values than traditional American values. All ethnic groups derive strength from sharing in their cultures of origin, and complete assimilation often leads to negative outcomes. The impetus for change lies solely on American institutions, as these ethnic minorities will become the majority of Americans in the near future and represent the nation globally. Third, structural racism exists and limits the success of Latinos and other minorities in numerous ways that the general American public may be unwilling to admit; ignoring this fact may result in the continued weakening of ethnic minorities, which may result in the weakening of the United States. Fourth, the lack of understanding of differences of Latino culture, the inability or unwillingness of American institutions to change, and the existence of structural racism all contribute toward the perpetuation of racial disparities.

Section 2 focuses on the methodology chosen for the study and includes discussions on participants of the study, data collection processes, data analysis processes, and limitations of the study. Section 3 is dedicated to the project of developing a detailed policy recommendation based on results generated from data. Section 4 contains my reflections on the study, reviewing its strengths and limitations, offering recommendations for other plausible approaches, and describing all from an academic, professional, and personal viewpoint.

Section 2: Methodology

In this section, I provide an overview of the study's methodology. I first describe the design of this qualitative case study. Then, I describe my methodology, including participant selection, recruitment, and ethical treatment. I then describe the type of data I collected and the justification for using these data for my research. I discuss my data recording procedures. Then, I outline my role in the research, participant selection, and data collection process. I also provide a detailed description of my data analysis procedures and trustworthiness of the data, including information about data outliers.

Research Design

Researchers can ask questions that address *what* rather than *how much* or *to what extent* (Creswell, 2013; Lewis, 2015). These questions are qualitative in nature. I conducted a qualitative study to examine a factor or effect that could not be measured numerically. I examined the following problem: Latinos are proportionately underrepresented in the U.S. population of college graduates due, in part, to high dropout rates. I performed this examination by asking Latino college students why they considered dropping out and what their school leaders could do to prevent the students from leaving.

The qualitative case approach is appropriate when the researcher wishes to understand a situation/problem as it applies to a representative population, group/class, or setting, especially if the situation is prominent or noteworthy for the case to be studied (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004). The situation was prominent at the study location.

The case study researcher considers that the population from which participants are selected may have their own views and perspectives, and different data can be produced by employing a population with different characteristics (Yin, 2014).

Other qualitative approaches were not appropriate. A phenomenological study approach might have proven beneficial in some contexts; however, I attempted to understand the problem as it manifested in a single location where it was most acute (see Lewis, 2015). The participants were college students at a particular location where the Latino dropout rate was historically high. A phenomenological design would have been appropriate if I had been trying to determine why the phenomenon (problem) happened in general as opposed to at that location. I employed a homogenous sample because all participants were students at a single college at a single location; however, I did not seek to compare that sample with other samples. I did not aim to find out why Latino dropout rates were higher or lower at the study location than elsewhere; therefore, I did not use a multiple case design.

An ethnographic approach was also not appropriate. I did not seek to examine the lives and experiences in depth of Latino students considering dropping out of college. Instead, I explored why they were considering dropping out, from their own perspectives. A longitudinal study would have provided a different approach than the one I employed. However, as required with a longitudinal study, I did not pose research questions to examine the participants at any particular time after dropping out (see Lewis, 2015).

A narrative approach (rather than an interview-based approach) might have been useful in understanding why the participants made their decisions; however, the approach did not align with the study's purpose. I used the second research question to ask participants to speculate on what their college leaders could have done to retain them at school. I did not ask them why they made the decision to leave, so the purpose statement did not support using a narrative view (see Lewis, 2015).

Finally, unlike grounded theory designs, I did not intend to generate new theory to understand the problem (see Creswell, 2013). Researchers studied the problem of college dropouts in general, and no additional theory needed to be generated to explain the problem. I aimed to examine the reasons why Latino students were underrepresented in the college graduate population. Theories were problematic to apply to an ethnic or cultural group because doing so might be an unwarranted generalization.

Participant Selection

Participants included Latino students at risk for dropping out at a college in the northeastern United States who were enrolled in a degree program but were considering dropping out before completion. I identified such persons by examining college records. Students attended the college from 2013 to the present. The students were enrolled in degree-seeking programs and had been attending this college for at least 1 year. The students were not currently enrolled at any other college or university.

I employed a sample size of 12 students. This size is considered appropriate to achieve data saturation when the qualitative case semistructured interview approach is

used (Creswell, 2013; Francis et al., 2010). I conducted interviews to explore the subject in depth with participants, and the interviews were approximately 30 to 45 minutes long, allowing for the collection of rich and thick data. This length further justified the relatively small sample size.

I consulted school authorities with an explanation of my study's goal and purpose; I asked for contact information for potential participants. The college leaders maintained files on students, along with contact information. However, I only used e-mail contacts because regular mail was time-consuming, and telephone messages could be viewed as intrusive and/or might be ignored. I was dependent on the students self-identifying as Latino on their college applications or other documents. The overall assumed made was that these students reported honestly. I made no assumptions of participant ethnicity based on first or last name.

After obtaining permission from school authorities and Walden's institutional review board (IRB), I drafted a detailed letter to potential participants describing the purpose of my study and how I intended to conduct the study. I explained my professional standing and described what I hoped to accomplish with my study. I ensured potential participants were aware that no negative consequences would accrue from participating in the study, and their participation would be strictly voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time before or during the study. I assured participants that strict confidentiality of their personal information and of the data collected would be maintained at all times, both during and after the study. I did not offer any inducements to

participate. I obtained the school administration's permission prior to participant solicitation.

All potential participants who expressed interest in the current study were provided with an informed consent form. The informed consent form included details of what was expected of them as participants, the effects their participation would have, ethical safeguards, privacy safeguards, and the strictly voluntary nature of their participation. After receiving the signed consent form, I contacted participants to set up a time for interviews. Interviews occurred at a neutral location at the university, such as a meeting room at the library, subject to the participants' schedules. I believed it was important that such a location be normally accessible to the public to ensure that no unequal power relationship was implied, as might occur if I conducted interviews in a location where only certain faculty could access.

Participants had to understand that there was no pejorative connotation attached to meeting the primary study criterion: students at risk for dropping out of college. I made certain that participants understood that I realized that there was no stigma attached to them considering withdrawing from college, and I wished to understand the reasons why they were considering these decisions. Establishing rapport with participants in this manner was crucial to conducting this study properly and obtaining good data. I needed participants to be forthcoming and honest, which might not have occurred if they believed they faced stigma or shame.

Data Collection Procedures

The primary data collection method was interviews that were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. I employed two additional methods of data collection. I took notes during the interviews, which also assisted in member checking. I increased the accuracy of my data coding by noting the themes and topics I identified during the interviews with participants. I also collected data from archival school documents that included student retention efforts and programs to increase persistence and degree completion. I asked participants if they were aware of such programs and if they used the programs.

These types of data were appropriate to the qualitative case study tradition (see Moustakas, 2001; Yin, 2014). Participants reported experiences that were the primary data, and member checking helped to ensure that I analyzed those data correctly. Interviews allowed me to understand the study problem more effectively. I included school policy documents to obtain an additional perspective. For example, if a participant reported that he or she was at risk for dropping out because he or she could not obtain academic help and counseling, examining school documents helped me to ascertain how much help was available.

Interview Protocol

I used a series of interview questions to develop answers to the two research questions. The interviews were semistructured because I used specific questions (see Appendix B); after an initial discussion, I encouraged participants to provide additional

insights they believed were important but might not have been addressed during the interview questions. My understanding of the study problem was enhanced by the answers to my interview questions and the subsequent discussion, and my thematic coding was assisted by data from each part of the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

Expert Panel Study

Because I used a researcher-constructed interview instrument, I had to test it prior to conducting the main body of my research (see Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). I used an expert panel (see Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002) to test the instrument. Three participants were selected, and I conducted interviews using my interview questions. I then coded these data thematically as I intended to do in the overall study. I aimed to determine whether those data yielded answers to the research questions.

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Data Analysis

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This section includes the presentation of the study findings in line with the purpose of the study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the reasons for low college graduation rates (high dropout rates) among Latino students in a single college in the United States. I begin the section with a brief summary of the data analysis procedures and evidence of trustworthiness. This section also includes the limitations of the study. The results section contains themes generated from the data to answer the research questions. The research questions that guided this study were the following:

RQ1: What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled?

RQ2: What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them?

The coding process involved two steps: manual coding and computer-assisted coding. Coding data twice allowed for prolonged immersion with data to reach data saturation. First, I transcribed interview data from audio recordings of interviews. Next, I read the transcripts multiple times to process information and record my comments on participant observations and insights about collected data. I manually assigned codes to themes identified in the data (open coding; see Yin, 2011). I used manual coding to identify initial themes from data.

To refine the codes, I uploaded the transcripts to NVivo 11 to begin computer-assisted coding. I read and reviewed the transcripts and highlighted chunks of data to assign these into nodes for coding. Each node represented one code. The codes were then arranged based on relationships to one another (thematic pairings or axial coding) and assigned hierarchical importance based on frequency and other factors (selective coding). These identified themes were cross-checked against the other data source (school policy documents related to student retention programs) for credibility.

After coding the data, I listed the themes that emerged from interviews and school documents, and I looked for connections between these themes. Themes were clustered

based on my interpretations of those themes. The next step involved an iterative process of cross-checking themes with textual data from both interviews and school documents. Then, I created a frequency table of themes to record frequencies and patterns of theme occurrences. The frequencies were measured in NVivo. As textual data were assigned to the nodes in NVivo, the software provided a count for the number of references coded. Data with a greater number of references were interpreted as more common patterns and had more weight in theme development (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

During this process, some themes may have been combined or eliminated. For example, the statement, "This will be my last semester until I can pay for at least a semester to pull up my grades" was assigned to the node *cannot afford tuition fees*, and the statement "I don't want to continue getting student loans" was assigned to the node *loans*. The common pattern in the nodes appeared to be financial difficulties; therefore, the nodes were combined to the theme *financial difficulties*. An example of an eliminated theme was *ambivalence*. The theme emerged from the statement "I am ambivalent about the decision [to drop out]. Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't. You know how that goes." This was mentioned only once by one participant and had no matches in any other theme. In the next step, a final table of themes was created using NVivo, as provided in the results section.

During interviews, I employed notetaking to record nonverbal cues of participants, such as tone of voice and facial expressions, which were also cross-checked with the interpretation of themes. This approach was coupled with my effort to allow

participants a wide range of discussion. In this way, the effect of researcher bias and/or presumptions was reduced, as discussions were not driven in any direction other than initially directed.

Outliers in the data, such as items that were mentioned only once or twice, were considered but were not given as much weight in the analysis and thematic ranking process. Thematic ranking involved weighing the developed themes in terms of frequencies in references from transcripts to determine the themes' relevance in answering the research questions (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I used these triangulation methods to handle discrepant cases. I used school policy documents to assist with the analysis by reading the documents and comparing them to participants' responses.

Trustworthiness

I employed techniques to build the trustworthiness of this study. Trustworthiness involves increasing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the study findings (Creswell, 2013). Credibility was ensured by triangulating data sources consisting of interviews, documents, and notes. Data from multiple sources were compared and cross-checked to ensure themes were emergent across all sources.

Data saturation was obtained to increase credibility. The sample size was sufficient to reach data saturation through collecting rich data from the interviews. Data saturation was also achieved through coding data twice, allowing me to immerse in these

data over until no new information emerged. Data from the sample were supported by data from notes and documents. Finally, member checking also increased credibility through allowing the participants to review interview transcripts and interpreting data to ensure that I interpreted the interview content correctly.

Transferability refers to the applicability of findings in other contexts (Creswell, 2013). The transferability of data and the results that these data generated were assured by obtaining rich, thick description from participants. I encouraged them to expound on their observations and recommendations as former college students who felt compelled to drop out of school. The only common characteristics that participants had was that they were Latino students thinking of dropping out from the college study site; therefore, I expected substantial variation in participants' attitudes, values, demographics, and cultural practices, which enhanced the transferability of the study's findings.

Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Dependability of data was accomplished using data triangulation I checked school policy documents to ascertain if participants' reported perceptions were accurate. I employed consistent member checking for accuracy of the data. Member checking involved verifying transcripts and interpretations of data with participants.

Confirmability is the degree to which the study, if replicated, will generate the same results with the same limits (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I thoroughly documented the study's procedures, methods, and results. I realized that a duty of the researcher was

to ensure that others could replicate his/her research. I looked for data that tended to contradict my overall results and conclusions and took those data into account.

Ethical Assurances

I obtained permission from the institution's IRB before proceeding with the study. The Walden IRB approval for this study is # 06-20-17-0093532. I submitted a prospectus to leadership, along with copies of the solicitation materials that I used and the consent form I provided to participants. I also presented my expert panel interview protocol. I followed all school guidelines for ethical conduct throughout the study, including specific observations and recommendations made by the IRB.

All participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation at any time prior to or during the study. No incentives were offered to participants. I ensured participants were aware that no negative consequences would accrue to them because of their participation. The information was provided in the informed consent form and was verbally repeated to participants before the interview.

Participants were assigned a code number, and at no time were participants identified by name or other demographic data. The informed consent form included a description of the study and its purpose and how privacy concerns will be addressed. No interviews were conducted without a signed consent form from the participant.

Interview data were saved using the assigned code number to each participant; however, I had a linking list to identify which code was assigned to a participant. The

linking list was known only to me and was stored in my encrypted computer. The data, such as audio recordings, field notes, school policy documents, and researcher-generated transcripts, were stored in a locked file cabinet to which only I could access. Electronic data were stored on my private, password-protected computer. All data will be physically destroyed or electronically erased 5 years after the completion of this study.

I did not anticipate any personal ethical issues in conducting this study. At the time of the study, I had no personal or professional relationships with potential participants. There was no issues of conflict of interest or personal power. I mitigated possible issues of personal bias on my part. However, I might have had former contact (in a professional capacity) with participants when they were students. I realized that this issue might have created an implied unequal power relationship; therefore, I considered it my duty as a researcher to recognize and do all I could to mitigate this effect. I established a rapport with participants and assured them they were collaborating with me in conducting research, rather than speaking with an authority figure.

Results

This subsection includes the presentation of results generated from the thematic analysis of the data. The subsection is organized according to the two research questions. The findings for the research questions are organized according to themes. Excerpts from the data are provided to support the findings.

Research Question 1

What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled? Three themes were generated from the data as factors affecting the Latino students' decision to drop out or stay enrolled in college: (a) financial difficulties, (b) familial responsibilities in addition to financial support, and (c) lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. Each of the themes will be discussed in detail.

Financial difficulties. The theme financial difficulties emerged from the data referring to issues in affording tuition fees, availing or paying loans, parents' financial sacrifices, sacrificing academic performance due to the need to work, and prioritizing work over studies to support themselves or their families. Most participants shared that they were experiencing financial difficulties. Financial difficulties led most participants to contemplate dropping out of college. Participants revealed that financial difficulties generally required them to work while studying, where the demands of work jeopardized their academic performances. Most participants had a scholarship; however, working while studying resulted in difficulty maintaining a minimum grade point average (GPA) for the scholarship. Participant 10 stated,

> I am not doing that well academically because I have to work full time now. I get a scholarship but require that keep a high GPA that I cannot keep since I don't have time to study or do the assignments.

Participant 6 lost her scholarship due to low grades because she had an accident. In addition, she claimed to be the one working to support her family. Three participants shared that their financial struggles were due to supporting their families. Participant 8 shared that he was the "breadwinner" of the family and that he was avoiding taking out student loans. Participant 8 was considering dropping out of college due to having an additional year and a half to complete an associate's degree, which he could not afford. Participant 11 said,

> Because school is harder than what I thought. I wanted to get a degree and get better opportunities, but I can't because I also have a family to support. And I have to make a choice between supporting my family or going to school, and I may have to pick work.

Participant 5 struggled with supporting himself. Participant 5 shared, "I pay for my own education, so sometimes I struggle with paying for school, books, gas, food, and whatever else I need." Participant 12 was the only participant who perceived that school was not for her. The only reason that the participant was still enrolled was that her parents wanted her to graduate from college and that they made *such a big sacrifice* to put her through school. Though her parents also struggled financially, Participant 12 was the only participant who did not have to work to study. However, the participant revealed that she would stay in school if classes were done in short-term courses and were less expensive.

Although struggling financially and wanting to drop out of college, Participant 1's decision was leaning toward staying in school, as the participant was in his final school year prior to obtaining a bachelor's degree in communication. Among the 12 participants, Participant 4 was the only participant who did not explicitly say she was at risk of dropping out due to financial difficulties; however, she might drop out of school to help her single mother to support their family of six. Overall, all 12 participants perceived that financial difficulties contributed significantly to their decisions to stay or drop out of college.

Responsibilities in the family in addition to financial support. As mentioned in the previous theme, some participants considered dropping out of college to work to support their families. Most participants' responsibilities in their families involved financial support, while some involved taking care of their parents or their children. Participant 7 claimed that she experienced *drama* within the family on top of financially supporting her siblings. In support, Participant 1 stated,

> In my situation as a single mother and head of my family it is so hard, to commit and be focus[ed] 100% at school. Working full time, provide quality time to my son, also maintaining the control in my house, taking my parents and grandmother to appointments, helping my family in my country (Dominican Republic), it is really a journey, who most of the time push me to think to quit the university, but what I say in the last question, I got the power and I will be [pursuing] my dreams. It is difficult.

Participant 10 shared that, on top of supporting his girlfriend and her child, they had another child on the way. Similar to Participant 1, Participant 10 was also considering prioritizing the needs of his family over his studies and was also experiencing issues with his scholarship due to work. Participant 10 shared,

My girlfriend is pregnant and will give birth in November, we are living together now, so I have to pay for the apartment and support the family. She has a child from a previous marriage that lives with us. I cannot work full time and go to school full time. If I become a part-timer student, the scholarship will not cover my tuition, and I cannot pay the class. So, I will finish the semester and drop until I can figure this out.

Participant 11 opted to consider prioritizing his responsibilities in the family. The participant shared that he had already given up playing soccer due to "multiple commitments after school." Participant 11 revealed that his "number one priority" was his family especially because, aside from his younger brother, he was the only one who spoke English. Participant 11 expressed,

My family is my number one priority. I am the only one who speaks English in my family. Well, my brother does too, but he is younger than me. My father's job is not enough to support all of us, so I have to work and attend school, and it is so hard.

Participant 3 claimed that in addition to working and studying, she had to take care of her one-year-old son while her husband was working. She sometimes dropped her

child off at daycare so that she could work or study, but Participant 3 claimed that daycare services were often expensive. Conversely, some participants struggled with supporting their parents. Participant 2 shared that he was "the man of the house," and he had to help support his single mother. Most participants appeared to prioritize helping their families, whether through providing for them financially or taking care of their families.

  Lack of programs for Latino students to stay in college. Most participants mentioned having a scholarship to pay for their college education. However, most participants also perceived that a scholarship was insufficient to help Latino students stay in college. Eight participants were unaware or unsure if their school had programs for Latino students to stay in college; however, most participants perceived that there was a lack of appropriate programs. Some participants were members of the Latino/Caribbean center in school, in which they met fellow Latino/Caribbean students; however, participants perceived that the center was insufficient; there were no role models, experts, or professional guidance to help them in their college years. Participant 10 shared that the mentors in the center, while helpful, generally did not understand the students' situations. Participant 10 stated,

    I think that a Latino mentor would be awesome for us. The mentor the university

    have, don't get me wrong please, they are cool, but I don't think that some of

    them understand us well. Some of them speak the language, but they don't

    understand how much we value our families. They feel that once a student turns

18 or 21, they are on their own. For us is different, we need each other forever, we

help our people forever.

Most participants perceived that having a mentoring and tutoring services meant

for Latino students would be advantageous. The mentoring program for international

students was perceived as inappropriate for Latino students, as participants perceived that

the program did not meet their needs. Participant 8 shared the following:

By creating programs for Latinos, not only for international students. I think they

are confusing international with Latinos, and we don't have the same needs and/or

customs. Latinos are more family oriented, and I don't think that people in U.S.

really understand it.

Most participants perceived that fluency in English was good; however, some

participants claimed that other people had trouble understanding them due to their

accents., Participants also perceived that having a Latino mentor or tutor would help them

in their studies, as well as help them reconcile their culture to their situation. Participant 4

revealed, "The university may have mentors and maybe some of them speak Spanish, but

that is not what we need. Anybody can speak Spanish but not everyone can understand

the culture behind a language." Some participants believed that they were not well-

integrated in the school. Participants shared that the only time they spent in school was

during classes, and none of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities,

aside from the Latino center. In relation to the first two themes, work and family

obligations, as well as cultural differences, might be the reasons Latino students did not

feel integrated in the school. Therefore, the lack of programs to address these needs was a

factor in the Latino students' decisions to stay or drop out of college.

Table 1 contains the summary of the factors contributing to the Latino students'

decisions to drop out of college. The challenge experienced by all participants was facing

financial difficulties. Most participants explicitly expressed that financial difficulties

forced them to prioritize work over their studies. One participant did not explicitly state

experiencing financial difficulties; however, the participant stated that she needed to help

her single mother support their family of six.

Table 1

Factors Contributing to Decision to Drop Out

Themes	Frequency
Financial difficulties	21
Responsibilities in the family	18
Lack of programs for Latino students to stay in college	16

According to Tinto (1993), financial difficulties might be one of the reasons,

outside of academic achievement, that could contribute to a student's decision to drop out

of school. In relation, the participants also generally had responsibilities in the family,

which added to their inclinations to drop out of school. Responsibilities in families were

not limited to financial obligations. Some participants were responsible for caring for

their parents or their children.

Previous researchers have established the cultural value of *familismo* among

Latinos, in which Latino families have tended to value close relationships with nuclear

and extended family (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Organista, 2007). The value of

familismo was often in contrast with the typical American culture, where individualism,

self-reliance, and a strong sense of personal responsibility were valued (Chambers et al.,

2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Dealing with social and cultural differences was also

among the nonacademic reasons that Tinto (1993) presented.

Lastly, with these issues that the participants faced, participants generally

perceived a lack of programs that helped Latino students stay in college. School

leadership provided a Latino center and scholarships; however, participants generally

believed that the programs were not suited to meet their needs. Participants revealed that

the Latino culture was family-oriented and that their priorities derived from supporting

the family. These factors might be related to social and cultural differences between

Latino and American culture, which could increase the likelihood of dropping out (Tinto,

1993).

Research Question 2

What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe

the college could do to retain them? Two overarching themes emerged from the data to

address the second research question. The themes included (a) achieve goals to graduate

and (b) recommended actions for the school. Among collected data, only one response

was considered an outlier and was not considered a major theme. The outlier was

Participant 12's response that she has not yet dropped out of college due to her parents'

sacrifices to put her through school. Among all participants, Participant 12 was the only

one who had her parents pay for her education, not because her family had the financial means to send her to college, however, because her parents desired for her to finish college.

Achieve goals to graduate. Most participants were inclined to stay in school to achieve their goals to graduate. Participants generally believed that obtaining a degree might help them obtain a better job and secure a more stable future. Participant 10 stated,

> My only expectation was to get a bachelor [sic] degree within 5 years and get a better job for me and my family, my goal was and is to make my family proud. The only thing that changed is the timeframe, I don't think I will be able to graduate within 5 or even 8 years.

Several participants shared that, due to difficulties, the timeframes of their plans changed. Most participants did not change their goals; however, some participants changed their aims to obtaining an associate degree. Participant 9 expressed,

> My expectations and goals are different now. When I started, my goal was to achieve a bachelor [sic] degree and perhaps a master [sic], now my goal is to at least complete an associate degree and go back to work. Everything changed when I realize how expensive college tuition is in United States.

One participant changed her goal from obtaining a bachelor's degree to obtaining a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Participant 2 shared,

> My only goal has been to graduate with my bachelor's degree. I transferred from a community college and even there I still had the goal of transferring to this

school and getting my B.S. in management information systems (Yes, I have the associate's from the community college). The goal has changed because I not only want a B.S. but also an MBA too, which I'll pursue part-time after having at least 2 years working in the industry. If I can afford it.

Participant 12 did not express any goals to graduate from college, while Participant 6 changed her plans to attend to the needs of her family. Participant 6 revealed,

Complete my degree and provide a better life to my child, but life changed my plans, now I will have to stop school until I can afford it. The school should have like a daycare for students at a minimal fee based on the students' finance.

Recommended actions for the school. Improvements in the school's program to help meet the needs of Latino students were perceived of help in making them stay in school. Recommended actions involved scholarships, financial aids, and incentives; most of all, participants suggested having a program for Latino students. Participant 10 mentioned, "By treating us like we are part of United States, not like outsiders," as the participant perceived that Latino students did not receive the same scholarships and aids as other students. Most participants perceived that receiving scholarships, aids, and incentives tailored to the needs of Latino students would be more helpful. Participant 4 said,

By offering programs that are designed for Latinos, not for International students, we are different. And by offering financial assistance for students like me that are

struggling to remain in school. Again, by having curriculums, programs, and aids tailored for Latino students and of course the staff that can not only speak Spanish but understand us.

Participant 9 similarly recommended a program for Latino students, rationalizing that the Latino population was "growing in the United States" and having a department "only for Latinos" would be helpful. Participant 8 expressed that Latino students had different needs than other international students, as Latinos were more "family-oriented." Participant 3 claimed,

Promote the Spanish and culture more in depth. People must become more aware about the Latino culture, our customs, and languages. I feel that increasing the awareness can help Latinos students like me, to feel more welcomed to the U.S. I think people in U.S. does not know enough about us and that lack of knowledge is one of our biggest barrier [sic] as a culture.

Some participants shared that they desired to have financial aids or options, as they supported their families while they studied. Participant 8 said,

Giving more financial options for students who are also head of their homes. I think the school must understand that now in these days the majority of the students have other responsibilities not only the school.

Some participants recommended scholarship programs and incentives modified to meet the needs of Latino students. Most participants faced difficulties with scholarships due to prioritizing work and family obligations resulting in poor academic performances.

Participants recommended scholarship programs suited for their needs. Participant 11 added that merit-based grants were perceived as helpful. Participant 11 stated,

> By offering merit-based grants (or making an easy-application process for those grants offered to Latino students), flexible work positions, and important information such as places where you can study in school and when they open/close, and who to go to in case of struggle with a class. And reminding them that, if they drop out, they will be destined to a poor-condition job where they will be treated like garbage.

Table 2 contains a summary of the factors contributing to the Latino students' decision to stay in school. Generally, the participants were driven by their desire to graduate from college. Most participants perceived that obtaining at least an associate's degree might help them secure better jobs and ease their financial burden. Participants perceived that the school leadership could attend to the needs of Latino students to help them stay in school. Participants recommended programs, scholarships, financial aids, and incentives designed specifically for Latino students.

Table 2

Factors Contributing to Decision to Retain

Themes	Frequency
Achieve goals to graduate	11
Recommended actions for the school	25

The factors contributing to students' decisions to retain might also be related to Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration and Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of

student persistence and achievement. Motivation to achieve goals to graduate might influence a student's decision to face the challenges identified in the factors contributing to students' decisions to drop out (see Tinto, 1993). Achieving goals might be considered a force of cognitive factors, which could contribute to student persistence (see Swail et al., 2003). In addition, actions provided by the institution might be viewed as forced institutional factors, which also could contribute to student persistence (see Swail et al., 2003).

Limitations of the Study

Patton (2002) defined limitations as weak areas of the study. The limitations of this study included the sample size, the geographical location, and the nature of qualitative studies. A relatively small sample size was a potential limitation; however, steps were taken to ensure that data saturation was reached.

The focus of this study was on Latino students in a college in the northeast. The findings of this study might not be transferrable to a different racial/ethnic group or to a different geographical location. However, I attempted to document the steps undertaken in this study properly should I or any future researchers attempt to replicate it with a different target population or geographic location.

The nature of qualitative studies consisted of data and data analysis largely being based on subjective perspectives, which was also a limitation of the study. I took steps to minimize biases and enhance the trustworthiness of this study. I used member checking

to help with the accuracy of the study findings, and I used notetaking to reduce biases when interpreting data.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the reasons behind the problem of low college graduation rates (high dropout rates) among Latino students in the United Stated. I conducted semistructured interviews with 12 participants. These participants were Latinos who were at risk for dropping out of the college where the study occurred. I thematically coded the interview transcripts to attempt to obtain answers to the research questions.

To answer the first research question, the factors that contributed to Latino students' decisions to drop out from college included (a) financial difficulties, (b) responsibilities in the family in addition to financial difficulties, and (c) lack of programs for Latino students to stay in college. To answer the second research question, Latino students stayed in school due to their desires to achieve their goals to graduate.

Participants provided recommended actions for the school to help Latino students stay in school. Participants recommended leadership using scholarships, grants, financial aids, lower tuition costs and book expenses, and incentives. These findings are discussed in Section 4.

Section 3: The Project

The aim of the white paper was to recommend an incentive and support program for Latino students driven by mentors to help them obtain a college degree. Based on the qualitative findings presented in Section 2 and a review of the literature, I arrived at several recommendations that might increase Latino students' chances of obtaining their degrees. The percentage of Latinos enrolled in college has increased over the years, from 4% in 1976 to 16% in 2013 (NCES, 2014). However, the dropout rates for Latinos in college remain disproportionately high relative to other ethnic groups in the United States (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Based on these statistics, I chose to focus on this ethnic group. Nationwide, researchers have found Latinos to exhibit lower rates of degree completion and higher rates of dropping out compared to other ethnicities, with only 29.2% of Latinos who started college in 2006 graduating within 4 years, compared to 46.3% of Asians and 42.6% of Whites (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

In this section, I present a narrative of the project. The project presented in this section is a policy recommendation for a local university in the northeastern United States, which was based on the findings explained in the Section 2. First, I discuss the purpose of the policy recommendation and explain the goal, criteria, rationale, and major outcomes. Second, I explain how the project addressed the local needs. The policy recommendation in this section was developed to increase the retention of Latino students in colleges through practical means that can be easily implemented and replicated. This

policy recommendation was designed for Latino students; however, an adapted recommendation may also be successful with other races.

Background of the Problem

About 55 million Latinos reside in the United States, approximately 17% of the general population, compared to Whites who compose 64% of the general population (NCES, 2014; Stepler & Brown, 2016). Latinos are not the dominant ethnic group in the United States; however, the percentage of the Latino population continues to rise, going from 35.7% in 2000 to 57.5% in 2016 (Bishop & Surfield, 2013). The low graduation rates for Latinos are a concern because they have the highest number of college enrollees among all ethnic groups in the United States (Fry & Lopez, 2012; NCES, 2014). As the population has increased, however, the numbers of Latinos attending colleges in the United States has not increased much. This is problematic because researchers claim that by 2020 at least 65% of jobs in the United States will require postsecondary education and training, and the Latino population would be eligible for such jobs (Carnevale et al., 2013). Limitations on education for the Latino population must be given a hard look to determine how the enrollment and graduation rates for colleges can increase. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) stated that researchers must identify the motivation behind Latino first-year students attempting postsecondary education, which could include having a talent for sport, assisting their families, or honoring their parents, as these motivators might increase their resilience in overcoming barriers.

The problem of underrepresentation of Latinos in the college graduate population exists nationwide, particularly in the northeastern United States, which was the site for this study. Thirteen percent might not appear to constitute a gap given that 15% of northeastern U.S. residents are Latino; however, the graduation rates of Latino college students are low compared to other ethnicities despite the large number of Latinos enrolling in northeastern U.S. colleges (Santiago et al., 2015). The graduation rates of Latinos in the northeastern United States has not increased proportionally as more Latino students have enrolled in college. In addition, Latinos have been taking longer to graduate or have not been graduating at all.

At the study site in the northeastern United States, the graduation rates for Latinos remained lower than those of other ethnic groups (Assistant Research Coordinator, personal communication, August 28, 2016). According to the assistant research coordinator for the research department located at the study site (personal communication, August 28, 2016), Latino students drop out more often than students of other ethnicities, and the reasons for this are complex and difficult to identify. The literature indicated that mentorship, as well as intrinsic motivation, often influence the success of first-year students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Dumais, Rizzuto, Cleary, & Dowden, 2013; Leon & Medina, 2016).

According to the data of the selected public school, the school's Latino population has steadily increased (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016); however, college dropout rates for Latinos in this school remained

disproportionately high, as 48% of Latino students dropped out every school year, which was more than double the dropout rate for Whites (21%) and African Americans (20%; Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Based on internal surveys conducted among students, some factors for the low graduation rate of Latinos included financial problems, lack of family support, and the existence of language barriers (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, Aug. 30, 2016). The findings of this study were somewhat consistent with this information, as the qualitative interviews indicated that students had struggles with financial aid and a lack of family support, as the participants revealed they had more important responsibilities at home. These issues might indicate a lack of support in many ways, as there might not be encouragement from their families to continue their studies as their home responsibilities might be perceived as more important. There might also be no one else in the family willing to take on the student's responsibilities when he or she attends classes. However, external barriers might be difficult to manage or circumvent from the perspective of the school. Providing Latino students with financial assistance might also be difficult or impossible for certain schools.

The continued underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education has been seen both nationally (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013) and at the study site (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016; Santiago et al., 2015). Latino enrollment at the study site has increased steadily, but dropout rates have remained the same, as 48% of Latino students drop out every year (Associate Professor

of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). Researchers have examined

the possible barriers faced by Latinos in different times of their lives in the United States

and possible interventions and policies that could be developed to remove the barriers

(Hinojosa et al., 2016; Molina & Pedraza, 2012; Nuñez et al., 2013). However, there

remained a gap in understanding the barriers faced by Latinos in their pursuit of higher

education (Molina & Pedraza, 2012). The findings of the current study provided an

understanding of the perceptions of Latino students, and the results from this study were

used to inform a policy recommendation to assist Latino students in attaining a college

degree.

Conclusions Based on the Results and Literature

Based on the problem and review of the literature, a number of challenges

remained for Latinos to pursue higher education in the United States. However, according

to this study's findings, participants reported personal struggles. Moreover, the findings

did not indicate structural challenges or challenges with racism, as these might not be

barriers for these participants, or they might be unaware of these barriers as they faced

more pressing matters, such as financial, familial, or academic issues. The findings are

discussed in accordance with the literature, and recommendations follow.

To demonstrate the content analysis of the current study, the research questions

are answered one at a time. RQ1 was the following: What do adult Latino students at risk

for dropping out of college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors

in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled? Three themes emerged: (a) financial

difficulties, (b) familial responsibilities in addition to financial support, and (c) lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students.

Financial Difficulties

Financial difficulties emerged as a theme with issues of affording tuition fees, paying loans, parents' financial sacrifices, and sacrificing studies due to the need to work. Most participants shared that they experienced financial difficulties, which led to contemplating dropping out of school. Participants revealed that financial difficulties generally required them to work while studying, and the demands of work jeopardized their academic performance.

Urdan and Herr (2016) posited that low-income students have a higher chance of staying in college if they receive financial assistance and if they have opportunities to earn more money. In another study, students stated that without financial aid policies, it would have been difficult or impossible for them to attend college (Rueda et al., 2017). Most participants had a scholarship; however, working while studying resulted in difficulty maintaining a minimum GPA for the scholarship. Participant 5 shared, "I pay for my own education, so sometimes I struggle with paying for school, books, gas, food, and whatever else I need." The literature was consistent with the findings of this study, revealing the need for scholarships tailored to the needs of Latino students.

Responsibilities in the Family in Addition to Financial Support

As mentioned in the previous theme, some participants considered dropping out of college to work to support their families. Most participants' responsibilities in their

families involved financial support, while some involved taking care of their parents or

their children. Participants 3 and 10 shared that they had to support a spouse and child,

making it difficult to balance work and studies with daycare being expensive. Similar to

Participant 1, Participant 10 considered prioritizing the needs of his family over his

studies and experienced issues with his scholarship due to work.

Jabbar, Serrata, Epstein and Sánchez (2017) posited that families also play a

significant role in students' school choices throughout the course of their academic

career. In addition, De'Sha and Fuligni (2017) found that students of Filipino and Latino

descent spent more time helping their families daily compared to their East Asian and

European counterparts. Participant 11 revealed that his "number one priority" was his

family, especially since—aside from his younger brother—he was the only one who

spoke English. Conversely, some participants struggled with supporting their parents.

Again, the literature and current study findings were in agreement, indicating the need for

more manageable schedules and assistance with finances.

Lack of Programs for Latino Students to Stay in College

Most participants mentioned having a scholarship to pay for their college

education; however, most participants revealed that a scholarship was insufficient to help

Latino students stay in college and obtain their degrees. Eight participants were unaware

or unsure if their school leadership offered programs for Latino students to stay in

college; most participants perceived that there was a lack of appropriate programs. Some

participants were members of the Latino/Caribbean center in school; however,

participants perceived that the center was insufficient because it helped them make friends, but there were no role models, experts, or professionals to guide them in their college years.

Alternatively, Velasco (2017) found that participants generally had positive views of cultural identity and high self-efficacy, and participants reported that the Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S) program and staff provided a supportive environment. Participant 10 shared that the mentors in the center, while helpful, generally did not understand the students' situations. Moreover, most participants perceived that having mentoring and tutoring services designed for Latino students would be advantageous. In relation to the findings of Velasco (2017), the program provided to participants in the current study might not be properly tailored to suit their needs and increase their success.

Research has indicated that Latino students' participation in academically rigorous programs, as well as counseling-intensive supports, affected these students' success and their intent to persist (Tovar, 2015). In this study, most participants perceived that fluency in English was good; however, other people had trouble understanding them due to their accents. Hence, some participants believed that they were not well-integrated in the school. Participants shared that the only time that they spent in school was during classes, and no participants were involved in extracurricular activities, aside from the Latino center. Without academic or social integration, students felt disengaged and would tend to drop out more often (see Shea & Bidjerano, 2014).

The challenge experienced by all participants was facing financial difficulties. Most participants expressed that financial difficulties forced them to prioritize work over their studies. Participants also had responsibilities in the family contributing to their inclination to drop out. Researchers have established the cultural value of *familismo* among Latinos, where Latino families tend to value close relationships with nuclear and extended family (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Organista, 2007). Researchers have often contrasted the value of familismo with the typical American culture in which individualism, self-reliance, and a strong sense of personal responsibility are valued (Chambers et al., 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Based on these issues that the participants faced, the participants perceived a lack of programs to help Latino students stay in college.

RQ2 was the following: What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them? Two overarching themes emerged: (a) achieve goals to graduate and (b) recommended actions for the school. Only one response was considered an outlier: Participant 12's response that she had not yet dropped out of college due to her parents' sacrifices to put her through school. Participant 12 was the only one who had her parents pay for her education, not because her family had the financial means to send her to college, but because her parents desired for her to finish college.

Achieve Goals to Graduate

Most participants were inclined to stay in school to achieve their goal to graduate because they believed that obtaining a degree might help them obtain a better job and secure a more stable future. Participant 12 did not express any goals to graduate from college, while Participant 6 changed her plans to tend to the needs of her family. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) stated that researchers must identify the motivation behind Latino first-year students attempting postsecondary education, as these motivators might increase their resilience to overcoming barriers. Helping Latino students realize their goals and motivators might provide them with something to work toward, and a mentor who could understand their culture might assist them to stay focused regardless of other barriers.

Recommended Actions for the School

Improvements in the school's program to meet the needs of Latino students were perceived as helpful in making students stay in school. Recommended actions involved scholarships, financial aid, and incentives; participants recommended having a program for Latino students. Participant 9 recommended a program for Latino students, rationalizing that the Latino population was "growing in the United States" and that having a department "only for Latinos" would be helpful. Participant 8 expressed that Latino students had different needs than other international students, as Latinos were more "family-oriented." Some participants shared that they wanted financial aids or options as they supported their families while they studied. Most participants faced

difficulties with scholarships due to prioritizing work and family obligations resulting in poor academic performances. Participants were driven by their desire to graduate from college. Participants perceived that the school leadership could attend to the needs of Latino students to help them stay in school.

Recommendations

Addressing this problem required a more thorough understanding of the barriers faced by Latinos regarding their pursuits of higher education. By revealing the experiences and perceptions of Latinos from the northeastern United States who dropped out of college or were about to drop out and the barriers they faced, a more detailed idea was gained on the needs of Latinos for them to pursue higher education. As discussed in the previous section, the primary problems faced by Latino students who participated in this current study included financial struggles, work and family obligations, and a lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. Students were driven to stay in school to achieve their goals and secure a more promising future for themselves and their families.

Peña and Rhoads (2018) identified four factors needed for the success of college programs for Latinos: supporting help-seeking behaviors, addressing needs during the transfer journey, supporting students' employment burdens and financial difficulties, and incorporating culturally responsive and approachable programs and practices. From the literature and the findings of the study, culture had a significant influence on Latino

students. This finding should be considered when teaching or assisting these students in college.

With the data generated by the study, the literature, and the theories of Tinto (1993) and Swail et al. (2003), leadership can develop future interventions and policies in the northeastern United States to address the Latino underrepresentation among those with a college degree and remedy the barriers that Latinos face in their pursuit of higher education, as based on the perceptions of those policies' intended recipients. The first recommendation is reevaluating the current state of the college regarding costs, class schedules, activities, academic minimum requirements, and availability of mentors. After a reevaluation is conducted, leadership may see why certain aspects of the current college experience is not accommodating toward Latino students.

Appointing a Mentor

Most participants perceived that a scholarship was insufficient to help Latino students stay in college and that there was a lack of appropriate programs. The findings of this study were not entirely in correlation with the findings of Velasco (2017) and Tovar (2015), indicating that the current program provided to the participants of this research might not be properly tailored to suit their needs and increase their success. As proposed by the participants of this study, Latino mentors might specifically be needed to discuss first-year students' goals with them at the beginning of the year, and perhaps later in the year as well to ensure they keep their goals in mind. Latino members are needed to provide culturally sensitive mentorship to Latinos to improve their educational awareness

(Gonzalez, 2016; Leon & Medina, 2016). An easy step toward higher retention rates of Latino students may be to employ Latino mentors who have studied and earned their degrees, and who may assist the Latino first-year students to do the same. Mentors are often used to assist first-year students to adjust to their new surroundings, the new expectations of them, and help them through the shock of responsibility and change.

A mentor has a significant influence on a first-year student's college experience, and often influences his or her decision to stay in college because he or she may feel supported, even if he or she does not have support at home. Employing a Latino mentor will make first year Latino students feel more welcome and accepted and will provide them with a lifeline: someone they can call for advice and assistance. Holding a meeting with all first years at the beginning of the year may also help them build relationships with other Latino students in similar situations to create a feeling of comradery. Students may be more likely to stay in school if they have friends. The mentor/mentors should discuss goals with the first years and check in with them throughout the year regarding their progress to remind them of their end goals.

Schedule Options

Most participants' responsibilities in their families involved financial support, while some involved taking care of their parents or their children. The literature and the findings were in agreement, indicating the need for more manageable schedules and assistance with finances (De'Sha & Fuligni, 2017; Jabbar et al., 2017). Another recommendation is to provide Latino students with more flexible schedules. However,

these options can be made available to all students. Scheduling options can include centralized studied, semicentralized studies, or decentralized studies (online). In my opinion, semicentralized studies will be the best option for Latino students. These will ensure that they still feel part of a group, and they still have the college experience; moreover, they will have the opportunity to complete some of their work from home. Students will have options, with enrollment, to tailor their college experiences to their needs.

Timeline Options

The timeline for college completion is flexible, meaning that students should be given time to complete college not limited within a set number of years. As well as the flexibility to complete a degree, students have the ability to request extensions. Extensions allow extra time to complete requirement can be provided to students to complete their degrees, specifically Latino students, at no extra cost. This process of created an expanded timeline for completed of a college degree program will mean that students pay for the degree that they want to earn, instead of per-year tuition. However, I suggest that the students stipulate with enrollment how long they believe that they need to complete their degrees. For example, students can choose to study towards the completion of the same degree for 3 years, 5 years, or 7 years, with corresponding schedules. College leadership could provide students with the approximate hours that they will need per week for each year selection. This change can provide Latino students with more flexibility at no to low extra costs. Such timeline selection does not; however,

guarantee that costs will not fluctuate since other factors, such as failing a class, may apply.

Extra Perks

Another recommendation, related to the (a) *financial difficulties*, (b) *familial responsibilities in addition to financial support*, and (c) *recommendations for action* themes, is to provide incentives for good grades. For example, this process may include providing free lunch if students maintain an above GPA grade average. Another benefit may be working from home if student's work is updated and assignments are handed in on time. This aspect will not mean students work from home the entire time, only perhaps for that specific subject for a week. Financial incentives, such as discounts on studies for the next year or payback on a percentage of tuition fees each term for 3.0 or higher GPA, may also help Latino students. Similar incentives may provide Latino students with smaller goals, guiding them toward success with time, while still reducing their financial struggles.

Supplementary Aids

The theme *financial difficulties* emerged from the data and referred to issues in affording tuition fees, availing or paying loans, parents' financial sacrifices, sacrificing academic performance due to the need to work, and prioritizing work over studies to support themselves or their families. The literature was in agreement with the findings of this study, revealing the need for scholarships and aids tailored to the needs of Latino students (Rueda et al., 2017; Urdan & Herr, 2016). Organization leaders providing

scholarships should include additional funds specifically for Latino students. Additional

funds can include money for living expenses, food, handbooks, and commuting to and

from class. These extra aids may assist these students to such an extent that they do not

need to work, and can thus focus on their studies. Aside from students with scholarships,

assistance with commute, such as providing bus passes or having second-hand shops for

books, can help. The books needed for college are often expensive and provide Latino

students with used handbooks at a discounted rate that can save them a lot of money.

Overall, students who have the means to continue to not only pay for college expenses

but can also pay for living expenses decreases the chances for abandoning college and

entering into the working world just to survive.

Goals

The goal for this policy recommendation project is to provide realistic

recommendations to colleges to improve the graduation rates of Latino students in

northeast, and possibly other states in America. The implementation of these

recommendations will lead to higher graduation rates for Latino, and possibly other

students who benefit from the changes. Another goal is to create awareness of the

struggles faced by Latino students and show college leaders and policy makers the

importance of considering the needs of these students.

Rationale for the Project

Latinos are the largest, fastest growing, and youngest ethnic minority group in the

United States (Bishop & Surfield, 2013; Patten, 2016; Stepler & Brown, 2016), yet

Latinos are underrepresented among those with a college degree (Hinojosa et al., 2016; Nuñez et al., 2013). The scholarly rationale for this white paper was due to the continuous barriers that Latino students faced in obtaining their degrees, despite scholarships and aids being provided by leadership of colleges and universities (Davis, 2012; Gonzalez, 2016; Leon & Medina, 2016; Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013). According to the findings and the literature, Latino students have struggled with maintain finances; balancing their family responsibilities, work, and studies; and perceiving that there are inadequate programs provided by schools for Latino students. Aside from previous researchers who have explored and investigated these barriers and possible solutions (McKenzie, 2014; Tovar, 2015; Velasco, 2017), the above statistics have indicated a consistent trend. The rationale for this white paper was to understand the barriers faced by Latino students and provide a practical policy recommendation to assist more Latino students in obtaining their degrees.

At the study site, Latinos continued as underrepresented in higher education, despite having a large number of college-aged individuals who have enrolled in a college. The dropout rate for Latinos was identified as 48%, compared to 21% of Whites and 20% of African Americans, and only 14% of its Latino students were found to graduate within 4 years (Associate Professor of Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). The exact reasons for the disproportionate dropout rates for Latinos at this college were largely unknown, although it was likely that the reasons were related to financial difficulties, lack of family support, and language barriers (Associate Professor of

Sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016). I provided similar findings, with financial struggles, family and work obligations, and a lack of retention programs focused on Latino students as the reasons for Latino students to drop out.

Review of the Literature

The aim of this white paper was to recommend an incentive and support program for Latino students, driven by mentors, to help them obtain a college degree. I focused on developing a policy recommendation to minimize or eliminate the barriers that prevented adult Latino students from attaining a college degree. The recommendations were made based on the findings of the study and the available literature, which included appointing a mentor, schedule options, timeline options, extra perks, and supplementary aids.

The main focus of this policy recommendation is to implement Latino mentors in colleges, including a support program lead by these Latino mentors. The Latino mentors must be alumni from any college, meaning that they understand the Latino students they will mentor, as Latino mentors will have experienced it themselves and still graduated. One Latino mentor should be employed for every 10 to 15 Latino students, or any number that proves in practice as an appropriate workload.

The findings of this study indicated why Latino students struggled to finish their after-school studies. Participants provided recommendations to educational institutions on how to assist them. This review of the literature will show what has been done previously to assist Latino students with their financial difficulties, their responsibilities, and scholarship programs and aids already dedicated to Latino students.

Research Strategy

The following online databases and search engines were used to provide the texts reviewed for this section: EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, PsychArticles, and ScienceDirect. The search terms used to find articles were the following: *Latinos, higher education, Hispanics, assistance, scholarship, community college, university, Latinos in community college, Latinos in undergraduate education, Latino students, student retention, first generation, first year, financial assistance, financial aid, responsibilities, first year, scholarships, intervention, barriers, program, policy, Latino-orientated, educational progress, aids, financial difficulties, responsibilities*, and combinations of these terms. I have chosen these terms because these were closely related to the problem of this study. Of the literature reviewed, 96% was published from 2013 to 2018, while 4% of the literature was published earlier.

Conceptual Framework

The following theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study: Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration and the geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail et al., 2003). Tinto's (1993) theory suggested that student integration and the geometric model were concepts associated with student persistence and achievement. This theory contends dropouts of students are commonly motivated not from academic failures as much as by financial burdens, social and cultural difficulties, language difficulties, and lack of motivation. Tinto highlighted that being an

immigrant and/or being part of a largely immigrant family had an effect on dropout rates; this concept was applicable to the present study, as many Latinos fell in those categories.

Tinto's theory of student integration. Tinto (1993) developed the theory of student integration to understand a student's decision to continue or drop out of school, outside of simple academic reasons (Sidelinger et al., 2016). According to Tinto (1993), most student dropouts are motivated by reasons that are not academic in nature, such as financial burdens, social and cultural difficulties, language difficulties, and lack of motivation, among others. According to the findings of this study, participants revealed that they faced barriers, including financial difficulties, family responsibilities, and a lack of Latino-orientated programs provided by the college. Not one of the barriers was academically related, except that time constraints and responsibilities might influence students' abilities to sustain a GPA. Tinto highlighted that being an immigrant and/or being part of a largely immigrant family had an effect on dropout rates; this concept was applicable to the present study, as many Latinos fell in those categories.

Academic and social factors affect all college students and their desires to continue their educations, but these factors may be more pressing for minority students, as their cultures at home may differ from the social and academic environments that they are placed in at school (Tinto, 1993). The literature and the findings of the study indicated that the value of *familismo* of Latino students was often in contrast of the typical American culture where individualism, self-reliance, and a strong sense of personal responsibility were valued (Chambers et al., 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015).

Participant 8 expressed that Latino students had different needs than other international students, as Latinos were more "family-oriented." If the goals and values espoused by the school differ markedly from the goals and values the student is taught at home, then the student may feel isolated and fail to engage in his or her own education (Tinto, 1993). The participants also revealed that they did not feel well integrated in their school and only spent time there when they were in class. Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration shows the multitude of factors that influence students' sense of integration outside their academic capabilities and their effects on student retention. Tinto's theory underscored the findings of the current project study and provided an explanation of the root of the barriers faced by Latino students.

Swail's geometric model of student persistence and achievement. According to Swail et al. (2003), three primary factors determine whether a student continues or drops out of school, namely the cognitive, social, and institutional factors. The most important part of the model is the base, where the institutional factors are found; these factors provide support to students to realize their own academic and social success (Sanford & Hunter, 2011). According to the findings of this study, there was a lack of Latino-orientated programs provided by the college, which might indicate institutional factors as a reason for dropout. For institutional factors, there are the following forces: "financial aid, student services, recruitment and admissions, academic services, and curriculum and instruction" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77). In this study, the barriers faced by Latino students were related to financial aid and academic services.

For cognitive factors, there are the following forces: "academic rigor, quality of learning, aptitude, content knowledge, critical-thinking ability, technology ability, study skills, learning skills, time management, and academic-related extracurricular activities" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77); the findings of this research indicated barriers with time-management. For social factors, there are the following forces: "financial issues, educational legacy, attitude toward learning, religious background, maturity, social coping skills, communication skills, attitude toward others, cultural values, expectations, goal commitment, family influence, peer influence, and social lifestyle" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 77); the findings of this study indicated barriers with financial issues and family influence. Many different forces act within these three factors that contribute toward the student's general experience in education. I used Swail et al.'s (2003) theory in this research to provide an understanding of the origin of barriers that Latino students faced.

First-Year Latino Students

In the past decade or two, many changes were made to improve the ease of access to post-secondary educational institutions for minority groups, yet much still has to be done. Davis (2012) stated that the policymakers or individuals in control of the American education system realized that the exclusion of minorities in universities and colleges had been more detrimental than beneficial. At most higher education establishments, admission decisions depend on standardized test scores that may jeopardize the borderline applicants, often minority students (Covarrubias, Gallimore, & Okagaki, 2018). In the case of first-year Latino students, they may be the first of their households

to make it to secondary education, making them even more unprepared for what to expect. According to Shumaker and Wood (2016), the parent's education level is a significant indicator of the child's education, as well as behavioral outcomes. Researchers have shown Latino students as motivated to succeed in work based on their familial orientations and intrinsic motivations, while working helps them to integrate on campus better (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016).

First-generation students, including Latinos, who often have financial constraints, have a 26% chance of leaving college or university after 1 year (Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). First-year Latino college students face unique challenges, including financial, academic, and social constraints (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014). As also stated by the participants, first-year Latino students were less likely to stay and interact with the college's faculty to better their chances of attaining better results (McCormick, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2013), and often did not have a clear understanding of the college life (McKenzie, 2014). As evidenced by the findings of this study, 25% of Latino first-generation students were parents, and few institution leaders considered this aspect and made accommodations (Nelson et al., 2013). Leaders should attempt to accommodate these students by increasing access to education for students who are also parents, which will have a long-term multigenerational positive influence on society, including family economic returns (Nelson et al., 2013). Latino students have increased access to a college education but continue to fail due to exclusion caused by their personal characteristics, institutional features, familial situation, and public policies,

as well as the phases of the students' development (Castro, Rodríguez-Gómez, & Gairin, 2017).

The findings provided by this study and the review of the literature have indicated that Latino students have faced certain barriers during their studies, and leaders should provide and implement changes to accommodate these students. The factors positively influencing the success of first-year students may include motivation, professional goals, leadership skills (Pelco et al., 2014), independence (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, 2016), and support systems (Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Durón, 2013). Participants indicated that their academic goals usually kept them motivated, and leaders would be wise to capitalize on this motivation. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) stated that leaders should identify the motivation behind Latino first-year students attempting postsecondary education, which might include having a talent for sport, assisting their families, or honoring their parents; these motivators could increase their resilience toward barriers.

Even though there may be mentors, the current mentors may speak Spanish, yet not understand the Latino culture. Mentorship and intrinsic motivation often influence the success of first-year students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Dumais et al., 2013; Leon & Medina, 2016). Relatable teachers who are supportive instead of controlling help the development of intrinsic motivation that significantly affects academic success (Trevino, & DeFreitas, 2014).

Phillips et al. (2016) posited that cultural mismatch adds to the stress of minority students and negatively influences their academic performance during college transition, which was also evident in the findings of this research. Phillips et al.'s findings showed that the endorsement of interdependence not matching the culture of independence in the college resulted in a reduced sense of belonging after 4 years. Lower fit also predicted lower grades, as well as subjective statuses when graduating. College leaders should provide inclusive environments to guarantee the graduation of diverse students (Phillips et al., 2016). Leaders should provide culturally sensitive mentorship to Latino families to improve their educational awareness (Gonzalez, 2016; Leon & Medina, 2016). To assist minority students successfully, advisors or mentors should have an understanding of the unique challenges faced by this population and adjust strategic interventions to assist these students to graduate (Roscoe, 2015). Thus, leaders should provide students with Latino mentors to guide them, especially in their first years.

Financial Assistance

The educational success of parents has a long-term influence on the overall success of the child's educational level, owing to the financial strength of the parent and the level of motivation to surpass the achievements of their parents (Heath et al., 2014). Urdan and Herr (2016) posited that lower-income students, which was the case most often for Latinos, had a higher chance of staying in college if they received financial assistance and had opportunities to earn more money. Gil (2016) explored universities' leaders who were successfully retaining first-generation Latino students and found that

these 4-year institutions had higher graduation rates compared with the national average for this population. These universities' leaders fostered Latino college completion by recognizing and responding to the unique needs of these students (Gil, 2016). The universities' leaders institutionalized Latino-specific interventions by providing funding for this population, developing systems with integrated support, and enforcing an inclusive campus climate (Gil, 2016). Gil (2016) presented similar findings as this study's findings, and Gil indicated that changes in this regard would be successful if implemented thoroughly.

The research conducted on financial aid or assistance for Latino students has been sparse yet consistent. The positive effect of financial assistance on student retention is constant, regardless of students attending college part-time or full-time (Gross, Zerquera, Inge, & Berry, 2014; Latino et al., 2018; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014). In a comprehensive study conducted at a single college, Rueda et al. (2017) explored the experiences of low-income, first-generation students. Most participants indicated that the financial assistance provided by the university was a key factor in deciding to attend this university specifically (Rueda et al., 2017). Students stated that without financial aid policies, they would have found it difficult to attend college or even impossible (Rueda et al., 2017). Financial aid seemed to cause some confusion, as well. Students reported that they experienced difficulty understanding their financial award letters, had challenges with work study allotments, and had trouble accessing and finding financial aid offices (Rueda et al., 2017).

Other researchers found that financial aid benefitted students. Campbell, Cochrane, Love, and Ellie (2017) stated that more research was indicating that if students did not have the burden of paying tuition fees, including transportation, textbooks, food, and living costs, then they had a higher chance of being successful in their studies. When students do not have enough resources, they have to make choices that sacrifice their academic performance; for example, they may not buy required handbooks because they cannot afford then, or they would rather work than study (Campbell et al., 2017). Any form of aid will help these students avoid sacrificing their academic careers, whether it be from federal, state, or institutional sources (Campbell et al., 2017).

The findings of this research indicated that low-income students in their first study years were much more successful if they received more financial aid compared to students who received less aid (Campbell et al., 2017). For example, 49% of students with no financial resources of their own graduated or transferred when they received $7,501 or more in financial aid, when compared to 17% of students who received only up to $2,500 (Campbell et al., 2017). The research indicated that students often only received aid from one source, yet students who received aid from federal, state, and institutional grants had the highest success rates (Campbell et al., 2017). Of these students, 47% graduated or transferred within 6 years, with 67% flagged as academically prepared (Campbell et al., 2017).

Work and Family Responsibilities

As stated by participants, family played an important role in the lives of Latinos, and they often sacrificed their academic performances for family responsibilities. Jabbar et al. (2017) posited that families played a significant role in a student's school choices throughout the course of their academic career. The researchers studied Latino students in Texas, and they found that families formed these students' "choice sets" and had a complex influence through emotional, inspirational, informational, and financial support (Jabbar et al., 2017).

Vasquez-Salgado et al. (2015) aimed to reveal how first-generation Latino college students navigated the conflict between family obligations and their own drive to excel academically. The researchers found that it was difficult to attain a perfect balance between obligations at home and school. This issue resulted in tension arising from choosing one over the other, and repercussions at home or school.

Abrica and Martinez (2016) explored successful Latino students and how they navigated their financial constraints. The researchers found participants persisted despite challenges faced. Participants depended on complex strategies, including having intrinsic motivations and strong desires for success.

De'Sha and Fuligni (2017) found that students from Filipino and Latino descent spent more time helping their family daily when compared to their East Asian and European counterparts. De'Sha and Fuligni found Latino students provided their families with finances at a higher rate than East Asian and European background students, and

male Latino students more often than females. Most importantly, young adults who provided daily help and financial support to their families were less inclined to obtain bachelor's degrees and more inclined to obtain associate's degrees (De'Sha & Fuligni, 2017).

Sáenz, García-Louis, Drake, and Guida (2018) aimed to better understand Latino male students studying part-time and full-time. Sáenz et al. explored Latino male college experiences to understand better how they balanced all their obligations toward their families, studies, and jobs. Sáenz et al. conducted semistructured focus groups with 130 male Latino students who were enrolled full- or part-time at several Texas community colleges.

The findings indicated the significant influence of family members on the educational pathways of male Latino's who depended heavily on *familismo,* as well as familial capital for support throughout their community college experience (Sáenz et al., 2018). Regardless of starting studies with a variety of community cultural wealth sources, male Latino's struggled to navigate their college experience due to being the first in their families to study and being apprehensive about help-seeking (Sáenz et al., 2018). Regardless of the variety of obligations these Latino males had in their families, these still did not put limitations on their educational pathways; instead, the research showed that their family relationships motivated them and provided them with support, strengthening their aspirations toward graduation (Sáenz et al., 2018).

Latino-Oriented Programs

As suggested by the participants, more programs were needed that were tailored to the needs of Latino students; however, some universities' leaders attempted to accommodate Latino students. Tovar (2015) found that interactions between a Latino student and institutional agents had a small, yet significant influence on this population's success. The researcher also found that Latino students' participation in academically rigorous programs, as well as counseling-intensive supports, affected these students' success and their intents to persist (Tovar, 2015). The institution can influence the academic and social integration of its students by adopting or developing measures that can facilitate the process (Carpi et al., 2013). The academic success of Latino students was found related to academic self-confidence, sociocultural characteristics, ethnic identity, beliefs, coping styles, college experiences, previous academic experiences, interactions with supportive people, intrinsic motivation and commitment, campus perceptions, and institutional characteristics (Crisp et al., 2015).

McKenzie (2014) explored the success of a student support services (SSS) program on first-generation transfer students. McKenzie used qualitative phenomenological methodology, as only a few first-generation transfer students graduated successfully from college and transferred to university where they received a degree. A large number of students who attended community college were first-generation students, while being disadvantaged and not able to earn degrees (McKenzie,

2014). Even though many of these students did not successfully graduate, they made up

24% of the student population in 2005 (McKenzie, 2014).

McKenzie (2014) primarily focused on the successes of nine first-generation low-

income students. McKenzie conducted interviews during participants' final terms.

McKenzie explored the successes experienced by participants, as well as resources and

activities that were provided to them by the SSS program. The researcher showed how it

added to their successes. The themes that emerged showed that the SSS program

provided participants with a community that could be similar to a family support system

(McKenzie, 2014). Access to an SSS program influenced the transfer and success of the

participants positively (McKenzie, 2014). Having feelings of belonging in the SSS

program further added to student success (McKenzie, 2014). The SSS program also

provided knowledge on what students could expect in college and increased the students'

confidence levels (McKenzie, 2014). Findings indicated that first-generation transfer

students, who were part of an SSS program, were successful (McKenzie, 2014).

California community college leaders have implemented EOP&S to assist low-

income, nontraditional, and first-generation students (Velasco, 2017). Velasco (2017)

aimed to identify the specific factors of the EOP&S that participants perceived to

influence their success and persistence. A questionnaire was provided to 167 Latino

students, using the EOP&S at Northern California community college (Velasco, 2017).

The findings indicated that participants generally had positive views of cultural identity,

high self-efficacy, and reported that the EOP&S program and staff provided a very

supportive environment (Velasco, 2017). Most participants showed high levels of validation, self-efficacy, and positive cultural identity (Velasco, 2017). Participants also perceived that taking part in EOP&S, specifically their interactions with advisors and counselors, added to their success levels (Velasco, 2017). In a related study, Garza (2015) found that Latino students had high optimism and aspirations, regardless of barriers, challenges, as well as a lack of mentorship. Mentorship and social support sources from family and the institution contributed to Latino students' sense of belonging in their colleges (Garza, 2015).

Project Description

Potential Resources, Existing Supports, Barriers, and Future Direction

The aim of this white paper was to recommend an incentive and support program for Latino students, driven by mentors, to help them obtain a college degree. The analysis of the interviews provided several barriers that they experienced as successful in their studies, and participants provided possible solutions, including Latino mentors and Latino-specific programs. The research reviewed in this section also provided evidence of the success of support programs and mentors.

Therefore, a recommendation is to implement Latino mentors in northeastern U.S. colleges, including a support program led by these Latino mentors. The Latino mentors will have to be alumni from any college, meaning that they will understand the Latino students they will mentor, as they will have experienced it themselves, and they still have graduated. One Latino mentor should be employed for every 10 to 15 Latino students, or

any number that evidence had shown as an appropriate workload. This process will ensure that the students needing assistance will not be overlooked and will get to know their mentors on a personal level. Mentors must be available to these students on a regular basis—they should have an office on campus, and students should have access to them via cellphone. However, leaders should not expect mentors to always be—they can establish their boundaries with their students themselves.

The purpose of providing such intense mentorship and support is for the students to be comfortable enough to discuss their problems with their mentors, as they encounter problems. When students encounter serious barriers, without any support, their first instinct may be to drop out. If they have free access to a support system—first of all their mentor, and second, other students who form part of the mentor's group—they may discuss their barriers firsts, develop solutions with their mentors, and may persist with their studies. The mentor must build a relationship of trust with each of the students in his or her group, which is also a reason for a small group. The support program will also be led by mentors but should be quite informal. A group meeting will be scheduled for each term, separately for each mentor and their students. Attendance should be mandatory for each student. Each meeting should be led with a specific aim in mind.

The objective for the first meeting should be surrounding the students' goals, the current challenges they face, and what they can expect throughout the course of their first years. Mentors should be ready with possible solutions to challenges or work through these with students if they do not have a solution immediately. The second meeting can

involve the students' current progress, how they have reacted to experiences thus far, and what they may possibly need help with solving. The third meeting should reiterate how far the students have come so far and encourage them to push through for the last few months. The last meeting for the year should involve reflecting back on everything students have accomplished, what their plans are for the holidays, and encourage them to rest and come back ready for their second years. In the second year of these students, they should still have access to the same mentors and meetings, and this support system should be available for them until graduation.

Possible barriers can be personality mismatches between students and mentors. In that case, a student can be transferred to a different mentor at their request. Another possible barrier is a lack of support from the mentor; in this case, a student can also report the issue and be transferred. If several complaints are made, the mentor should be replaced. Another barrier may be students disregarding the support system, not making use of it, or not understanding the benefits. Attendance to the meeting should be mandatory. The mentors should be responsible for reaching out to students who do not regularly communicate with them and report them as at risk if they avoid communication.

Implementation and Timetable

The first task will be to recruit Latino mentors to lead their groups. The college leaders can use data of Latino enrollments for the previous year to determine the number of mentors needed so that each mentor has a manageable number of students. The college leaders can use their most recent Latino alumni, depending on how many mentors are

needed. Second, mentors should be assigned Latino students as students enroll for the following year. As the students enroll, mentors can provide students with a welcome message and a copy of the agenda for the year, including details of the first meeting. Mentors should also explain to students that mentors are there to help students with any challenges that they face.

A group meeting will be scheduled for each term, separately for each mentor and their students. The mentor will be responsible for setting up the meeting and conveying details to their students. The aim for the first meeting should be surrounding the students' goals, the current challenges they face, and what they can expect throughout the course of their first years. The second meeting in the second term should involve the students' current progress, how they have reacted to experiences thus far, and what they may possibly need help with solving. The third meeting should reiterate how far students have come and encourage them to push through the last few months. The last meeting for the year should involve reflecting back on everything the students have accomplished, what their plans are for the holidays, and encourage them to rest and come back ready for their second years.

In the second year, Latino students should still have access to the same mentors and meetings, and this support system should be available for them until graduation. Leaders can make adaptations to the program after each meeting with the students as problems arise. After each meeting with students, mentors should meet with each other, discuss their challenges, and develop solutions to better the program for future students.

Roles and Responsibilities

The primary responsibility of implementing this policy recommendation will be the administrators and stakeholders. The stakeholders will have to stipulate the budget available to employ the mentors needed for this program; however, because this program will mostly involve part-time work for the mentors, a large budget may not be needed. Second, administrators must advertise their needs for mentors with specific requirements and contact eligible candidates. The administrators will also have to handle the required employee contracts with these mentors and provide mentors with the requirements of their job and all aids, resources, and information that they may need. One administrator will also have to be responsible for the entire program, regularly liaise with mentors, and provide them with guidance. The final responsibility of this policy recommendation will fall on mentors. Mentors will be responsible for liaising with students, assisting them where needed, setting up and leading quarterly meetings, and providing feedback to administrators and stakeholders.

Project Implications

At the Local Level

The possible implications for this support program for Latino students are increased retention rates for Latino students. Second, Latino students will have an opportunity to make friends going through similar struggles as them, which may encourage them to persevere. Latino students may perceive the college leadership as caring about them. Latino students will have the opportunity, through regular support, to

reach their goals and graduate. A support culture may be developed on campus, which may lead to better-integrated Latino students who may decide to take part in other college activities.

Wider Context Influences

In a wider context, the success of this policy recommendation may lead to a larger number of Latino students entering the workforce with the ability to compete for job requiring higher education degrees. By entering the workforce in positions of higher pay, higher responsibility, and higher levels of management, Latinos have the opportunity to increase their own economic standing, which allows for a positive contribution to the surrounding community and increase in the local economy.

Latino students who drop out of college without attaining their degrees or diplomas have limited job opportunities to choose from and may have to settle for lower paying job opportunities. They will not earn as much as someone with a degree or diploma and may not be able to live the lifestyle that they wish. The possible success of this policy recommendation at the study site in the northeast may lead to other colleges adopting this Latino-orientated program, which will lead to larger scale benefits, such as having a widespread educated Latino population entering the workforce. The success of this policy recommendation may lead to more Latino students applying to this specific college in the northeastern United States, which may result in a more diverse and positive campus.

Summary

The aim of this white paper was to recommend an incentive and support program for Latino students, driven by mentors, to help them obtain a college degree. Based on the qualitative findings provided in Section 2 and a review of the literature, I arrived at several recommendations that might increase Latino students' chances of obtaining their degrees. I recommended implementing Latino mentors in northeastern U.S. colleges, including a support program led by these Latino mentors. The Latino mentors must be alumni from any college, meaning that they should understand the Latino students they would mentor, as mentors would have experienced it themselves and still proceeded to graduate. Latino students' participation in academically rigorous programs, as well as counseling-intensive supports, affected these students' success levels and their intent to persist (Tovar, 2015). The following section will provide a discussion of reflections and conclusions, project strengths and limitations, recommendations for alternative approaches, scholarship, development, leadership, and change, the importance of the work, implications, applications, and recommendations, and an overall conclusion.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

There are several strengths associated with implementing this project. The first strength is that the project will not have a significant financial impact on the college's budget. Only one mentor is needed for every 10 to 15 Latino students who enroll. The second strength is that the findings from this study are consistent with the literature regarding the success of mentors and focused support (Carpi et al., 2013; Gonzalez, 2016; Knouse, 2013; Murakami & Nunez, 2014; Velasco, 2017). The third strength is that this support program is not complex to implement, and it does not require excessive funding; it is part of a collaboration that implements a collaboration council. The use of this council provides an implementation of culturally responsive support from the collegiate community to assist with acculturation into the collegiate environment.

The recommendations for improving collegiate acclimation for Latino students must be approached realistically; some funding will be necessary. Administrators must stipulate the budget available to employ mentors needed for this program; advertise their need for mentors with specific requirements; contact eligible candidates; discuss and sign employee contracts with selected mentors; and provide mentors with the requirements of their job and all aids, resources, and information that they may need. One administrator will also have to be responsible for the entire program, including the overseeing of mentors. Lastly, mentors will be responsible for liaising with students, assisting them where needed, setting up and leading quarterly meetings, and providing feedback to

administrators and stakeholders. The support program can also be implemented immediately after Latino mentors are interviewed and appointed. The success of the support program may be visible after 3 months and will be easy to monitor.

The first limitation is that the success of the program is dependent on the competence of mentors, which is why mentors will have to be interviewed before they are appointed. The second limitation of the program is that it will be tailored to Latino students; other struggling students may not benefit from the program because it will be led by Latino mentors. The third limitation is that the success of the program will be dependent on the participation of Latino students and their willingness to use what is provided to them.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The goal for the white paper was to provide incentive and support program recommendations to assist Latino students in obtaining their college degree. The recommendations leading to this accomplishment included implementing support programs that placed Latino mentors in northeastern U.S. colleges. Although this suggested program is feasible, affordable, and easily implemented, there are other approaches that could be successful. However, many of these approaches may be more expensive or may need increased personnel to implement (Orfield, 2017). Such approaches include a commitment and matriculation program and an integrative precollege class that teaches skills necessary for the college environment (Kosobuski, Whitney, Skildum, & Prunuske, 2017).

A commitment and matriculation program would include a collaboration council made up from the community's advisory board and the collegiate advisory board. This program should provide substantial support for Latino students, emphasizing a culturally responsive approach for navigation between the student's home life, community, and education. Guidance is given hands on with more developmental courses offered, and community members are involved in providing real-life experiences in the workforce based on the student's major or interest. One example of this type of program is the Enlace Program. The overall goal of the Enlace Program is to retain Latino students, and this program has a 55% success rate (Evergreen Valley College, 2019; Regua, Burton, & Garza, 2009).

An integrative precollege class that teaches skills necessary for the college environment is another alternative and begins in secondary education. This high school program includes a bridge program that teaches Latino high school seniors skills that will assist with success in college. For example, during the summer before a student enters college, he or she would take a community class to establish knowledge of skills as critical thinking and decision-making. Courses should also address occupational skills, such as how to manage money and integrate into a college environment. The "primary goal of college transition programs is to provide students with early awareness of the benefits of continuing their education and by introducing them to the skills and support systems necessary for college life" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 5). The Dynamy Internship program is an example of a college transition program and is one of

the oldest residential internship programs in the United States offering transitional education for students graduating from high school and entering college in the future (U.S. Gap Year, 2019). This program focuses on mentorship and leadership education including college advising and occupational living standards such as how to find an apartment, balance studying with recreation, and prepare for and become successful during the college years.

Scholarship, Development, Leadership, and Change

As a researcher and scholar, I learned about qualitative research and how to conduct research with integrity. It was rewarding to interview participants regarding their barriers to finishing college. I was privileged to be allowed into these students' lives with the possibility of making changes. Conducting this project was not without its challenges, however, and I learned to persevere regardless of difficulties with my end goal in mind. There is a need for research similar to this project study to explore the success of the implemented solutions and to refine these based on further evidence. Last, I realized the importance of every section required for this project study and aimed to conduct this study as thoroughly as possible. I hoped that the recommendations made in this study would be implemented to bring about the social change needed to address the problem stipulated throughout this research, and that the findings of this study would provide avenues for further research in education.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Latinos are underrepresented among Americans with at least a college degree, both nationally and in the northeastern United States (Fry & Lopez, 2012), which was the setting for the present study. According to data gathered in 2012, 29.2% of the U.S. population ages 25 years and above possessed a bachelor's degree or higher; of these individuals, 13.9% were Latinos, which was well below the 50.6% rate for Asians, 32.6% rate for Whites, and 18.8% for Blacks (NCES, 2014). Through exploration of the experiences and perceptions of Latinos from the northeastern United States who dropped out of college regarding the barriers they faced, a more detailed understanding was gained regarding the needs of Latino students to pursue higher education and to persevere to degree completion.

With findings generated by the study, leaders can develop interventions and policies in the northeastern United States to address underrepresentation among the Latino population with a college degree and to assist Latino students in overcoming the barriers they face in their pursuit of higher education. Findings from this study may be used to guide future studies related to the underrepresentation of Latinos in higher education in other states and to shape interventions aimed at increasing graduation rates among Latinos. Similar studies are needed to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students, thereby improving the quality of the workforce in the United States.

Implications, Applications, and Recommendations for Future Research

Leaders can use findings from this study to develop intervention programs, training curricula, and policy recommendations to help Latino students graduate at a rate proportional to their peers in college. Second, findings may be used to develop or modify intervention programs or policies to address the problem of underrepresentation of Latinos among those with a college degree. Last, the data generated may serve as an addition to the lack of scholarly literature on Latino underrepresentation among those with a college degree in the United States.

The first recommendation for future research is to conduct a mixed-methods longitudinal intervention study addressing the support system stipulated in this study and measuring the success of the support program over 2 years. Data collection may include interviews with students and mentors regarding benefits and challenges of the program. Quantitative measures can be used to examine the retention rates of Latino students in intervals throughout the year for 2 years. Such a study may validate the project and may lead to implementation of this project throughout other states.

The second recommendation for future research is to explore struggles of low-income African American students and compare these to struggles of Latino students. The comparison between struggles may provide researchers with a deeper understanding of differences and similarities between these two populations, and may provide a guideline of how to adjust current support programs to suit the needs of African American students. Research is needed to improve the college experience for African

American students because they have the second lowest graduation rates after the Latino population.

The third recommendation for future research is to conduct a quantitative study on the level of influence of barriers mentioned by participants in the current study. Through quantification of the impact of each barrier, educational leaders may have a better idea of where to assist Latino students to retain them at higher rates. These institutional leaders may then provide better support programs focusing on barriers that have the most influence on students deciding to drop out.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand why Latinos were at risk for dropping out of college. The percentage of Latinos who are enrolled in college has increased over the years, from 4% in 1976 to 16% in 2013 (NCES, 2014). However, the dropout rates for Latinos in college remain disproportionately higher relative to other ethnic groups in the United States (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Two research questions guided this study to understand what adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study setting perceived to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled, and what adult Latino students at risk for dropping out believed the college could do to retain them. The findings indicated that (a) financial difficulties, (b) familial responsibilities in addition to financial support, and (c) lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students cause Latino students to

drop out of college. Achieving goals to graduate and recommended actions for the school were the factors that retained Latino students.

After a review of the literature in relation to data analyzed, a project for implementation was proposed. The project recommended implementation of Latino mentors in northeast colleges, including a support program led by these Latino mentors. I proposed the mentor program to increase retention rates for Latino students, increase the percentage of Latino students reaching their goals and graduating through regular support, and increase the percentage of Latino students entering the workforce with a proper education. The findings from this project study may lead to social change by providing a better future for Latino students.

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Appendix A: White Paper

White Paper Title: An Incentive and Support Program for Latino Students to overcome

Barriers

Dates of Project: September 1, 2017

Date of Report: July 7, 2018

Executive Summary

Background

I prepared this executive summary for administrators, leaders, and professors of the local college in the northeastern United States who were seeking ways to improve the outcomes of their Latino students. Recommendations are listed based on the findings of the report on barriers that prevent college degree attainment for Latinos, as well as a policy recommendation that may improve the retention rates of Latino students. The policy recommendations are proposed to actualize an incentive and support program for Latino students to increase retention and graduation rates. The implications, roles and responsibilities, and strengths and weaknesses of the policy recommendations are detailed.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand why Latinos were at increased risk for dropping out of college compared to White counterparts. A deeper understanding of this problem may be solved through a policy recommendation. There are about 55 million Latinos in the United States comprising approximately 17% of the general population (NCES, 2014; Stepler & Brown, 2016). While Latinos are not currently the dominant ethnic group in the United States, their numbers are rapidly increasing at a yearly rate of 44.1% (Bishop & Surfield, 2013). However, the low graduation rates for Latinos were identified as a concern given that they have the highest number of college enrollees among ethnic groups in the United States (NCES, 2014). The

problem was the high college dropout rates among Latino students that contributed to underrepresentation in the college campus and in the college's graduates.

The problem of underrepresentation of Latinos in the college graduate population exists nationwide and particularly in the northeastern United States, which was the geographical area chosen for this study. While 13% may appear not to be indicative of a gap given that 15% of northeastern U.S. residents are Latino, the graduation rates of Latino college students compared to other ethnicities continue to remain low despite the large number of Latinos enrolling in northeastern U.S. colleges (Santiago, Galdeano, & Taylor, 2015). The graduation rates of Latinos in northeastern United States have not increased proportionally in the face of more Latino students enrolling in college. However, Latinos may be taking longer to graduate and are frequently not graduating at all (Santiago et al., 2015).

In a public state school located in the northeast, the graduation rates for Latinos remain lower than those of other ethnic groups (Assistant research coordinator, personal communication, August 28, 2016). According to the assistant research coordinator for the research department, Latino students drop out more often than do students of other ethnicities, and the reasons for this are complex and difficult to identify (Assistant research coordinator, personal communication, August 28, 2016). Based on internal surveys conducted among its students, some of the factors for the low graduation rate of Latinos at the college are financial problems, lack of family support, and the existence of

language barriers (Associate professor of sociology, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

The participants of this qualitative case study approach were Latino students at risk of dropping out of the college and, who were enrolled in a degree program but were considering dropping out before completion. I made certain that participants understood that I realized that there was no stigma attached for considering withdrawing from college and that I simply wished to understand the reasons why they are thinking about it. I identified these participants through the examination of college records. The students who participated in the study had attended this college since 2013. Data were collected from 12 participants through semistructured individual interviews. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled?

RQ2. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them?

The primary data collection method of interviews included audio-recorded interviews, which I later transcribed. I also took notes during the interviews (which also assisted with member checking). I collected data from archival school documents on the college's student retention efforts and programs to increase persistence and degree completion.

The theory of student integration (Tinto, 1993) and the geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail et al., 2003) were applied as the conceptual frameworks when conducting this qualitative case study on the barriers that prevented adult Latino students from attaining a college degree. Tinto (1993) developed the theory of student integration to understand a student's decision to continue or drop out of school, outside of simple academic reasons (Sidelinger et al., 2016). According to Tinto (1993), most student drops were motivated by reasons that were not academic in nature, such as financial burdens, social and cultural difficulties, language difficulties, and lack of motivation. According to Swail et al. (2003), three primary factors determine whether a student continues or drops out of school, namely cognitive, social, and institutional factors. The most important part of the model is the base, where the institutional factors are found, because these factors provide support to students to realize their own academic and social success (Sanford & Hunter, 2011). The conceptual framework based on Tinto's (1993) theory and Swail et al.'s (2003) model framed the analyses of the data.

Open coding was used to analyze the transcribed data. The coding process involved two steps, including manual coding and computer-assisted coding. Coding the data twice allowed for prolonged immersion with the data and increased accuracy. Several barriers to college completion were identified including financial difficulties, familial responsibilities beyond financial support, and lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. The benefit of this study was that administrators and other stakeholders could better understand why Latino students are at risk to drop out of

college, and with such understanding, could make data-informed decisions to make

changes that may. The study findings formed the base for the policy recommendation,

which is an incentive and support program for Latino students, driven by mentors, to help

them obtain a college degree.

Summary of the Literature, Analysis, and Findings

RQ1. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study

setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay

enrolled? The following three themes emerged: (a) financial difficulties, (b) familial

responsibilities beyond financial support, and (c) lack of dropout prevention programs

targeting Latino students.

Challenge 1: Latino students frequently experience financial difficulties in their

pursuit of higher education. Financial difficulties emerged as a theme with issues of

affording tuition fees, paying loans, parents' financial sacrifices, and sacrificing studies

due to the need to work. Most participants shared that they have been experiencing

financial difficulties, which have led to most participants contemplating dropout. The

participants revealed that financial difficulties generally required them to work while

studying, in which the demands of work jeopardized their academic performances. Urdan

and Herr (2016) posited that lower-income students, which is the case most often for

Latino's, have a higher chance of staying in college if they receive financial assistance

and if they have opportunities to earn more money. In another study, students specifically

stated that without the financial aid policies it would have been difficult for them to

attend college, or even impossible (Rueda et al., 2017). Most participants had a scholarship; however, working while studying resulted in difficulty maintaining a minimum GPA for the scholarship. Participant 5 shared, "I pay for my own education, so sometimes I struggle with paying for school, books, gas, food, and whatever else I need." The literature agreed with the findings of this study, indicating the need for scholarships tailored to the needs of Latino students.

Challenge 2: Familial responsibilities beyond financial support. As mentioned in the previous theme, some participants considered dropping out of college to work to support their families. Most participants' responsibilities in their families involved financial support, while some involved taking care of their parents or their children. Participant 3 and 10 shared they had to support a spouse and child, making it difficult to balance work and studies, with daycare also being expensive. Similar to Participant 1, Participant 10 considered prioritizing the needs of his family over his studies and experienced issues with his scholarship due to work.

Jabbar, Serrata, Epstein, and Sánchez (2017) posited that families also played a significant role in a student's school choices throughout the course of their academic careers. In correlation, De'Sha and Fuligni (2017) found that students from Filipino and Latino descent spent more time helping their family daily when compared to their East Asian and European counterparts. Participant 11 revealed that his "number one priority" was his family especially since, aside from his younger brother, he was the only one who spoke English. On the other hand, some participants struggled with supporting their

parents. Again, the literature and the findings were in agreement, revealing the need for more manageable schedules and assistance with finances.

Challenge 3: A lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. Most participants mentioned having a scholarship to pay for their college education, however, most participants also revealed that a scholarship was not sufficient to help Latino students to stay in college and obtain their degree. While eight of the participants were unaware or unsure if their school had programs for Latino students to stay in college, most participants perceived that there was a lack of appropriate programs. Some of the participants were members of the Latino/Caribbean center in school, however, the participants perceived that the center was insufficient because it helped them to make friends, but there were no role models, experts, or professional guidance to help them in their college years. Alternatively, in another study, the researcher found that participants generally had positive views of cultural identity, high self-efficacy, and reported that the EOP&S program and staff provided a very supportive environment (Velasco, 2017). Participant 10 shared that the mentors in the center, while helpful, generally did not understand the students' situations. Moreover, most participants perceived that having a mentoring and tutoring services meant for Latino students would be advantageous. In relation to the findings of Velasco (2017), the current program provided to the participants of this research may not be properly tailored to suit their needs and increase their success.

Research has indicated that Latino students' participation in academically rigorous programs as well as counseling-intensive supports affected these students' success and their intent to persist (Tovar, 2015). Generally, most participants perceived that fluency in English was good, but other people had trouble understanding them due to their accents. As a result, some participants felt that they were not well-integrated in the school. The participants shared that the only time they spent in school was during classes, and none of the participants were currently involved in extracurricular activities aside from the Latino center. Without academic or social integration, students feel disengaged and will tend to drop out more often (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014).

The challenge experienced by all the participants was facing financial difficulties. Most participants explicitly expressed that financial difficulties forced them to prioritize work over their studies. In relation, the participants also generally had responsibilities in the family adding to their inclination to drop out. Previous studies established the cultural value of *familismo* among Latinos in which Latino families tend to value close relationships with nuclear and extended family (Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Olson, & Soto, 2012; Organista, 2007). The value of *familismo* was often in contrast of the typical American culture in which individualism, self-reliance, and a strong sense of personal responsibility were valued (Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2012; Fee, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Lastly, with these issues that the participants faced, the participants also generally perceived that there was a lack of programs to help Latino students to stay in college.

RQ2. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them? Two overarching themes emerged: (a) help achieve academic goals and (b) recommended actions for the school.

Suggestion 1: External motivation to achieve academic goals. Most participants were inclined to stay in school to achieve their goal to graduate, because they generally believed that obtaining a degree may help them get a better job and secure a more stable future. Participant 12 did not express any goals to graduate from college, while Participant 6 changed her plans to attend to the needs of her family. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) stated that it was important to identify the motivation behind Latino first-year students attempting post-secondary education as these motivators may increase their resilience toward barriers. Helping Latino students realize their goals and motivators may provide them with something to work toward, and a mentor who understands their culture may assist them to stay focused regardless of other barriers.

Suggestion 2: Recommended actions for the school to better retain Latino students

Improvements in the school's program to help meet the needs of Latino students were perceived to be of help in making them stay in school. Recommended actions provided by the participants involved scholarships, financial aids, and incentives, but most of all, a program for Latino students. Participant 9 similarly recommended a program for Latino students, rationalizing that the Latino population was "growing in the U.S.," and that having a department "only for Latinos" would be helpful. Participant 8 expressed that Latino students had different needs than other international students, as

Latinos were more "family-oriented." Some participants shared that they desired to have financial aids, or to have financial options as they supported their families while they studied. Most of the participants were facing difficulties with scholarships due to prioritizing work and family obligations resulting in poor academic performance. Generally, the participants were driven by their desire to graduate from college. The participants perceived that the school could attend to the needs of Latino students to help them stay in school.

Goals

The goal for this policy recommendation project was to provide realistic recommendations tied to the study findings of the local community college in the northeastern United States to improve the graduation rates of Latino students. Eventually, the implementation of these recommendations can lead to higher graduation rates for Latinos, and possibly also other students who may benefit from the changes. Another goal was to create awareness of the struggles faced by Latino students and show colleges and policy makers the importance of taking the needs of these students into consideration.

Addressing this problem required a more thorough understanding of the barriers faced by Latinos regarding their pursuit of higher education. By revealing the experiences and perceptions of Latinos from the northeastern United States who have dropped out of college, or were about to drop out, regarding the barriers they have faced, a more detailed idea was gained on the needs of Latinos for them to pursue higher education. As discussed previously, the primary problems faced by Latino students who participated in

this current study were financial struggles, work and family obligations, and a lack of

dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students. In addition, students were driven

to stay in school to achieve their goals and secure a more promising future for themselves

and their families. Peña and Rhoads (2018) identified four factors needed for the success

of college programs for Latinos: supporting help-seeking behaviors, addressing needs

during the transfer journey, supporting students' employment burdens and financial

difficulties, and incorporating culturally responsive and approachable programs and

practices. From the literature and the findings of the study it was established that culture

has a significant influence on Latino students, and this should be taken into consideration

when teaching or assisting them in college.

The mentor program that I propose can be incorporated into the Latino program

of a northeastern U.S. college. The Latino program was established in 2010 as an exciting

program at a northeastern U.S. college to establish learnings for student and faculty

participation, as well as study on the population of U.S. Latino(a)s to show any issues.

Leadership of this program helps students grow novel ideas, skills across disciplines, and

particular information about their contributions, barriers, and roles. The current Latino

population of the college is 15%.

Policy Recommendation

The policy recommendation is to establish a support program for Latino students,

driven by mentors, to help them obtain a college degree. The analysis of the study

interviews provided insight on several barriers that Latino students experience throughout

their studies, and also provided insight on possible solutions, including Latino mentors and Latino specific programs. The literature provided similar evidence of the success of support programs and mentors. Therefore, the policy recommendation is to implement Latino mentors in a northeastern U.S. community college, including a support program led by these Latino mentors. One Latino mentor is recommended for every 10 to 15 Latino students, or any number that proves in practice to be an appropriate workload. Providing the mentors with an appropriate workload will ensure that the students needing assistance will not be overlooked and will get to know their mentors on a personal level. The mentors will have to be available to these students on a regular basis and that the students have access to them via cellphone. However, the mentors will not be expected to be available around the clock – they can establish their boundaries with their students themselves.

The aim of providing such intense mentorship and support is so that the students are comfortable enough to discuss their problems with their mentors, as they encounter problems. When students encounter serious barriers, without any support, their first instinct may be to drop out. As the study findings indicated, eight of the participants were unaware or unsure if their school had programs for Latino students to stay in college, and most participants perceived that there was a lack of appropriate programs. Some participants were members of the Latino/Caribbean center in school, however, the participants perceived that the center was insufficient because it helped them to make friends, but there were no role models, experts, or professional guidance to help them in

their college years. If they have free access to a Latino tailored support program – first of all their mentor, and second, other students that form part of the mentor's group – they may discuss their barriers firsts, come up with solutions with their mentor, and may persist with their studies. The tailoring of the program includes that the mentor will be a Latino mentor who has already overcome the struggles faced in college, which will make them relatable. The mentors have to build relationships of trust with each of the students in their group, which is another reason for fewer than 15 students per mentor. The support program will also be led by the mentors but should be quite informal.

Barriers. Possible barriers could be personality mismatches between students and mentors. In that case, students could be transferred to a different mentor at their request. Another possible barrier is a lack of support from the mentor, in this case a student can also report it and be transferred. If several complaints are made the mentor should be replaced. Several complaints would indicate that a mentor is not doing a sufficient job of assisting his/her students or that there may be a personality mismatch, and after investigation by the responsible administrator, the student can either be moved to a different mentor or the mentor can be replaced entirely.

Another barrier may be students disregarding the support system, not making use of it, or not understanding the benefit they are provided with. Attendance to meetings arranged by the mentor should be mandatory. To ensure that students attend, they can be offered a discount on their study costs for the year. Each meeting they attend will be noted by the mentor. The mentor will provide this information to the administration

department, and based on that, Latino students can get cashback, or a discount on their next account. The mentors will also be responsible for reaching out to students who do not regularly communicate with them and report them as at risk if they are not in communication with their mentor regularly.

Roles and responsibilities. The primary responsibility of implementing this policy recommendation will be the administrators of the community college. The administrators will have to stipulate the budget available to employ the mentors needed for this program, however, since this will mostly be flexi-time work for the mentors, a large budget may not be needed. Second, the administrators will need to advertise their need for mentors with specific requirements and contact eligible candidates. The administrators will also have to handle the required employee contracts with these mentors and provide them with the requirements of their job and all aids, resources, and information they may need. One administrator, who is an existing employee, will also have to be responsible for the entire program, regularly liaise with the mentors, and provide them with guidance.

The final responsibility of this policy recommendation will fall on the mentors. The mentors will be responsible for liaising with students, assisting them where needed, setting up and leading quarterly meetings, and providing feedback to administrators and stakeholders. The mentors will be there to motivate the students and help them come up with solutions to their problems as they arise. Their job will not be to provide money or other sources of their own. The aim of the program will be to teach Latino students' ways

to overcome their barriers, as previous research has shown that merely providing them with money and aids as external motivation is not always successful. Of students receiving financial aid, 47% graduated or transferred within 6 years, with 67% flagged as academically prepared (Campbell, Cochrane, Love, & Ellie, 2017).

Mentor Program Fall 2019 – Job Description

In collaboration with The Latino Program, a job position called Latino Mentor will be created. The role of these mentors will be to work with first-year Latino students to increase the retention rates of that group. The location will be a college in the northeastern United States and the inception of the program will be at the start of the Fall 2019 semester. The Latino mentors will be well-known student leaders who can support the academic success of their Latino peers and thus, increase their retention rate.

Qualifications for the Latino mentor positions are that the candidate is a student at the university, is a sophomore or above, has successfully completed at least 27 credits, and holds a grade point average of 2.5 or above. Applicants must complete an online or hard copy application and submit it along with a copy of their Fall 2019 class schedule. If selected as candidates, they will be interviewed.

Successful candidates will be expected to serve as mentors and models for first-year students by demonstrating responsible behavior, answering their questions, and referring them to campus resources as needed. They will be required to complete the required contact hours with their mentees, their mentor peers, and the Program Director. During the semester. They will be expected to provide feedback to the Director and at the

end of the semester, report to the Director regarding the mentor's experiences; this could include writing a paper or making a presentation.

A minimum of 8 hours per week are required. Of these, program and plan sessions will be 3 hours, group sessions with assigned students will be one hour, and weekly team meetings will be one hour. Other time will be devoted to associated tasks.

The expected outcomes of the mentoring include that their mentees learn how to locate and use campus resources that will assist them in their learning. Their mentees will learn about on- and off-campus financial resources that may be available. Mentors will help mentees develop communication skills with peers, graduate assistants, and the program director. All mentor activities will be performed with the appropriate work ethics and standards.

Mentors will be paid $800 for the semester. Upon completion of the program, they will be paid an additional $500 to reimburse them for the tuition for the one-credit course. They will be considered for later management opportunities. Salaries will be paid after twelve weeks and at the end of the semester. Candidates must continue to meet ethical, performance, and academic standards to remain in the program.

A mandatory coaching class will be held in the afternoon of the first Saturday in July. Topics taught will include the responsibilities of the mentors, the need for an optimistic attitude and exceptional customer service, and the diversity of those with whom they will be working, New mentors will be instructed on how to be productive team members, developed leadership skills, become effective communicators and resolve

conflicts, develop effective and appealing presentations, and be flexible and creative. They must have strong personal values and ethics, have thorough knowledge of campus resources, and be self-confident, creative, and resourceful. They must know how to execute goals, be diplomatic, and serve as role models.

Applications must be submitted no later than April 6 to the Student center Latino Program Office. Interviews lasting approximately 20-30 minutes will be conducted on May 7 and 8. Candidates will be informed of hiring decisions by May 13.

Project Implementation

The first task will be to recruit Latino mentors to lead their groups. The college can use the data of Latino enrollments for the previous year to determine the number of mentors needed so that each mentor has a manageable number of students. The mentors should be assigned Latino students as they enroll for the following year. As the students enroll, the mentors can provide them with a welcome message and a copy of the agenda for the year, including the details of the first meeting. The mentors should also explain to the students that they are there to help them with any challenges they face. The mentor will be responsible for setting up meetings and conveying the details to their students. The aim for the meetings should be surrounding the students' goals, the current challenges they face, and what they could expect throughout the course of their first year.

Future direction. In the second year of these students they should still have access to the same mentors and meetings, and this support system should be available for them until graduation. The findings of my study indicated a need for Latino tailored

programs and support to help Latino students to complete their studies. This policy recommendation was thought to be the most viable with regards to student suggestions, finances available, and the current struggle faced at the community college. Adaptations can be made to the program after each meeting with the students as problems arise. After each meeting with the students, the mentors should meet with each other, discuss their challenges, and come up with solutions to better the program for future students.

Implications of the policy recommendation. The possible implications for this support program for Latino students are first of all, increased retention rates for Latino students. Second, Latino students will have an opportunity to make friends going through similar struggles as them, which may encourage them to persevere. Latino students may perceive the college to truly care about them. Latino students will have the opportunity, through regular support, to reach their goals and graduate. A support culture may be developed on campus, which may lead to better integrated Latino students who may decide to take part in other college activities. The success of this policy recommendation may lead to a larger number of Latino students entering the workforce with a proper education and enable them to contribute positively to society. The possible success of this policy recommendation in the northeastern United States may lead to other colleges adopting this Latino-orientated program, which will lead to larger scale benefits. Last, the success of this policy recommendation may lead to more Latino students applying to colleges making use of this recommendation, which may result in more diverse and positive campuses.

Policy recommendation strengths. There are several strengths associated with the implementation of this policy recommendation.

1. This policy recommendation will not have a significant financial impact on a college or university's budget. Only one mentor is needed for every 10-15 Latino students who enroll.

2. The literature and the findings were in agreement regarding the success of mentors and tailored support for Latino's chances of graduating.

3. The support program will not require significant steps for implementation and does not require excessive resources. The support program can also be implemented immediately after Latino mentors are interviewed and appointed.

4. The success of the support program may already be visible after three months and will be easy to monitor consistently.

Policy recommendation limitations. There are also a few limitations that should be noted.

1. The success of the support program is dependent on the competence of the mentors, which is why the mentors will have to be thoroughly interviewed before they are appointed.

2. The success of the support program will also be dependent on the participation of the Latino students and their willingness to make use of what is provided to them.

3. The support program will be specifically tailored for Latino students, and other struggling students will possibly not benefit from it as it will be led by Latino mentors.

Other Recommendations and Alternative Approaches

With the data generated by the study, the literature, and the theories of Tinto (1993) and Swail et al. (2003), a policy recommendation was developed for a local community college in the northeast to address the Latino underrepresentation among those with a college degree and remedy the barriers that Latinos face in their pursuit of higher education, based on the perceptions of those policies' intended recipients. As such, the first recommendation would be for the administrators to reevaluate the current state of the college regarding costs, class schedules, activities, academic minimum requirements, availability of mentors, etc., before implementing any changes. After a reevaluation is conducted it will become clear as to why certain aspects of the current college experience is not accommodating toward Latino students. Other recommendations that emerged from the study findings are the following:

1. **Schedule options.** Provide Latino students with more flexible schedules. Scheduling options can include centralized studying, semi-centralized studying, or decentralized studying (online).

2. **Appointing a mentor.** Most participants perceived that a scholarship was not sufficient to help Latino students to stay in college and that there was a lack of appropriate programs. The findings of this study were not entirely in

correlation with the findings of Velasco (2017) and Tovar (2015), indicating that the current program provided to the participants of this research may not be properly tailored to suit their needs and increase their success. As proposed by the participants of this study, it may be needed to appoint Latino mentors specifically, to discuss first-year students' goals with them at the beginning of the year, and perhaps later in the year as well to make sure that they keep their goals in mind.

3. **Timeline options.** Most participants perceived that receiving scholarships, aids, and incentives tailored to the needs of Latino students would be more helpful. Extensions should be provided to students, specifically Latino students, at no extra cost. This would mean that students pay for the degree that they would like to earn, instead of per-year tuition. For example, students could choose to study the same degree for 3 years, 5 years or 7 years, with corresponding schedules. As such, the college could provide students with the approximate hours necessary for studying they would need per week for each year selection.

4. **Extra perks.** Provide incentives for good grades. This may include free lunch if you maintain an above grade average for example. Another perk may be working from home if your work is up to date and assignment handed in on time. This would not mean work from home the entire time, only perhaps for that specific subject for a week. Financial incentives such as discount on

studies for the next year, or payback on a percentage of tuition fees each term for high grades may also help Latino students. Incentives like these may provide Latino students with smaller goals, guiding them toward success in the long run, while still reducing their financial struggles.

5. **Supplementary aids.** The theme of financial difficulties that emerged from the data referred to issues in affording tuition fees, availing or paying loans, parents' financial sacrifices, sacrificing academic performance due to the need to work, and prioritizing work over studies to support themselves or their families. Organizations providing scholarships should include extra aids specifically for Latino students. Extra aids can include money for living expenses, food, handbooks, and commuting to and from class.

These recommendations provide assistance for Latino students promoting positive influence for students to successfully complete the college courses. However, other alternative approaches are also available, with matriculation and commitment programs and the implementation of courses prior to entering college providing education on such skills not covered in academically focused high school classes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to provide a policy recommendation that is grounded in original research as well as previous research. Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out college at the study setting perceive to be the most significant factors in their decision to drop out or to stay enrolled?

RQ2. What do adult Latino students at risk for dropping out at the study setting believe the college could do to retain them?

The findings indicated that financial difficulties, familial responsibilities in addition to financial support, and lack of dropout prevention programs targeting Latino students cause Latino students to drop out of college. Achieving goals to graduate and recommended actions for the school were the factors that retained Latino students.

The aim of this policy recommendation was to recommend a support program for Latino students, driven by mentors, to help them obtain a college degree. Based on the qualitative findings and a review of the literature, the researcher arrived at several recommendations that could possibly increase Latino students' chances of obtaining their degrees. The policy recommendation is to implement Latino mentors in northeastern U.S. colleges, including a support program lead by these Latino mentors. Latino mentors will understand the Latino students they mentor, as they will have experienced college or university themselves. This program may lead to increased retention rates for Latino students, an opportunity for Latino students to reach their goals and graduate through regular support, a larger number of Latino students that will enter the workforce with a proper education and contribute to society. The findings of this research and the

deliverable of this project may lead to social change and provide a better future for Latino students.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Barriers That Prevent Adult Latino Students From Attaining a College Degree

1. Why are you considering to drop out of college?

2. How close to completion of your degree are you?

3. How do personal or family issues affect your ability to stay in college?

4. How are you performing academically?

5. Does your school in any way provide programs to help you stay in college?

6. If so, do you avail yourself of such programs, and to what extent?

7. How do you think the school could help you to stay in college?

8. How do you think the school could help Latino students to remain in college?

9. If you decide to dropout, do you intend to return at some point in the future?