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COLLEGE CHOICES OF LATINA/O STUDENTS ATTENDING A FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE: UNDERSTANDING PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION

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COLLEGE: UNDERSTANDING PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

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in

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by

Cecilia Loftus Ornelas

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ABSTRACT

Although Latina/os are the largest minority group in California and
enrolling in higher education in record-breaking numbers (Zarate & Burciaga,
2010), the graduation rate of this group is very low (Kewal-Ramani, Gilbertson,
Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). A phenomenological approach was used in this study to
explore the lived experiences of Latina/o students at a for-profit college in the
Inland Empire. Students from different major fields of study described how they
explored and sought college information, how they experienced both community
and for-profit colleges, and described their levels of sense of belonging in both
community and for-profit colleges. Students shared their experiences reflective of
the serpentine pathway of college-*conocimiento* (Acevedo-Gil, 2017) and the
influence of a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan,
2005; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007) on their persistence in higher education.
Findings indicate that Latina/o students have limited college choices, weigh
criteria to choose a for-profit college after departing from community colleges to
"transfer across," and feel that they belong in the for-profit institution for reasons
that included either feeling cultural congruity with other students, or simply
experienced college community support from faculty/ staff. Recommendations
include: instructors be assigned as mentors who are personable and exhibit
genuine caring; for-profit colleges should be as financially accessible as
community colleges for all students; and the personalization available in for-profit
colleges should be implemented into the community colleges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all Latina/o students in higher education, and more specifically, dedicated to the students enrolled in for-profit institutions of higher education, you were my inspiration for this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), approximately 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of which 50.5 million (or 16 percent) were of Latino origin. Within California alone, Latinas/os constitute 38 percent of the population (US Census Bureau, 2010b). However, the PK-12 demographics are very different. Nationwide, Latina/o students are projected to represent 30% of PreK-12 schools by 2023 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-a). In some states, such as California, which maintains the largest K-12 public education system in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b), by 2015, over 53% of K-12 students identified as Latina/o/x (California Department of Education, 2015).

Although Latinas/os represent the largest minority population in the United States, they are also underrepresented in higher education (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Historically, Latina/os also have the lowest educational attainment level and lowest graduating rates in the nation (Kewal-Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). As such, less than 62% of Latina/o/x students in the United States graduate from high school, and only 12% earn a bachelor's degree (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). This is a particular issue because by 2025, California is likely to face a shortage of workers with some postsecondary education but less than a bachelor's degree. In fact, the future gap among "some college" educated workers may be as high as 1.5 million. Given that California is set to become the

fifth largest economy in the world, the educational success of Latina/o students has broader implications.

Problem Statement

While the majority of Latinas/os enroll in community colleges (Núñez & Elizondo, 2013), scholars call for a need to also understand their increasing enrollments in the for-profit sector (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). However, for-profit colleges have been under scrutiny for several years (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The increase in federal financial support, combined with high student dropout and unemployment rates resulted in the federal government investigating the quality of education offered in for-profit institutions. For example, in April 2015, the investigations concluded with the closure of 30 Corinthian colleges (Federal Student Aid, nd; Nasiripour, 2015). The Corinthian college closures resulted in the displacement of 16,000 students (Federal Student Aid, nd; Nasiripour, 2015). With the fastest growing student population, for-profit colleges enrolled 11 percent of postsecondary students in 2010 (Borden, 2012). For-profit colleges are more likely to enroll students who are older, female, low-income, first-generation, and students of color (Garrity, Garrison, & Fiedler, 2010; Iloh & Tierney, 2013; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). For-profit institutions account for 47 percent of all federal student loan defaults, with for-profit students being more than twice as likely to default after controlling for similar cumulative debt burdens (Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2012).

Nonetheless, for-profit students are more likely to complete an associate's degree than those in community college. Moreover, when compared to community colleges, for-profit institutions have lower remedial education placements and maintain higher first-year retention rates (Deming et al., 2012). On the other hand, for-profit students are more likely to depart before completing a degree (Deming et al., 2012) due to a mismatch between student goals and education programs available (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Finally, six years after first enrolling in college, for-profit students are more likely not to be enrolled in any postsecondary institution, have higher unemployment rates, and earn lower incomes than if they had enrolled in another institution (Deming et al., 2012). Given the student demographics, the dismal education and economic outcomes affect low-income, first-generation, and students of color greatly.

Not enough Latina/o college students are graduating from their programs of study across all types of higher educational institutions, even from for-profit colleges. The retention and graduation of minority students has been an issue in the United States for over 50 years and the problem continues to be grow as all populations increase, especially for Latina/o students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the current study was to understand the college choices of Latina/o students through the lived experiences of individual Latina/o students who attended a for-profit college. In particular, to understand the reasons Latina/o students pursue college; the experiences that lead Latina/o students to

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depart a community college; how Latina/o students go from attending a community college to attending a for-profit college; and how Latina/o students find a community within a for-profit college.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

In particular, the research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do student's personal and academic pathways influence the decision to attend a for-profit college?

2. How do Latina/o students experience their first year at a for-profit college?

3. How does a sense of belonging influence the persistence for Latina/o students at a for-profit college?

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to transform educational practice because the aim is to identify, describe, and understand key variables that influence a student a disruption on the path toward college graduation based on in-depth interview data. Ideally, educators and educational leaders can implement individualized and/or group programs and practices to attempt to intercede on the departure from college. By assisting Latina/o students in their educational endeavors, the United States, as a nation, will benefit from the goal of the study as successful graduates will become productive and contributing members of society.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This dissertation was guided by college-*conocimiento* (Acevedo-Gil, 2017) and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). While college-*conocimiento* guided the college pathways and choice framework in research questions one and two, the sense of belonging (and its influence on persistence) framework guided research question three.

Assumptions

The following assumption was made by the study:

Self-Reporting interviews reflect accurate representations of 'the truth' through the eyes of the participant.

Delimitations

In order to maintain a focus, this study limited the scope to include:

1. One for-profit institute of higher education in the Inland Empire

2. Latina/o students

3. Students in their first and second-year in college

Definitions of Key Terms

1. Latina/o is used to reflect the definition for Hispanic used by the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau statistic report, which "refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or

origin regardless of race" as Hispanic or Latina/o (pp. 2).

2. Persistence is the result of individual student commitment, action or behavior to continue to be enrolled and attend college (Tinto, 1975; Hagedorn, 2005).

3. Retention is the result of an institution's efforts and actions to maintain students' enrollment status (Tinto, 1975; Hagedorn, 2005).

4. Sense of Belonging is the perceived level of connection an individual student feels with the institution of learning (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007).

Summary

In order to provide the background of the understanding of the persistence and retention among first-year Latina/o students, the following literature review has been broken down into six components:

1) Demographics (2) Barriers to Latina/o educational success (3) Latina/o Access to Education (4) Issues in the For-Profit College Sector (5) College Choices of Latinas/os and (6) Retention Strategies

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latina/o Underrepresentation in Higher Education

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), approximately 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of these 50.5 million (or 16 percent) were of Latina/o origin. Latinas/os constitute 38 percent of the population in California (US Census Bureau, 2010b) and predictions state that by the year 2015, Latinas/os will be the new majority population in California (2008). Although Latinas/os represent the largest minority population in the United States, Latinas/os are underrepresented in higher education (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Historically, Latinas/os have the lowest educational attainment level and lowest graduating rates in the nation (Kewal-Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007).

Statistical reports on Latinas/os underrepresented in higher education have not only described an increase in the population of Latinas/os in California, but the ways in which this growth has not been proportional to the higher education attainment levels of this population. A Pew Hispanic Center report indicated that in comparison to their white counterparts, Latinas/os were half as likely to graduate from institutions of higher education (Fry, p. 4, 2005). The numbers of Latinas/os in higher education have increased overall as the population itself has increased. The comparison between the two (white and Latino) in higher education attainment is significant. Fry points out that in post-

secondary education, completion widened by as much as a nine-point gap for a total of 16 points by 2001 (p.5) which is almost double the count from 1996. At this rate, the gap between the number of Latinas/os in higher education in relation to their White peers will continue to increase in favor of Whites. The reasons for this phenomenon are varied and multi-faceted; therefore, it is crucial to explore the barriers many Latinas/os confront in graduating from institutions of higher education in order to increase Latino students' persistence in school, and ultimately, increase the graduation rates of the population.

Barriers to Latina/o Students' Postsecondary Success

The roadblocks impeding the college graduation rates of Latinos have been researched, discussed, and disputed amongst scholars. Despite the disagreements, authors observed several common variables, such as lack of guidance and support, limited access to financial aid, deficient language and basic skills, student unpreparedness, and socioeconomic disparities, as responsible for the attrition and dropout rates of Latina/o students in higher education (de los Santos & Cuamea, 2010; Becerra, 2010; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009).

Even before enrolling in college, Latina/o students face institutional barriers. For example, the limited academic resources in the K-12 school systems affect the availability of the counseling services for high school students (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). While each average Californian high school student has to compete with 945 other students, students of color compete with over 1,056

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students. Similar findings are supported by authors such as Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, and Colyar (2004); and McDonough and Calderone (2006) concur that the counselor-to-student ratios are higher in many schools Latinas/os attend. However, for Latina/o students, the lack of guidance service seeps into higher education as well.

A major obstacle for a college student's success is continued poor support in college, or the lack of support and direction from someone who has the knowledge and experience to guide the college student to graduation. Learning how to navigate through the educational process is a difficult task for students at any level and could be a reason to depart from college. As advocates of purposeful student services and support, Engstrom & Tinto (2008) argue that access to education is not an opportunity without support. Students who are poor or academically unprepared are not likely to succeed on their own. These students need to be valued, supported, included, and guided in the process in order to translate this access to persistence, which is success.

The lack of access to financial aid information is another major barrier to Latina success in higher education. When access to financial aid is available, navigating through the complex system is overwhelmingly without guidance. Zarate and Burciaga (2010) emphasize the lack of access to financial aid information as a barrier to Latina/o students' success, provide an overview of information regarding the various academic routes to higher education for Latina/o students, the challenges along these routes, and the strategies to aid

these challenges. The authors name several retention factors, including the lack of transfer culture, academic preparation, gender differences and engagement, and most importantly, access to financial aid information as factors. Access to financial aid/information is absolutely crucial for Latina/o students since a large majority of Latinas/os may not know that financial assistance is available let alone know the process through which to obtain it (p. 27). Even though financial aid access is important for all low-income students, it seems financial aid is underutilized by a large population of Latino families. Understanding the rules and organization of the financial aid calendar is challenging enough, but cultural knowledge of the program is also required. Unfortunately, the common problem is that these Latino families do not acquire the information on time or not at all (p .28).

An additional obstacle to Latina/o success in higher education is being academically unprepared in areas such as writing. This weakness is evident in the low levels of writing proficiency demonstrated by the incoming freshman students. Without the basic writing skills, Latina/o students find the academic settings to be a confusing and difficult environment. Plata (1995) analyzed the writing samples of Latina/o and Anglo males and females and found that the Anglos fared better than their Latina/o peers. The participants of the study are identified as nontraditional, first generation, and underprepared to attend the university. The writing samples were from those who had taken a written examination, which were assessed holistically by the university faculty from

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various disciplines. The results were consistent- the Latinas/os writing proficiency was weaker than the Anglo students. Although the study does not attempt to correlate writing proficiency with academic persistence, failure to pass the written examination because of inadequate scoring could definitely impede graduation from the testing institution.

Even academically successful Latina/o students are vulnerable to the barriers of completion during the formative years in college. Zalaquett (2006) interviewed Latina/o students who were categorized as successful and found similarities among all Latina/o students. Both at-risk and successful Latina/o students experienced the same obstacles in their educational careers. Regardless of grade point averages, Latinas/os encounter a lack of strong adult guidance, are misinformed about financial as well as other policies and procedures, and receive less financial aid as a direct result of the misinformation (p. 36). That leaves to question the history of how so many Latinas/os in the higher education system of California end up in the same situation. An examination of the political environment surrounding higher education in California in 1960 is reviewed for a better grasp of the barriers impeding Latinas/os graduation rates.

Policy and Political Barriers

The original Master Plan for Higher Education in California of 1960 was successful in accommodating the large numbers of students with access to college. With this Master Plan, the nation had produced the largest and most

distinguished system of public education in higher education. Callan (2009) believes that the Master Plan for Higher Education was the best choice for the time, goals, and population; however, progress was not made because this original plan was limited (p.17). Initially, the Master Plan was created to respond to the growth of students entering the doors of colleges in large numbers after World War II. The Master Plan was successful in increasing the access of college education for the young adult population of the time, but a shift in demographics meant a change was needed in the Master Plan. Forty years later, there was so much diversity that the original intended audience of the Master Plan was no longer the dominant group making up the population. It seems the Master Plan's relevance and utility are in question as the critical changes in California in the areas of education and economics. Inadvertently, the Master Plan has burdened the state and community colleges with large numbers of students who do not have the basic academic skills for success in college.

As a remedy, the Basic Skills Initiative was introduced to assist the California community college system in preparing underprepared students for post-secondary work (Offenstein & Shulock, 2011). The initiative was designed to improve the basic educational skills of low-achieving students. Funds were allocated and curriculum was produced for this population of students in need. When problems arose with the results of the Basic Skills Initiative, such as low-test scores, inability to test out of levels, questions of curriculum appropriateness, they indicated that there were failures of the initiative itself. Offenstein and

Shulock (2011) contend that policy reform in basic skills education is necessary to improve the students' academic outcomes (p. 171).

Many have critiqued even the basic skills and remediation programs, and a removal of remediation was a proposed solution. The backlash against failed remediation programs began in the 1990s (Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). Many questioned the idea if students who needed to acquire basic skills had any business in higher education to begin with (Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). The critics believed that no amount of time and effort would be sufficient to substitute for real skills and ability. Remedial education can only get students so far; therefore, it was proposed to remove remedial education, which would force the student to enter a college-level class and compete with peers who meet the standards.

California was not the only state pushing out the basic skills students, as several states, including New York have been implementing anti-remediation programs in their universities. Rustick (2007) states that although the doors to higher education are not shutting minority students out, the minority students are certainly not finding the support they need in the four-year universities. Students are likely to find themselves in two-year colleges in order to acquire the foundational skills of the English language. The minority students affected by remediation the most are nonnative English Speakers and Latina/o and Black students.

Alternatives to the traditional Basic Skills Initiative have already been established and studied by large institutions of higher learning. One such

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institution is San Francisco State University. This school began a project to reduce the need for remediation courses (Goen-Salter, 2008). The project integrated reading and writing- instead of separating the two skills as the traditional approach required. Otte & Mlynarczyk (2010) discuss alternatives to the classical remediation programs. However, being proficient in writing does not guarantee a Latina/o student will not drop-out of college. Having a partial education is not enough to complete the goal of graduating from college. Although an education is part of the great American Dream, a college education it is not as easily accessible to everyone.

Latina/o Access to Education

Access to the American Dream of education is not easily gained for many people of diverse backgrounds for various reasons; furthermore, controversy is influenced by different perspectives surrounding those various reasons. Some would say that nativity to a specific region does not automatically grant a person the knowledge of recognizing the benefit of the particular social constructs of the dominant majority. Bourdieu (1977) believes the ability to function and participate in "the economy of cultural goods" is an acquired skill by a person since birth. This acquisition is known as cultural capital. Education is an object of cultural capital and taught to those and by those who are members of the ruling society. In this view, Bourdieu rationalizes particular populations of people lack this cultural capital (including various forms of capital, such as social and academic capital). For some people, realizing an education is difficult to achieve as the

cultural boundaries and rules of education and knowledge are often inaccessible. This view can be constructed through a deficit view as the focus is on what the person does not have or may not be able to acquire due to birthright.

Challenges to deficit views of capital are evident all across the literature on educating students of color. For example, Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth represents a shift away from these deficit views and a direct challenge to the traditional interpretations of cultural capital. This conceptual framework is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) which opposes the belief that students of color arrive at school lacking in cultural wealth. As a matter of fact, it is quite the opposite, as students arrive to school with a different set of cultural values that go unrecognized or devalued (Noguera, 2004; Núñez, 2009). Educators need to acknowledge this cultural knowledge as sources of capital and nurture them to build on further types of capital, such as aspirational, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital.

Nontraditional forms of capital are most likely to be recognized in educational circles outside the traditional programs of higher education; therefore, students sometimes enroll in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), more specifically community colleges. Attending a local community college represents an appealing alternative to the mysterious entity known as the university. As there are many problems related to beginning an educational career in a community college, these problems are not insurmountable. Núñez, Sparks, and Hernández (2011) have stated that "Despite having demographic and

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background conditions related to a lower likelihood of college completion, first-time and first-year beginning students enrolled in 2-year HSIs actually intend to go further in their educations than their counterparts in other community colleges" (p. 35). It seems regardless of the some of the problems tied to attending Hispanic-serving community colleges, many Latina/o students fared better than other Latinas/os attending a non-Hispanic-serving institution.

For Latina/o students, enrolling in community colleges is seemingly beneficial in terms of overall attendance fees; however, it may actually be hurting those students more than anticipated. Melguizo, Hagedorn, and Cypers (2008) studied a sample of 5,011 Latina/o students from the Los Angeles district in order to compare the financial and time costs of remediation and transfer between community college and four-year university. The samples were pulled from the nine community colleges within the Los Angeles district. Initially, the tuition and fee costs may seem relatively lower at a community college than a four-year university, but the findings were that students were actually spending more money and spending more time in community college. Ideally, a student would enroll in a two-year and transfer at the end of the 24-month span, but not many students can accomplish this goal in exactly two years. Other factors, such as taking remedial and nontransferable courses; lack of support centers; counseling and/or advising unavailability; misalignment between high school, remedial, and college courses; and lack of information about California transfer curriculum early on in the college process (p. 424) contribute to the increased amount of time and

finances when comparing the community colleges with the four-year universities. More recently, even the California State University system, a system of four-year universities has encountered some challenges that continue to affect student choices of school, which affect time and money spend on education overall.

The California State University system, for example, released impaction information regarding program enrollment and student admission for the 2014-2015 school year, which will limit enrollment for upcoming quarters. Some major programs and campuses have become designated as Impacted, which means "the number of applications received from fully qualified applicants during the initial filing period exceeds the number of available spaces" (Calstate.edu, 2013) for students. Schools must restrict enrollment to the campus designated for a specific category. To make this possible, impacted campuses or programs can use supplementary criteria to further screen the applications. A student wishing to enroll in an impacted program may be rerouted to a different campus, if he/she has met all of the criteria and deadlines during the first initial filing period. The impaction of programs definitely opens the possibility that many more students may not get the classes they want or need to complete their degree requirements. This is very disheartening for all college bound students; consequently, many college students are seeking various methods of attaining the college degree the working world is requiring of them for financial stability.

When universities and community colleges are not feasible for students, alternative routes to higher education include opting to attend for-profit colleges

(Clark, 2011; Floyd, 2007). After all, many for-profit colleges have instituted

beneficial programs and support which community colleges are not providing

their students. Small class sizes, secured classes, convenient schedules, free

tutoring, and advising are some of the attractions for-profit colleges offer

students. The reasons minority students are attracted to for-profit are numerous

as well. Not only are for-profit colleges focused on the skills and requirements

needed for success in the working world, but they have found additional

meaningful strategies for attracting students. These colleges are offering open

courses throughout the year; technology-enhanced classrooms in most

classrooms; personalized schedules every new term; accelerated and/or blended

curriculum and platforms; and several types of student services, which make

enrolling in for-profit colleges appealing to a large number of students (Beaver,

2009; Gonzalez, 2009; Oseguera & Malagon, 2010).

The numerous support and services specifically offered by the for-profit

are helpful and crucial for Latina/o students; however, Latina/o students are not

faring too much better than the Latino/os attending non-profit colleges and

universities. In non-profit four-year universities, according to the Chronicle of

Higher Education 2010 statistics, approximately 35% students graduated in four

years with Bachelor degrees. One specific for-profit college in Anaheim,

California reports that they graduated 35% of their students in three years with

Bachelor degrees (Westwood College, 2012). It seems for-profit colleges have

many of the ingredients necessary to retain and graduate their minority students

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at the rates proportionate to their high enrollment rates, but the numbers are suggesting there is missing link somewhere between first-day enrollment and graduation. Latina/o students are enrolling in college in large numbers, but they are not completing their degrees. Hence, this dissertation aims to contribute to the literature by providing insights into what institutional processes support and limit students at for-profit colleges.

Access to College via For-Profit Institutions

Historically, the for-profit colleges have attracted the non-traditional, adult, and/or minority students (Beaver, 2009). Even now, for-profit colleges inarguably serve large numbers of minority students; they are "top producers of minority college graduates in the country, according to an analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics conducted by Black Issues in Higher Education" (Farrell, 2003, p. A35). For some, this is positive if students can find a school that serves their purpose and goal, but for others, this is exploitive if students are not fully informed about their education. This view, however, paints a picture that students are totally ignorant and unconscious of their environment and choices they make. Of course, students need full disclosure, information, and guidance, but students do arrive at school with goals, time schedules and limits, and desires, no matter what socio-economic status. Students armed with specific information would be able to form their own judgments and choices in their education and lives.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 granted Pell Grants, which created incentives for the entry and expansion of proprietary schools, such as for-profit colleges into the same market as public colleges. The act was made "to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education" (Pub. L. No. 89-329). This was a part of Lyndon Johnson's campaign for a Great Society in America. With Title IV: Student Aid Programs under the Higher Education Act as an amendment in 1992, enrollments at for-profit colleges have soared. "Since fall 2000, enrollment at for-profit colleges has increased 260 percent. For-profit college enrollment now comprises 11.2 percent of total postsecondary education enrollment at Title IV-eligible institutions" (Harnisch, 2012, p. 2). Reaching this critical mass, these trends suggest that for-profit colleges should no longer be ignored; for-profit colleges are contenders in the competition for enrollment and revenue.

Evans (2000) argues that non-profit and for-profit schools should not be compared because there are too many critical differences between the institutions, but the aspect of caring and paying attention to a student is the same in any institution. In this case, a for-profit college is definitely a business, a for-profit organization, that although is partially funded and operated by public funds and authority, is not constrained by the same laws and policies. Evans believes that "Schools are much more like families and religious institutions than like corporations and other professional organizations" that a business model

comparison can be rarely made (p. 1). A family and religious institution would

hire teachers and personnel who would nurture and mold students with a caring

quality. Teachers will instruct, counsel, advise, and coach in their interactions

with students just as a family member would. One of the critiques is that for-profit

colleges use the business model of viewing the student as a customer and follow

the motto of satisfying the customer. If the student is a customer who has paid for

a service, then the instructor is in the business of serving a population's needs

and being attentive to a certain level of satisfaction. Remembering the

Hawthorne effect and the positive impact of paying attention to people, even if it

is temporary, can have lasting effects if the attention is continuous and deliberate

(Tyack & Cuban, 1995, 118). From a student's perspective, this attention is

positive because a student views the focus on customer satisfaction as caring,

and caring has gone a long way in education and leadership, especially if the

caring is genuine and consistent (Valenzuela, 1999).

     In a pilot study conducted at a for-profit college, students recalled this

attention to customer service as genuine caring (Ornelas, 2012). In this pilot

study, three freshman Latina/o students were interviewed about their personal

experiences, challenges, and coping strategies while enrolled in for-profit

colleges. All three of the interviewees describe how the faculty and staff support

have been one of the most influential components of their success in college.

Open communication and regular exchanges with people who encourage

students to succeed in their goals is crucial for Latina/o students. For example,

Sergio describes the faculty and staff as most helpful while in school. Sergio reveals that he feels all of the people involved in the school process have assisted him during his time of struggle. He believes that the faculty and staff are perceptive to his personal challenges and willing to provide advice. Sergio even mentions his awareness of the job support programs on the campus. Sergio is not the only student who is aware of the employment assistance provided by the school. The two other participants in the pilot study shared similar stories, as well as countless other students enrolled in for-profit colleges.

Proprietary education has a long history, and it is either trivialized, scorned, critiqued, or ignored, however, there is a critical mass of students who chose this route, and the for-profit sector needs more attention and research. Oseguera and Malagon (2011) agree that little is known about the institutions themselves, the reasons for-profit enrollments have increased, and the reasons students, especially Latinas/os are attracted to the for-profit route. In their study, the researchers used existing data from the Educational Longitudinal Study in attempt to answer these questions. As this study does focus on for-profit colleges, the data collected and analyzed was mainly from a quantitative perspective, but lacked the students' voices of qualitative data. Much of the literature on for-profit colleges is similar to Oseguera and Malagon's (2011) study in that quantitative approaches are the dominant methodology.

College Choice

For-profit colleges have been under scrutiny for several years (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), and negative publicity against for-profit colleges continued to circulate in public mediums, (Celarier, 2016; Cohen, 2015; Perez, 2017; MacQueen, 2012; Sridharan, 2012); nonetheless, the high enrollment numbers of Latina/o students entering these for-profit colleges had not diminished. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education conducted an investigation that resulted in the closure of 30 Corinthian colleges and the displacement of 16,000 students (Nasiripour, 2015). Students of color represented 62 percent of first-time California Corinthian college students during Fall 2013, compared with 14 percent who identified as White (IPEDS, n/a). However, with 45 percent of students, Latinas/os represented the largest demographic group (IPEDS, n/a). The numbers revealed for-profit colleges are more likely to enroll students who are older, female, low-income, first-generation, and students of color (Garrity, Garrison, & Fiedler, 2010; Iloh & Tierney, 2013; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). Although for-profit colleges have their own set of unique issues, the high numbers of Latina/o students enrolling in for-profit colleges alone should be reason for analyzing specific for-profit college programs or practices attractive to Latina/o students searching for higher education in the modern day. In addition to examining the college institutions as a whole entity, another lens is also critically needed to effectively gain a clearer vision on finding solutions to retain college Latina/o students. This essential

aspect involves the human component of preference and choice from the voices of Latina/o students who chose to attend for-profit colleges. The decision-making processes of Latina/o college students are varied and complex (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Cox, 2016); therefore, in light of certain institutional, social, and economical differences amongst non-profit and for-profit colleges, a better understanding of the reasons individual Latina/o students choose to enroll in for-profit colleges is certainly warranted to explain the gaps in the enrollment rates of the focus minority group.

Understanding the college choice process of Latina/o students can highlight some of major factors influencing Latina/os decisions to enroll in for-profit colleges. These factors can better inform policy makers, administrators, researchers, and faculty to direct change in the retention practices of many colleges. Many studies cite Hossler and Gallagher (1987) examination of the broad stages of the entire choice process that college students experience; unfortunately, the study did not fully account for certain complexities, especially those surrounding the third stage where college students evaluate their school choices and actually make decisions. Alternatively, Levin and Milgrom's (2004) economic theory of rational choice does seem to account for the general premise that individual people have their own preferences and will choose according to these individual preferences, which seems to leave room for some of the intricacies omitted by previous choice theories. Yet, as an economic theory, Levin and Milgrom's choice predictions seemed to be based on numbers and

formulaic equations, which might be effective for predicting consumer purchase

decisions on various products in the general marketplace. Regretfully, shopping

and choosing an education is a dramatically different process than shopping for

material goods; therefore, another perspective is needed to better fit the

decision-making processes Latino students experience when choosing the

college to attend.

On the other hand, authors such as Gandara (1995), Ceja (2006), and

Alvarez (2015) found that the families influenced Latina/o students when

choosing college and making other decisions involving post-secondary goals.

Specifically, these authors established that despite barriers experienced by

Latina/o parents and siblings, they serve as important and positive influences in

developing the college aspirations of their children, sisters and brothers.

Other studies, such as Iloh (2016) and Iloh and Tierney's (2014) also

recognize the impact an individual's identity and personal circumstances can

have on their motivations for making certain decisions regarding college.

Moreover, these studies illuminate the consideration of time, risk, gains, and

uncertainty as additional criteria students use to weigh out the college paths

between for-profit and community colleges. However, Iloh and Tierney only

examine students whose experiences were limited to the attendance of either a

community college or a for-profit college. These were not students who departed

from community colleges and transferred to for-profit colleges. While further

studies by Chung (2008) and Oseguera and Malagon (2011) also may focus on

students enrolled in for-profit colleges, and may even focus on Latina/o students, these quantitative studies analyze data from existing longitudinal studies, which may have produced limited results. It is necessary to explore research from both quantitative and qualitative studies and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question and its possible solutions. In fact, at times, it is crucial for researchers to study various literature and adapt to the information sufficiently to modify, incorporate, and create new and relevant ways of thinking and explaining Latina/o college choices.

For example, Acevedo-Gil (2017) created the conceptual framework, college-*conocimiento* to contextualize "Latinx student college choices within the inequitable distribution of institutional resources in the K-12 system" (p. 1). This framework was developed by combining Perna's (2006) college choice model with Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento. Perna (2006) conceptual model of college choice presents a four-layered integration of economical and sociological perspectives rooted in human capital theory. The student will choose a college as the result of a comparison between the expected benefits with the expected costs of college while being informed by four layers. However, Perna's model seemed unable to address many Latina/o student experiences in higher education. As such, Anzaldua's (2002) conocimiento "is a theory of epistemological development that entails challenging oppressive conditions through individual consciousness and social justice actions" (p. 8) which did relate to the realities of numerous Latina/os, in general.

Acevedo-Gil (2017) takes the *conocimiento* cycles into education for two reasons: "contextualize access to institutional resources and examine college choice processes at the individual level" (p. 10). The author describes the college conocimiento as a seven-stage serpentine process where Latinx students reflect on the college information that they receive in relation to their intersectional experiences when preparing for college and making college choices. Past literature did not include the common experiences of the dominant population-Latina/os; therefore, college-*conocimiento* challenged traditional choice theories of college choice as it centered on Latina/o students and allowed for qualitative exploration of nonlinear college choice pathways. Acevedo-Gil (2017) can provide better insight into the complex process of college choice for Latina/o students to assist in finding a solution to the gap in the persistence and retention rates of Latina/o students in higher education.

Latina/o Persistence and Retention

Inarguably, research reveals after completing high school, there is a gap between the percentage of white students and Latina/o students who: enroll in a four-year college (Lopez & Fry, 2013), persist in the second-year of college (Crisp & Nora, 2010), and graduate (NCES, 2015; Perez Huber, et al., 2015); resulting in an urgency to increase the persistence rates for Latina/o students (Lee, et al., 2011). In this study, persistence is viewed from the individual student's actions; when an individual student continues to be enrolled and attend college, then the student is considered to have persisted in his/her studies

(Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009, p.26). From the institution's perspective, retention is the outcome of its efforts and actions to maintain students' enrollment status (Hagedorn, 2005).

Because students do not make decisions to leave college solely based on the personal conditions at home, it is important institutions implement a variety of strategies to support college persistence. For example, although a Latina/o students' level of integration into the academic and/or social culture of that institution could determine the retention of the student, a negative experience or lack of support from the institution can also impact a student's decision to leave or stay in school (Crisp, & Nora, 2010). While Tinto's classical Interactionist Theory (1993) certainly introduced foundational knowledge for student integration into the academic and social culture of the institution, it was quite evident that a multi-layered perspective was needed to succeed in increasing the numbers of Latina/o graduates in higher education.

In his interactionist, or integration theory, Tinto posits that students must distance/detach themselves from their original (home) group in order to successfully integrate with the new (school) group. To integrate completely would be to incorporate or adopt normative values and beliefs of the new group (p. 13). Empirically distinct integration measures offer valuable insight into a student's academic performance, participation in academic and social activities and clubs, and intellectual growth. As such integration has mainly been used when examining issues of transition; however, this view is incomplete without the

psychological aspect of integration. Tinto's 1975 integration model does not seem to particularly relevant in assisting Latina/o students to persist in college. Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) argue that Tinto's model does not represent how Latina/o students experience college, how Latina/o students make decisions surrounding college, and/or the reasons Latina/o student depart or persist in college. As a neutral model, Tinto's theory does not account for the racial climate of certain college campuses and the negative impact on the persistence of students of color. Previous studies established sense of belonging as a stronger framework to understand postsecondary experiences for Latina/o students (Braxton, 2000; Nuñez, 2009). This is where the sense of belonging becomes the paramount piece to the persistence and retention puzzle.

<u>Fostering a Sense of Belonging</u>

A sense of belonging is a student's subjective feelings of connectedness or cohesion to the institution (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007, p. 241). This is significant because "Researchers can examine both the participation in particular activities and what that participation means to the student" (240). While a strong sense of belonging is a major aspect in the retention of all students, in general, researchers believe a sense of belonging is particularly crucial for students of color (p. 238). The sense of belonging was observed by one study to be a positive influence in student persistence in college. Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr (2007) drew data from surveys taken by approximately 2,183 students enrolled at the University of New Mexico, which is considered a Hispanic-serving Institution.

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The results of the survey indicated that several experiences impact a student's sense of belonging. The experiences range from paying for college expenses, participating in academic support programs, faculty interest in a student's development, and socializing with students of diverse backgrounds. By increasing a student's sense of belonging to a school, the greater the likelihood the student's motivation to persist in college will increase.

Fostering a sense of belonging includes recognizing students as individuals of value and insight. Many times, marginalized students who are educated under impoverished conditions become disengaged in their schooling. Their struggles are ignored and/or minimized, but authors, such as Rodriguez (2012) describe that recognizing Latina/o students and their obstacles raises their consciousness about themselves and the world. By recognizing a Latina/ student's existence, legitimacy, and contributions to society, a sense of belonging would manifest as the student becomes aware of his/her role in the institution and the world, at large. This heightened sense of awareness also increases the level of agency in a student's life. A sense of belonging to an institution, although seemingly trivial, can produce a positive snowball effect for the student. For example, a sense of belonging can increase self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy " as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" The particular self-beliefs permeate everything about a person and influences thoughts, feelings, behavior, and speech. When self-efficacy

increases, the level of agency also increases, which in turn can affect the

retention and completion of Latina/o college students.

One strategy to increase a students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy

is mentoring. Research by Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002)

on the psychological connections between student-to-faculty and student-to-peer

found five elements associated with a sense of belonging. The elements

represented the researchers' measurements, which included "empathetic faculty

understanding; perceived peer support; perceived isolation; perceived faculty

support and comfort; and perceived classroom comfort" (p. 240). An effective

mentor could guide newcomers in integrating into the new environment with its

own set of customs, rules, and expectations to succeed using all five

measurements. With much insight into the process of academia from mentors,

newcomers can transition and grow on many levels within the college

environment to increase their sense of belonging.

Mentoring as a Retention Strategy

A pilot study was conducted by Campos, Phinney, Perez-Brena, Kim,

Ornelas, Nemanim, Kallemeyn, Mihecoby and Ramirez (2009) to observe the

mentorship program implemented to support the incoming Latina/o freshman

who would be considered at-high-risk of dropping out of college. For the study,

11 Latino first-year college students from a predominantly minority urban

university were recruited for a pilot mentoring program over the course of two

school quarters. The 11 Latinos comprised of 5 males, 6 females; 67% born in

the United States; and a mean age of 18 years (p. 163) who were identified as being a high risk for experiencing academic challenges. The participants were matched with experienced students who would be the support for information, advice, counseling, and camaraderie. The authors found that "Mentoring has the advantage of providing personalized attention to the particular needs of each student" (p. 73), which can have both short and long-term positive effects. The participants of the mentoring program reported not only feeling more confident in many aspects of their personal and academic life, but also experiencing an increase of their cultural capital. The participants felt supported in their pursuit of goals and the mentors assisted them in adjusting and belonging to the college world. Peer mentoring is considered effective as this strategy is an attempt to tailor a plan to assist the student with additional support in the areas he/she might need to succeed.

Peer mentoring is beneficial not only for the receiving party of the mentoring relationship, the mentee, as one study discovered peer mentorship positively impacted both the mentor and the mentee alike (Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000). The goal of the authors was to examine the academic and interpersonal growth of peer mentors enrolled in a minority engineering program. The site of the study was at a predominantly White university in the Southeast. The 19 mentors in the study were 4 females and 15 males, who were African-American undergraduates majoring in engineering. The mentors were paired with freshman minority students who were in the pre-engineering stage of declaring a

major. The students worked closely with each other in various academic and social settings, such as tutoring, advisement, problem-solving workshops, shared informal meals and conversations, watched movies, and played in bowling matches. Although one of the purposes of the mentorship program was to improve the freshman retention rates of their minority students (p. 375), gains in the mentor's own motivation to remain within the same department and college were clearly indicated. Mentors in the program reported academic, professional, and personal gains in their roles. While the purpose of some mentorship programs might be to encourage freshman retention rates, a dual purpose could be to increase persistence and graduation rates of the sophomore and senior classes. Students of various stages of the educational path can benefit from peer mentorship.

Mentorship is a retention strategy for many groups of students regardless of gender. One university, in particular, created a women's mentorship program to improve retention in the field of engineering (Poor & Brown, 2013). The officials at Washington State University (WSU) were concerned that not enough women were pursuing a major in engineering, much less making a career in the field. Being that gender was an indicator of retention, officials decided that a mentorship program for women would foster freshman sense of belonging. The numbers of women volunteering in this program started out in 2008 with 30 mentors and 38 mentees, but by 2011, the program had 61 mentors and 90 mentees. The data showed the positive results of the bonds formed by the

mentorship were encouraging and worthwhile to continue. Mentorship is not limited to bonds formed through traditional physical contact between mentor and mentee; innovation and technology forces organizations to rethink their programs, relationships, and support beyond the current constraints.

Many forms of mentorship exist and this field can continue to progress even into the technological century with e-mentoring when physical contact is not available or convenient. Quintana and Zambrano's (2013) explore the e-mentoring and coaching process for educators operating from an isolated region of the country of Chile. The e-mentoring was mediated through email and mentees/mentors met once a week and lasted about two years. The participants included four teachers, two men and two women who volunteered for the program. The results illustrated that it was possible to form impactful relationships even through email. Beyond email, the authors suggest that organizations continue to advance in mentorship models and mediums used to form mentorships and improve professional practice.

Other effective practices to enhance Latina/o students' persistence come from other nontraditional strategies as well. For example, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) and Yeager and Walton (2011) focused on addressing the Latina/o college experience in order to describe best practices to assist Latina/o students achieve success. The authors recommend "strength-based practices of familia, mentorship, cultural congruity, and professional development from a psychosociocultural (PSC) approach" (p. 379). It is evident some of the colleges

are not retaining the Latina/o students and need to implement different strategies to encourage Latina/o enrollment, participation, and completion of a higher education.

By examining the population of students who seem to have the most support in higher education, research can shed insight to the greater obstacles experienced by the Latina/o college student. More research into the perspectives of Latina/o students attending for-profit institutions is needed. The objective is to explore and understand the lived experiences and barriers experienced by Latina/o freshman students in a mentoring program while attending a for-profit institute of higher learning. The end-goal of the study will be to use this information to increase Latina/o graduation rates and decrease the drop-out rates at a for-profit college.

Summary

This dissertation was guided by college-*conocimiento* (Acevedo-Gil, 2017) and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). While college-*conocimiento* guided the college pathways and choice framework in research questions one and two, the sense of belonging (and its influence on persistence) framework guided research question three.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

My objective was a qualitative exploration to understand the college choices

and perceptions of the lived experiences of Latina/o students in for-profit

institutions; therefore, an interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach

was necessary. I was unable to speak for my participants, so "the aim is to

determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the

experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). By conducting one-on-one interviews, the students and

their experiences were able to speak for themselves in story-telling fashion. It is

through these interviews that participants experienced a "process of selecting

constitutive details of the experience, reflecting on them, giving them order and

thereby making sense of them (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Story-telling is a meaning-

making experience for both the researcher and participants alike.

Research Design

The phenomenological approach was used to explore how college-

conocimiento and sense of belonging could be interpreted through the lived

experiences of first and second- year Latina/o students at a for-profit college. In

their interviews, students described how they explored and sought college

information, how they experienced both community and for-profit colleges, and

their levels of sense of belonging in both community and for-profit colleges. The

participants' interviews illustrated the shared experiences of the serpentine pathway of college-*conocimiento* and the influence of a sense of belonging on their persistence in higher education.

Research Setting

The for-profit educational institutions have become a booming industry as students are seeking accelerated degree and certificate programs to prepare them for the world of work in half the time as the public colleges. It is the combination of the accelerated programs at the for-profit colleges, the recent budget cuts all across education, and impaction programs at the community colleges that have caused more traditional college students to enroll in non-traditional for-profit colleges. The selected site, Crestwood[1] College, is a for-profit college offering these accelerated degree programs along with other incentives to attract, retain, graduate, and employ their students. By offering the most popular degrees in the fields of Health, Business, Justice, Technology, and Design, students can enter a specific career field in 18 months- as seen on television commercials. While much was being revealed in the news and debated in the courts about the marketing and advertising aspects practices of the for-profit colleges, little is known about the students who attend these colleges. Therefore, the selection of this site was made deliberately to speak with students who have chosen this specific educational path in light of the controversy with for-profit colleges. Additionally, the students who attend Crestwood College were

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[1] All college names are pseudonyms

not only local community members, but commuters from outside counties as well, which represented diverse opinions and perspectives.

Crestwood College formally announced that it had experienced an extended period of declining enrollments in January 2016, and closed its doors in April 2016 due to "given market shifts and changes in the regulatory environment."

Research Sample

The researcher purposefully selected four representatives of each of the five major departments available at the college: technology, healthcare, business, design, and justice. The number of participants chosen was not a large number as "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). The purposeful sampling was not random and did not require such a large number of participants.

The 20 participants of the study were first and second-year Latino/a students who attended a for-profit college in the Inland Empire. The participant's age range was from 18 to 40 years and of varying degrees of proficiency in both math and English. Of the 20 volunteer participants in the study, 10 were female and 10 were male.

All students identified themselves as having a Latino/a or Hispanic background from countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala, and Peru. All, except for one student who participated in this study were the first-generation in their family to go to college. Although a few of the participants were

native speakers of the Spanish, all of the participants were fluent speakers of English. The table below includes the names[2], ages, gender, 1st college attended, and focus of study for each of the 20 participants of the dissertation study.

Research Data

Table 1. Participants Name; Age; Gender; Ethnicity; First College; Focus of Study

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	First College	Focus of Study
1. Bridget	19	F	Hispanic	CSU	Business
2. Bethany	22	F	Mexican	CC	IT Network
3. Patrick	19	M	Hispanic	CSU	Business
4. James	20	M	Hispanic	For-Profit	Business
5. Damien	35	M	Hispanic	CC	Graphic Design
6. Celeste	36	F	Mexican	For-Profit	Criminal Justice
7. Sulema	38	F	Salvadorian	CSU	Business
8. Susanna	30	F	Mexican	For-Profit	Medical Assistant
9. Marcel	25	M	Guatemala	For-Profit	Business
10. Marianna	29	M	Hispanic	For-Profit	Construction Management

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[2] All students' names are pseudonyms

11. Jefferson	18	M	Hispanic	For-Profit	Medical Assistant
12. Daisy	33	F	Mexican	For-Profit	Health Information Technology
13. Maribella	18	F	Guatemala	For-Profit	Medical Assistant
14. Priscilla	21	F	Mexican	CC	Criminal Justice
15. Krystal	24	F	Mexican	CC	Criminal Justice
16. John	21	M	Mexican	For-Profit	Graphic Design
17. Stanley	20	M	Mexican	For-Profit	Graphic Design
18. Adam	29	M	Mexican	CC	Information Technology
19. Salvador	24	M	Unknown	For-Profit	Information Technology
20. Martin	28	M	Peruvian	CC	Information Technology

Data Collection

I recruited participants for the study in the forms of campus bulletin flyers, class presentations, and personal meetings. Participants were informed that my purpose was to explore and understand the lived experiences and perceptions of Latino/a first and second-year students who attended a for-profit college. The procedure involved an audio-recorded interview. The volunteer was interviewed with open-ended and yes-no questions on their educational history, present

college experiences, and goals. I interviewed all of the participants on the school campus in a room with open access during non-instructional time.

Data Analysis

Following Moustakas (1994) methods and procedures for analyzing the data I collected using the phenomenological approach, I set aside, or bracketed any predispositions and preferences I may have about the subject matter or group of participants in the study. I first transcribed the one-on-one interviews. Then, the interviews were analyzed and manually coded for common themes that aligned with the Latina/o students' experiences in the college-*conocimiento* pathway and the influence of a sense of belonging as they emerged during the interviews. I focused on codes most fitting in "describing the meanings of the individuals' being-in-the-world and how these meanings influence the choices they make" in college (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.729). Moreover, the qualitative software, ATLAS TI, assisted with the organizational coding of the data. Open-coding strategies were used to code the data for additional themes connected to and not connected to the primary themes.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In order to establish validity and trustworthiness I employed multiple strategies (Creswell, 2009). Using *member checking*, I provided participants with specific descriptions and themes found in their individual interviews for accuracy. Furthermore, I retained accurate records in ATLAS TI to reflect consistency and

transparency in the decision making process and interpretations of the data (Perez, 2014). The third strategy I used in this study to ensure validity was to clarify any *bias* that I, myself, as the researcher might have brought into this specific study (Creswell, 2009); therefore, I am including my positionality statements below.

Positionality of the Researcher

As a researcher, my positionality is gained through personal and professional experiences. Even though almost all of the educational institutions I attended were public entities, I have spent 10 years in various private school settings as a tutor and/or instructor. I feel that on my journey through the educational path, I have the experience of interacting with many types of learners and students from diverse walks of life and/or types of educational institutions. I have understood and discovered that all students have differing needs, but all students need support and mentorship to be successful in reaching their goals, especially if they have never had it.

Self

On my father's side, I am the first-generation born in the United States. Although my mother's parents are from Mexico as well, I am the second-generation on her side to be born in the United States. I am composed of at least three identities: a Chicana, a female, and scholar. As a Chicana who was born and raised in East Los Angeles, I remember the constant generational and cultural differences between the grandparents and my parents. As female raised

primarily by her mother, I have memories of pride as I witnessed my mother stretching the government food stamps for all six of her children. As a young scholar growing up in a chaotic and dysfunctional home, I found solace in the great story books in the library. I understand that my participants' identities were also comprised on multi-dimensional levels. Because I shared these multiple perspectives and identities with my participants, I was able to build rapport and establish trust.

<u>Self and Others</u>

The students in this study were attending a private for-profit college, a nationally accredited institution, which may carry a stigma. They were first-generation born in the United States and the first to attend college in the family. They came from low or low-middle income levels and not from affluent sections of the neighborhood. All students were on financial aid, but they varied in life situations. While a few lived and were financially supported by their parents, others were single or married and independently supported.

I fell in love with academia and dived head-first into the knowledge of all fields; the expectation of years of schooling did not waver my emotions. I was unsure of my strengths and I felt I needed time to explore the various fields of study before I committed myself. The students in the study, however, are eager to leave the vast field of general education and immediately into specific career education because they are confident of their desires and abilities. These confidence is admirable and I sometimes I wish I had known my passions earlier

in life. If I had been aware of the for-profit colleges earlier in my high school years, I believe I would have chosen the fast-track as well.

<u>Self and System</u>

The students in the study were attending a for-profit college and part of the stigma was that students who graduated from these types of institutions were not prepared to enter the work field as anticipated. However, in my perspective, such a student was not different from the student attending a public college, and students attending public colleges, in general, were also considered underprepared for college. These students who attended public colleges were the same students who attended the for-profit college. The difference in that the student who chose the for-profit route chose the faster route. I did not see my participants in a deficit lens and they likely could sense that in our regular rapport sessions in the classroom or the hallways.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

It can be argued that, in the past, colleges that identified as for-profit institutions, which specialize in career-focused education, attracted the lower and working class students to educate and train these students into menial and low class positions of employment (Beaver, 2009). As stated in Chapter 2, the current for-profit students most likely include under-represented students, women, students who are married, have dependents, and hold a GED (general education diploma) (Chung, 2012). In addition, the for-profit students maintain higher school absenteeism, and have limited support from parents who either hold high school diplomas or less (Chung, 2012). In San Bernardino County, more than half of the population identified as Latino and mirrored the growing number of younger Latino generation born in the Southwestern region of the United States (Mordechay, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Therefore, the participants in this study concentrate on the lived experiences of low and/or middle-income Latina/o students and the influences that affected their decision to attend a for-profit college. The purpose of this study was to examine the research questions:

1. How do student's' personal and academic pathways influence their decision to attend a for-profit college?

2. How do Latina/o students experience their first year at a for-profit college?

3. How does a sense of belonging influence the persistence for Latina/o students in a for-profit college?

After conducting interviews with 20 male and female students attending a for-profit college, the most important findings were among the students who had experienced both community colleges and for-profit colleges. To begin, first, I discuss the findings on college choice in response to the first research question: "How do student's personal and academic pathways influence the decision to attend a for-profit college?". Then, I will examine the findings in participants' first experiences at the for-profit college to answer the second research question: "How do Latina/o students experience their first year at a for-profit college?". To respond to the third research question, "How does a sense of belonging influence the persistence for Latina/o students?", the findings will describe the influence that retention strategies had on the persistence of Latina/o students enrolled in a for-profit college.

Results of the Study

Pathways to Choosing a For-Profit College

Ten of the 20 participants attended for-profit colleges directly after high school. These students did not have any prior experience attending any other institution of higher education prior to attending for-profit colleges. Five of the 10 participants had attended previous for-profit colleges, but five participants never had any prior college experience at all. The following samples illustrated the experiences of those students who never had any prior college experience at all.

James, Maribella, and Susanna described the decision-making process of how they learned about, applied for, and chose the for-profit during high school. In the first example below, James explained how quickly he was enrolled in college once he got contact information from the internet:

No, actually, the only reason I came here was because I googled this, I just googled schools around me and then I seen this and I looked, I got some information off of the school, and then they were the first ones to call me back, and make, like, an actually make movements for me to come to this school, they send somebody and then, like, in less than a week, I would want to say, everything happened, yeah. (#4, 2014)

The first college to return James' message was a recruiter from a for-profit college. The recruiter guided the enrollment process expeditiously and within one week James was a college student. James observed that it was the school that sent a recruiter, or representative who made 'everything happen.' It seems, however, that James did not have many choices between schools. He simply moved forward in the decisions that were being made for him. Like James, Maribella also shared a similar experience with an active recruiter who seemed to make some decisions for her below:

But if not, I'ma start working for a year, and then next year, I'll start college. That was my choice, and then, until Jameson, I think, or something, he called me, he's like, oh yeah, are you interested about this? And I was like, um, he said, um, if you can't, if he wanted me, if he wanted to come over to

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my house to give me like a presentation to show me what's like, the school

about, and the programs, so he did, and I liked it, so he's like, you wanna

sign up right now, and I was like, I thought about it, I was like, yeah, why

not? At least, I wanna see how it works, but if it doesn't work, then I'll just

get out, like, so yeah, now I'm here, haha. (#13, 2014)

A representative from a for-profit college went to Maribella's actual residence,

performed a presentation, and Maribella signed up to attend college in the same

meeting. Without having explored any other schools besides the initial for-profit

college, Maribella, like James, was immediately agreeable to the first college

whose representatives showed her personal attention. Both James and Maribella

did not seem to have any kind of variety of colleges to choose from. Finally, a

third student provided further insight into the lack of college options and choices.

In the example below, Susanna described how the rejection of a first for-profit

college forced her to settle for the for-profit college she attended:

Um, because when I was searching for other colleges to go to first, before I

got here, um some colleges won't um accept my diploma because it's from,

like a Christian school, so I went to Everall [a for-profit college], and they

told me, oh you're, you're accepted, we accept your um diploma, and I got a

call the next day saying that you're declined because your diploma is not

accredited, so I called the school where I went to um, went to get my high

school diploma from, they said that um I could go to Crestwood College,

and I was like where is that at, they're like in Ontario, and I was like, okay,

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so I was looking at the price ranges from different colleges that they gave

me and this one was like the kinda the cheapest one to attend because

other colleges want $40,000, and so I came here, and I talked to Valerie, I

don't know her last name haha Valerie, and I told her my situation, and she

said, no problem, you are accepted here, we do accept your diploma, and

you're gonna go for your registered medical assistant. (#8, 2014)

For Susanna, it seemed her high school served as problematic from the

beginning, which limited her college options. The first for-profit college Susanna

decided to attend rejected her high school diploma. Susanna had no option but to

attend the college that would accept her high school diploma, which was the

second for-profit college. For students like James, Maribella, and Susanna, who

did not have many options available during the crucial decision-making process,

it seemed the college choice was made for them and not from them.

<u>Pathways to Choosing a Public College</u>

Ten of the 20 participants attended public colleges before enrolling in a for-

profit college that grants associate degrees. Seven students first attended public

community colleges, while three students first attended public California State

Universities, which granted bachelor degrees. In this section, examples from

students like Priscilla, Marianna, and Martin will illustrate the motivation for

attending a public college before attending a for-profit college. These students

believed in the benefit of higher education for themselves and their families. For

instance, the next example, Priscilla described her desire to advance her family

economic conditions as a factor in pursuing a higher education. Her interview

highlighted findings that aligned with several of the steps along the college-

conocimiento pathway (Acevedo-Gil, 2017), which offer insight into the complex

decision-making process of college choice. Priscilla's experience exemplified the

arrebato experienced to establish college aspirations. Priscilla recalled:

> Yeah, and um, also because it's, it's just like, if you, the more education you
>
> have, well, that was like whole thing, before, the more education you have
>
> the higher, then the higher the pay, the better your job um, will be, and I just
>
> wanna get my family out of where they were at, and so I was, that my whole
>
> mentality, like, when I began college was that. Help my family. Yeah,
>
> because like I said, better, the better chances of getting a better job, and
>
> then, I mean, if you have a better job, you have better pay. (#14, 2014)

Coming from a low-income background, Priscilla was using college as a way of

improving her family economic conditions. She had the mindset that the more

education she received, she would be able to gain better career marketability,

and ultimately, higher income for her and her family. In the second example

below, Marianna described her motivation for returning to college as upwards

mobility:

> I was doing admin work, so I had a job, which was good, you know, I was
>
> working long hours, you know, putting in some time because I wanted to
>
> save up some money so that I can move out of my parent's house, I'm like,
>
> okay, I'm gonna go ahead and save up some money, put it aside, and then,

you know, then take the next step because I really want to do the whole civil

engineering again, but I can't do that here without being certified, I can't just

do it just because I have the experience. (#10, 2014)

Marianna explained that although she had a previous job in civil engineering, she

realizes that in a modern economy, experience alone will not advance a career.

Marianna understood that she would be able to be promoted if she had a higher

education. Like Marianna, Martin also realized that in order to get himself out the

'hole' he described in the example below, he needed to get a college education:

So, it's like, it's competition when it comes down to that because you know,

everybody needs a job, and without a college education, what company is

gonna pay you that amount of money, and just out of the blue, you know,

you don't, that one trade that you have, you can't go to, let's say another

trade, and say, oh, I expect you to pay this much cuz I used to make that

much, so it finally hit me, when I started, you know, I got divorced, as well,

so it started just all falling apart, and I was like alright, I need to get out of

this hole, and um, I was a like, you know, what? I'm just gonna go to school.

(#20, 2014)

Martin's example illustrated that he was motivated to attend college to earn more

pay in his trade. As someone who experienced a divorce, Martin decided to

return to college to remove himself out of dire situation.

In addition to advancing themselves economically, students also noted their

status as the first in their family to attend college and their parents for inspiring

them to attend college. For example, Priscilla directly stated "I wanted to be the first one to graduate from high school and college" (#14, 2014), while Celeste revealed, "My dad, he went to school in Mexico, but he only went, I think, maybe 2nd grade of high school, so he wasn't, you know, he didn't have the high school diploma or anything like that, so they were actually learning from us" (#6, 2014). Celeste seemed proud to be her dad's teacher in the education she was receiving from high school, so the desire to continue in the sharing of knowledge spilled over into the college realm. In the final example below, Krystal explained how her mother was the role model to inspire her to attend college in the first place:

> My role model was always my mom cuz my mom, she came from T.J. when she was like um, I think 9 years old, and she finished junior high here, and she finished um also her high school, she graduated from Garfield High School, yes, and um she graduated with honors, so she always like one of my role models, and I would always wanted to do like follow her footsteps in like the same way that she did it, you know, like, honor rolls and everything, so that was like one of major role models, was my mom. (#15, 2014)

Although Krystal's mother attended school outside of the United States during her adolescent years, Krystal's mother was successful in graduating with honors in a California high school. Krystal described how she strived to push herself to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Similarly, parents and parental experiences also served to foster college

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aspirations. For instance, in the following example, Bethany revealed her mother advised her on her future financial plans:

My parents were the main people to help me- mostly my mother. She really pushed me to go to college. She said we're not gonna be here forever. You have to go do something. I'm not gonna be here to support you. Your dad is not gonna be here to support you. You have to support us eventually so you have to go off to college. (#2, 2014)

Bethany's mother pressed the value of being able to financially provide for not only herself, but her parents as well. Bethany felt obligated to go to college to support herself and her parents. And finally, in the third example below, Sulema described the pressure her father placed on her to succeed in college:

I'm all well, you know how they ask you all that what you wanna be and blah, blah, blah, and they're like yeah, I'm all, my dad says that I have to be a child psychologist and a teacher, so I have to double major, and they're like what? And I go, that's what my dad says, so that's I gotta do. They're like what do you want to do? I'm all, I , I don't know because my dad said that's that what I have to do, so that's what I have to do, and they're like, well that sucks, I'm like I don't know. (#7, 2014)

Sulema explained that her father pushed her to not only to attend college, but to double-major and do as she is instructed to do by her father. For many students, however, even though their parents served as inspirations to attend college, their parents were not able to provide support or guidance in the educational process.

For instance, in the example below, Priscilla discussed her parent's inability to help her with any school-related knowledge:

They grew up in Mexico, my mom did a, middle school, and my dad did like, first year of high school or yeah, like first couple days, they wanted me to get an education, but like I said, it was hard throughout my whole education, because I would struggle so much, and then, my mom be like, well, how, how can I help you, I don't know. (#14, 2014)

Priscilla's parents were born in Mexico and did not receive educations passed the first year of high school. Her parents encouraged Priscilla to pursue more education than they did, but unfortunately, were unable to assist Priscilla in the pursuit of higher education.

When Priscilla made the choice to pursue college, she moved into the *nepantla* stage of the college-*conocimiento* pathway (Acevedo-Gil, 2017), where she was receptive to information on college. As mentioned previously, however, Priscilla, lacked the parental support and described her limitations in this experience: "Yeah, she [my mother] didn't know, when I applied for college, she didn't know, we didn't know what to do because I didn't have anyone to look up to, like a, I mean, even as a, as a mistake, like let's say I have a brother" (#14, 2014). Although Priscilla had made the decision to attend college, she still did not receive the concrete support from neither her parents or any other siblings before her.

At her high school, Priscilla had only a single teacher to provide her with

information on college. Priscilla recalled:

> I would say like just researching myself, and then, if I had questions, um, in high school I had a really good, like teacher, who, I would just go and ask him for help, and so he would kinda like, let us know what path to go on, and, he would just kind help us in that direction. (#14, 2014)

Without the proper amount of college information for Priscilla to help her in the decision-making process, it did not seem Priscilla had much choice in the whole college choice process. It seemed as if decision made for them already by others. In Marianna's example below, she described her decision-making process when it came to college:

> Um, might sound just kind of selfish, but myself, I mean, you know, parents have always been supportive with everything I do, but I've always been very um on my own, I make my own choices, I don't really discuss what I do with anyone, you know, um, it was just one of those things where, even when I left, you know, um, I, I was looking for a place and I didn't even tell my mom til that day when I was moving out, I said, I'm leaving, you know, it's, it's just, I don't know. (#10, 2014)

Although Marianna's parents were supportive in her life, Marianna was accustomed to making her own decisions. However, in this case, it may seem Marianna made a decision based on insufficient information without realizing the consequences of not seeking outside information or opinion.

Upon entering the *coatlicue* stage, which is the third stage of the college-

conocimiento pathway, students anticipated obstacles along her path to college. For example, Priscilla expressed: "Freshman year, I was like yeah, sophomore year, I was like, okay, maybe, junior year, that's when I, that's when I was like, oh I don't know, I really didn't know if I was going to, um, I ended up in continuation school, just to get more credits" (#14, 2014). Priscilla was more than aware that she struggled just to graduate from a continuation high school. Priscilla realized she was accountable for her own actions, but she also did not feel her high school had supported her learning aspirations. In the following example, Priscilla complained about the teachers and methods of teaching at her high school:

> No, I feel like they, they just, it's like oh read this, do this, but here, it's like you actually have to think on your own, do it on your own, because it's not like the teachers are there reading with you, like in the classes, um, even in high school, it was just like oh just read that, and then answer this, or just use your book, and I, even like the exams that they give you, I feel like I'm like, oh well, I didn't even learn anything from it, like all like the S- not the SATS, but like the um bench- the benchmarks that the gave. (#14, 2014)

It may have been Priscilla's individual actions to have caused her to attend a continuation high school, but in her negative perceptions of her high school experience also seemed to play a factor in driving some of Priscilla's actions.

A couple of stages later students arrived at the *coyolxauhqui* step of the college-*conocimiento* pathway (Acevedo-Gil, 2017), which involved choosing a college. In this space, the participants noted the influence of peers and siblings.

For instance, Priscilla, enrolled in a community college because she automatically assumed local residents were limited to enrolling in community colleges. Priscilla explained: "I thought, actually, everyone did, went locally, not like out-of-state, and things like that" (#14, 2014). She believed attending this type of college was the normal and expected route for her as a resident of the specific geographical region where a community college was already located. A second participant, Adam, also attended a community college before attending the for-profit college and made certain comparable observations. Like Priscilla, Adam also enrolled in a community college because: "I mean, my two sisters did it, so I done it as well, I really didn't know what I was, wanted to do, or you know, I just know, just go to college" (#18, 2014). Adam's two older sisters completed their education at the community college, which resulted in gainful employment.

> It was just the closest thing to home, and then, um, it was just, like the easiest, just you make an application, you send it, you don't have to do an essay, yeah, so I didn't know anything about that, so it was just like, okay, well, that's my choice. (#18, 2014)

Adam believed he could reap the same benefits as his sisters had in graduating from the community college. Finally, Martin, also explains his first college choice reason and describes his personal experiences at the community college he attended. Like many students before him, such as Adam, Martin chose the path of a community college because his older sibling had already attended the college. He says: "My older brother, he um, he went to RCC and then um I don't

know I just, older brother, you follow" (#20, 2014). Even though Martin was not directly advised to enroll in the local community college, he decided to take his brother's lead and follow in the same direction. Once Martin started the college conversation with his own high school peers, he realized they too were planning on attending the same community college his brother attended, and this simply confirmed his decision to apply at the local community college.

Pathways Toward Leaving a Public College

A clash of realities began once in college, as students experienced numerous obstacles. For instance, Priscilla received an expected graduation date and was an active student for many semesters. However, Priscilla complained about the frustration of registration and the inability of finding open courses to fulfill her requirements on time to meet the expected graduation date. She describes the courses as: "a lot of the times, it's full, so the classes you get are not even worth your time or your money" (#14, 2014). Priscilla's motivation weaned when semester after semester she continued to have these same setbacks. Eventually, Priscilla lost motivation to continue in the community college and groaned:

> Then you just kinda get tired of it, and now it's like rerouting just like working because I was like, why am I gonna to go to school if I'm not even getting the classes that I need, so in my mind, I was like, if I don't go to school the next semester, I'm like, I'm not going to school anymore, at all, so I didn't want that. (#14, 2014)

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Under ideal circumstances, colleges would be able to offer more sections of the courses needed to accommodate the student population, which would increase course availability. Students would be able to schedule their academic courses to coincide with their employment and personal obligations. This student would be able to complete a degree program by their expected graduation date at the community college. However, the reality is that Priscilla did not feel the courses were available to meet her weekly schedule. The lack of open courses forced Priscilla to add more time to her original expected graduation date and only prolongs the attainment of her degree. As a direct result, this extended time would delay her entrance into the world of work, and most importantly hinder the financial gain of entering the career field.

Like Priscilla, Adam also grumbled about the course availability, but he went further to depict the image of a confusing environment. In the following example, Adam recounted the experiences at the community college as:

It kinda, you're kinda, it's kinda everywhere because it's uh, I really don't know where to go, it's a big place, it's like, uh, I don't know what classes I need, uh, I think, uh I think I missed orientation, it's uh, uh, I didn't know what, what day, so it's all, uh, you kinda have to find your way there. (#18, 2014)

In the example above, Adam expressed the lack of knowledge surrounding site locations and course selection in his educational path while at the community college. This could conflict with student's confidence level surrounding college

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and the processes involved in college.

Martin, like Adam and Priscilla above, also mentioned both the disappointment of facing closed classes during registration and the lack of guidance in the community college process. Moreover, Martin added that the college's personnel did not have the service-oriented attitudes he was expecting. Martin says:

> They're just there to collect a paycheck, you know, I don't know, it's just, my, my thinking is, you, you, you know, everyone has to work, you pick a job, but there's always options, you now, you don't always have to work at a job you know, per se, so th- it's a service job, you know, you're there to serve your students, that's their job to help them out, you know, like, hey, you know do it with a smile, students come here, I mean, whether, whatever their age is, they're coming to you because they need it, they're not coming to you because they, they just feel like it. (#20, 2014)

Martin believed the representatives of the community college did not present themselves as people who were satisfied working in a learning environment. Martin believed that if people work in a service-oriented position, such as in a college, they must feel and express the need to service, or help other people. He seemed to understand that in this world, people chose their calling in the work force, and if a person is in a position where people are looking for advice and guidance, then the person in that specific position should be able to assist those who were seeking that assistance. This person who was in a service-oriented

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position should not only conduct their business to fulfill their job descriptions, but that person should conduct their business with a smile. A smile was necessary to help Michael feel as if this person was satisfied and actually enjoyed the kind of position that can provide answers and to the information seekers who were lost and provide a path. The people working for a community college did not emanate job satisfaction, according to Michael, which translated into a negative experience for him in the community college environment.

As another example, Bridget, decided on a California State College as her first choice. Bridget, however, also encountered challenges in her experience with the college and her grade point average reflected so. She explained:

Um the classes were way too big, like lectures were 200 students, quizzes were not personal at all like you sat in your chair and used a clicker to like point and then that's how it collected your answers. So, that was weird and I couldn't understand. And teachers had….you had to have an appointment to see them and if you didn't then you would not be able to see them until you had an appointment. (#1, 2014)

Bridget found the large lecture classes not conducive to her learning and instructors to be out of service reach for immediate assistance. At the end of the term, she failed her classes at the community college and her disappointment discouraged further attempts to reenroll back into the same environment. Bridget decided to enroll in college again, but this time she did her research and evaluated colleges that would guide her to attain her goals.

These examples above illustrated the experiences of students who actually attended community colleges and a California State University. These examples show that students who attend a community college or California State University have certain expectations of the processes involved as a student and have expectations for the people who are involved in these college settings. These participants voiced their disappointment in the school systems that only offered a limited number of courses to fit their schedules, and that those limited classes filled up so soon that the students would have to wait for another semester/term to fulfill their degree requirements, which would only lengthen the wait for their degree. And most importantly, the service provided by the college staff and/or instructors during these processes were not conducted by people who should have positive attitudes in an atmosphere already filled with student uncertainty and confusion.

Pathways Toward a For-Profit College

In acknowledgement of the complex decision-making process experienced by Latina/o students, the following examples illustrate a return to the *nepantla* stage, or second stage of the college-*conocimiento* pathway (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). In this stage, the participants revealed their reasons for leaving the community college environment and enrolling in the for-profit college.

For example, Krystal had previously attended a community college, but she decided to end her ongoing community college route and plan a different strategy. This change of strategy led her to the for-profit sector and she explains

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her reasoning for this change in the following example: Krystal states: "I decided to leave uh Mt. SAC because it was gonna take me longer to graduate, and I just wanted to get it out of the way already" (#15, 2014). Although Krystal was a full-time student, she felt she was spending too much time on prerequisite classes and had not even had one of her core classes for her major degree. Once she became a student and had her class schedule provided, Krystal noticed how quickly she was able to get a course in her intended major study. Krystal further adds: "Uh what made me stick with Crestward [College] is because it's short-term, like let's say, like for example, for criminal justice, it's like 17 months, and it's like you have your core classes like right away, even though you're taking like other classes" (#15, 2014). Her instant attraction was the fact she was able to participate and focus on the core classes she had come to higher education to just enter her career choice in the first place.

Bridget gave different reasons that spurred her to leave the current college she attended, which was the public California State University. She described:

"Um, my, one of the guys that went here, um, he actually worked for the student services, yeah, and um, he would always tell me about it cuz he knew I was a criminal justice major, and he is, he was also a criminal justice major, so he told me, he was like, you should really go there, and you'll finish fast, and he kinda pushed me towards it, but I left it, I was just like, oh, okay, maybe. And then at the time, when I was actually looking into schools, I was alright, I'll take the time and look, research that school, yeah,

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so that's how I came across it." (#1, 2014)

Bridget's contact at her current college had enough merit to advise her to attend a different college. Besides her friend's advice, Bridget also believed she would only waste her time and spend more money on unnecessary classes if she continued to be a student at California State University. In her search the second time around for a college to attend, Bridget, however, did not rely on credible sources or advice; instead Bridget leaned towards her own intuition. She described the search and decision-making process in the following sample:

So, I felt like something wasn't right, like it was weird the way they were explaining things and then someone here, I don't know who, but they just kept calling me all the time. And I don't know where they got my number, I think like online. And then I was like ok yeah, I'll just come in and then I liked what the representative said and I liked they way she explained things and she wasn't like, I guess like um, I guess like, shaky- shady about it. She was just like this is it this is, you know? And then I met with financial aid and everything was in different departments, like they each knew what they were doing. Other than like Everall [College], everybody was just one person. (#1, 2014)

In her search for colleges, the second time around, Bridget spoke to a representative of a for-profit college, but decided to pass on a college tour because the representative did not seem to present himself, or herself in the positive marketable light needed to receive her vote of confidence. It was a

particular for-profit college, however, that caught her attention and persuaded her to enroll as a student.

However, Bridget was not alone in placing her confidence in the for-profit college. Martin, who had also attended a previous college and did not graduate, decided to return to school after a period of absence as a student. In his search for colleges the second time around, Martin described this experience:

> Um, they called me right away, and um, you know I came in and that's, okay you called first, and I come in first, and um, they asked me, you know, what, you wanna come to school? What are you, what do you want to do? You know, what, what, what are you wanna, you know, get a degree in? And I, you know, I told them, you know, I, in the Marine Corp I was doing computers, and, and technology stuff, and so they have the program here, and they thoroughly described the programs that they offered here and the cert- you know, whatever we get certified in inside your degree as well, I mean, is actually more than Cal Poly, you know, I compared them both. (#20, 2014)

With his military experience behind him, Martin was in search of colleges to attend and decided to pass on a California State University. In his comparison, Martin decided that the for-profit college was the better fit for him.

First-Year Experiences in For-Profit College

Upon experiencing college and the environment, some Latina/o students moved into the sixth stage of Acevedo-Gil's (2017) college-*conocimiento*

pathway, A Clash of Realities: Entering and Conflicting with College, as they

dealt with the realities they encountered as a result of their college choice. The

exact moment in time when a clash of realities occurred for these students varied

for each student and more than one clash of reality may have occurred at any

given time. However, not all Latina/o students experienced the same types of

conflicts during this process. A student may encounter academic, social, and/or

financial conflicts in this sixth stage.

Challenges in For-Profit College

Some Latina/o students in the study described the disappointments

encountered in the for-profit college environment during this tumultuous sixth

stage of the college-conocimiento process. The two students in this section

below described the challenges experienced while at the for-profit college as

primarily financial. For instance, in the example below, Bridget described her

college obstacle as making the monthly payments:

> Um, well making the monthly payments cuz like I never had, at Cal State
>
> San Bernardino, financial aid would just take it in, take it out, and then send
>
> me the rest. And here, like I have to make sure I make my monthly
>
> payments every month and then um I kinda felt like I was in high school
>
> again cuz the classes are so tiny and I had to adjust to everybody and then
>
> not really knowing anyone and then, like really shy and I didn't really feel
>
> like I belonged, I guess, and then at first I thought that this school was kinda
>
> like for underprepared, like it wasn't for people who were my level cuz I felt

like I was pretty smart and I felt like this was the continuation school, but

then as I progressed, I was like ok the classes are hard. (#1, 2014)

Bridget described a few challenges she experienced as a student attending a for-

profit college, but the first obstacle she mentioned was paying the monthly

payments she never had to pay at the public four-year university. A second

student, Marcel, also mentioned the financial aspect of attending college in the

following example:

I would have to say, I would have to say the support from my parents um to

help me first get started, um, yeah definitely. It was like, um, they were

gonna assist me in the beginning with like my payments cuz I was

unemployed so they were gonna assist me with my payments, um, getting

to school and gas. (#9, 2014)

Although the financial aspects of education were daunting for Bridget and Marcel,

it seemed like money and the time commitment were the tradeoffs they had given

in order to be at an institution that would support their educational goals.

Positive Experiences at the For-Profit College

Once Bridget made her choice, she enrolled at the for-profit college. Bridget

not only fared academically well at the for-profit college, but she also discovered

one particular student service was well within her reach. Bridget happily

describes the much-welcomed assistance from the career services department at

the for-profit college:

Um, not everything, but they do send me the links, and then I apply,

and they've helped me build my resume practically. And every time I have

to add a new work experience, they're the ones who do it, so that it's not all

crowded and it's not multiple pages. It looks neat. (#1, 2014)

Instead of the usual bewilderment unexperienced students encounter when

attempting to create, format, and edit resumes, the career services department

was helpful in updating Bridget's resume for her. Moreover, the career services

department not only assisted in editing and formatting, but it was the career

services department that had connected Bridget with a few employers during her

time at the for-profit college.

A second participant, Krystal, also spoke enthusiastically about the student

support services at the for-profit college. She expressed:

Like um, student support services, like they provide you like with much

information about anything that you need, and then for example, like uh for

the library, like uh, Penelope, she's also available, like if you need help with

like um using the computer or learning like how to do APA format or

something like, she's there to help you as well, so I think that's one. I do feel

because also you guys have like, we have also the workshops, that also

help, so I mean, yes, we do, so I think we do have a good set, like system

here. (#15, 2014)

Krystal was satisfied with the student services and was able to recall the name of

a specific person who Krystal perceived as a resource in her experience at the

for-profit college. For students like Krystal being able to access support at

various levels easily signaled inviting messages of being welcome.

Martin also vividly recalled a memorable positive attitude emanating from the staff and faculty as student in a for-profit college:

I remember they [community college staff and faculty] did [care], but it wasn't, it's not like Crestwood, um, Crestwood, I think gets more involved as, as a student, like what they [the students] think, that's one thing I did, I do like about this school, is they make sure that you, well, they make you feel like you know, hey you're not gonna fail, so if we see you failing, we're gonna ask you what's going on. (#20, 2014)

When it came to the personal aspect of the learning experience, Michael believed that the faculty and staff at the community college did care about him succeeding in school, but he was unable to recall any specific memories of caring exchanges with instructors. On the other hand, Michael definitely observed and felt a more caring atmosphere as staff and faculty engaged students in conversation and involved themselves more in the students' success at the for-profit college. Michael's positive experiences in his educational career as a student in the for-profit sector seemed to be significant as they affected his perspective on the character of the people who taught and worked directly in an educational setting.

As illustrated above, for students like Michael and Bridget, the regular interactions with faculty and staff indicated the administrators cared for the students' success. Faculty and staff who portray these attentive characteristics

are perceived as concerned and understanding for the student's needs, and more likely to be viewed as approachable for feedback and assistance. When a student's trust and confidence in the faculty is established through student observations and interactions, this can decrease a student's likelihood of departing from the college.

Realistically, the interactions with faculty and staff alone are insufficient for retaining students, especially Latino students. Combining aspects of retention, such as increasing students' sense of belonging into the school culture and/or environment can increase the likelihood of a positive effect on the retention and graduation rates on the Latino students, thus preventing students' early departure from college.

Impact of Sense of Belonging on Persistence

A student's sense of belonging is the perceived feeling of academic or social integration and connection to a specific institution; the attachments formed may be attributed to single factor, or a combination of multiple factors, depending on the individual student (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). A student's sense of belonging may be influenced by her/his levels of achievement, support, and comfort experienced by engagement with course material, peers, classmates, faculty, and staff.

The length of time a student is a participant in the educational setting may not directly measure a student's sense of belonging. Therefore, for a student, even a fleeting encounter with one individual affiliated with the institution can be

perceived as unfavorable, thus undesirable for the student to persist within that short span of time. Unfortunately, it is possible those negative impressions formed in the first few seconds of meeting the instructor of the course can have the power to impact a student's decision-making process for a much longer duration.

For instance, Priscilla and Julio describe their sense of belonging as a positive experience in the first year at a for-profit college. In the first example, Priscilla described the comfort of the familiar friends and the support of family as factors that increased her sense of belonging at the for-profit college. She said:

Yeah, cuz even when you become a, like friends with somebody here, they understand you, it's not like um, they understand like some of the things you're going through, they understand that a lot of, a lot of us, we support our families and we help them out, so we have to balance school, we have to balance work, we have to balance everything, um, so yeah, you just feel, you just feel like you belong because you understand each other, and you have more things in common, yeah, you just, basically, you just understand one another. (#14, 2014)

Priscilla attributed her sense belonging to being in an atmosphere with people who shared her sense of community and family values. Priscilla believed her friends at the for-profit college understood and supported her drive and goals. In addition, she felt they understood and supported her efforts to balance her multiple responsibilities.

Similarly, another interviewee, James, also perceived he belonged at the

for-profit college for reasons related to his culture. In observance of the fact that

he attended a college with a large number of Latino students, he described his

sense of belonging in the following example:

> Yeah, I do feel like I belong here, you know, like I said, people make me
>
> feel welcomed. I've really never thought about our percentage of race that's
>
> been here as a reason of why I am, you know, why I feel like I belong here,
>
> but now that I think about it, I mean it does make you feel somewhat good
>
> that your, at least your race, or your people, is being noticed in schools
>
> other than, you know, for negative things, but for, you know, them trying to
>
> make a change, so, now, yeah I do feel like I belong here because of that.
>
> (#4, 2014)

James described an increase of his sense of belonging because of the welcome

he received from people he interacted with on campus. Although a little

apprehensive at first, James revealed how his individual sense of belonging

might have stemmed from his cultural belief of the power of large numbers to

progress a people. James wanted to be recognized for making positive change

for his culture and the for-profit college allowed him to make these observations.

As illustrated above, for students like James attending college with students

who share similar values or cultural background impacted their sense of

belonging to the school. Not all students felt like they belonged simply on the

basis of their heritage as James did. For example, Martin believed he felt that he

belonged at the for-profit college because of the faculty and staff who supported him on campus. Martin described his sense of belonging the following example:

Um, I don't think it's because I'm Latino, it's dumb, I think it's just, I feel like I do belong here in this school cuz I like it, does that make sense? Like I, I um, it's just the way the school is, is, the way, the way the school is, so, you know, their programs they offer, um, the faculty that they hire, are, you know, they're good, they're friendly, they're nice, um, again going back to career services, student support, you know, or, some of those employees there are students, and I think that's what good about it because they're students as well that they understand or they know how it is here, and they help you out more with that, does that make sense? (#20, 2014)

Martin did not attribute his sense of belonging to his cultural identity; instead, he seemed to believe the faculty and staff exhibited friendly personalities, which he interpreted as 'good' experiences.

Finally, Patrick, in the second example below, described the cause of his sense of belonging to the college:

Yes, absolutely, I think that regardless of ethnic background, I think everyone feels welcome, I haven't had someone say, you know I hate this college cuz, you know, there's not enough white people here, or there's not enough Asian people here, so I think that just being here, in general, you don't see a sense of higher respect for one ethnic race towards another, so I think that being Hispanic has nothing to do with, you know, me belonging

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to this college. I think that anyone belongs here, personally, you know, I

have, I haven't seen- I haven't heard a complaint yet. (#3, 2014)

Patrick experienced a sense of belonging at the school because of the positive

social interactions he had with many people associated with the for-profit college.

He believes all people who attend that same college would feel a sense of

belonging at the college for the same reasons he feels a part of the school.

The examples above illustrated the voices of the Latina/o participants in this

study as they experienced the decision-making process involved in researching

and attending college. After conducting interviews with 20 male and female

students who attended a for-profit college, the most important findings were

among the students who had experienced both community colleges and for-profit

colleges.

Summary

First, I discussed the findings on college choice in response to the first

research question: "How do student's personal and academic pathways influence

the decision to attend a for-profit college?". For the Latina/o students in the study,

findings described how little choice they actually had in the decision-making

process of their education. Then, I examined the findings in participants' first

experiences at the for-profit college to answer the second research question:

"How do Latina/o students experience their first year at a for-profit college?".

Findings indicated that although some of the students experienced financial

challenges while attending the for-profit college, the long-term benefits of an

education, in addition to the positive and caring relationships students fostered while at the for-college served as support and motivation for the Latina/o students' drive to stay in college. To respond to the third research question, "How does a sense of belonging influence the persistence for Latina/o students?", the findings described the influence that retention strategies had on the persistence of Latina/o students enrolled in a for-profit college. Findings indicated that Latina/o students felt they belonged to the institution for reasons which included either feeling cultural congruity on campus with other students, or simply experienced college community support from faculty and staff.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this dissertation study was to increase the retention and persistence rates of Latina/os in for-profit colleges. As indicated earlier, although Latinas/os represent the largest minority population in the United States, they are also underrepresented in higher education (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Historically, Latina/os also have the lowest educational attainment level and lowest graduating rates in the nation (Kewal-Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). As such, less than 62% of Latina/o/x students in the United States graduate from high school, and only 12% earn a bachelor's degree (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). This is a particular issue because by 2025, California is likely to face a shortage of workers with some postsecondary education but less than a bachelor's degree. In fact, the future gap among "some college" educated workers may be as high as 1.5 million. Given that California is set to become the fifth largest economy in the world, the educational success of Latina/o students has broader implications.

Overview

The reasons for this problem are varied and multi-faceted; however, with such a large population affected by this problem, it is critical that solutions are sought. In Chapter 2, a review of the literature provided some historical, political, and sociological insight as to how this phenomenon might have occurred. For

example, lack of support, or lack of admission and financial aid information, constant budget cuts, an increase in class size, and a decrease in available classes at the community colleges students were a few factors influencing this phenomenon. The literature also highlighted that for-profit colleges attract students because their larger budgets and smaller class sizes offer a personalized experience of intimate support. However, for profit institutions are having just as much difficulty graduating Latino/a students as the community colleges.

Therefore, it was important to listen to the voices of Latina/o students who attended institutions of higher learning, especially institutions that attracted large numbers of Latina/o students, to understand the problem and seek solutions.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the methodology and methods of this dissertation. The current qualitative study employed a, interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach. The participants in this dissertation study were 20 Latina/o students who attended a for-profit college and in their 1st and 2nd year in college. After exploring the participants' responses to the research questions, I decided it was appropriate to utilize two theoretical frameworks in this dissertation study: college-conocimiento (Acevedo-Gil, 2017) to effectively capture the complex decision-making process of college choice for these Latina/o students and the second framework to describe the influence of a positive sense of belonging (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2010; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997) on the persistence rates of Latina/o

students in higher education.

Findings in Chapter 4 indicated that student participants did not have access to sufficient information about college. Even though the internet and Google were available, these were not replacements for actual guidance when researching colleges and to ask relevant questions surrounding college. In one instance, a participant had access to only one teacher for this guidance. There is a need to increase access to information because the Latina/o students did not have much choice in the decision-making process of their education. It is important that these students become aware of a variety of institutions in order to be able to truly have a choice.

Given the lack of information, the majority of participants first enrolled in their local community college. Those who attended community colleges described the impersonal or lack of personality or empathy in faculty and/or staff at the community colleges. Participants explained how representatives of these larger, traditional schools seemed to mirror the negative attitude, or conditions of the institution as a whole. Findings concluded that some of the participants in the study departed from these traditional schools because of the perceived negativity and found themselves back in the process of searching for the right college.

Further findings in Chapter 4 indicated that although Latina/o students experienced financial challenges at the for-profit college, the benefits of attending a for-profit college were numerous. These colleges offered open courses; technology-enhanced classrooms; personalized schedules; accelerated and/or

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blended curriculum; and the many student services available make enrolling in

for-profit colleges convenient to many students. More importantly, however,

these for-profit colleges experiences included a caring and supportive

environment. In this for-profit environment, Latina/o students felt a heightened

sense of belonging in a place where advise and answers were provided, which

supported their persistence in school.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

My findings illustrate that an indicator of the Latina/o student success were

based on the strength and relationships built with mentors inside or outside of

their college experiences. Therefore, I recommend for practice, that instructors,

as well as all other representatives of an institution of learning should be

assigned as mentors who are personable and exhibit genuine caring with all

interactions with students. A mentor could set the path for increasing a student's

sense of belonging in a place foreign to his/her environment. Culturally-

knowledgeable and empathic mentors are needed to guide students through

untrodden paths at many stages of their educational paths, especially in the high

school and college. These mentors would be able to inform and advise Latina/o

students as they reflect through the non-linear pathways of college-*conocimiento*,

in case the student is considering stopping-out from the institution

My findings supported previous studies that found that non-profit colleges

also lose students to for-profit colleges because they are not equipped to serve

diverse 21st century consumer/student populations (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport,

2003; Cook & Fennell, 2001; Iloh & Tierney, 2014; Iloh, 2016). Many traditional colleges are still functioning as they did 100 years ago. Therefore, my recommendation is that traditional colleges and institutions research the habits and goals of the current and diverse consumer/student population in order to most effectively implement programs and services that will meet the needs and goals of the both the seller and buyer.

One attraction specifically for Latina/o students to the for-profit college was the quality hands-on education they perceived they needed to enter the career field they were seeking as professionals. My findings indicated that the Latina/o students who participated in the study also persisted in their classes because they believed Crestwood College and the faculty were not just educating them, but actually training them to be active agents in their learning at the for-profit college. Although for-profits are critiqued for not preparing students to attain well-paying jobs, considering the high tuition costs, participants felt they were receiving the on-job experience in much needed areas of their career education attraction specifically for Latina/o students to the for-profit college was the quality hands-on education they perceived they needed to enter the career field they were seeking as professionals. My findings indicated that the Latina/o students who participated in the study also persisted in their classes because they believed Crestwood College and the faculty were not just educating them, but actually training them to be active agents in their learning at the for-profit college. They felt they were receiving the on-job experience in much needed areas of

their career education.

Of course, researchers cannot forget that a more modern and updated teaching and learning experiences would also include technologically forward recommendations for educators based on student/consumer demands. These demands could be translated as learning, accessing, and utilizing new technologies for direct knowledge and building relationships, such as: using Smart phones, accessories, and applications associated with different phone software and usage; interacting on social and business networks; and overall, just going digital to explore and evaluate the many usages and benefits for various programs (Chen, Bennett, & Bauer, 2015). My findings indicate that the Latina/o students in this study believed that the faculty at the for-profit college demonstrated the digital knowledge needed to educate them on how to perform in a technologically-forward society.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study builds on previous research and contributes to the field of higher education. For example, at Crestwood College, the newly enrolled students were required to attend a first-day student orientation different from a traditional college orientation. In traditional college orientation, and described in the first (separation) phase of Tinto's 1975 integration theory, students are expected to arrive alone and ready to immerse themselves in the college culture before attending any classes. However, in contradictory spirit, the students of Crestwood College were invited to bring their parents, siblings, children, and/or

any other family members to the orientation session. The for-profit college shared not only pertinent academic and financial information about college and becoming successful students and family supporters, but they provided food, beverages, and entertainment during the experience.

Moreover, because Spanish was the dominant language of a large population of the incoming students and their families, Crestwood College representatives served as translators throughout the process. Students enrolled at the Crestwood College perceived that the for-profit college cultivated Latina/o student communities by allowing family members to be a part of the supportive community from early on as first-day orientation. Latina/o student success could be attained through the combined support of family and institution; community colleges and four-year colleges can learn from the practices implemented in for-profit colleges.

This study also reframes the traditional understanding of college choice and persistence of Latina/o students into higher education. First, while college-conocimiento (Acevedo-Gil, 2017) conceptualizes that college choice is non-linear for Latina/o students, my study provides empirical data to elaborate on the non-linear college choices of Latina/o students. In doing so, I highlight that the college choice process continues for Latina/o students, even after enrolling in a higher education institution. Furthermore, my findings show that Latina/o persistence can include stopping out at one institution (from community college) that fails to support students and persisting at another institution (for-profit).

Tinto's 1975 theory failed to include the importance of Latina/o students' familial ties and maintenance of those familial ties, which means it also could not effectively explain Latina/o students' inability to transition and become incorporated into the new world filled with constant, yet subtle, racial assaults, or microaggressions. This was the world that rejected them as people and participants in the processes and decisions involving their interests. As indicated previously, researchers (Yosso et al., 2009) critique Tinto integration theory because Latina/o students are negatively influenced by these microaggressions. My findings highlight that higher education institutions are not neutral places. The persistence of Latina/o students is certainly influenced by the climate of the campus culture experienced by the individual student.

Finally, the findings contribute to the field of higher education by establishing the notion of "Transferring Across." Previous researchers discuss reverse transfer (Alvarado, 2014) and swirling (de los Santos & Wright, 2010) as part of the postsecondary trajectories of Latina/o students. I define Transferring Across as the process that a student experiences when transitioning from a community college to a for-profit college. There is a dearth in the literature examining this process. Moore and Shulock (2010) illustrate that Latina/o and African American students are overrepresented in the percentage of students who transfer from a California community college to a for-profit college. Only 14% of Latina/o students transferring from a California community college, however, 16% of them include a transfer to a for-profit institution (Moore & Shulock, 2010),

double the percentage of white students to transfer to a for-profit college. As such, the concept of Transfer Across accounts for the students who transition from a community college to a for-profit institution because both institutions have dismal college persistence and completion rates, particularly for Latina/o students.

Next Steps for Educational Reform

For policy, at least five strategies for reform are plausible. First, college outreach policies need to be reassessed to increase college access. Second, my findings indicate that as a modern consumer, Latina/o students seek the the modern consumer/student seeks the type of flexible, convenient, and responsive education offered by for-profit colleges. Third, a strategy to improve college completion rates would involve considering options such as making for-profit colleges as financially accessible as community colleges for all college-bound students. A fourth recommendation is to implement the personalization available in for-profit colleges into the community college sector. Finally, college leaders need to incorporate a student-centered approach to engagement and retention that challenges the traditional integration approach.

As a foundation piece, higher education outreach policies should be modified to include requirements for open and active dissemination of college information to the local communities, especially in geographical areas with large populations of Latina/os. For example, colleges should use various strategies to inform the local residents of their presence as a balancing tool against the

competitors' aggressive advertising and recruiting techniques for students.

A second recommendation is in the findings that the modern consumer/student seeks the type of flexible, convenient, and responsive education offered by for-profit colleges (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2003, p. 9). For example, for-profit colleges are not limited to traditional academic schedules and fixed costs of infrastructure and expensive facilities; therefore, for-profit colleges are able to offer courses at more convenient times and in more convenient locations. Community colleges and universities should offer the courses in demand at more convenient times as well. Although the location aspect is a bit more challenging to address, a suggestion is to lease out facilities outside of the campus to serve as satellite campuses to serve the students in need of this convenience.

A third recommendation is to consider options to make for-profit colleges as financially accessible as community colleges for all students. With the growth of student debt and an increase on student loan default rates, this is an important issue to grapple with. According to the United States Department of Education, for-profits continue to have the highest average default rates. A step in the right direction can be seen in "the Enhanced Tuition Awards (ETA) program provides tuition awards to students who are New York State residents attending a participating private college located in New York State" (New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, 2018). In the past, students attending private for-profit colleges were not eligible to participate in the scholarship award

program. Donna Gurnett, president and chief executive officer of the Association of Proprietary Colleges, which represents 12 for-profit institutions in New York, describe the desire to keep student tuition and student loan debt low.

Fourth, counseling and guidance needs to be personalized. For instance, where academic assessments are usually a requirement for admission, it could be helpful to assess an individual's need for guidance and support to succeed in college. While the California Community Colleges are making changes to through Common Assessment, which includes meeting with a counselor, more work is needed to advise students consistently and continuously. As indicated in the findings, Latina/o students want to seek out guidance from someone who they trust; this would entail students being able to access the same counselor throughout their time in college.

A final recommendation for educational reform is in the area of integration into school culture and how it can translate into success. As discussed previously, Gandara (1995), Ceja (2006), and Alvarez (2015) discuss the influence of families on Latina/o students when choosing college and other decisions involving post-secondary goals. Specifically, these authors contend that despite barriers experienced by Latina/o parents and siblings, they serve as important and positive influences in developing the college aspirations of their children, sisters and brothers. My findings confirmed that Latina/o students are motivated to begin college and do well in college with the support and collaboration of their family members. In particular, the for-profit sector welcomed

family members during orientation, which helped establish a sense of belonging for participants. Therefore, practices and programs designed to include the family members of Latina/o students in community colleges and four-year colleges could be implemented to better serve students who have strong family ties.

Recommendations for Future Research

To continue to inform practice, future research should involve interviewing Latina/o students who have graduated from for-profit colleges. Much is still unknown about for-profit graduates who have persisted through to be gainfully employed and/or successful in their careers. Future studies could consider how these graduates perceive their for-profit education and/or experience impacts their ability to succeed in their careers. In addition, these studies should examine how these graduates perceive their skills and abilities gained through the for-profit education compare to their coworkers who graduated from traditional universities and colleges. These questions could continue to inform research for the purposes of increasing the persistence rates of Latina/o students.

The findings of the study emphasized the need for continued research in not only public community colleges, but private, for-profit colleges, as well. It is also important to challenge negative stereotypes of students who attend for-profit institutions because the for-profit college student is the same as every other student on any community college campus. The large numbers of Latina/o students enrolled at the for-profit colleges cannot and should not be ignored. Ideally, future research findings will also demonstrate that a change in policy and

practice is greatly needed in both community colleges and for-profit institutions of higher learning.

Limitations of Study

Despite the substantial insight provided by the phenomenological approach of inquiry on the lived experiences of Latina/o students enrolled at a for-profit college, the limitations of the current study did involve the types of participants used in the study. Because students served as the participants in this study, perhaps parents, siblings, other family members, and/or faculty and staff perceptions could have also been utilized to capture a wider perspective on the phenomenon

Conclusion

As the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, it is critical to assist Latina/os in attaining the comparable graduation rates of their peer counterparts in order to grow the individuals and families of these communities to be able to participate in national and global competition. This is not a problem that will solve itself away; institutional accountability is required. All stakeholders, students, parents, and administrators of all cultures and ethnicities, we all share the role in leading. The role of effective leadership should be to raise awareness of the realities and challenges of the minority student school experiences. By raising awareness, we can strive to make learning an equitable and successful experience, not just for Latinas/os, but for other marginalized students.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

DEVELOPED BY CECILIA LOFTUS ORNELAS (2014)

Focused Life History

1. Please describe some memorable K-12 academic and social experiences.

2. a. Who did you look up to when you were in grades K-12?

2. b. Why did you look up to this person or persons?

3. Please describe your high school classes, the kind of grades you got, and the homework assigned.

4. Did you always know you were going to graduate from high school? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel K-12 prepared you academically for college? Why or why not?

6. Explain how you decided you needed to go to college.

7. Who or what helped you get to college in the first place?

8. a. Have you attended college before?

8. b. If you have previously attended college, what college?

8. c. Please describe how you decided to attend the first college.

8. d. Please describe the classes, teachers, and student support at the previous college.

8. e. Describe how you decided to leave the first college (if applicable).

The Details of the Present Experience

9. Please describe how you decided to attend this college.

10. Were there any challenges in adjusting to college?

11. If you did experience challenges, how did you deal with those challenges?

12. Which of those challenges do you feel are within your power to overcome? Do you feel any of those challenges are beyond your control? Please describe how and why the challenges are in or out of your control.

13. How do you feel you are progressing academically while here in this college? Please describe the kind of grades you are getting.

14. Please describe how you are balancing college with everything else in your life. Are you happy with the way you are balancing home life and school work? Why or why not? Describe your reasoning please.

15. Describe a typical school/work week. More specifically, describe this last week.

16. What programs/support are available to you to use at this college? Please describe the programs to your knowledge.

17. a. What kinds of support systems are available outside of college? Please describe these support systems.

17. b. Can you depend on those support systems to be available whenever you need them? Why or why not? Please explain your answer.

18. Do you use the programs/support available to you in or outside college? Why or why not? If so, please describe the ways you utilize the resources available to you.

19. a. As a student of Latina/o heritage enrolled in a largely Latino populated school, do you feel a sense of belonging in this college? Please explain why or why not.

19. b. Does coming to school with many Latina/o students increase your sense of belonging? Why or why not? Please explain your answer.

19. c. Would you feel the same way if the school did not have many Latina/o students enrolled? Please explain why or why not.

19. d. Do you feel being Latina/o makes a difference to the kinds of services or support you are getting now at school? Why or why not?

19. e. Do you feel being Latina/o should make a difference to the kinds of services or support you are getting now at school? Please explain why or why not.

20. If you could add or change the student services or support in any way, how would you change them?

Mentoring

21. Describe the mentor/mentee relationship as you understand it.

22. Has your mentor fulfilled your expectations? Why or why not? Please explain.

23. Do you feel the mentoring has been beneficial to your success? Why or why not?

24. Do you have mentors outside of college? If you do, who are they? Describe how they help you.

25. Do you have a mentee? Explain how you help them.

26. What are some important characteristics of a good mentor? Please describe the characteristics of a good mentor.

27. Does your mentor have these characteristics? Why or why not?

28. If you could change anything about the mentorship program, how would you change it?

Goals

29. Please describe your goals while in college.

30. Please describe your goals after college.

31. Do you feel college is going to help you reach your goals? Explain why or why not?

Reflection of the Meaning

32. Given what you have said about your life before you attended this college and given what you have said about student support and services, how do you understand support and mentorship in your life?

33. Where do you see yourself going in the future?

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

Academic Affairs
Office of Academic Research • Institutional Review Board

April 01, 2014

	CSUSB
	INSTITUTIONAL
	REVIEW BOARD
	Expedited Review
	IRB# 13044
	Status
	APPROVED

Ms. Cecelia Ornelas
c/o: Prof. Louie Rodriguez
Department of Leadership and Curriculum
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Ornelas:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Understanding Persistence and Retention through the Eyes of First and Second-Year Latina/o Students in a Private Career College" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. **Your application is approved for one year from April 01, 2014 through March 31, 2015. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 – 4) of your approval below.**

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

1) **Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,**
2) **If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,**
3) **Too renew your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,**
4) **When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.**

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Sharon L Ward, Ph.D.

Sharon Ward, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

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