

NARRATIVES ON COLLEGE ACCESS AND ACADEMIC UNDERMATCH:  
UNDERSTANDING LATINX STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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When students are academically qualified to attend a four-year college or university but instead enroll at a community college, they are considered academically undermatched. Research suggests that Latinx students are more likely to academically undermatch than their peers yet they remain the least likely to complete an upward transfer to a university and earn a baccalaureate degree. The purpose of this study was to explore the enrollment decisions of, and familial influences on, Latinx students who were admitted to a university but who initially enrolled at a community college. Using community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge as theoretical frameworks, I examined the narratives of 13 Latinx students and the parents of five of those students. Nine student participants were female and four were male, ranging from 19 to 31 years old. Parent participants were four females and two males, ranging from 43 to 52 years old. Findings from this study are divided into two parts. Student findings revealed navigating the pathway to college was fraught with limited information, even though students acknowledged they had access to resources and their high school counselors and teachers helped in the college search process. However, students still did not feel that crucial information they wanted or needed was available. Parent findings uncovered how parental aspirations and perceptions of opportunities in the United States served as a foundation for helping students aspire to attend college. Based on these findings, higher education practitioners would do well to use inclusive frameworks, such as community cultural wealth, to create programs that address Latinx students and their families, including providing materials in Spanish. Through use of inclusive frameworks, research on Latinx student college choice continues to elevate the complexities and

realities these students encounter. Additionally, policymakers should continue to reevaluate the shifting burden of costs for higher education from taxpayers to students as this impacts college choice and academic undermatch.

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# UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC UNDERMATCH: LATINX STORIES OF ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

## Introduction

Enrollments for low-income students and students of color have increased over the last 20 years (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004). However, the institutional type at which a student ultimately enrolls, whether it is a community college, a non-selective public or private university, a selective public or private university, or a private, not-for-profit or for-profit university, affects baccalaureate degree completion (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Low-income students and students of color often do not enroll in college, but when they do, they tend to enroll at less selective institutions such as community colleges (Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012; Nuñez, Sparks & Hernandez, 2011).

The Pew Research Center reported 49% of Latinx high school completers aged 18-24 enrolled in some postsecondary institution (Lopez & Fry, 2013). While the potential growth for Latinx educational attainment in the U.S. is exciting, the reality is that the rate of baccalaureate degree completion is only 14% for Latinxs over the age of 25 (Lopez & Fry, 2013). For those Latinxs who make it out of high school, many will enroll in college, but overall, Latinxs are the least likely major racial or ethnic group to attend a four-year institution (Fry & Taylor, 2013) and earn a bachelor's degree (Lopez & Fry, 2013).

As a group, Latinx students enroll in community colleges at larger proportions than their peers (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Figure 1.1 shows recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) about the institutional types in which students enroll, by race and ethnicity. Overall, the figure demonstrates that the percentage of Latinx students enrolled at public two-year colleges for fall 2014 exceeded that of any other

racial/ethnic group. These numbers are greater when we consider those states with larger Latinx populations, like Texas and California, which have larger proportions of Latinx students enrolled at community colleges.

Where a student goes to college matters, especially in terms of completion. Students who attend more selective institutions are more likely to be retained (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012) and have higher graduation rates (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012). Overall graduation rates, however, for students who began at any four-year institution in fall 2007, was 59% (Kena et al., 2015), while only 17% of all students who began at a two-year institution in 2007, and transferred to a four-year institution, have earned a baccalaureate (Shapiro et al., 2014).

Understanding access to varying institutional types in higher education is important, since Latinx students who begin their postsecondary education at the community college are unlikely to complete a bachelor's degree even within eight years (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Kurlaender, 2006; Long & Kurlander, 2009). Arbona and Nora (2007) found that only 7% of Latinx students who started at the community college completed a bachelor's degree, compared to 44% of Latinx students who began at a four-year institution. With community colleges as the primary access point to college for Latinxs in the U.S. (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn, Cypers & Lester, 2008), understanding how and why Latinx students choose to attend these institutions is key.

Latinxs are the largest ethnic group enrolling in community college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2011). Moreover, Latinx students are more likely than their White and Asian peers to choose to enroll in community college even if they are academically qualified to do otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Smith, Pender & Howell, 2013). However, Latinx students remain the least likely to complete an upward transfer to a baccalaureate granting institution (Alexander, Garcia,



Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2004; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010) and complete a baccalaureate degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007). This is consistent with other research that indicates starting at a community college can have a negative impact on Latinx student baccalaureate degree attainment (Kurlaender, 2006).

When students are academically qualified to attend a four-year college or university but instead enroll at a community college, they are considered academically undermatched (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Radford & Howell, 2014; Smith et al., 2013).

Undermatch is a relatively new term that has emerged in the literature (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009). When considering college access and choice for Latinx students, academic undermatch is essential to explore since we know that, even when academically qualified to choose otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Radford & Howell, 2014), Latinx students still choose to attend the community college, yet only 7% who start at the community college complete a bachelor's degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007).

### Purpose

This paper is part of a larger study that identified the environmental, cultural, and social influences that inform a student's decision to enroll at a community college. The purpose of the study was to examine influences on Latinx student enrollment at the community college rather than a baccalaureate-granting college or university for which they were eligible to enroll. I explored 1) student perceptions of the college choice process, 2) the perceptions and role of the family on the student's college choice process, and 3) the knowledge and practices that exist in the home to support college-going and student success (e.g. nontraditional forms of support and encouragement that may exist). For this paper, I will focus on the main research question that guided the overall study:

- 1) How do academically qualified Latinx students, eligible to attend a four-year college, describe their pathway to the community college?

#### Literature Review

##### *Academic Undermatch*

With enrollment increases among low-income and minority students, especially Latinx students, one significant area of research examines the type of institutions (four-year versus two-year, private versus public, and non-profit versus for-profit) in which these individuals are enrolling (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Kurlaender, 2006; Smith et al., 2013). A relatively new term that has developed in recent literature points to academic undermatch in college choice (Bowen, et al., 2009). Academic undermatch is defined as having occurred when a student has the academic preparation and credentials to enroll in an institution more selective than the alternative they chose (Smith, Pender, Howell, & Hurwitz, 2012).

While the term undermatch is a more recent addition in the literature (Bowen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012) the concept is not new. Kurlaender (2006) began discussing some of the factors that influence community college enrollment by Latinx students including academic preparation, income and location. Also discussed in the literature about college access is the influence of the family on student's choice to enroll. This is integral as parents and family can have a great impact on college choice for Latinx students (Auerbach, 2002; 2004, Turley, 2006), especially those with limited information in their networks (Perez & McDonough, 2008), those who are negatively impacted by seeing "sticker" prices (Heller, 1997), or those who underestimate their qualifications and abilities (Gonzalez, 2012).

Students make choices about where to go to college that are highly dependent on the student's own perception of what opportunity and access looks like for them (Kurlaender, 2006;

Nuñez & Bowers, 2011). Those students with a general desire to go to college, but little knowledge of what the process looks like, or understanding of how to create a set of choices for college enrollment, tend to be those who are low-income and underrepresented minorities (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). These students, if they choose to enroll in a college, may end up choosing to attend colleges that they are academically overqualified to attend.

Some of the literature surrounding academic undermatch puts the responsibility of choice on the student without considering the structures and barriers that have shaped their choices. This is especially important to consider when addressing college access for Latinx students, who tend to be first in their family to college (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007) and whose parents are eager for information but may be unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system, have limited college knowledge, or have limited English language abilities (Auerbach, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

### *Latinx Student College Choice*

Despite the continued growth in enrollment of Latinx students in higher education (Krogstad & Fry, 2014), specifically in the community colleges (Kena et al., 2015), the models of college choice and community college choice do not specifically account for the college choice decisions of this group. What is available is a growing body of research across multiple disciplines that addresses the college access, application, and enrollment decisions of Latinx students within recent years.

### *Applications*

Research indicates Latinxs are less likely to have applied to any college, even in their senior year of high school, including those who were considered high achieving in eighth grade (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). More importantly,

Martinez and Cervera (2012) find that many Latinx students have not applied to any college by the spring semester of their senior year. One suggestion is that familismo, is important to consider for many Latinxs in college access (Desmond & Turley, 2012) and could contribute to their application behaviors. Gonzalez (2012) corroborates that Latinx students' have strong desires to stay close to home for college, which is positively associated with the decision to attend a two-year college (Gonzalez, 2012).

It may be that these ties to family and home provide a supportive network that can sustain them in the face of racism (Desmond & Turley, 2012). In general, however, Latinxs are less likely to carry out a college search and choice process that includes visiting and applying to multiple colleges and universities. On average, Latinxs apply to fewer than two colleges, if they applied at all (Hurtado et al., 1997; Turley, 2009). Accessing information from school agents such as teachers and counselors, as well as gaining information from college resources such as college recruiters, websites, and viewbooks were strong predictors of increased college application behaviors for Latinxs (Gonzalez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

### *College Enrollment*

A study by Person and Rosenbaum (2006) provides more insight to the enrollment patterns for Latinx students choosing to attend college. They suggest that Latinx student college enrollment depends on the people within their social networks that can, and do, inform them about attending certain colleges (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Primary social contacts such as family, friends, and relatives, and the interactions students have with them, are the most important reason for choosing to attend college (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Students are likely to enroll in colleges and universities that are known to

them through their connections to brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or other relatives beyond the traditional family structure (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

Latinx student enrollment at community colleges outpaces their White, Asian, and African American peers (Fry, 2014; Kena et al., 2015). Moreover, four-year college enrollment, even at non-selective public colleges, may be out of reach for many students, including Latinx students (Adelman, 2007; Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Heller, 2007; Heller, 1997; Kim, 2004; Kurlaender, 2006; Nunez & Kim, 2012; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Posselt et al., 2012) even when they were academically eligible to do otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Nunez & Kim, 2012; Smith et al., 2013; Radford & Howell, 2014). Thus, it is imperative to continue to understand the decision to enroll at the community among Latinx students.

#### *Institutional Type*

Where a student goes to college matters, especially in terms of completion. Students who attend more selective institutions are more likely to be retained (Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012) and have higher graduation rates (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Nunez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012). Overall graduation rates, however, for students who began at any four-year institution in fall 2007, was 59% (Kena et al., 2015), while only 17% of all students who began at a two-year institution in 2007, and transferred to a four-year institution, have earned a baccalaureate (Shapiro et al., 2014). Students with intentions to complete a baccalaureate may have better outcomes for degree completion if they start at a non-selective four-year college versus a community college (Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

Rodriguez (2015a) states that less than 3% of all postsecondary institutions, or 172 institutions, are among the most highly selective. Additionally, in academic undermatch more attention has been given to high-achieving, low-income students who do not attend highly

selective institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013). Rather, it may be better to understand how access to the baccalaureate for low-income and minority students is situated through attendance at a non-selective, comprehensive, public college (Fryar, 2015; Rodriguez, 2015a).

### Conceptual Framework

This study uses community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a conceptual framework. I use Community cultural wealth because the framework allows for a broader interpretation of how different inputs can inform and affect a student's ability to successfully navigate institutions, such as colleges and universities, and become informed about their educational abilities. Community cultural wealth is a Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenge to the conventional understanding of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). The community cultural wealth model is ideal as it challenges dominant interpretations of cultural capital and modifies this deficit perspective of Latinx culture into one that acknowledges and incorporates the resources strengths that families already have (Perez-Huber, 2009, Villalpondo & Solorzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) indicates that culture influences societal organization, institutional structures and the implementation of curriculum and policy. From that she acknowledges the funds of knowledge work of Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), which asserts value and meaning to the communities, families and experiences for people of color. Yosso (2005) challenges educators to consider those forms of capital that students from communities of color bring to their educational experiences.

In this model, Yosso (2005) provides six forms of capital by which she indicates are visible ways in which cultural wealth is nurtured by people of color. The forms of capital she

includes are aspirational, familial, social, navigational, linguistic and resistant. For the purposes of this study, the focus will remain on 1) aspirational capital as it relates to the abilities of the families' hopes and dreams for their child to pursue an education beyond their own attainment; 2) familial capital as it engenders the understanding of knowledge created within the home and kinship networks that inform students' educational choices; 3) social capital as it refers to the people, networks, contacts and resources that provide support to navigate through institutions (Yosso, 2005); and 4) navigational capital as it represents to the ability for Persons of Color to move about and progress through institutions that were not designed with communities of color in mind (Yosso, 2005).

## Methods

I conducted a qualitative, multiple case study during the 2015-2016 academic year at a large, public research university in Texas. Case studies provide a deeper understanding and contextual analysis of a phenomenon (Soy, 1997). A multiple case study is a "special effort to examine something having lots of cases, parts, or members," (Stake, 2006, p.vi). This study was concerned with examining academic undermatch among Latinx students. The quintain is academic undermatch, the umbrella under which the cases being studied belong.

A case study should be bounded in time, place, activity, definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to keep the study reasonable in scope. Therefore, I created a set of boundaries and set criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the study to delineate the breadth and depth of the study. I focus specifically on the student data and student experiences on academic undermatch and navigating the pathway to college. I decided to bound the study by focusing on recruiting students who were admitted to a four-year college but chose to attend a community college instead.

### *Sample*

Each student experience is the unit of analysis. The process for identifying potential participants for the study was twofold. First, I recruited students through purposive, snowball, and criterion sampling. I contacted colleagues working in community colleges across North Texas, as well as colleagues at universities across the state of Texas, to ask if they knew students who would want to participate in this study. I sent these colleagues an email detailing the criteria by which students would be eligible to participate in the study, 1) students must be 18 or older and have graduated high school; 2) students should self-identify as a Latinx. A Latinx person is one whose ancestry or familial descent is from a country of Latin origin (Latin America, Central America, the United States, and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean); 3) students should have been admitted to a four-year institution but declined to attend; 4) students should have attended a community college after declining to enroll at a four-year institution to which they gained admissions. From this, I obtained eight student participants.

I continued to work with the Registrar's Office to obtain directory information (name, email, and previous college attended) for students who transferred to Golden Triangle University (GTU) from a community college. I was provided a list of over 10,000 students. Because five students from the initial students attended the same community college district in North Texas, Metropolitan Community College District (MCCD), I narrowed the pool to MCCD students for additional participants. This narrowed the list to about 2300 students who transferred to GTU from MCCD. I sent a link via email to those 2300 students with a questionnaire designed to ensure students met the criteria, listed above. I was able to schedule and complete interviews with seven of those who responded to the questionnaire.



Including the initial eight participants, I interviewed a total of 15 students; however, after reviewing their interviews, two students were not included in the final analysis as they did not undermatch but in fact had matched their initial college of attendance. Therefore, a total of 13 students are included in the findings. Table 1.1 provides the demographic portrait for the student participants. All names of participants and schools have been replaced with pseudonyms. All student participants received \$25 cash remuneration for their participation in this study.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each student participant. All but one student lived in North Texas; I traveled to San Antonio to meet and interview one of the students. Interviews ranged from 50-135 minutes in length as some students shared more than other students. Prior to their interviews, I also asked students to complete a demographic questionnaire to collect additional information about the student, e.g. their age, where they went to high school, and family income. I did not do observations, but I did complete journals and memos after each interview and after analyzing each transcript. I felt it important to document my own feelings about each student narrative so that I could better tell each student's story, as capturing my own emotions at the time can help to reconstruct the narratives provided by the student.

To analyze my data, I began by understanding the stories within each individual case. As I noticed similar issues emerging across each case, that I felt were important to identify and discuss in the findings, I then conducted a cross-case analysis to identify common themes across each case that was first examined individually. Stake (2006) indicates that the cross-case analysis is focused on applying the situational experiences within each case to the research questions. In the student findings, each main theme was created in relation to the research question, with

related sub-themes following. To code and create themes across each case, I used a constant comparative analysis of each interview (Glaser & Straus, 1967). I went back to the transcripts and began anew, open coding the student data. I then recorded memos to make comparisons across the initial codes I created in my analysis to document what was being revealed to me through the data (Charmaz, 2006). Afterwards, I started axial coding to identify the relationships around the codes I created through open coding and from my recorded memos.

### Delimitations

The delimitations I set for this study are: 1) location; 2) student age (at time of initial entry to college); and 3) admission to a university, then enrollment at a community college as a determinant of undermatch. Regarding location, I was primarily concerned with interviewing students who attended college in North Texas. Eleven of the students I interviewed are from North Texas, and one student attended a community college in South Texas, but transferred to a university in North Texas. The other student attended a community college in South Texas.

I only interviewed students who were traditional-aged students when they first enrolled at the community college. At Metropolitan Community College District (MCCD), the population of traditional-aged students only accounts for about 20% of their enrolled student body. While enrollment for this group, traditionally-aged students, varies from college to college in (MCCD), traditionally-aged students are not representative as a sample for community colleges. Also, students who were eligible to attend a four-year institution, but never applied to attend any university after high school were not recruited for this study. These students would also be considered undermatched (Smith et al., 2012), however, this study adhered to a strict definition of academic undermatch to avoid confusion as to the eligibility of students who gained admission to a four-year institution.

## Findings

There are several themes that arose from the data based on the research questions for this study. First, students were extremely motivated to go to college, yet there remained limited knowledge about college costs, financial aid, and the overall implications of selecting to first attend a community college (i.e., not all courses would transfer), rather than a four-year college to which they gained admissions. Second, the choice to attend a community college over the four year was a strategic option that allowed them to defer taking out student loans (which a majority ended up taking out once they transferred to a four-year).

### *Navigating the Path to College with Access to Resources but Limited Information*

Choosing to attend the community college versus a four-year college to which they gained admissions was, for these students, a path that for all intents and purposes was well-intentioned, well-resourced, yet limited. Eight of the 13 students in the study participated in some precollege outreach program. Talent Search, AVID, a program sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission in South Texas, and a regionally, well-known high school precollege program in North Texas. The remaining five students relied on teachers, counselors, coaches, and family to provide information about college applications, college search, and choosing colleges.

Regardless of how students said they had acquired information about going to college, their overall knowledge about college contained some crucial gaps, such as incomplete knowledge and understanding about college costs, financial aid, scholarships, major exploration, or career development, that could have made a difference in their decisions to attend a community college or four-year college. All the students in the study were reluctant to say that

they had everything they needed when they were deciding which college to attend. One student, Linda, captured the overarching sentiment of many of the students in this study,

I guess the school system is just really, I guess they don't want to kind of like hold your hand through it, but sometimes I guess you kind of need that information to help you get through it, like the information to be more broken down and more explained to you. I think the education system doesn't really put a lot of emphasis on everything you have to do when you're applying for college. They don't explain everything to you, and you kind of find out as you go.

Despite these gaps in knowledge, students drew on their navigational capital to maneuver through these systems of education and maintained resilience to survive and learn from these experiences and help others.

Miranda was especially honest about her perceptions of the guidance she received from precollege programs and how she realized there was so much more information she needed.

Interviewer: What type of information did you get when you went to Knowledge is Freedom and AVID. Could you describe that for me?

Miranda: Yeah. The type of information, basically it was like AVID, it was one professor and whatever we wanted to do she would kind of help us with it. I don't know. The more I think about it the more I think they were there, but they weren't really there. They helped us a little bit, but not even, because for AVID we wanted to go to all these universities and we want to go visit them and yeah, we saw how pretty they were, but we never learned anything about financial aid.

We only went to go visit pretty campuses, and that was it. Based on how pretty it was is whether a lot of people were like, "Yeah, I'm going to come here," but we never took a look and thought, "Oh what majors are here? What do they offer? What is their financial aid? How much is it going to cost you?" Things like that that really matter, they didn't do. They only took you to campuses. For Knowledge is Freedom, it's like they helped you a lot with SAT and ACT's and getting you prepared for that, but it's like they didn't help you get prepared for actually going into college or what you were going to do after you took the SAT or ACT. I'm sure a lot of us took it just to take it.

Miranda's words illustrate the importance of having more complete knowledge about college (such as cost, financial aid, major exploration, etc.) to find the best college fit. She shares

later that, “I would have loved to go to a four-year university straight out of high school if I knew like I wasn't going to struggle. I feel like in my situation it was the best choice I could have made.” Miranda felt going to a four-year college straight out of high school would have been a struggle, financially. She was not alone in feeling this way. Eleven students felt that they could not afford college, yet they did not have a complete understanding about the cost of college.

When talking about college and describing his pathway to college, Abraham spoke about the cost of college. He says his parents, at the time, could not afford to help him to pay for classes. In his narrative, Abraham talks definitively about how he feels he bore the responsibility for the cost of college.

I was also concerned when I saw the prices of the university. And again, not knowing financial aid, not understanding financial aid, I think that seeing those numbers turned me off, away from it, knowing that my parents couldn't help me at the time. I was fresh out of high school. [...] I was kinda freaked out by those numbers.

Later in our interview, he talks about finding out how friends at more expensive, private colleges, would get quite a bit of aid to pay for college (tuition discounting).

Abraham: [...] I know after I started university, college and even once I was here, I found out about other universities that were much more expensive than provided students that went there with more financial assistance than even here, which I was confused about how is that... how does that work?

Interviewer: How did you find out about that?

Abraham: Just through friends that ended up going at other universities. We would just talk about it whenever we would catch up or whatever. Just talking about financial aid like, “How much did you get?” “I got this much.” “How much did you get?” I had no idea that much.

Abraham specifically talked about receiving assistance with applying to, and searching for colleges from his high school guidance counselor. He knew that he had to complete the FAFSA but he was largely unaware, as were all the students in the study that some colleges can and do offer more grant aid or engage in tuition discounting. This occurs especially at private

colleges to which many of the students in the study applied. Though students applied to these private colleges, they consistently said the cost to attend was too great or that they could not afford to attend.

### *Why the Community College?*

As I mentioned above, students, for the most part, had access to resources at their schools or through precollege programs to help them search for and apply to college. Yet all students felt there was more information they were not being given, like an unexplained set of procedures, about how to get to college. Like Linda's statement earlier, students did not have their hands held through the process, "They don't explain everything to you, and you kind of find out as you go."

In choosing to attend the community college, students drew from both Navigational and Social Capital to decide where to enroll in college. They drew from their social capital as they were informed by family, peers, and others in their networks about their experiences getting to and through college. They have some degree of familiarity with the community college, through their relatives' or peers' own attendance or through their own dual credit enrollment.

### *Making Strategic Choices*

To some degree or another, every student interviewed felt that attending the community college was a cost-effective alternative to enrolling directly at a four-year college. The narratives from Amalia and Ana give more perspective about navigating the choice of attending the community college as strategy to minimize overall debt incurred, relative to their siblings and peers. Their stories echoed what students throughout the study have stated: choosing to attend a community college was not their first intention, but it was a strategic option to manage their concerns about cost and affordability. Ana and Amalia specifically heeded advice from the

relatives who attended college before them to attend the community college and delay taking out student loans.

As I spoke with Amalia through our interview, she was thoughtful about her choices. She realized that she had a great Talent Search counselor who helped her navigate the college search process, but Amalia remained somewhat resistant to schooling, especially in high school. So, what led her to choosing to enroll at a community college instead of the four-year college she was admitted to?

I think that it was just really scary to think about going and me having been, really, taking school as a joke and then going into something really serious like a four-year university. I was like, I'm going to waste a lot of money going there not knowing what to do, and then I'm going to have to transfer to a community college because I'm not going to be able to do it. I think that that's what was really ... If I'm going to do this, then I should at least be strategic about it. I think that that's the biggest reason; two, my dad; and I told everyone my family's financial problems.

Amalia acknowledged that in being strategic, she considered her prior schooling environment and resistance to schooling to make a choice that was financially sound for her and her family.

Ana, the defiant high school senior, refused to accept the community college as an option. She felt her female cousins, her role models, were the ones who were trailblazers and showed her what it meant to be an independent woman. And though she didn't want to go to Palomino Community College (PCC), her siblings and those same cousins told her that the benefits of staying at PCC would be reaped over time. They told her that going to the community college would be a better financial decision.

So, they all suggested, "Why don't you start at the community college in [City]? I know you don't want to do that, but you'll save yourself two years of student loans, because they haunt you even after you have your job, and just do that." I was like, I don't want to I just want to leave. They're like [her brothers], "you won't regret it later, just try to suck it up with mom and dad for two years, you'll save yourself two years of college debt instead of a university and then all you have to pay off is the last two years at a university. You know, it's just being financially smart, we just don't want you to go through the same

thing as we did.” So, that was their biggest advice, the loans, which I'm glad I did because, I followed their advice and it helped out that route a lot.

Though reluctant to do so, Ana enrolled at PCC after high school. Because she had earned so many scholarships, along with information from her Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Ana did not incur any debt during her time at the community college, taking out loans only after transferring to a university. For her, this was pivotal to controlling her overall indebtedness, in comparison to her siblings, cousins, and peers.

Like Ana and Amalia, students felt that attending a community college helped to reduce the amount of loan debt they had. This is particularly important when considering seven students received a scholarship to cover tuition at a community college and four received enough grant aid through their college, because of completing the FAFSA, to pay for tuition. The parents of the other two students paid for tuition at the community college. None of the students in this study incurred loan debt at the community college.

### *Degrees of Familiarity*

Nearly all students mentioned some degree of familiarity, during high school (or earlier), with the community college in which they decided to enroll. Attending the community college was familiar to these students because of their social contacts. A few students enrolled in dual credit courses through that community college, taking classes at both at their high school and at the community college. Students also mentioned having a sibling, friend, or relative who started at the same community college before the student enrolled.

Two of Cael's brothers attended Eaglefoot Community College a few years prior to his own attendance at Eaglefoot College. Cael's concern about the cost of college was noticeable throughout our interview.



Cael: [...] My brothers had both gone to community college, and I kind of saw that's the cheapest thing, and kind of would be like if my parents had to help me, that would be the best thing, just because it was affordable.

Interviewer: And you said your older brothers went to community college?

Cael: Yeah. They both went to Eaglefoot. One of them went, but I don't think he finished. [...] The other one got an associate's, and that's where he stopped.

Cael was one of the seven student participants who received a tuition scholarship to pay for attending the Eaglefoot College. The scholarship alleviated his concern about the cost of college. That scholarship, along with being familiar with the college because of his brothers' prior attendance, put Cael at ease with his choice to attend Eaglefoot. The cost to attend college for Cael, and many others in this study, was at times too much to bear. This was part of the reason that Cael began to get emotional and cry during this interview. He felt that the burden of the cost was his to endure, as his parents had made enough sacrifices for him and his siblings.

He also credited his sister-in-law as someone who successfully modeled the community college-university transfer, something his brothers did not do.

I saw it [the community college] definitely as a good place to start. One of my sister-in-law's, she also went to community college first, and then she graduated from [Public Four-year College], so I kind of saw ... She's like, "Yeah, I saved some money doing this." I was kind of like, "You know, maybe I should do that." I ended up getting ... They have the [Tuition Scholarship] program in [MCCD], so I ended up getting that for my grades. I was like ... It wasn't crazy selective, but you kind of show them your grades, and just ... I don't even think there was an interview. It's just like I write a paper why I think I qualified and deserved the opportunity, then general FAFSA stuff, and I ended up getting that, so I get community college completely paid for through that program.

Having that interaction with his sister-in-law validated Cael in choosing to attend Eaglefoot. He felt affirmed that this was the right choice.

Risa's familiarity with her community college is unlike any of her peers in this study.

Risa participated in a pre-college program through her local community college, which is also a

residential community college. Hill Country Junior College (HCJC) gave Risa the opportunity to live on campus and take classes during the summer after graduating high school. She was already planning to attend the four-year college three hours away from her hometown, but after attending the pre-college program through HCJC's main campus (an hour from her home) she decided to attend that college instead.

Everything was set to go. I had my classes. I went to orientation. My financial aid was done. Everything was good [...] I went to orientation and then like pretty much after orientation, two days after that I'm like I don't know ... Because when I was at [Pre-College Program], they had a basketball team there, so I talked to the coach [...]. The coach asked me what are my plans, and stuff like that. And he told me, "We have a college team, a basketball team here. I would like for you to try it out and do it, try up for the team". That's what actually I ended up doing. This thing at Hill Country Junior College, playing, because there my dorm was paid. It was a lot less, and it was close to home.

Risa's involvement in the pre-college program, living on campus and taking classes, was a large reason why she decided to attend the community college first. Her experience with the pre-college program, her familiarity with the campus, its location, and the personnel were among the deciding factors for her to stay closer to home and attend the community college. This situation supports previous research that suggests that psychosocial factors, such as visiting and engaging with a college campus has "the power to move students from the back seat to the front seat of their college choices," (Nora, 2004, p. 1999). The student in this case, however, opted to stay at the community college, rather than enroll at the four-year college.

## Discussion

This qualitative study provides another way to examine and discuss academic undermatch, as the literature that exists is primarily quantitative (Bowen et al., 2009; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Smith, et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013), with little focus on issues of undermatch among students of color (Lowry, 2015; Rodriguez, 2015a, 2015b), and

even less for specifically Latinx students (Freeman, 2016). Even though students drew upon aspirational, social, familial, and navigational forms of capital, which encouraged and motivated students to enroll in college, limited knowledge and information about financial aid (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coco & Moeller, 2008) impacted their decision to attend a community college.

The main research question that guided this study was how do academically qualified Latinx students, eligible to attend a four-year college, describe their pathway to the community college? Each student spoke of their own pathway to the community college, describing a wide range of resources that were made available to them throughout their process of searching for and choosing colleges. However, students consistently felt that there was still information that they were not given.

The literature indicates that low-income, first generation students rely heavily on the guidance and knowledge of their high school counselors in seeking assistance to apply to college (McDonough, 1997; Radford & Howell, 2014). Many must rely exclusively on counselors and high school staff to provide them with all of the information regarding how to get to college (McDonough, 1997, 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Yet, the students in this study felt those they looked to for help were not all that helpful. These students still experienced a barrier of having additional information, which shaped their choice to attend a community college. This became especially true as all students identified college costs as a concern and reason for choosing to attend a community college, but were unaware of the net cost of college (Winston, 2004). Nonetheless, all of the students in this study transferred to a university, with 6 having graduated with a bachelor's degree by spring 2017.

Attending community college as a strategic option, for these students, helped students to navigate what they perceived as high college costs and unaffordability to attend a university.

Seven of the students took on college loans once they transferred to the university, which may speak to the issue of being averse to taking on debt. Perhaps the aversion to taking out loans is shortsighted (Cunningham & Santiago, 2008) and is due to limited knowledge and access to information about financial aid (Roderick, et al., 2008) and college costs. The cost of college tuition can be overestimated by parents and students (Pender, Hurwitz, Smith, & Howell, 2012). Because of the limited knowledge on actual college costs and tuition, "...[S]ticker prices play a prohibitive role in the college choice process for families whose net price may, in fact, be manageable," (Pender, et al., 2012, p. 2).

Nevertheless, choosing to attend a community college as a strategic option has, for these students, served as a navigational tool to maneuver into, and through, higher education (Yosso, 2005) and control overall debt. Though others argue that overall indebtedness for students who transfer from a community college to a university is the same as students who started at a four-year college (Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014; Gonzalez Canche, 2014), the perceptions of costs of college are very real for these students.

Fernandez and Fletcher (2014) maintain that rising tuition costs and failure of financial aid to keep pace with such increases may be likely be a catalyst for creating transfer that is financially motivated, that is students opting to attend a community college to save money rather than attend a four-year institution. If what Fernandez and Fletcher (2014) suggest is true, yet overall indebtedness for community college students who transfer to complete a baccalaureate is the same as their peers who begin at a four-year college (Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014; Gonzalez Canche, 2014) then policymakers should continue to review how college costs continue to affect student enrollment.

Though policymakers, particularly in the state of Texas, have touted efforts to control overall college costs, like a \$10,000 bachelor's degree (Koppel & Belkin, 2012), such efforts rely on community college enrollment to keep costs down. Really, it may be in the best interest of policymakers to revisit state appropriations, relative to cost, to genuinely impact how students, particularly Latinx students, determine college choice. This directly affects academic undermatch as sticker prices increase, first generation, low-income, and Latinx students who were eligible to enroll at a four-year college will not, and will opt instead to go to a community college (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor, et al., 2013; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Rodriguez, 2015b).

### Conclusion

This study found that academic undermatch occurred very late for most students, with some students waiting until August to make the decision to attend a community college rather than the four-year college to which they had gained admission. Students felt their high school counselors and teachers helped, but still did not provide crucial information they wanted. Overall, students felt their choice to attend the community college was a financial strategy to control costs and manage debt. Though this is very important as it aided in overall enrollment regardless of institution, it may speak to the continued need for additional resources on/about financial aid and college costs so that students can make more informed decisions. Especially since Latinx students may opt to undermatch and attend a community college given increases in sticker prices (Rodriguez, 2015b) and limited knowledge about costs and financial aid (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor, et al., 2010; Paulsen & St. John, 2002).

Table 1.1 Student Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Family Income	Comm. College Attended	University Admission Gained
Linda* <sup>1</sup>	19	Female	\$60-99K	Urban Centre College	Pioneers of Texas University and Cooper State University
Isabel	20	Female	\$0-29K	Bear Brook College	Golden Triangle University and Clark Christian University
Ernesto <sup>1</sup>	20	Male	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University; Golden Triangle University; and Plinth State University
Miranda*	21	Female	\$30-59K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University at Metro City; Sam Rayburn State University; and Urban Baptist University
Amalia <sup>2</sup>	22	Female	\$30-59K	Wakeford College	Mustang State University
Aaron <sup>^2</sup>	22	Male	\$100K+	Maple Flower College	Cooper State University; Terrace Baptist University; Arkadelphia State University; Murchison University; McKinney College; Barcus University
Cael*	22	Male	\$0-29K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University; Ralph W. Steen State University; Sam Rayburn State University; and Cooper State University
Josefina*	22	Female	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University and Golden Triangle University
Monica <sup>2</sup>	23	Female	\$30-59K	Fountain Lake College	Golden Triangle University and Ralph W. Steen State University
Janet* <sup>2</sup>	23	Female	\$30-59K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University; Ralph W. Steen State University; and Erath State University
Abraham*	24	Male	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University
Risa+ <sup>2</sup>	26	Female	\$0-29K	Hill Country Junior College	Pioneers of Texas University; Roadrunner State University; and Clark Christian University
Ana+ <sup>2</sup>	32	Female	\$0-29K	Palomino Community College	San Ygnacio International University; Hays State University; Divine Providence University; and Golden Triangle University

+Student did not attend a HS in North Texas; \*Student attended a magnet HS in North Texas; ^Student attended a private, catholic, college prep HS; <sup>1</sup>Student was still attending community college at time of interview; <sup>2</sup>Student has graduated and earned both Associate's & Bachelor's degree.

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APPENDIX A  
EXTENDED INTRODUCTION



## Introduction

“The increasing failure of Latinos to achieve the American Dream is embedded in the very origins of that dream: the American mythology that everyone can make it in this country, no matter the circumstances they encounter, as long as they simply work hard enough,” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 6).

### *Connie's Story*

Connie<sup>1</sup> is a Latinx student at a community college in North Texas. She graduated from high school in spring 2013 and enrolled at her local community college that fall. She has a younger brother who is a senior at the same high school with similar aspirations to go to college. Connie is the first in her immediate family to attend college. She and several of her cousins and friends attended the same high school and are all taking classes together at the same community college.

Connie was a student of her school district's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) outreach program. AVID prepares students for college success (AVID, 2015) in elementary, middle, and high school. Through her high school's AVID program, Connie learned about going to college and applying to a variety of different colleges. Connie applied only to Pioneers of Texas University (PTU) and was admitted for Fall 2013. However, she decided to attend a community college near her home to be closer to her family, as she felt her family's needs were incredibly important. She made the decision to continue living at home because she wanted help her mother. She was concerned about the financial burden of attending college and her parents' looming separation, insisting it was important to care for her mother. She aspired to transfer to either PTU or Golden Triangle University (GTU) to complete her bachelor's degree.

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<sup>1</sup> Connie is a participant from a pilot study conducted during the spring 2014 semester. The name Connie is a pseudonym.

Connie's parents were educated in Mexico and did not get past the equivalent of a high school education. She relied on her high school and AVID counselors to get information about applying to college. Since she was concerned about how she would be able to afford college, she sought advice in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Though her counselors helped her complete the FAFSA, she did not know the impact of missing information or an incomplete application. She received a notification from the Department of Education that her FAFSA was missing information and therefore incomplete. Professionals familiar with admissions counseling know this is simple to fix, but Connie did not receive the guidance needed to address these issues and did not complete the process. Without additional assistance to finalize the FAFSA process and receive aid, she felt it was financially impossible to go to PTU. When asked if she had spoken to anyone at the community college about her financial aid situation to help her pay for college she seemed unsure, stating:

I think it would just be easier if I just pay out of my own money pocket [...] I just don't know how to ask them...I don't feel comfortable enough to ask them. I'd rather just pay it out of my pocket.

Connie's story is like that of many Latinxs enrolled in postsecondary education in the United States. Due to limited access to information about college admissions, coupled with the fact that a Latinx student is more likely to attend a majority-minority and poorly-resourced K-12 school (Orfield & Lee, 2005), Latinx students are more likely to enroll in a community college after high school, if they enroll at all (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Kurlaender, 2006). Even for students who graduate high school and have the academic qualifications to meet minimum eligibility for college admissions, without the requisite knowledge about applying to college or applying for financial aid, a student's opportunities to attend college are limited.

## Introduction to the Problem

Enrollments for low-income students and students of color have increased over the last 20 years (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004). However, the institutional type at which a student ultimately enrolls, whether it is a community college, a non-selective public or private university, a selective public or private university, or a private, not-for-profit or for-profit university, affects baccalaureate degree completion (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Low-income students and students of color often do not enroll in college, but when they do, they tend to enroll at less selective institutions such as community colleges (Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012; Nuñez, Sparks & Hernandez, 2011).

The Pew Research Center reported 49% of Latinx high school completers aged 18-24 enrolled in some postsecondary institution (Lopez & Fry, 2014). While the potential growth for Latinx educational attainment in the U.S. is exciting, the reality is that the rate of baccalaureate degree completion is only 14% for Latinxs over the age of 25 (Lopez & Fry, 2014). For those Latinxs who make it out of high school, many will enroll in college, but overall, Latinxs are the least likely major racial or ethnic group to attend a four-year institution (Fry & Taylor, 2013) and earn a bachelor's degree (Lopez & Fry, 2014).

As a group, Latinx students enroll in community colleges at larger proportions than their peers (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Figure 1.1 shows recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) about the institutional types in which students enroll, by race and ethnicity. Overall, the figure demonstrates that the percentage of Latinx students enrolled at public two-year colleges for Fall 2014 exceeded that of any other racial/ethnic group. These numbers are greater when we consider those states with larger Latinx

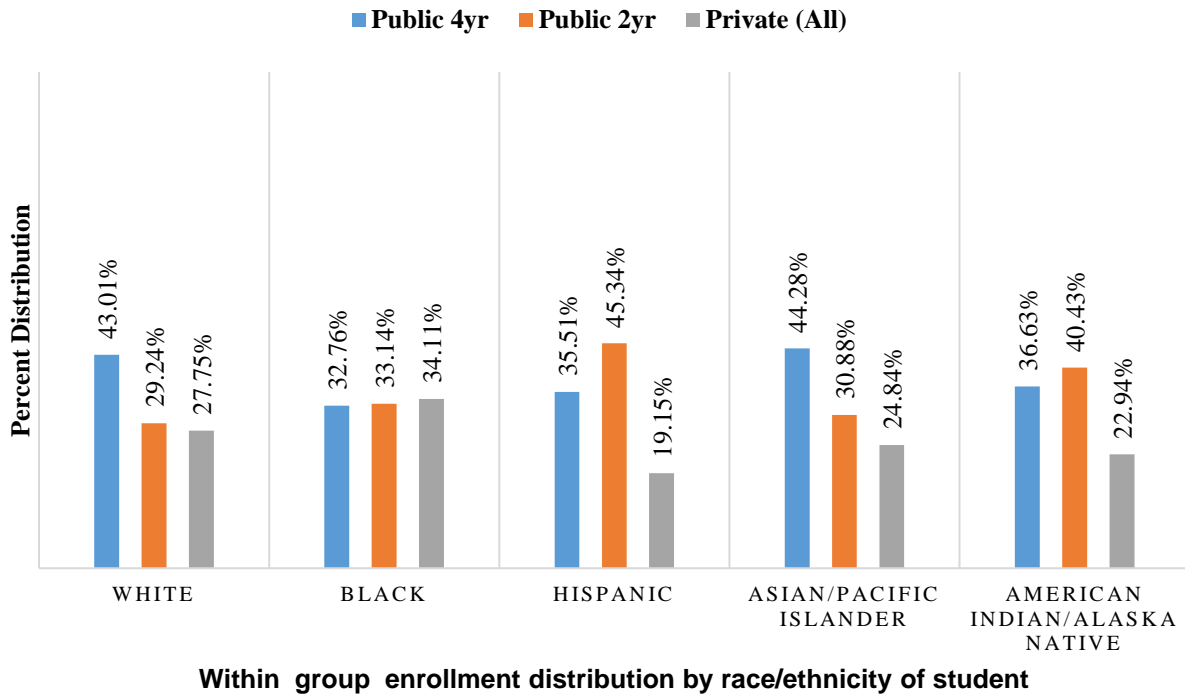
populations, like Texas and California, which have more than 50% of Latinx students enrolled at community colleges.

Nationally, research shows that students who begin college at a non-selective four-year college or university are more likely to graduate than students who start at community colleges. Six-year graduation rates are 59% for all students at any four-year postsecondary institution (Kena et al., 2015). This is higher than the 17% of students who began at a community college and later transferred to a four-year college to earn the baccalaureate (Shapiro, et al., 2014).

Understanding access to varying institutional types in higher education is important, since Latinx students who begin their postsecondary education at the community college are unlikely to complete a bachelor's degree even within eight years (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Kurlaender, 2006; Long & Kurlander, 2009). Arbona and Nora (2007) found that only 7% of Latinx students who started at the community college completed a bachelor's degree, compared to 44% of Latinx students who began at a four-year institution. With community colleges as the primary access point to college for Latinxs in the U.S. (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn, Cypers & Lester, 2008), understanding how and why Latinx students choose to attend these institutions is key.

Many Latinx students and families are not aware that college choice can have a lasting impact on degree attainment (Auerbach, 2004). The ability to access information from school agents, such as teachers and counselors, as well as from other resources like college recruiters, websites, and viewbooks, are strong predictors of increased college application behaviors for Latinxs (Gonzalez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Since many Latinx high school students do not even begin the college search process until their senior year of high school (Gonzalez, 2012; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Martinez & Cervera, 2012), they are at a significant disadvantage for access to four-year colleges and universities.

Figure A.1. Fall 2014 Enrollment in Postsecondary Education, by Institutional Type and Race/Ethnicity of Student.



Note: Data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2015, table 306.20.  
[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_306.20.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_306.20.asp?current=yes)

### Problem Statement

Latinxs are the largest ethnic group enrolling in community college (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2011). Moreover, Latinx students are more likely than their White and Asian peers to choose to enroll in community college even if they are academically qualified to do otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Smith, Pender & Howell, 2013). However, Latinx students remain the least likely to complete an upward transfer to a baccalaureate granting institution (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2004; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010) and complete a baccalaureate degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007). This is consistent with other research that indicates starting at a community college can have a negative impact on Latinx student baccalaureate degree attainment (Kurlaender, 2006).

When students are academically qualified to attend a four-year college or university but instead enroll at a community college, they are considered academically undermatched (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Radford & Howell, 2014; Smith et al., 2013).

Undermatch is a relatively new term that has emerged in the literature (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009). When considering college access and choice for Latinx students, academic undermatch is essential to explore since we know that, even when academically qualified to choose otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Radford & Howell, 2014), Latinx students still choose to attend the community college, yet only 7% who start at the community college complete a bachelor's degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007).

#### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study identified the environmental, cultural, and social influences that inform a student's decision to enroll at a community college. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine influences on Latinx student enrollment at the community college rather than a baccalaureate-granting college or university for which they were eligible to enroll. In this study, I explored 1) student perceptions of the college choice process, 2) the perceptions and role of the family on the student's college choice process, and 3) the knowledge and practices that exist in the home to support college-going and student success (e.g. nontraditional forms of support and encouragement that may exist). The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do academically qualified Latinx students describe their pathway to the community college?
2. What role does family play in the student's college choice?
3. What are the culturally based practices of the household that support college-going and student success?

4. How do students describe their experiences at the community college?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant to the emerging literature on academic undermatch in college choice. Within the last year or two, the term academic undermatch, along with related emerging research (Belasco & Trivette, 2015; Fosnacht, 2014; Rodriguez, 2015a; Rodriguez, 2015b), has gained attention and popularity in the higher education media (McDermott, 2013; Reed & Williams, 2015; Supiano, 2014).

Community college advocates claim that the emerging research on undermatch faults community colleges for thwarting student aspirations as well as transfer and baccalaureate graduation rates (Reed & Williams, 2015). Others claim that the current discussions surrounding undermatch, which focus primarily on student choice to attend a non-selective four-year college when they were eligible to attend a very selective four-year college (Smith et al., 2013; Hoxby & Avery, 2013), lack a clear understanding of the opportunities and choices that are realistically available to low-income (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Radford, 2013) and minority students (Lowry, 2014; Rodriguez, 2013).

Researchers at the University of Michigan (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014) clearly articulated that there is more to academic undermatch than is currently available in the growing literature surrounding the topic, which does not examine the “margin that matters” (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014, p.95). Bastedo and Flaster (2014) noted that research on academic undermatch should do more to investigate the reasons why low-income students choose to attend a community college instead of a regional, public, non-selective, comprehensive university. This should be considered the margin that matters most for those who research academic undermatch. While this analysis is timely, the intersection between one’s socioeconomic status and ethnic identity as a Latinx

student in higher education continues to be neglected. This is especially important because Latinx students are most likely to undermatch (Radford & Howell, 2014), choosing to attend a community college although they were eligible to attend a four-year college (Kurlaender, 2006) and remain unlikely, more so than other ethnic or minority groups, to complete a baccalaureate degree (Fry, 2011; 2014).

A bachelor's degree has become a prerequisite to initial employment or career advancement (Hagedorn & Tierney, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009), and Latinxs remain the least educated ethnic or racial group (Fry, 2011). Currently, 30% of the U.S. population has at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While demographic reports show that college participation among Latinxs has increased (Fry, 2011; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Lopez & Fry, 2014), educational attainment for this group is still lower than their racial/ethnic peers; only 14.1% of those 30% currently holding a bachelor's degree or higher are Latinx (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Only Native American students, who remain under-researched and are largely absent throughout the literature (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012), have educational attainment lower than Latinxs.

Currently, Latinxs represent 17% of the population, the largest racial/ethnic group in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In states such as California, Texas, New York, Arizona, New Mexico, and Florida, Latinxs constitute over 50% of the state population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In comparison to non-Latinxs, Latinxs are twice as likely to be living in poverty (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). More recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2013) confirms that 25.6% of those who identified as of Hispanic origin are currently living in poverty, which is still greater than non-Latinxs. Economists and higher education researchers clearly state that earning a bachelor's degree leads one's lifetime earnings potential to be upwards of a million



dollars earned (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Jones, 2013). Due to the direct implications for poverty, earnings, and potential impact to the nation, increasing the educational attainment of the Latinx ethnic group is crucial.

### Key Terms and Definitions

The following provides definitions of terminology used throughout the paper to enhance the context of the discussion. In understanding and operationalizing the use of such terminology, information was gathered from the literature as noted.

*Academic Match* - Term used to refer to the choice of college students to enroll at an institution to which the student's academic qualifications are comparable to the selectivity of the school (Smith, Pender, Howell, & Hurwitz, 2012; Smith et al., 2013).

*Academic Undermatch* – Term used by researchers (Roderick, Coca, Nagaoka, 2011) to refer to the choice of college students to enroll at an institution to which their academic qualifications exceed the minimum requirements for admission.

*Excess Hours* – Term from Section 54.014 of the Texas Education Code, known as Tuition for repeated or excessive undergraduate hours. It states:

An institution of higher education may charge a resident undergraduate student tuition at a higher rate than the rate charged to other resident undergraduate students, not to exceed the rate charged to nonresident undergraduate students, if before the semester or other academic session begins the student has previously attempted a number of semester credit hours for courses taken at any institution of higher education while classified as a resident student for tuition purposes that exceeds by at least 30 hours the number of semester credit hours required for completion of the degree program in which the student is enrolled.

Students who enrolled in a public, post-secondary institution of higher education after fall 1999 and prior to fall 2006 cannot exceed 45 hours required for completion of the degree.

*High Achieving* – Though no single definition exists, when used in literature on undermatch, the term is often used to describe high school students with an SAT or ACT score in the top decile of test takers (Hoxby & Turner, 2015).

*Hispanic* – Term created by the U.S. government in 1977 by the Office of Management and Budget after a previous law indicating that Latinas/os are an ethnic group whose data should be collected and analyzed (Passel & Taylor, 2009).

*Latina/o* – Term to identify persons whose ancestry or familial descent is from a country of Latin origin. Specifically used among those individuals born in Latin America, Central America, the United States and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean (MacDonald, 2004).

*Latinx* – Term used to replace Latina/o to be inclusive and gender non-specific. (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016). For this study, the term Latinx/Latinxs is used as an overarching term to refer to all the previously mentioned terms of identification, unless used in context with the referring organization, movement, or legislation.

APPENDIX B

EXTENDED REVIEW OF ACADEMIC UNDERMATCH

## Understanding Academic Undermatch

“[T]he rise in enrollments and institutional expansions that have characterized the last 30 or so years has also been accompanied by a “prestige gap,” occurring at multiple levels ... While greater numbers of individuals, including those from previously excluded groups, have entered the ranks of higher education, the system of higher education itself has been transformed to include differential tracks,” (Louie, 2007, p. 2229).

### *Overview of Academic Undermatch*

With enrollment increases among low-income and minority students, especially Latinx students, one significant area of research examines the type of institutions (four-year versus two-year, private versus public, and non-profit versus for-profit) in which these individuals are enrolling (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Kurlaender, 2006; Smith et al., 2013). A relatively new term that has developed in recent literature points to academic undermatch in college choice (Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, 2009). Academic undermatch is defined as having occurred when a student has the academic preparation and credentials to enroll in an institution more selective than the alternative they chose (Smith et al., 2012).

While the term undermatch is a more recent addition in the literature (Bowen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012) the concept is not new. Kurlaender (2006) began discussing some of the factors that influence community college enrollment by Latinx students including academic preparation, income and location. Also, discussed in the literature about college access is the influence of the family on student’s choice to enroll. This is integral as parents and family can have a great impact on college choice for Latinx students (Auerbach, 2002; 2004, Turley, 2006), especially those with limited information in their networks (Perez & McDonough, 2008), those who are negatively impacted by seeing “sticker” prices (Heller, 1997), or those who underestimate their qualifications and abilities (Gonzalez, 2012).

What is important to understand is that academic undermatch is a function (or dysfunction) of college access. Students with a general desire to go to college, but with little knowledge of what the process looks like, or understanding of how to create a set of choices for college enrollment, tend to be those who are low-income and underrepresented minorities (URMs) (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010). These students, if they choose to enroll in a college, may (and do) end up choosing to attend colleges that they are academically overqualified to attend.

Much of the literature that is available on academic undermatch is framed around choosing to attend a highly selective institution instead of a non-selective, primarily four-year, institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). Students who attend highly selective colleges will graduate at higher rates than their peers at non-selective institutions (Alon & Tienda, 2005). Overall bachelor's degree graduation rates, regardless of institutional selectivity, are much higher for students who begin at any four-year institution (Kena et al., 2015) than for students who start at a two-year college then transfer to complete the bachelor's degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Shapiro et al., 2014). Even more interesting, yet not included in the current literature on undermatch, is that the likelihood of graduating with a baccalaureate degree increases for URMs, as institutional selectivity increases (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Fry, 2004).

#### *Extent of Undermatch*

The full extent of undermatch, for college-eligible high school students across the nation, has started to unfold in the literature with attention given to students with the academic qualifications to attend a four-year institution more selective than the alternative they chose (Bowen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). In a report for the College Board, Smith and colleagues (2012) examined nationally representative data from the National

Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/2000) and the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002/06) to understand the extent to which high school seniors in the sample undermatched. The researchers examined the academic credentials of students, including SAT/ACT scores, and GPA, along with the information about where the students applied to college, if they were admitted, and where they ultimately enrolled (Smith et al., 2012).

The report found that college undermatch decreased from 1992 (where 48.9% of the senior cohort undermatched) to 2004 (where only 40.9% undermatched). However, the report also found that the number of students eligible to attend highly selective institutions decreased from 70.2% in 1992 to 58% in 2004. This is consistent with literature that contends that over the last 20 years, the most elite colleges have become increasingly more difficult to access (Hoxby, 2009; Fryar, 2015). Smith and colleagues (2012) continued to suggest that students from the senior cohort of 2004 were also more likely to undermatch. They also argued that undermatch occurs because students do not apply to a matched college (an institution to which the student's academic qualifications are comparable to the selectivity of the school) and subsequently do not attend a college to which they would be matched (Smith et al., 2012).

#### *Characteristics of Students Who Undermatch*

A more recent study (Smith et al., 2013) used the NELS:88/2000 and ELS:2002/06 data to further estimate the likelihood of undermatch by socioeconomic status (SES), race, and gender. They categorized data based on institutional selectivity to filter student admission and application behavior to examine who had access to what institution, and to which institutional selectivity type did students ultimately enroll. They found that Hispanic, Asian, and Black students were often only eligible to access non-selective four-year institutions and community colleges (Smith et al., 2013).

Overall, the research on undermatch showed the pervasive extent of undermatch for low-income, first generation students attending college. They demonstrated in their data that Latinx students had high percentages of students eligible to attend the community college (74.1%), surpassed only by black students. Despite this, Latinx students who were eligible to attend a four-year college or two-year college had the highest percentage (43.8%) of students by race/ethnicity to undermatch by choosing to attend a community college or not attending college at all (Radford & Howell, 2013; Smith et al., 2013).

What the research on academic undermatch reveals, yet fails to address, is how the increasing stratification of access to four-year colleges affects where minority students go to college (Posselt et al., 2012). For Latinx students, the pervasiveness of college undermatch can have a lasting impact, as researchers caution that attending a less selective college, particularly a community college, has degree completion implications (Bowen et al., 2009; Brand et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012). Students who enroll at an institution for which they are an academic match or academic overmatch (attending a more selective college than their academic credentials would allow) are more likely to be retained and graduate with a bachelor's degree (Baum et al., 2010).

#### *Limitations of the Current Literature on Undermatch*

While academic undermatch is critical to understand, as researchers portend negative persistence and graduation outcomes for undermatched students (Bowen et al., 2009; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013), there are gaps in the current literature surrounding this phenomenon. These gaps, if further explored, would provide greater depth to the issue of academic undermatch. Below are some of the gaps in the literature on academic undermatch that this research addresses.

## *Methodology*

The literature that exists on college undermatch is primarily quantitative, with few exceptions (Freeman, 2017; Lowry, 2017; Radford, 2013). Bowen and colleagues (2009) wrote their book on the state of higher education and college choice in North Carolina, but the methods they used to gather and present their data were heavily focused on quantitative correlational and descriptive data. They nonetheless, drew impressive conclusions and suggestions on how to best serve and work with low-income, high-achieving, college-going students (Bowen et al., 2009). They specifically found undermatching to be correlated with parental education, family income, and being Black (Bowen et al., 2009).

Caroline Hoxby, an economics researcher who has co-authored several reports and articles on academic undermatch (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013), highlighted the precarious college choice process for low-income, high-achieving students. In their quantitative study, Hoxby and Turner (2013) discussed the effects of an intervention program. Their results demonstrated that low-income students who participated in this intervention were more likely to apply to more schools, were admitted to better schools, and persisted at greater rates than their low-income peers who did not receive the intervention (Hoxby & Turner, 2013).

While the Hoxby and Turner (2013) study helps to show how a low-cost intervention can make a difference in application behavior, the authors were unable to provide greater depth in their analysis, explaining why students do not apply to more selective institutions. Another article from the same authors attempts to analyze the comment data from surveys to better understand why students do not apply to certain colleges (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). This provides some depth to their initial results, but does not convey the complexity and nuances about why students make the choices they do.



A qualitative approach to examining academic undermatch can focus on the nuances of choice. Qualitative research on academic undermatch attempts to understand the context within which students made the decision to choose a less selective college. Continued efforts to produce qualitative research can add depth and expose the structural and situational contexts of college choice and subsequent enrollment.

*College Choice in Context of Lived Experiences of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*

Along with a lack of varied methodological approaches to understanding academic undermatch, much of the current literature problematizes undermatch as a pandemic among low-income, high achieving, college-bound students. URM students make up a large proportion of those students who would fall into this category, yet little literature exists that focuses on a racial or ethnic group (Freeman, 2017; Lowry, 2017; Rodriguez, 2015a). More often, racial/ethnic representations are only acknowledged if researchers discuss the extent to which their study controlled for demographic variables, or if there are statistically significant results to point out.

Radford and Howell (2014) made an effort to note that Latinx students are the most likely ethnic group to undermatch, directly addressing the percentage at which Hispanic students undermatch. They pointed out that Latinxs who undermatch were less likely to graduate in six years versus their peers. Aside from this note in their chapter, the remainder of the discussion on undermatch focused on low-SES students.

The available literature does not focus on the lived realities of racial and ethnic minority students who make choices about where to go to college, with the exceptions of Freeman's (2017) study on rural, Latinx, community college students, Lowry's (2017) study that focuses on undermatch for African American students attending a community college, Rodriguez's (2013) dissertation on academic undermatch among underrepresented minorities, and Black, Cortes, and

Lincove's (2015) paper addressing academic undermatch among high-achieving minority students in Texas. While the impact of one's socioeconomic status is one lens through which to identify barriers to access, a student's lived experience as a racial or ethnic minority, in context with their own opportunity to access college and choice to attend a college, should be given greater consideration. This is especially important as the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) reports that most people living in poverty in the U.S. are ethnic/racial minorities.

Students of color deal with covert and overt forms of racism, discrimination, stereotypes, and microaggressions that could potentially hinder educational access and opportunity (Tate, 1997). High school students of color are aware that certain requirements for college admissions present themselves as unfair or biased toward minorities (Walpole et al., 2005). Vela-Gude and colleagues (2009) also suggest that for Latinx students, developing a sense of resilience and strength is necessary, as some Latinxs feel discouraged to apply to colleges and perceive their counselors set higher expectations for white and higher-income peers.

### *Institutional Selectivity*

Current undermatch literature posits that low-income, high achieving students make limited choices in deciding which four-year college to attend (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013). They postulate these students tend to matriculate into non-selective, four-year colleges and institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013). The gap in the literature is that the reality for many low-income students, especially Latinx students, the arena of college choice is much more constrained (Kurlaender, 2006; Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

For most students, attending the nation's most selective institutions is out of reach (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Posselt et al., 2012) and most low-income and minority student enrollments have grown in the two-year sector (Krogstad & Fry, 2014; Kurlaender, 2006; Long,

2010). Though an increasing number of Latinx students are attending college, when considering actual rates of enrollment to different institutional sectors, like community colleges, there remains an unequal distribution across race (Posselt et al., 2012) with a greater proportion of Latinx students enrolled at the community college (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn et al., 2008; NCES, 2015).

The burgeoning literature on undermatch does not focus solely on the choice of attending a community college, versus all other four-year institutions, but the opposite. Most undermatch research focuses on the choice of attending a very selective four-year institution versus all other institutions (Belasco & Trivette, 2015; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). Research that focuses on the latter minimizes the potential for understanding how and why undermatch occurs when students choose to attend a community college when they are academically eligible to attend any four-year institution. Bastedo and Flaster (2014) argued that the current discussion on academic undermatch misses the mark on college access and choice, emphasizing that the growing literature published on undermatch does not focus on what they term “a margin that matters for student outcomes” (p. 95), i.e., whether a student attends a two-year or a four-year institution.

#### *Summary of Academic Undermatch*

Though a definite cause of undermatch has not been articulated in the literature, it is speculated that students make choices about where to go to college that, though they appear to be well-informed, are highly dependent on the students’ own perception of what opportunity and access looks like for them (Kurlaender, 2006; Nuñez & Bowers, 2012). Money is a huge factor for Latinx students when considering where to go to college (Kurlaender, 2006), not to mention many Latinxs do not make the choice to apply to college until very late in their senior year of

high school (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). This puts Latinxs at a disadvantage for choosing colleges, considering many institutions limit access by requiring admissions deadlines as early as January 1st, well before the spring semester has begun.

College choices are also a function of the current structural arrangements of access and opportunity in higher education (McDonough & Fann, 2007). Academic undermatch puts the responsibility of choice on the student without considering the structures and barriers that have shaped their choices. McDonough (1997) clearly articulated the ability of high SES parents to provide private services for college preparation, while low SES students do not have access to such services. A research study by Walpole and colleagues (2005) showed that for African American and Latinx students, their ability to prepare for the ACT or SAT was limited to the knowledge they could acquire from conversations with their high school counselors or teachers. These students were also unaware of the possibilities to apply to colleges where scores are weighted less (Walpole et al., 2005).

Research on postsecondary outreach programs generally showed the benefits of such programs on college enrollment (Loza, 2003; Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002). Sherwin (2012) reported on a college match intervention to help provide families and students information so that they can make “more informed decisions about college enrollment” (p. 3). Hoxby and Turner (2013) similarly pointed to a low-cost intervention that demonstrates increased enrollment to matched colleges for the students in their study. These programs place the onus of access and choice on the student, attempting to fill-in deficits families may have, rather than addressing the structural and institutional barriers and inequalities that exist.

APPENDIX C  
EXTENDED LITERATURE REVIEW

## Understanding College Access

“Today, the ways of knowing of White, wealthy, and thus most powerful Americans not only remain more valued, they continue to be acted upon by K-12 schools, universities, and society as if they are a function of innate ability. The logic remains so pervasive and has such explanatory value that we still find tolerable, if unfortunate, the large gaps in college admissions between upper-class, White Americans and lower-income applicants and applicants of color,” (Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002).

To organize the established and emerging literature on college access, I employed an organizing mechanism used by Fann (2005) and expanded by McDonough and Fann (2007) to discuss and analyze the field of college access in higher education, focusing on the individual-, organizational-, and field-level contexts. This organizational outline borrowed from the analytical framework of McDonough, Ventresca, and Outcalt (2000), who argued that the field of college access is shaped by students’ individual influences, K-12 and higher education organizations, and federal and state policies that weave a nuanced and complex web of structural arrangements and opportunities.

Individual-level analyses focus on the factors that affect choice for students such as parents, socioeconomic status, and race and/or ethnicity. Organizational-level analyses examine the environment of K-12 schools and higher education and the complexity of the interaction of those organizations and the access they provide (or do not provide) to the students they serve. Field-level analyses provide a macro-level understanding of the changes to institutions and professions (McDonough & Fann, 2007), such as federal and state policies that influence how college access is structured.

I used these three categories to organize my review on college access. Additionally, issues pertinent to Latinx student college access were situated within each subtopic. Below is an outline for the structure of this section:

- Individual-Level Contexts

- Socioeconomic Status
- Parents, Families, and Community
- Race and Ethnicity
- Peers
- Organizational Contexts
  - K-12 Schools
    - Curriculum and Academic Preparation
    - Teachers
    - High School Guidance Counselors
    - Precollege Outreach Programs
  - Postsecondary Institutions
    - College Admissions
    - Institutional Type
      - Community Colleges
      - Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)
- Field-Level Contexts
  - College Admissions Testing
  - Financial Aid
  - Affirmative Action
  - State-Level Policies

*Individual-Level Contexts*

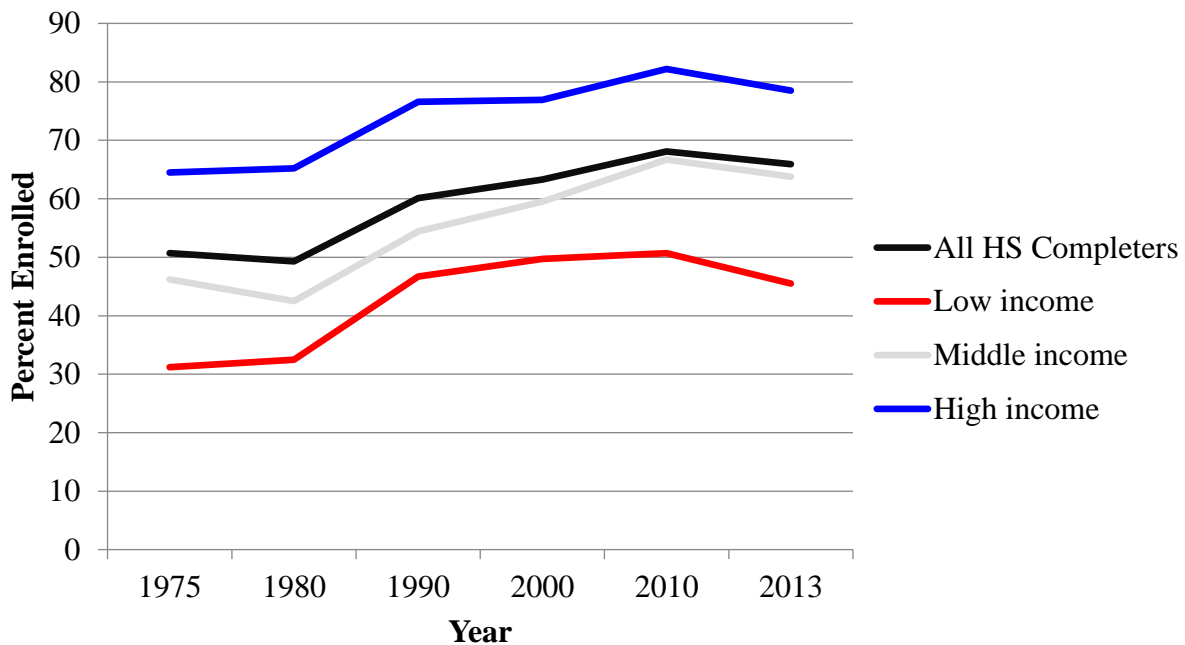
There are many factors that are influential in the individual process of choosing colleges (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; McDonough & Fann, 2007). Below is an overview of

the influences that parents and family, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and culture, and peers can have on college access and choice.

### *Socioeconomic Status (SES) and College Access*

Low SES students are less likely to attend a four-year college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Paulsen & St. John, 2002) and are less likely to live on campus or enroll full-time (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). They are more likely to attend a community college, putting them more at risk of not completing the baccalaureate than their higher SES peers (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). Figure 3.1 shows that since 1975, based on SES, the percentage of overall enrollment of recent high school completers enroll in college has increased, yet low-income students continue to have the lowest percentages of enrollment.

*Figure C.1 Percent of recent high school completers enrolled in college.*



Note: Data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, table 302.30. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_302.30.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_302.30.asp)



Hoxby & Avery (2013) contended that many eligible high-achieving, low-income students often lack information about their college-going opportunities and have familial, cultural, and social issues that prevent them from applying to more selective colleges. When low-income students do enroll in college, it is likely to be at less selective four-year colleges (Fryar, 2015) or community colleges (Smith et al., 2012). Many low-income students do not apply to any college (Turley, 2006), much less any selective four-year college (Hoxby & Avery, 2013) that they may have been academically qualified to attend. Overall, they remain unlikely to attend any form of postsecondary education (Adelman, 2007).

For low-income students, the cost of college is a barrier to access, choice, and enrollment. The net price or cost of college can be understood as the sticker price of an institution, minus all federal and state financial aid and tuition discounts from that institution (Winston, 2004). Donald Heller (1997; 2007) maintained that low-income students are price sensitive, in that an increase in cost, whether through tuition increases or perceived reduced financial aid, will decrease their likelihood of attending college. Low-income students are the most sensitive to the variations in net price and, if they enroll in college, it is likely to be at lower-resourced institutions such as non-selective four-year institutions or the community college; or they may not enroll at all (Adelman, 2007; Heller, 2007; Heller, 1997; Kim, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002).

Low-income, price-sensitive students would be more likely to attend a high-resource college or university if they were more aware of how much lower the net price really is, relative to the sticker price, according to Archibald and Feldman (2011). However, this assumes that students have knowledge of, and access to, this information. Low-income students are limited in the information they receive during the college choice process (McDonough, 1994, 1997), are

more likely to stay close to home to go to college (Turley, 2006), and have less access to information about specific colleges (McDonough, 1994, 1997).

There is a growing body of literature that contributes to understanding Latinx students' sensitivity and response to net prices for college. Using a nationally representative data set, Kim and Nuñez (2013) found that Latinxs were more likely to be part of families in the lowest income levels. Latinx students, with limited information, were also negatively impacted by the net price of an institution and were unlikely to enroll in a four-year institution they were qualified to attend when they perceived the net price of the institution to be out of reach (Kurlaender, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Nuñez & Kim, 2013). Latinxs choose to attend colleges with lower costs (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010; Paulsen & St. John, 2002), such as community colleges. Thus, Latinx students may need more information about college costs to make informed decisions.

### *Parents, Family, and Community*

Parents have high aspirations for their children's educational attainment (Auerbach, 2002, 2004; Ceja, 2004, 2006; Jun & Colyar, 2002; Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Minority parents continue to hold high aspirations for their children (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), believing that a college education is a means by which to gain upward mobility in society (Spera et al., 2009). Not all parents have the resources and ability to help their children achieve the aspirations they hold (Jun & Colyar, 2002; Haro, 1994). Some parents are unfamiliar with navigating the school system and rely on schools as the authority on educating their children (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010) or face resistance when they question their school's ability to provide for their children's educational needs (Dyrness, 2007).

Dominant conceptions of parental support and encouragement revere those parents who communicate regularly with the teachers and counselors at their children's schools and who advocate for their children's placement into advanced curricula (Jun & Colyar, 2002; Lareau, 1987, 1989). These parents are likely to have attended college, be of middle- or high-socioeconomic status, and are not of a racial or ethnic minority group (Lareau, 1987, 1989). They are often white, affluent parents who have the resources and ability to maximize their children's potential to access the best colleges through their advocacy (McDonough, 1994, 1997). Conversely, parents who do not communicate often with school officials and do not question the authority of their children's school and teachers are more likely to be of a racial or ethnic minority (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) and of lower-socioeconomic status (Lareau, 1989).

The homes of Latinx families are perceived as deficient or insufficient to prepare their children for advanced educational attainment (Dyrness, 2007; Valdés, 1996; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Villenas, 2001). Yet, the cultural mores and practices of the family are often overlooked as having value in K-12 schooling or in gaining access to higher education. Among K-12 educators, it is important to understand the values within the home to continue to successfully engage Latinx students in the classroom and build on the knowledge they already come to school with (Gonzalez, 2005; Tenery, 2005). The knowledge Latinx students have may come from their parents, or other families in the community with whom *confianza*, or a mutual trust, has been built (Dyrness, 2007) and teach their children the importance of money and other skills through their own work (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 2005).

In gaining access and enrolling in college, the connections between families and student success are especially important for Latinx students (Ceja, 2006, Perez & McDonough, 2008). Latinx families with high educational aspirations for their children may view living at home, or

staying close to family, as a cultural strength because their child can draw upon the resources that family and community offer (Kiyama, 2010). Related to this is the concept of *familismo* (Marin & Marin, 1991), or holding the wants and needs of one's family in higher regard than personal desires. The concept of *familismo* can impact college access for many Latinx students, regarding applying for and attending certain colleges (Desmond & Turley, 2009).

Overall, parents and families are powerful determinants of college choice, as parental encouragement and support are critical to gaining access to college (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) and are, arguably, the most important predictors of college choice and enrollment (Jun & Colyar, 2002; Hossler et al., 1999). Auerbach (2002; 2004) posited that the inadequate knowledge Latinx families may possess regarding college access may hinder educational opportunities for their children. Families without college knowledge rely completely on schools to provide all of the information necessary about how to get to college (Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009).

Many Latinx families are unaware of the extent to which college choice can affect degree attainment outcomes for their children and may need more information about college to help their children in the college choice process (Auerbach, 2002; 2004). Auerbach (2004) acknowledged the need for collaboration between Latinx families, school administrators, and staff to increase access to college-going information. Unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and lack of college knowledge, coupled with structural and language barriers, make it especially challenging for many Latinx families to help their children prepare for college (Auerbach, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005), much less navigate the pathway to enrolling in a four-year college.

Families are eager for college information, and providing college knowledge to families is an important strategy to increasing Latinx student college participation (Fann et al., 2009). Families who become informed and knowledgeable about the process to go to college are more comfortable in assisting their children to access college information (Auerbach, 2004; Fann et al., 2009). Collaborative efforts between both the K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions, along with the parents of college-bound children could be integral to the choices their students make about preparing for, and enrolling in, college (Fann et al., 2009; Oliva, 2008).

### *Race and Ethnicity*

There has been an increase in enrollment for African Americans, Latinxs, Asians, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students in higher education (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Kena et al., 2015). Latinxs are the fastest growing minority enrolling in higher education, while American Indian/Alaskan Native students remain grossly underrepresented (Brayboy et al., 2012). Increases in enrollment by racial or ethnic minorities, however, do not reflect an equitable increase in access among all institutional types (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004).

Students of color are still least likely to have access to elite four-year institutions (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Posselt et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013) and are likely to attend a two-year college (Gandara, 2002; Mullin, 2012), if they attend at all (Smith et al, 2013). Alon and Tienda (2007) argue that admissions policies reflect an increasing shift toward using merit-based measures, such as test scores, and disregard other aspects and influences of the holistic student, such as high school GPA and co-curricular involvement. Such changes reflect an unequal distribution of access to higher education (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Posselt et al., 2012) as merit-based ideologies continue to provide advantages to non-

minorities and those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Oakes et al., 2002). Merit-based measures reinforce the status quo through continued structural inequalities and inequitable schooling for racial and ethnic minority students (Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002).

Racial and ethnic minority students may also experience multiple forms of racism and discrimination throughout their K-12 schooling. Students report that they are often subjugated to racial stereotyping by teachers, peers, and their own community if they attend majority-minority or underresourced schools (Bhimji, 2004; Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, & Platt, 2011). Though they are in school, students also indicate having to overcome the criminalized portrayals of communities of color, often found in the media (Dorffman & Shiraldi, 2001; Reddick et al., 2011). This is especially important for men of color, as they are often criminalized and policed within their school contexts (Harper, 2013; Rios & Galicia, 2013). Moreover, student achievement in school is often overlooked because of the racialized contexts that suggest their knowledge is inferior due to their identification as a racial or ethnic minority (Reddick et al., 2011). This, coupled with the fact that Black and Latinx youth are often placed in lower-track curriculum can lead to what Reddick and colleagues (2011) say is, “a self-fulfilling prophecy of academic failure” (p. 605).

### *Peers*

Students who aspire to attend college and have peers that are college-bound are likely to enroll in some form of postsecondary education after high school (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Hossler et al., 1999; Perna & Titus, 2005). The impact of peers on college enrollment for minority students is even greater. Sokatch (2006) noted that the likelihood of four-year college attendance for urban, low-income, minority youth was significantly greater if they had friends who plan to attend college and encouraged that minority student to attend college.

For Latinx students, peer influences can be important determinants of college choice. Latinx students may be influenced to enroll in a college that a peer will attend, or currently attends, which Person and Rosenbaum (2006) termed as chain enrollments. In this enrollment pattern, primary social contacts of Latinx students, who are usually also Latinx, encourage and support the student to enroll at the same institution and often help in navigating the process of admissions and enrollment. These contacts can be critical to Latinx students' successful transition to college; yet they may also affect college access and choice as a student's information about college is dependent on the college knowledge of those contacts (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

### *Organizational Contexts*

Organizational contexts concern the extent to which K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions influence and structure college access (McDonough & Fann, 2007). This section discusses the role of K-12 schools, outreach programs, and postsecondary institutions on college access.

#### *Role of K-12 Schools*

Latinxs and African Americans are disproportionately represented in under-resourced high schools that track minority and low-income students in non-college bound curriculum, send fewer students to college, and are in neighborhoods with high poverty (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Oakes, 2005). In considering the distribution of opportunity to educational access, being of a racial or ethnic minority matters (Carnevale & Rose, 2003). This is especially important as access to higher education institutions has become increasingly stratified (Posselt et al, 2012) and significantly impacts communities of color (Kane, 1998).

Curriculum and academic preparation. Being placed into higher-track curricula prepares students for college (Oakes, 2005). Poor and middle class, and minority and White students can be at the same school and still have different interpretations of their schooling experiences (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Particularly, low-income and minority students often do not have access to higher-track curriculum such as Advanced Placement (AP) or honors courses (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). These AP courses have strict requirements for entry and disproportionately enroll more White, Asian, middle- and upper-SES students (Oakes et al., 2002). Students who attend schools that are in low-income neighborhoods, or are majority-minority, typically have no access to, or relatively few, AP courses (Oakes et al., 2002; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2010; Teranishi, Allen, & Solórzano, 2004). Racially segregated or racially isolated K-12 schools provide separate and unequal schooling conditions that hinder educational equity by tracking students into non-college bound curriculum, regardless of the student's academic abilities (Oakes, Rogers, Silver, Horng, & Goode, 2004; Orfield et al., 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004).

Elementary and secondary schools structure educational opportunity through formal, or informal, curriculum tracking (Oakes, 2005). Inequities in tracking non-White and poorer students into lower-tracks can have deleterious effects on college access, reducing the likelihood that these students will be exposed to courses that prepare them for college (Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002; Oakes et al, 2004; Orfield et al., 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004). One of the strongest predictors of college enrollment is the quality and intensity of a student's curriculum in high school (Perna, 2004), including the highest level of courses taken in certain subjects (Adelman, 1999). Additionally, research suggests that taking at least one advanced mathematics course is a strong predictor of enrollment in college (Horn, 1998; Kim & Nuñez, 2013; Perna & Titus,



2005). Overall, minority and low-income students are unlikely to complete high school with the credentials that are necessary to access four-year institutions with few admissions requirements (Roderick et al., 2011).

Given the research surrounding tracking (Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002; Oakes et al, 2004; Orfield et al., 2010; Teranishi et al., 2004) and inequitable placement of Latinxs into non-college bound, tracked curricula (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), these students are unlikely to take such advanced courses. This puts Latinxs at a disadvantage enrolling in any postsecondary institution since they are less likely to enroll in AP or advanced math courses (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Nuñez & Kim, 2013; Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002; Oakes et al., 2006). It is critical that Latinx students are supported and encouraged to take advanced courses in high school (Nuñez & Kim, 2013) to increase the number of these students enrolling in college.

Teachers. School agents have a significant impact on access to college information, knowledge, and resources for students in the K-12 system. In schools, teachers spend more time with students in any given day versus other school personnel (Jarsky, McDonough & Nuñez, 2009). Thus, their perceptions of student abilities can influence students' perceived self-efficacy (Oakes, 2005). Teachers tend to underestimate the potential of minority students (Ferguson, 1995). Latinxs and African American students are consistently found to be overrepresented in lower-track courses, classes associated with preparing students for the workforce, or vocational education (Oakes, 2005).

Higher-track classes associated with preparing students for college are characterized by teacher behaviors that are thought to promote learning (Oakes, 2005). These teaching behaviors are also thought to motivate students to learn. On the other hand, students on lower tracks get less from their schools. They receive less instruction time, and have teachers who exhibit fewer

teaching behaviors associated with stimulating learning, which translates to less active learning time for the students, and little time with students engaged in learning (Oakes, 2005).

Many Latinx students attend racially segregated schools where there are less White students, and where Latinxs and African American students are the majority enrolled (Orfield, et al., 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Teranishi et al., 2004). Teachers in racially segregated schools tend to be inexperienced and have high turnover in comparison to schools that are more integrated or majority White (Oakes et al., 2004; Orfield et al., 2010). For Latinx students, having highly qualified teachers positively contributes to their overall likelihood of enrolling in a four-year institution (Nuñez & Kim, 2013).

High school guidance counselors. The role of high school guidance counselors in helping to shape college access is incredibly influential. A person's socioeconomic status, along with the sociodemographic composition of their high school, can structure access and opportunity for students, especially through the work of high school counselors in providing information (McDonough, 1997). Low-income, first generation students rely heavily on the guidance and knowledge of their high school counselors in seeking assistance to apply to college (McDonough, 1997; Radford & Howell, 2014).

The ability of a high school counselor to provide students with information on college access depends on resources available to the counselor and within the high school (McDonough, 1997). To add additional layers of support, parents of higher SES students hire private counselors and tutors to help prepare college applications and create a set of college choices (McDonough, 1994, 1997). In contrast, low-SES and minority students, especially Latinxs, rely heavily on their school counselors for all college information (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010; Fann et al., 2009). The

role of high school counselors in accessing information about college is paramount to college access and choice, but many counselors are unable to help all of their students effectively.

The role of high school counselors in helping students to access information and resources necessary to go to college has far-reaching implications for college enrollment of Latinx students. As McDonough (2005) states, “Counselors and counseling matters in college access” (p.77). The role of counselors and their impact on college access is especially pronounced for Latinx students, as many must rely exclusively on counselors and high school staff to provide them with all of the information regarding how to get to college (McDonough, 1997, 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Latinx students may find themselves refusing to seek out assistance due to a myriad of reasons, including lack of attention, hostility, or lack of support for their college intentions from their high school counselor (McDonough, 2005; Radford, 2013; Vela-Gude et al., 2009).

#### *Precollege Outreach Programs*

Multiple actors immeasurably shape college access, with high school counselors having great potential to influence college access for Latinx students. Some schools in the U.S. have tracked Latinx (and other students of color) into non-college bound programs, which can serve to push some students out of the educational system (Davison-Aviles, Guerrero, Barajas-Howarth, & Thomas, 1999; Martinez, 2003; Southworth & Mickelson, 2007). These actions, and the counselors who work in these environments, can ultimately affect the college-going decisions of even the highest achieving students.

One way to ensure that academically qualified students find additional resources and support to accessing college information is through precollege outreach programs. Outreach programs range in scope, funding, and location (Swail & Perna, 2002). Some of the better-known

programs are AVID, Upward Bound, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), and TRIO. However, many precollege outreach programs exist nationally, locally, at the institutional level, and through private foundations (Loza, 2003; Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002; Tierney, 2002).

While so many precollege outreach programs exist, at their cores lie the mission to provide college preparation, access, and support for low-income and minority students who have the potential, yet they are not “getting served as serious contenders,” (Swail & Perna, 2002, 32). Precollege outreach programs are instrumental in helping underserved populations navigate the way to college (Loza, 2003), yet these programs are not sufficient to equalize opportunity of access for these groups. Many precollege outreach programs are understaffed (Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002), with many others not having the resources to effectively evaluate the programming they provide (Tierney, 2002), nor do they serve every student who would benefit from the program (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Denner, Cooper, Dunbar, & Lopez, 2005; Loza, 2003).

Latinx students who participate in these programs have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with college information, such as being provided information about college-track classes, college visits, and information about the pathway to college indicate the importance of these activities to their college decisions (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011). Of equal importance is that both Latinx students and their parents who gain information from these programs are better able to realize the pathway to college and sustain their career and educational aspirations (Denner et al., 2005). Loza (2003) contended that these programs, though beneficial have eligibility requirements, such as a minimum GPA and potential or motivation for college attendance, barring the most at-risk Latinx students from access to the program.

### *Postsecondary Institutions*

Postsecondary institutions influence college access in a variety of different ways. Below are the ways in which college admissions policies and institutional types have structured access to higher education.

College admissions. The increasing competitive market for college admissions has placed low-income and racial and ethnic minority students at a disadvantage in accessing college (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Posselt et al., 2012). Alon and Tienda (2007) asserted that, over time, institutions have started to heavily rely on standardized test scores to assess applicants for admissions. This “shifting meritocracy” (Alon & Tienda, 2007, 489), or overreliance on merit-based measures of achievement, such as test scores and grade point averages (GPA), benefit those already in power (Posselt et al., 2012) and serve to reinforce the status quo (Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002).

Overall, Black and Latinx students are more likely to score lower on college entrance exams and standardized tests than their White and Asian peers (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Walpole et al., 2005; Zwick, 2007). Solely relying on such measures to determine eligibility for admissions comes at a detriment to minority students as using non-cognitive factors, such as determining one’s character and leadership abilities in additional application documents, in admissions could better ascertain an applicant’s ability to succeed and be admitted to an institution (Alon & Tienda , 2007; Posselt et al., 2012).

Institutional type. Where a student goes to college matters, especially in terms of completion. Students who attend more selective institutions are more likely to be retained (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012) and have higher graduation rates (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012). Overall graduation rates, however, for students who

began at any four-year institution in fall 2007, was 59% (Kena et al., 2015), while only 17% of all students who began at a two-year institution in 2007, and transferred to a four-year institution, have earned a baccalaureate (Shapiro et al., 2014). Students with intentions to complete a baccalaureate may have better outcomes for degree completion if they start at a non-selective four-year college versus a community college (Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

Rodriguez (2015a) states that less than 3% of all postsecondary institutions, or 172 institutions, are among the most highly selective. In addition, most of the attention on academic undermatch has been given to high-achieving, low-income students who do not attend highly selective institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2014; Smith et al., 2013). Rather, it may be better to understand how access to the baccalaureate for low-income and minority students is situated through attendance at a non-selective, comprehensive, public college (Fryar, 2015; Rodriguez, 2015). In considering Latinx student enrollment, Latinxs are the least likely racial/ethnic minority group to enroll in any postsecondary institution (Kim & Nuñez, 2013); and when Latinxs do enroll, they are more likely to be enrolled at a two-year institution (Kurlaender, 2006; Nuñez & Kim, 2013).

Community colleges. The conversation concerning access and choice for students in the U.S. has focused on enrollment to the four-year sector of higher education. Recent estimates, however, demonstrate that about 46% of all undergraduates in the U.S. are enrolled in a community college (AACC, 2015). Further, 41% of all first-time freshmen in fall 2013 began their postsecondary educational journeys at the community college (AACC, 2015). Community colleges are the primary pathways to access for low-income and first-generation students in the nation, with Latinx, African American, and American Indian students more likely to begin their postsecondary educational journey at the community college (Fry, 2011; Mullin, 2012).

In their study of college students in Ohio, Long and Kurlaender (2009) hypothesized that students don't randomly choose colleges, but that there are differences in those students who start at four-year colleges and those who start at community colleges. What they found was that while differences existed between those who enrolled in more selective four-year colleges and community colleges. Students at community colleges, however, were more like students at non-selective four-year colleges (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Furthermore, students who attended community colleges were significantly less likely to complete a baccalaureate in nine years, compared to those who started at a non-selective four-year college (Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

A concern about community college enrollment is the degree to which a students' educational aspirations are thwarted once enrolled, particularly for Latinx students who entered with bachelor's degree aspirations, yet do not transfer to complete the baccalaureate (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn, Cypers & Lester, 2008; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Nora and Rendón (1990) indicated in their work that Latinx students who intended to transfer felt it was important to continue their education to complete the bachelor's degree. Arbona and Nora (2007) also demonstrate that Latinx students who first enrolled at a community college, and aspired to earn a bachelor's degree, are less likely to complete such a degree, even in an eight-year time frame. While Suarez (2003) contends that transfer is a shared responsibility between the student and the institution, students may lack essential information and receive incomplete or haphazard information about how to transfer (Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004).

Minority serving institutions. Along with understanding the institutional sector in which low-income and minority students are likely to enroll, it is also of importance to know the demographic composition of the institution. Specifically, Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)

are the colleges/universities that enroll large populations of low-income and underrepresented minority students (Baez, Gasman & Turner, 2008). MSIs can be public or private, four-year institutions or community colleges (Flores & Morfín, 2008), and are largely under-resourced, with some facing major funding issues (Baez et al., 2008), yet they continue to enroll and graduate large numbers of low-income, at-risk, minority students (Gasman, 2008).

These institutions include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPIs) and Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs). The significance of MSIs in educating the nation's minority college student population is vast. HBCUs enroll 16% of all enrolled African American students but account for only 3% of all institutions of higher education. TCUs represent less than 1% of institutions, but enroll 19% of all Native Students. The enrollment for HSIs is substantial, considering HSIs enroll almost 60% of all Latinxs currently in college and constitute less than 12% of all institutions in the U.S. (Excelencia in Education, 2015). The state of Texas has a rapidly growing Latinx population and has the second-largest number of Latinxs living in the state, only surpassed by California (Flores & Morfín, 2008). According to Flores and Morfín (2008) most the HSIs in California and Texas are community colleges, which may not be surprising given that Latinxs in these states are more likely to enroll at a community college.

As mentioned, HSIs enroll half of all Latinx students, yet HSIs represent a smaller proportion all institutions. Almost half of all HSIs, 46%, are community colleges (Excelencia in Education, 2015). At these Hispanic-serving community colleges, Latinx students comprise much of the student enrollment (Nuñez et al., 2011). These numbers demonstrate the growing



importance of HSIs and Hispanic-serving community colleges as institutions where many Latinxs attain their educational goals.

### *Field-Level Contexts*

Field-level contexts are focused on understanding the broader policies (and politics) that ultimately shape and influence college access, and student perceptions on college access (McDonough & Fann, 2007). Below is discussion of how college admissions tests, financial aid, affirmative action, and state-level policies have impacted college access.

### *College Admissions Tests*

Initially known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT was similarly conceptualized to the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test in that intelligence is an inherent attribute that can be measured accurately at one point in time (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). The American College Testing Program (ACT) was created to be more closely linked to the average curriculum a student would encounter in high school and assess a student's mastery of the content (Syverson, 2007). The SAT and ACT, however, are norm-referenced standardized tests, which have become integral to the admissions process (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Syverson, 2007). They have also become tools to measure prestige, as official college rankings often include the average SAT or ACT score for the most recent freshman class of an institution (Syverson, 2007).

The SAT has historically been closely correlated with a student's family income and family educational attainment (Atkinson & Gieser, 2009). It is also assumed the score on either test is a signal of the students' academic capabilities. Often, students with higher SAT or ACT scores are encouraged to seek admissions to more selective institutions without questioning that student's academic qualifications, i.e. GPA (Syverson, 2007). More important than test scores are the student's academic qualifications. While academic rigor varies across all schools in the

U.S., a students' record in high school (Syveson 2007) and cumulative grade point average in academic subjects (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009) are better predictors of college success (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Syverson, 2007).

Critics of the SAT have long stated that the use of this test has been to restrict access to college for racial and ethnic minority groups (Alon & Tienda, 2007). More unfavorably, there are some who have claimed the SAT is a measure of affluence and restricts access to college for low-income students (Crouse & Trusheim, 1988; Zwick, 2004). Latinx and African American students do feel the SAT and ACT tests are unfair (Walpole et al., 2005). Even when students could access test preparation information in advance of the exams, they did not perform well (Walpole et al., 2005). For many students, the implicit message of the SAT, that one's score on the exam is more important than what one achieves in the high school classroom (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Geiser & Santelices, 2006), can harm self-concept and self-confidence.

### *Financial Aid*

The federal government, and subsequent awarding of federal aid, has been shaped by historical events such as the GI Bill, or Serviceman's Readjustment Act, the launch of Sputnik by the Russians, and Johnson's election to the presidency in 1964 (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Heller, 2007). After these series of events, the federal government took up a larger role in providing aid, first to institutions. But after the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1972, federal aid began to be directly distributed to students in the form of the Pell Grant, originally known as the Basic Education Opportunity Grant (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Long, 2010). Interestingly, Long (2010) pointed out that while the research varied as to the usefulness of the federal financial aid program, and the degree to which it has truly provided access to four-

year colleges for low-income students, the sector with the largest enrollment growth after Pell has been in public, community colleges.

Perceptions of college costs and affordability vary widely from one family to another. This may lead some high school counselors to steer students to apply to the community college, rather than a four-year college, if they know costs are a concern for students (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Regardless of sector growth, the Pell Grant is the primary federal need-based program for low-income students (Long & Riley, 2007). Pell, however, has not maintained its value net of tuition costs (Long & Riley, 2007).

Like early federal aid programs, state aid was distributed similarly, largely going to the neediest students, or through subsidies provided directly to the institution (Heller, 2007; Long, 2010; Long & Riley, 2007). This method of distributing aid kept college affordable for low-income students (Heller, 2007). As federal aid policies shift in favor of concerns over affordability for financially able families, states have also divested in the subsidies provided to colleges and universities, and have shifted to awarding merit-based, rather than need-based aid (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Heller, 2007; Long & Riley, 2007), limiting access to low-income students with college aspirations (Long & Riley, 2007). These merit-based awards have become more prevalent as ways to emphasize and incentivize those students deemed meritorious, and are often awarded to middle- and higher- income families, posing a detriment to college access for lower-income students (Long, 2010; Long & Riley, 2007).

Financial aid has little to do with enrollment in college for higher income students, but rather where the student enrolls in college (Heller, 2007; Heller, 1997; Kim, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna, 2000). For high-income students, the question is less about if one is going to college, but where (McDonough, 1997). When grants are part of the aid package for White, high-

income students, this influences choosing to attend one's first choice college versus all others (Kim, 2004). Merit-based aid, which favors middle- and higher-income students, has more of an effect on the choice of college (Long, 2010; Perna, 2006).

For example, the HOPE scholarship is merit-based, state aid implemented in Georgia for high-achieving students (Long, 2010; Long & Riley, 2007). This scholarship had a disparate effect on access, widening the gap between the low and middle- and high-income students, and Black and White students. Considering "[...] most middle- and upper-income students will attend college regardless of whether they receive financial aid," (Long, 2010, 34) this can pose an issue for low-income students, in terms of college access and choice. Since students with the most financial need are least knowledgeable about how to get or apply for financial aid (McDonough & Calderone, 2006), they are at a disadvantage in going to the college of their preference.

Students and families have expressed concern with the FAFSA, and are often confused, or even deterred, from applying for aid (ACSFA, 2005). For Latinx students, their knowledge about financial aid is highly dependent on the resources available to the student as they apply for aid (Gross, 2011; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Kim (2004) notes that Latinx students may not be aware of how to apply for aid, what type of aid is available, or the net price of different colleges after aid is received. Net of all aid and family contributions, Latinx students are more likely to still have unmet financial need for college (Long & Riley, 2007).

Latinx students tend to rely more heavily on information from their counselors about college access (Fann et al., 2009), including financial aid (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). This is important, since parents of Latinx students are unfamiliar with financial aid terminology, are

less familiar with the FAFSA and are unaware of the different types of financial aid available (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Some Latinx parents may express concern and be averse to using loans to pay for college expenses (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). When counselors have a large counseling load or are unaware of the needs of Latinxs in their schools, then the extent to which information about applying for financial aid is given to students and their parents will be limited and can vary widely from school to school (McDonough, 1997, 2005a; McDonough & Calderone, 2006).

### *Affirmative Action*

Like distribution of financial aid, affirmative action is often discussed as to how it can positively or negatively affect college access. Only affirmative action appears to be more of a divisive issue, often at the forefront of national headlines and more recently debated on a national stage with the Supreme Court (*Fisher v. University of Texas*, 2013). Outcomes of this and other legal cases (*University of California Board of Regents v. Bakke*, 1978; *Hopwood v. State of Texas*, 1996; *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003) continue to have ramifications, sometimes deleterious, on access to postsecondary institutions for students of color.

Critics of the use of affirmative action in college admissions claim, “ (...) society has changed to the point that Whites can no longer be presumed to be the ‘oppressors’” (Khadaroo, 2008). Ward Connerly, leader of the American Civil Rights Institute, suggested that it is “morally wrong” and “counterproductive” when race is considered in the higher education admissions (Khadaroo, 2008). States such as California, Michigan and Washington have imposed voter-approved referendums that ban racial preferences in admissions, demonstrating the contentious nature of the issue in the public (Baez et al., 2008; Long & Tienda, 2008).

Despite the debate, researchers suggest that banning affirmative action has largely led to a redistribution of students, particularly students of color, into less selective institutions over more selective institutions, exacerbating issues with stratification of access (Hicklin & Meier, 2008). After the Hopwood case, Long and Tienda (2008) note that even with the state of Texas enacting the top ten percent plan, fewer Latinxs and African Americans applied and were admitted to the top three public institutions in the state. They state, “[...] minority applicants were the net ‘losers’ of the changing admission regimes while Whites continued to maintain their admission advantage” (Long & Tienda, 2008, 270).

#### *State-Level Policies – Texas*

Since this study was conducted in Texas, it is of interest to discuss in this part of the literature review the policies within the state. As mentioned earlier, the state of Texas has a rapidly growing Latinx population (Flores & Morfín, 2008). Overall, the state has increased its number of students with some college credential (THECB, 2015), yet there are still gaps that remain. Specifically, stratification in access to different postsecondary institutional types has persisted in the state. After the Hopwood decision, the Texas legislature passed a law allowing students in the top 10% of their class access to all public institutions in the state, known as the top ten percent plan (Tienda & Niu, 2006). With this law, flagship institutions sought to maintain the ability to craft a diverse student class (Long & Tienda, 2008; Tienda & Niu, 2006). The reality is that these institutions saw a decline in minority applicants and subsequent enrollments, even with accepting the top decile of students (Long & Tienda, 2008).

Though Texas has the top 10% plan, minority student enrollment is not necessarily increasing at non-flagship four-year colleges in the state. Horn and Flores (2012) suggested that numerically, Latinx and Black student enrollment has increased in Texas, yet there has been a

disparate impact on where these students are enrolling. Latinx and Black students are attending non-selective institutions, even though they are eligible to attend flagship and elite colleges within the state (Horn & Flores, 2012), that is, they are academically undermatching (Black et al., 2015).

Texas' statewide initiative aimed to increase the number of persons in the state with at least some college credential (Certificate, Associate's, Bachelor's, etc.) called Closing the Gaps, has shown that overall, Latinxs are the largest ethnic or minority group to enroll at the community college, but continue to have lower educational attainment (THECB, 2014). The state reported that Latinxs in Texas constitute 32.6% of the total fall 2013 enrollment in the state, with 55.44% of those Latinxs enrolled in a public two-year college (THECB, 2014). Based on the literature, there is a greater likelihood that these students at the community college may not transfer to a four-year college/university and consequently will not earn a bachelor's degree, (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn et al., 2008; Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

### *Summary of College Access*

In the previous section, I outlined a broad overview of the literature surrounding college access, with more attention given to the needs of Latinx students. Access to college is mediated by a number of influences including those pertaining to individual contexts, such as a student's race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family, peers, and community (Hossler et al., 1989); organizational contexts where the role of teachers, counselors, curriculum in K-12 schools, precollege outreach programs, postsecondary admissions and institutional types influence student's perception of college access; and field contexts, that is the environment in which policy and politics shape access to college (McDonough & Fann, 2007). The following section will

provide an overview of existing models of college choice and understanding those models in relation to the available literature surrounding Latinx student college choice.

### Models of College Choice

Choosing where to go to college is a complex array of decisions made by the student, sometimes as early as the freshman year of high school. The following section will provide an analysis of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice, Somers and colleagues' (2006) model of community college choice, and the expanding literature on college choice for Latinx students.

#### *Hossler and Gallagher's Model of College Choice*

In their review of the literature on college choice, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) derived a three-phased model for college choice by high school students. They combined econometric and sociological models to put forth a model which accounts for individual factors (such as the student characteristics, search activities, significant others, etc.) and organizational factors (like school characteristics, postsecondary institution recruitment activities, postsecondary "courtship" activities, etc.) that influence the student at each phase.

The three phases for choosing which college to attend are 1) predisposition, 2) search and 3) choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1998). Predisposition toward attendance to college posits that students will consider their individual characteristics in deciding if they will attend a postsecondary institution. It is in this phase where Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Hossler and colleagues (1999) indicated that the effect of parents, peers, and high school characteristics can and do shape the extent to which students will, in this phase, ultimately choose to pursue postsecondary enrollment or not. Search refers to the student engaging in an active process of seeking out information about postsecondary institutions to attend. It is also at



this point of the model that it is thought that colleges and universities will also begin to reach out to students through recruitment activities. It is during the search phase that students begin to create a choice set based on their information seeking behaviors. Choice refers to the student deciding on what college to attend after high school.

The college choice model presented, though seminal, is also flawed. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) focus was on the model and how these numerous factors have come together to influence decisions about where to go to college, if a student decides to attend at all. All the while, it is briefly mentioned that the shape of choices for low-income and minority students may look different. The greatest limitations of this model are that it is based primarily on the research of the experiences of traditional-aged, middle-income students with initial college enrollment at a four-year institution and, while each part of the model is dissected and discussed (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) and an in-depth analysis of student's choice is provided (Hossler et al., 1998), entry to the community college is overlooked and not examined as a college choice in this model.

What is also missing from this model of college choice is the degree to which college access, choice, and subsequent enrollment is influenced by being a low-income or minority student. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) mentioned that students of color and low-income students do not necessarily come to the decision of having a choice set, or choosing to attend college, like their middle/high income and white peers do. They also offered that public policymakers should focus on creating better avenues for increased options for access to postsecondary enrollment (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

### *Community College Choice*

The above model of college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999) fails to account for community college choices. Students choose to attend a community college for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, cost (Bragg, 2001; Stokes & Somers, 2004), proximity to home and family (Desmond & Turley, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Kurlaender, 2006; Nuñez & Kim, 2013), familial support and encouragement to continue postsecondary education (Somers et al., 2006) and attempts to seek educational attainment despite negative educational expectations (Gonzalez, 2012; Somers et al., 2006).

In advancing the discussion on community college, Somers and colleagues (2006) proposed a framework for understanding what factors influence the decision to attend community colleges. Their framework is rooted in combining econometric models of college choice (Hossler et al., 1989, citing Fuller, Manski, and Wise, 1982), which assume students are rational actors actively cogitating about their college choices using cost-benefit analysis to produce a set of choices, and sociological models that are based in status-attainment research (Jackson, 1982; Stage & Hossler, 1989) and concern the interactions of social, individual, and aspirational factors to influence college choices.

In their study of over 200 community college students, Somers and others (2006) not only found that community college choice is complex, but they contended this exploratory study suggests additional nuances that influence the decision to attend a community college. Moreover, they included in their preliminary model of community college choice three main categories as follows:

- Aspirations and encouragement. This includes family support and encouragement, feeling that they can overcome and achieve despite negative messages from high school agents about college aspirations, and information on college from peers and other relatives.
- Institutional characteristics. The decision to attend a community college was greatly impacted by the institution's location, ease of access, academic programs that met their career and educational goals and student support services to help students navigate the college.
- Finances. The affordability of the community college was a key issue that students held on to in this research. While students note financial aid awarded assisted with their decision to attend, many emphasize their ability to afford college, even the community college based on sticker price, rather than net price (Somers et al., 2006)

This model of community college choice is more ethnically representative (it includes Black and White students) than other models of college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Jackson, 1982). However, the Latinx student population is unknown. As the fastest growing population enrolling in higher education (Krogstad & Fry, 2014), particularly in the community colleges (Kena et al., 2015), the decision to attend a community college should be examined for this group. This community college choice model also includes a non-traditional aged student population, including reverse-transfer students who started first at a four-year college and later transferred to the community college (Somers et al., 2006).

Non-traditional student populations are important to understand when considering the choice to enroll at a community college. Non-traditional student populations typically include minority and first generation student populations (Bragg, 2001; Mullin, 2012), many of whom

make the decision to attend a community college, if they choose to attend college. This group of students, while important, are beyond the scope of this dissertation as I intend to understand academic undermatch for Latina/o, traditional-aged, first time in college (FTIC) enrollees who have never attended a four-year college, but were eligible to do so.

### *Latinx Student College Choice*

Despite the continued growth in enrollment of Latinx students in higher education (Krogstad & Fry, 2014), specifically in the community colleges (Kena et al., 2015), the models of college choice and community college choice do not specifically account for the college choice decisions of this group. What is available is a growing body of research across multiple disciplines that addresses the college access, application, and enrollment decisions of Latinx students within recent years.

### *Applying to Colleges*

Research indicates Latinxs are less likely to have applied to any college, even in their senior year of high school, including those who were considered high-achieving in eighth grade (Hurtado et al., 1997; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). More importantly, Martinez and Cervera (2012) found that many Latinx students had not applied to any college by the spring semester of their senior year. One explanation is that *familismo* is important to consider for many Latinxs in college access (Desmond & Turley, 2012), and could contribute to their application behaviors. Gonzalez (2012) corroborated that Latinx students have strong desires to stay close to home for college, which is positively associated with the decision to attend a two-year college (Gonzalez, 2012). It may be that these ties to family and home provide a supportive network that can sustain them in the face of perceived discrimination (Desmond & Turley, 2012).

Whatever the reason, Latinxs are less likely to carry out a college search and choice process that includes visiting and applying to multiple colleges and universities. On average, Latinxs apply to fewer than two colleges, if they applied at all (Hurtado et al., 1997; Turley, 2009). Accessing information from school agents such as teachers and counselors, as well as gaining information from college resources such as college recruiters, websites, and viewbooks were strong predictors of increased college application behaviors for Latinxs (Gonzalez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

### *College Enrollment*

A study by Person and Rosenbaum (2006) provided more insight to the enrollment patterns of Latinx students choosing to attend college. They suggested that Latinx student college enrollment depends on the people within their social networks that can, and do, inform them about attending certain colleges (Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Primary social contacts such as family, friends, and relatives, and the interactions students have with them, are the most important reason for choosing to attend college (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Students are likely to enroll in colleges and universities that are known to them through their connections to brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or other relatives beyond the traditional family structure (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

Latinx student enrollment at community colleges outpaces their White, Asian, and African American peers (Kena et al., 2015; Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Moreover, four-year college enrollment, even at non-selective public colleges, may be out of reach for many students, including Latinx students (Adelman, 2007; Bastedo & Flaster, 2014; Heller, 2007; Heller, 1997; Kim, 2004; Kurlaender, 2006; Nuñez & Kim, 2013; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Posselt et al., 2012) even when they are academically eligible to do otherwise (Kurlaender, 2006; Nuñez &

Kim, 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Radford & Howell, 2014). Thus, it is imperative to continue to understand the decision to enroll at the community college among Latinx students.

### *Summary of College Choice*

This section provided an overview of two models of college choice that are important for this study. The first, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three phase model of predisposition, search, and choice posits college choices as being influenced by individual contexts (i.e., socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, family, peers, and community). The second, Somers and colleagues (2006) focuses specifically on identifying the factors that influence community college choice and better summarizes the complexities of community college choice. Both models, however, do not account for the complexities in college choice for Latinx students. The literature review on college access and the section above on Latinx student college choice highlights the need for additional research to specifically address how and why Latinx students choose to enroll at a community college, even when the option to enroll at a four-year college is available. In the next section, I discuss two theoretical frameworks, created with Latinx communities in mind, can provide a better lens to understand the myriad influences on Latinx student college choice.

### Theoretical Frameworks

After reviewing the literature on college access, as well as the current information regarding college choice models and the continued need to acknowledge the needs of Latinx students through the process of searching for, applying to, and choosing colleges, I use two asset-based theoretical frameworks to guide this study. Funds of knowledge was used as a primary framework, as protocol questions were developed with this theoretical approach in mind. Community cultural wealth supports and compliments funds of knowledge as Yosso (2005) acknowledges the work of the funds of knowledge in the overall framework.

### *Funds of Knowledge*

Funds of knowledge is rooted within the anthropology of education (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Funds of knowledge challenges dominant discourse on the deficits of knowledge within the homes of Latinxs in the Southwest, namely Mexican-American families, and conceptualizes the pedagogies of the home of Latinxs as educationally enriching with non-valued forms of education passed from one member of the family to others.

Funds of knowledge refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992). The concept of funds of knowledge was born out of the work of Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg (1990; 1992), which analyzed the working-class households of Mexicans in the Southwest U.S. Their work examined the ways in which these socioeconomically disadvantaged families could navigate their social and economic networks.

Moll and colleagues (1992) continued this work by studying the social networks of these families and the interconnectedness of household knowledge among the families in this region. They recognized that these networks are not inflexible or static, but rather are active and adaptive to those network connections they encounter. Central to understanding the interconnectedness of these families and households is the concept of reciprocity. Velez-Ibanez (1988) stated that reciprocity is an “attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis. Whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the exchange expresses and symbolizes human social interdependence” (p. 42). Such reciprocity builds *confianza*, or a mutual trust, between families in their networks.

These exchanges between households, families, and kinship networks provide multiple opportunities for children to learn the funds of knowledge within and shared between homes

(Moll et al., 1992). The children of these homes are not passive learners, but engaged participants in their learning, often becoming both language and cultural brokers for their families or other persons along their kinship networks (Moll et al., 1992). By incorporating teachers as part of the household, they could understand the pedagogy of the home, become part of the extended network of the children and contribute to their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Funds of knowledge in education is traditionally studied through a K-12 context, identifying culturally relevant practices and teaching to incorporate in the curriculum (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). These studies have been based primarily in the Southwest region of the U.S. with the central focus on Latinx families (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Overall, research on funds of knowledge consistently aims to understand how knowledge within and between households can be utilized and transformed into resources for pedagogical practice and activate the potential for learning for both children and their families (Moll et al., 1992; Tenery, 2005).

#### *Funds of Knowledge in Higher Education*

Though there is extensive application of funds of knowledge throughout educational anthropology and enhancing curriculum and teaching in K-12, there is a dearth of literature that uses funds of knowledge as a framework or approach to analyzing Latinx college access and choice. The research that is available addresses the curriculum of a parent outreach program in the southwest U.S. (Kiyama, 2008, 2010), specifically geared to Latinx parents of children in elementary school. The research by Kiyama (2008, 2010) was specifically designed to examine the funds of knowledge within the home as related to higher education and college access. Ultimately, Kiyama (2008; 2010) found that the households that participated in the program



already held high aspirations for their children's educational goals and formed educational ideologies about college that, while positive, were incomplete.

Furthering this research, Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) found that families can and do have college knowledge; more importantly, this knowledge may come from their extended family members that may be part of the household. They posited that because these families may hold this knowledge, higher education researchers should work with families to activate their funds of knowledge "into concrete strategies or actions that will enhance students' chances of enrolling and succeeding in college" (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012, p.12). This suggestion indicates the need for Latinx families to have detailed access to college-going information. This work emphasizes the need for the role of funds of knowledge to become better understood in issues of college access, specifically how families perceive the process for gaining access into college (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012) and understanding what culturally based practices exist in the household that support college-going and student success.

#### *Community Cultural Wealth*

Using community cultural wealth compliments funds of knowledge. Both theories require education professionals to reconsider how knowledge about institutions are valued and understood within communities of color, particularly Latinx communities. While funds of knowledge is rooted in anthropological epistemologies, community cultural wealth is a Critical Race Theory challenge to conventional, deficit-oriented discussions of cultural capital that has traditionally assumed communities of color lack the capital required for upward social mobility (Yosso, 2005).

The community cultural wealth model challenges dominant interpretations of cultural capital and modifies this deficit perspective of Latinx culture into one that acknowledges and

incorporates the resources and strengths that families already have (Perez-Huber, 2009, Villalpondo & Solórzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Research on funds of knowledge has focused on understanding the knowledge in the home and between families (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Kiyama, 2008, 2010; Moll et al., 1992; Tenery, 2005), whereas research on community cultural wealth allows for a broader interpretation of how different inputs can inform and affect a student's ability to successfully navigate social institutions and become informed about their educational abilities. Funds of knowledge emphasizes the parent/family voice and community cultural wealth emphasizes the student's voice.

Yosso (2005) indicated that culture influences societal organization, institutional structures, and the implementation of curriculum and policy. From that she acknowledged the *funds of knowledge* work of Moll and colleagues (1992), which asserted value and meaning to the communities, families and experiences for people of color. Yosso (2005) challenged educators to consider those forms of capital that students from communities of color bring to their educational experiences.

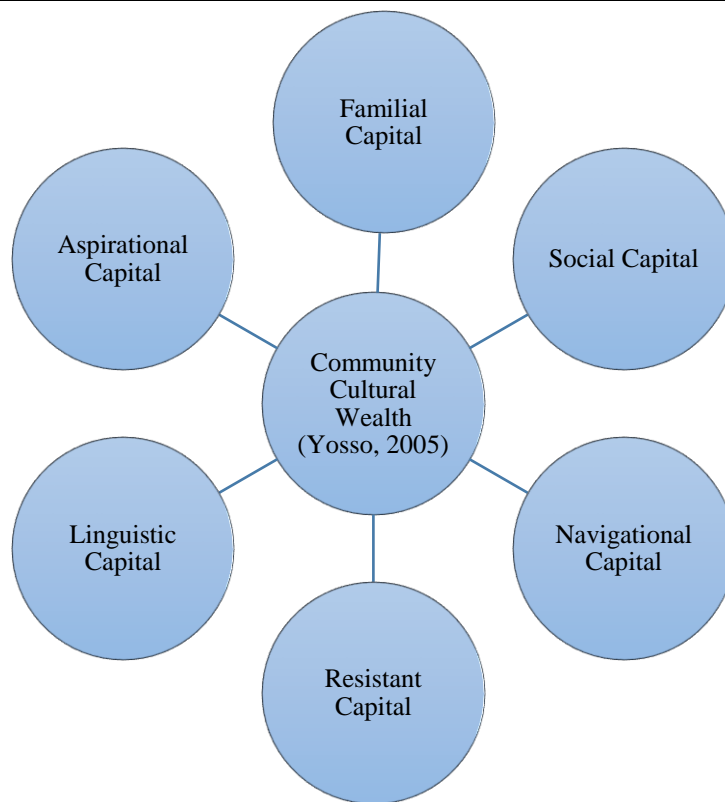
In this model, Yosso (2005) provided six forms of capital, which she indicated are visible ways in which cultural wealth is nurtured by people of color. Figure 5.1 provides a visual representation of the six forms of capital in this framework. The forms of capital she included are aspirational, familial, social, navigational, linguistic and resistant. Below, I outline and briefly describe each form of capital based on Yosso's (2005) work:

- Aspirational capital – Relates to the families' hopes and dreams for their students to pursue an education beyond their own attainment.
- Familial capital – Is the understanding of knowledge created within the home and kinship networks that inform students' educational choices.

- Social capital – Refers to the people, networks, contacts and resources that provide support to navigate through institutions (Yosso, 2005).
- Navigational Capital – Refers to the ability of Persons of Color to move about and progress through institutions that were not designed with communities of color in mind (Yosso, 2005).
- Linguistic Capital – Can be understood as the social and intellectual skills fostered through the ability to communicate in more than one language.
- Resistant Capital – Includes skills and knowledge, “fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality,” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

*Figure C.2. Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth.*

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Note: Adapted from Yosso (2005).

## Summary of the Literature and Theoretical Frameworks for this Study

This literature review began with a broad overview of college access focusing on individual, institutional, and policy influences on how access to college is shaped, especially for Latinx students. Because college choice is a function of the current structural arrangements of access and opportunity in higher education (McDonough & Fann, 2007), I discussed two college choice models that best relate to this study. In detailing both Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model and Somers, et al. (2006) community college choice research I determined that though these models account for the influences of family, peers, and counselors, Latinx student college choice warrants further examination as their needs are not adequately addressed by either of these models. I conclude this section by presenting two frameworks, funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth, that focus on understanding the context within which Latinx students make college choices.

APPENDIX D  
DETAILED METHODOLOGY

In the introduction, I began by telling Connie's story. Connie was one of three participants of a pilot study I conducted in Spring 2014. I was interested in understanding academic undermatch and community college choice, so I conducted this study. The information gathered from this pilot informed my dissertation research. I include it here to share how I came to designing the study at hand. After that, I discuss the study design, sample, data collection and analysis, reflexivity and reciprocity, delimitations, and limitations.

### Pilot Study

In Spring 2014, I wanted to research Latinx students who attended the community college and were academically undermatched. I gained approval to contact students at Eaglefoot College within the Metropolitan Community College District (MCCD)<sup>2</sup> and reached out to those students for an interview. I received a list of over 300 students identified as having been eligible, upon admission to the community college, to enroll in college-level Math and English courses. Only 15 of the 300 had completed the SAT or ACT. Those scores, based on previous undermatch literature, would have been a proxy to estimate the student's ability to have been admitted to a four-year college. Instead, I included in the recruitment email a demographic questionnaire that asked about the students' high school graduation plan and if they applied to any four-year college and, if so, did they gain admission to a four-year college. I received a total of 16 responses from the 300. Six students agreed to participate. Three students participated in an interview.

There may be several reasons for my difficulty obtaining student participants at this community college. First, when requesting student data, the college had no information whether the student was admitted to a four-year college or university, and few had completed the SAT or

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<sup>2</sup> The names of colleges and college systems for participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

ACT. Without that information, I had to ask the students more probing questions to ensure they were truly undermatched (see page 10 for definition). Second, the questionnaire I sent out initially asked students to participate as part of a focus group. It received very little student response. Within a week, less than five students opened the survey and only one had responded. So, I sent another email that indicated on the questionnaire that participants could request an individual interview if they did not feel comfortable being part of a focus group. This yielded a few more responses. Five more students completed the survey. Third, I had no ties of any kind to the institution, having not attended or been employed at their community college. I was an outsider, and these students had no idea who I was personally or professionally. Finally, and most interesting, I received some resistance from students regarding my topic. One student insinuated that personnel at four-year colleges view students attending a community college as academically inferior. Other students wanted to know what my “hypothesis” was and were skeptical about my interest in interviewing the students at this college.

### *Findings*

The three students I interviewed in the pilot shared their lived experiences of how they accessed college information and made the choice to attend college. I opened the introduction with Connie’s story, because it was representative of all three participants’ stories. I also feel the elements of her story manifest throughout the literature on undermatch, college access, and college choice. The other two students were also tenacious, aspired to transfer and complete their bachelor’s degrees, and had participated in various programs in high school to prepare for four-year college enrollment.

One of the findings of this pilot study was that finances were a huge concern for the students in that study. One student pointed out a friend who attended and failed at a Texas

university. The participant said the friend had blown her first year at the university and wasted her parents' money. Secondly, all three talked about limited information sources and knowledge about college, indicating they had no idea what they are doing, and prior to their enrollment at the community college no one they knew personally had ever attended a four-year college. The third finding was the common thread of the highly-valued social ties influencing their college choice and experience, such as their cousins and friends with whom they had grown up and who attended community college with them. The influence of these ties on college choice also informs the research for my dissertation.

#### *Participant Criteria*

After reflecting on the outcomes of the participant recruitment for the pilot study, I decided for my dissertation research, I would need to recruit students admitted to a university but who then decided to attend the community college. The biggest concern I had, aside from the recruitment issues I detailed earlier, was whether the students had in fact undermatched. Of the three interviewed students in the pilot study, only one had been admitted to a nearby four-year college while the other two did not even apply.

While those two students' application behaviors are reflective of the research for low-income (Lopez Turley, 2006) and Latinx students (Klasik, 2011; Martinez & Cervera, 2012), the current research on undermatch focuses on students who are eligible to attend a four-year college through actual admission to four-year colleges (Smith et al., 2013) or through a proxy of SAT/ACT exam scores and high school GPA (Hoxby & Turner, 2014). To carry out dissertation research that examines college access, choice, and problematizes academic undermatch at a "margin that matters" (Bastedo & Flaster, 2014, p.95), I had to be sure that the students in my dissertation study were undeniably eligible to attend a four-year college or university.



## The Purpose of this Dissertation Study

This study is part of the research to identify the environmental, cultural, and social influences that informed student college choices and decisions to enroll at a community college. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence Latinx students to enroll at the community college rather than a baccalaureate-granting college or university for which they were eligible to enroll. This is known as undermatching. I explored 1) student perceptions of the college choice process, 2) the perceptions and role of the family and kinship networks on the student's college choice process, and 3) the knowledge and practices that exist(ed) in the home to support college going and student success (e.g. nontraditional forms of support and encouragement that may exist). The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do academically qualified Latinx students describe their pathway to the community college?
2. What role does family play in the student's college choice?
3. What are the culturally based practices of the household that support college-going and student success?
4. How do students describe their experiences at the community college?

## Why Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach to this research allowed for a deeper understanding of students' college choice process. Per Merriam (2009), the qualitative researcher is more interested in capturing information on the experience that the participant has regarding a phenomenon rather than describing the participants and their outcomes. Qualitative research also allows for investigators to be more flexible in their approach to understanding a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2009).

A qualitative study allowed me to understand academic undermatch in a way that other studies on the topic (Hoxby & Avery, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012) had not by exploring the nuanced decisions and lived experiences that have led students to their decision to attend a community college. This qualitative method provided me the opportunity to examine academic undermatch and how this decision has affected the participants involved in my study (Merriam, 2009).

### Study Design

This study employed a multiple case study design. Case studies provide a deeper understanding and contextual analysis of a phenomenon (Soy, 1997) or quintain (Stake, 2006), the object to be studied. A multiple case study is a “special effort to examine something having lots of cases, parts, or members,” (Stake, 2006, p.vi). This study was concerned with examining academic undermatch among Latinx students. The quintain is academic undermatch, the umbrella under which the cases being studied belong.

A case study should be bounded in time, place, activity, definition and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008) to keep the study reasonable in scope. Therefore, I created a set of boundaries and set criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the study to delineate the breadth and depth of the study. Based on my pilot study and the issues I encountered, including whether participants had, in fact, undermatched, I decided to focus on recruiting students who were admitted to a four-year college but chose to attend a community college instead. This bounded the study to a specific subset of students. Then, as I began to recruit participants (as I describe later in the next section) I decided to focus on those students had transferred to a public four-year college in North Texas, Golden Triangle University, further bounding my study by place.

As I became more focused on understanding the individual student experiences in academic undermatch (college access and choice), it was clear that each student would become the unit of analysis for this study. Stake (2006) says that a multiple case study “is not so much a study of the quintain as it is a study of cases for what they tell us about the quintain,” (p. 7). Understanding the students’ experience in navigating the pathway to college was central to this study. As such a multiple case study design was best suited to continue research on this group, in relation to the quintain, academic undermatch.

#### *Site and Participant Recruitment*

I chose Golden Triangle University (GTU; a pseudonym) as a site as for several reasons. The Carnegie Classification for GTU lists this institution as a comprehensive doctoral university (Carnegie Classification, 2015). The U.S. News and World Report (2015) shows that GTU has an acceptance rate of about 61.5%. According to GTU’s fact book, as of Fall 2014, this institution boasted an enrollment of 36,164 students. The average SAT and ACT score for newly admitted students was 1109 and 23.7, respectively.

While this institution is moderately selective, GTU enrolls many Latinx students and is an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). *Excelencia* in Education defines an emerging HSI as, “colleges and universities with growing Hispanic enrollments that do not yet meet the federal enrollment threshold criteria to be identified as a Hispanic-Serving Institution,” (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), for Fall 2014 and 2015 almost 3,000 Latinx students (per year) applied as freshmen, and were admitted, to GTU. More than 200 of these students each semester, however, chose to enroll at a community or technical college. Because these students were academically qualified to attend

this public university, but chose to first enroll at a community college, they have academically undermatched.

I spoke with the director of admissions for GTU several times about collecting data on students who were admitted to GTU for Fall 2014 and Fall 2015, did not attend and chose to enroll at a local community college. I worked with her to gather directory information on this student group. During the 84<sup>th</sup> legislative session in Texas, however, HB 4606 passed, which “...requires student records of applicants be treated as though the student were enrolled and would be covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA),” (THECB, 2015, p. 72). Because of the passing of this bill, my contact at GTU was unable to provide the information I would have needed to contact this group of students. The impact of this bill on my ability to acquire information to contact students for participation in my study was unforeseen. Because of this recent policy change, my administrative contact at GTU had to find appropriate courses of action for this and future data requests of this nature.

As an alternative, I decided to shift my recruitment focus. I still wanted students who were admitted to a university but chose instead to attend a community college. Now, however, I decided to recruit student participants who were currently attending GTU, or any other university, and transferred into the university from a community college. This was easier to do as the bill that had passed in the Texas legislature meant that the director of admissions at GTU could no longer provide me with the specific group of students with whom I wanted contact, i.e. Latinx students who were admitted, did not attend, and attended a community college instead. The specific information about student’s race/ethnicity and where they subsequently enrolled was now protected information under HB 4606. Though the registrar’s office could not provide specific race/ethnic data either, a student’s most recent previous institution attended is directory

information and can be released through a request to the registrar's office. Thus, it was easy to ask for a list of students who transferred to GTU from a community college. Also, using personal contacts to recruit participants did not ask for them to share FERPA protected data.

I had completed paperwork for my university's Institutional Review Board in October 2015, with the initial request to contact students admitted to GTU, but did not attend. Then, in March 2016 I submitted a change to the study indicating I would now recruit transfer students from GTU and other colleges. In the "Sample" section below, I describe how I did this in further detail. Though my recruiting methods changed, I still maintained a firm definition of undermatch as mentioned in previous literature, that is, students eligible to attend a four-year college but who enrolled at a less-selective college (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Radford & Howell, 2014; Smith et al., 2012).

### *Student Sample*

Due to some delays in acquiring participants for this study, I first recruited students through purposive, snowball, and criterion sampling. I contacted colleagues working in community colleges across North Texas, as well as colleagues at universities across the state of Texas, to ask if they knew students who would want to participate in this study. I sent these colleagues an email detailing the criteria by which students would be eligible to participate in the study:

1. Participants must be 18 or older and have graduated high school.
2. Participants should identify as a Latina/o<sup>3</sup>. A Latina/o is a person whose ancestry or familial descent is from a country of Latin origin.
3. Participants should have been admitted to a four-year institution but declined to attend.

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<sup>3</sup> Though I use Latinx throughout this study, in my recruitment materials, I did not use the term as it is a newer term and not everyone is familiar with its use.

4. Participants should have attended a community college after declining to enroll at a four-year institution to which they gained admission.

The email also contained a link to a survey where students could opt-in to participate in the study. I sought to first recruit student participants, then their parent or guardian for separate family interviews. Because this study is concerned with understanding the role of the family and the knowledge and practices of the home that support college-going and student success, it was of great importance to interview at least one parent/guardian. I describe the parent sample and method of recruitment in the “Parent Sample” section below.

Recruiting student participants through my contacts and network yielded eight participants, all of whom I interviewed for the study. Of those eight participants, only three parents, whose students provided information volunteered to interview. I wanted to obtain at least 5 parents to interview and inform the study. I continued to work with the Office of the Registrar at GTU to obtain directory information (name, email, and previous college attended) for students who transferred to GTU from a community college. I was provided a list of over 10,000 students. Since five of the initial eight participants attended colleges within the same community college district in North Texas, Metropolitan Community College District (MCCD), I narrowed the pool to MCCD students for additional participants. I did this so that 1) the list of over 10,000 students would be more manageable and 2) it narrowed down the location within which I would have to travel to interview students and their parents.

Of the list of 10,000 students I received, about 2300 transferred to GTU from MCCD. I emailed the recruitment letter (Appendix A) with a survey link to those 2,300 students with questions designed to ensure students met the criteria listed above (Appendix B). I received 67 responses to that survey, along with email responses about the nature of the research study. From

the 67 survey responses, 38 identified as Latinx, and only 22 of those Latinx students indicated they had applied and were admitted, right after graduating high school, to a four-year college but attended a community college. I obtained student phone numbers through the survey (because GTU does not include phone number as part of directory information) to call and text message all 22 students to confirm their interest in participating and to schedule a time for an interview. Only seven students responded to confirm their interest to interview. I scheduled and completed interviews with those seven of the 22 survey respondents.

I interviewed a total of 15 students: eight recruited through personal contacts throughout Texas and seven from the list provided by the registrar's office. After reviewing their interviews, two students were removed from the final analysis as I determined they did not undermatch. After reviewing one student's interview transcript and interviewing his mother, it was confirmed that the student did attend GTU after high school; he left GTU to attend a community college to improve his GPA. The other student was not clear about what universities he had been admitted. After reviewing his transcript and talking with him further, he did not complete the application to any university. Because of the issues with these two participants, I did not include their information in the student findings. Therefore, a total of 13 students were included in the findings. All student participants received \$25.00 compensation for their participation, including the two who were not included in the study.

### *Parent Sample*

Because I was interested in understanding the parent/family context within which students made their college choices, especially to identify the funds of knowledge and forms of support and encouragement within the home, I wanted to contact and interview parents after interviewing the student. Multiple case studies use more than one source for data collection on a

case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Soy, 1997; Stake, 2006) and the parent interviews serve as an additional source of data on the students. After each student interview, I asked for the student's permission to contact someone whom they identified as part of their household as a parent or guardian.

All but three students I interviewed provided a parent contact, including name and phone number. Eleven students provided only their mother's name and phone number, and one student provided her father's information. I contacted and scheduled interviews with parents of seven students: six mothers and two fathers (the mother and father of one student completed an interview together). Each parent was interviewed twice and compensated \$10.00 per interview completed. Since one mother only completed the first interview, and the other was the mom of one of the young men who were not undermatched, the findings only include the analysis for the 10 completed interviews of four of the mothers and the two fathers (the mother and father of one student participant, identified in table D.2, completed both interviews together).

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Most of the student participants in this study were interviewed on campus at GTU. If GTU was not the location of the interview, students were given the option of meeting in their home or at a local bakery or coffee shop. Because four of the students were not GTU students at the time of interview and one lived in San Antonio, choosing a location familiar to them was intentional. Parents were also given the option to interview in their home or at another location of their choice, like a coffee shop or local library. I wanted to make the students and parents as comfortable as possible during their meeting with me. The natural surroundings of the participant can contribute to understanding of and help develop the context in which participants exist (Creswell, 2014). I took field notes and wrote post-interview memos that gave me a better



understanding of the participants and their surroundings and to enrich the context of the study (Gonzalez, 2001).

### *Demographic Questionnaires*

Before each interview, I provided student participants a questionnaire to gather demographics such as age, gender, and educational expectations (Appendix H3). A similar demographic questionnaire was also given to each parent to complete (Appendix H5). These questionnaires helped in organizing information and structuring a profile for each participant.

### *Interviews*

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each student participant. I developed the interview protocols for this study based on similar dissertation research relating to the topics of college access and choice, academic undermatch, and funds of knowledge (Kiyama, 2008; Lowry, 2014; Perez, 2007). Appendix H4 lists the questions. To gain a better understanding of the funds of knowledge within the home, I conducted two interviews with the identified parents of the student. The first interview provided a short history/introduction to the family and family values. The second interview focused more on the educational ideas and ideologies held in the home. Tables D.1 and D.2 outline who and how many persons were interviewed for this study. The names of all participants, all colleges mentioned in Table D.1, and colleges discussed in the findings, have been replaced with pseudonyms. Except as noted, all interviews were conducted in English.

The first interview with the parent was similar to the oral history interviews found in many of the studies using funds of knowledge (Appendix H6; Gonzalez et al, 1995; Kiyama, 2008; 2010; Moll et al., 1992). Once I completed the oral history interviews with the parent, I scheduled an additional time to meet for another interview. I told them that this additional

interview would be no longer than one hour and could be done at their convenience. The second interview was semi-structured and aimed at better understanding the perceptions and role of the family on the student's college access and choice (Appendix H7).

*Table D.1. Student Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Family Income</b>	<b>Comm. College Attended</b>	<b>University Admission Gained</b>
Linda* <sup>1</sup>	19	Female	\$60-99K	Urban Centre College	Pioneers of Texas University and Cooper State University
Isabel	20	Female	\$0-29K	Bear Brook College	Golden Triangle University and Clark Christian University
Ernesto <sup>1</sup>	20	Male	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University; Golden Triangle University; and Plinth State University
Miranda*	21	Female	\$30-59K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University at Metro City; Sam Rayburn State University; and Urban Baptist University
Amalia <sup>2</sup>	22	Female	\$30-59K	Wakeford College	Mustang State University
Aaron <sup>^2</sup>	22	Male	\$100K+	Maple Flower College	Cooper State University; Terrace Baptist University; Arkadelphia State University; Murchison University; McKinney College; Barcus University
Cael*	22	Male	\$0-29K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University; Ralph W. Steen State University; Sam Rayburn State University; and Cooper State University
Josefina*	22	Female	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University and Golden Triangle University
Monica <sup>2</sup>	23	Female	\$30-59K	Fountain Lake College	Golden Triangle University and Ralph W. Steen State University
Janet* <sup>2</sup>	23	Female	\$30-59K	Eaglefoot College	Golden Triangle University; Ralph W. Steen State University; and Erath State University
Abraham*	24	Male	\$0-29K	Rockview College	Cooper State University
Risa+ <sup>2</sup>	26	Female	\$0-29K	Hill Country Junior College	Pioneers of Texas University; Roadrunner State University; and Clark Christian University
Ana+ <sup>2</sup>	32	Female	\$0-29K	Palomino Community College	San Ygnacio International University; Hays State University; Divine Providence University; and Golden Triangle University

+Student did not attend a HS in North Texas; \*Student attended a magnet HS in North Texas; ^Student attended a private, catholic, college prep HS; <sup>1</sup>Student was still attending community college at time of interview; <sup>2</sup>Student has graduated and earned both Associate's & Bachelor's degree.

Table D.2. Parent Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Student with whom related to</b>	<b>Relationship to student</b>	<b>Educational expectations for student</b>
Raquel <sup>@</sup>	44	Abraham	Mother	Complete a doctoral degree.
Jaime <sup>@</sup>	46	Janet	Father	Complete a master's or professional degree.
Anita <sup>@</sup>	52	Isabel	Mother	Complete a master's or professional degree.
Martha <sup>@</sup>	43	Josefina	Mother	Complete a master's or professional degree.
Renee & Steven	47 & 48	Aaron	Mother & Father	Father: Complete a bachelor's degree Mother: Complete a master's or professional degree.

<sup>@</sup>Preferred language to interview/communicate is Spanish (Read/Write/Speak)

As I reviewed the transcripts from the 2014 pilot study, I became aware of how my interviewing techniques and rapport-building needed improvement. I needed to humanize myself with students and not come across as cold or indifferent to their stories and experiences. Before the student and parent interviews, I spent some time talking with participants about who I was. I felt that students and parents were more comfortable answering questions in the interview. After interviews, I talked to them about why this research is important to me and how their experiences are important to document. This was important for students, as some shared that I was the only Latinx person they knew pursuing a doctorate and many were interested in pursuing a graduate degree.

*Issues in interviewing.* I intended to conduct all interviews for students and parents in English for personal ease and efficiency in transcription and data analysis. Spanish is my second language; therefore, becoming fully engaged in a Spanish language conversation takes more time. I feel more comfortable speaking English, especially in interviews where rapport-building is necessary. While all students were interviewed in English, only three of the 15 students I

interviewed had parents who could interview in English; of the 13 included in the study, only two had parents who would be able to interview in English.

My goal was to complete at least five parent interviews, but only one of every five student interviews I conducted led to encountering an English language-dominant parent. Based on that figure, I would have had to interview at least 25 students to reach the five intended parents. Given the \$25.00 cash incentive for student participants, along with the time needed to find 10 additional students to interview, I felt it better both financially and in the interest of time to interview the Spanish language-dominant parents already identified by the other 11 students.

Four of the Spanish-speaking parents agreed to be interviewed. I hired a graduate student, with whom I had worked in other capacities to conduct qualitative interviews in Spanish, to accompany me to the Spanish-speaking interviews with the parents who agreed to participate. I was present at those interviews but was not the primary interviewer. I wanted to listen deeply to the conversation and stories that the parent participants shared. If I asked questions, it was a follow-up, to clarify what was previously said, or to ask for the parent to go deeper on a topic they were talking about during the interview.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative research is an iterative process whereby inductive reasoning allows the researcher to construct and interpret meaning from the data (Krathwol, 2009). To start this process, all interviews were tape recorded and the first two student interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. As I began interviewing students and their parents more frequently, I decided to use transcription services to complete the remaining interviews. I used one company to do English transcriptions, because the turn-around was 24-72 hours and cost \$1 per minute of conversation. I used a different company to do the Spanish-to-Spanish transcriptions, which

provided the fastest turn-around (1-2 weeks), and the lowest cost of \$2.75 per minute of conversation.

I double-checked all transcriptions against the recorded interview to ensure accuracy. As mentioned earlier, I recorded field notes during all interviews to note the features of the interview and conversation that were not captured in the digital recording. After each interview, I wrote a memo to capture my own thoughts about that interview and attempted to understand, or make sense of, the narrative provided. After re-listening to each interview, I continued to write additional memos that documented new insights gained from interviews.

### *Analytic Techniques*

To analyze my data, I began by understanding the stories within each individual case. I incorporated techniques from both narrative analysis, specifically noting how participants reconstructed their narratives (Williams, 1984) and the themes that surfaced in the content of the participants' stories (Bamberg, 2012). According to Bold (2012), "Narratives necessarily tell the events of human lives, reflect human interest and support our sense-making process," (p. 16-17). I felt it was important to capture the narrative of the student participants, so at the start of the student findings I begin by providing each student's story, maintaining the particularity of each case.

As I noticed similar issues emerging across student narratives that I felt were important to identify and discuss in the findings, I then conducted a cross-case analysis to identify common themes across each case that was first examined individually. Stake (2006) indicates that the cross-case analysis is focused on applying the situational experiences within each case to the research questions. In the student findings, each main theme was created in relation to the research question, with related sub-themes following. To code and create themes across each

case, I used a constant comparative analysis of each interview (Glaser & Straus, 1967). I went back to the transcripts and began anew, open coding the student, then parent, data. I then recorded memos to make comparisons across the initial codes I created in my analysis to document what was being revealed to me through the data (Charmaz, 2006). Afterwards, I started axial coding to identify the relationships around the codes I created through open coding and from my recorded memos.

As I continued to examine each case, and the family data that I collected for five of the student cases, I became intrigued by the data of the families provided. Baxter & Jack (2008) suggest that embedded subunits within a case provide the researcher with the ability to explore the case more deeply. Each family is part of the corresponding student case, but in exploring and reporting the data for the families it became clear this data is embedded subunit data for the corresponding case. Each family, or embedded subunit, is reported similarly to the students' findings, with the family narrative first, then the findings from the cross-case analysis. I also present the findings of the parents separately to maintain the distinctiveness in the stories told and to honor the parents' stories separate of the students' stories.

I used the theoretical frameworks of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and funds of knowledge to further aggregate the axial codes into larger themes identified across the student data, then across the parent data. Then, I used community cultural wealth as a lens to analyze the student data and create themes from the axial codes. For the parent data, I used funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth as lenses to create the themes.

To store, manage, organize, and analyze data, I purchased qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti. I used this software to code student and parent interviews, incorporate my memos and field notes, and define the terms used for codes and themes.

### *Member Checks*

I provided the participants an opportunity to review the preliminary findings for this study. I held a focus group session for student participants. I incentivized attending the session by providing snacks and water. Seven students confirmed their attendance, but only three attended. I provided the student participants with their transcript and a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the findings. Student participants were also able to review a copy of the student findings to provide feedback. Parent participants were contacted individually to meet and discuss the findings of the study. I invited the student participant to join their parent in this meeting. Parents were also given a copy of their transcripts in Spanish and I brought a copy of the parent findings, in English, so I could discuss the information I had written up with parents and students, in Spanish. I wanted to be sure that I had correctly interpreted the stories they shared with me. I adjusted my analyses and interpretations based on their feedback.

### *Reflexivity and Reciprocity*

A key part of qualitative research is for the researcher to understand his/her own positionality within the context of the study (Kleinsasser, 2001). Additionally, through writing up the study, the researcher can begin to learn and unlearn the theories and preconceived ideas held prior to or during data collection (Kleinsasser, 2001). Prior to collecting data, I engaged in self-examination of my positionality and preconceived ideas. From this, I have come to understand two things. First, my interest in researching the Latinx community and access to higher education by this group stems from my own personal journey from my home to and through college. Second, my positionality as an insider to the Latinx community varies based on the people/person with whom I am interacting.

### *Personal Reflexivity*

My mother, Lucy, has always been my champion. When I wanted to give up on school, she refused to let me quit. The messages I received from her, even when I was a little girl, were always “go to school,” “be somebody,” “go to college.” Lucy was relentless in telling both my sister and me how important she felt education would be as our pathway out of poverty. I remember moving about every three years as she struggled to remain employed, since she had only obtained her high school diploma. Her inability to keep us in a stable location was because of her need to seek employment that would maintain support for her daughters.

Due to all these relocations, I attended eight different schools (K-12) across two different states. My senior year of high school was spent in Texas, away from my close friends and family in New York, and I was struggling to renegotiate my academic goals in my new home. She always expressed her desire for both my sister and me to excel in our studies and attend college. So, while I fought with her about schooling choices, there was never any doubt I would go to college. My sister and I aspired to achieve more in life because of those messages, not to mention we feared the alternatives – both poverty and our mother’s disapproval.

I also had more college knowledge in my home because of the experiences of my sister and extended family members. My sister was the first to go to college, and I followed her to the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). Her experiences helped to shape my college choices, mostly because I learned what not to do. I chose to attend UTSA to be nearer to her and her newborn daughter. I remember choosing to move and wanting to help shape my niece’s memories of family and my presence in her life as her *tia*.

Though I chose to attend UTSA, I cannot forget that my maternal grandfather’s family was also vital in developing my ideas about college. My *tío* George is my grandfather’s brother.



Many years before I was born, George earned his Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and had a 35-year-long career at Bronx Community College, retiring as the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs. I remember talking frequently with him about college when I was in high school in New York. While we disagreed about what I should study, he constantly affirmed my college aspirations and reinforced not only the idea that I should go to college but that I should aspire to have a career, not a job.

My *prima* Nellie is my grandfather's niece and completed her Masters of Social Work (MSW) when I was a little girl. She was, and is currently, a social worker for the state of New York. I also applied to the College of New Rochelle, in New York, where Nellie had completed her bachelor's degree. I applied because I remembered our conversations about college. She would always say that college was the best time of her life, a period of self-discovery. From what I remember, she was always traveling the world in her free time and lived her life on her own terms. I also remember that Nellie was one of the few women in my family who was unmarried and without children until she was past the age of 35. She dedicated her career to helping children in abusive homes and maintains a strong passion to explore the world, which she continues with her teenage daughter.

I know my mom made sure that I knew these things about my relatives, the outliers. She purposely put these role models in front of me to maintain my aspirations. I know it was essential for me to see my *tío* and *prima* modeling the success I aspired to, especially because of my mother's high aspirations for me. Though I had no doubt I was going to college, I did not know how to get there. I also did not know that college access and choice was less about me and more about the structural arrangements and opportunities that were available to me. I say this because I had at least three family members who had attended college before me and who I could ask for

assistance. However, those three were also first-generation students, two of whom attended college more than 25 years before me.

In her analysis of funds of knowledge in Mexican-American families in a parent outreach program, Kiyama (2010) acknowledged the aspirational knowledge that many families held for their children's educational attainment but also indicated that more concrete knowledge on how to access and navigate postsecondary institutions is needed. Through my own experience, I feel this is true. Therefore, I have dedicated my career to disseminating knowledge and information to communities of color about the importance of college choice. I have been an enrollment officer, admissions counselor, academic advisor, and student affairs coordinator. Each experience has provided me the opportunity to work directly with students and their families to help them access information about college.

#### *Insider/Outsider Reflection*

As I conducted this study, I realized that I am, in some ways, an outsider to the Latinx community, a group with whom I heavily identify. My education and training coupled with my experiences places me outside much of the community. In fact, completing my doctorate will put me not only in the small community of scholars that constitutes about 3% of the U.S. (NCES, 2014) but also in the less than 1% of the Latinx community with an advanced education and terminal degree (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). I am an insider to the experience of being a Latinx, first-generation college student, but an outsider to those Latinxs living the narratives I document in this dissertation.

I am an outsider to the majority population of Latinxs residing in Texas. While all my collegiate education (and a good portion of my K-12 schooling) has been in Texas, I was born in New York, identify as Puerto Rican or *Boricua*, and when speaking Spanish, my dialect and

accent tend to be noticeable to those with whom I speak. This was something I always heard from friends and their parents, but when I worked for the Orientation and Transition Programs office at UNT as the only full-time, Latinx, Spanish-speaking staff member, many Spanish-speaking parents I spoke to were Mexican-born and often pointed this out to me.

I always found it interesting that parents immediately knew, once I began speaking with them, that I am not from Texas or *Mexicana*. Not all Latinxs in Texas are Mexican, but there is a larger population in the state who identify as Mexican or Mexican-American. Parents would often ask, *Eres puertorriqueña? Porque su acento y manera de hablar son muy diferentes* (Are you Puerto Rican? Because your accent and manner of speaking are very different). I always found this interesting since Spanish is not my first language. I learned Spanish formally at school and informally at home, watching Spanish-language soap operas with my maternal grandmother.

My education and professional career has also been only at four-year colleges and universities. I did not attend a community college and have only recently been employed at a community college. My experience with community colleges and the students has been at the periphery, as an outsider looking in. As an undergraduate, I knew students who left my institution to go to one of the local community colleges and bring up their GPA when they were dismissed from UTSA. As a university employee in San Antonio, I academically advised students at the community colleges, who were interested in transferring to one of the institutions I worked for, to complete their bachelor's degree. As a higher education master's student, I learned more about the role and function of the community college.

As a doctoral student, I embarked on an educational path that allowed me to deepen my understanding of the mission, goals, personnel, and students at the community college. I was part of a NASPA national board to advance the image of student affairs at the community college.

These experiences continued to show me how much of an outsider I am. My most intimate experiences with the community college was in assisting my partner in completing his bachelor's degree by taking courses at the community college. I am an outsider, but I have seen how students can struggle to navigate the pathway to the baccalaureate even when they are doing everything they think is necessary at the community college.

As mostly an outsider to the communities of interest for this study, I was not prepared for the emotional response I would have in empathizing with students and their families. At first, I thought I was being optimistic, that their stories would not affect me because I had lived a similar journey of not knowing and just going to college. Yet, as I talked with other colleagues who are also Latinx and were the first in their families to go to college, they kept reminding me that, when we tell our stories to others, emotions and hidden pain often emerges. As I typed out my mother's story, memories flooded my consciousness, and I was reminded of the struggle in those years. Likewise, I was just as unprepared to be so strongly affected by the stories of the students and their parents. Gonzalez (2001) says, as a Chicano academic he often straddles two worlds. That is what I felt, that I was in one world as an academic recording interviews and trying to interpret their meaning, while also in the other identifying with their struggles and empathizing with their situations. I often found myself needing to journal the experience after student interviews to regain personal balance and continue with my day's work.

### *Reciprocity*

One of the last questions in the student interview protocol specifically asked about information that students still need to be successful. This was a purposeful question, not only for identifying areas where students may still need assistance even after being enrolled in college, but to also use my knowledge to help them. After the formal interviews were completed, I

continued to talk with the students, answering outstanding questions they had about college, including financial aid, advising, and transfer. I am still in touch with several students, as they have reached out through text message with additional questions about financial aid, reverse transfer, and advising. In my pilot study, I had a few conversations with the participants after the interviews about applying for financial aid, scholarships, and additional aid within their college. I also provided them with detailed information on how to transfer to GTU as they all mentioned considering transfer there to complete their bachelor's degree.

A lot of the students and parents in the study also spoke about being the person their friends or family go to for help with college. I added that question to understand the extent of their community and social networks. I know that these students and their families still need more information, but any information I can give to them can hopefully enable them to become advocates or protective agents (Ceja, 2006) who support their family and peers in accessing and attaining resources to attend and succeed in college.

#### Delimitations

The delimitations I set for this study are: 1) location; 2) student age (at time of initial entry to college); and 3) admission to a university, then enrollment at a community college as a determinant of undermatch. Regarding location, I was primarily concerned with interviewing students who attended college in North Texas. Eleven of the students I interviewed are from North Texas, and one student attended a community college in South Texas, but transferred to a university in North Texas. I traveled to San Antonio to interview one student who attended a community college in South Texas.

I only interviewed students who were traditional-aged students when they first enrolled at the community college. At Metropolitan Community College District, the population of

traditional-aged students only accounts for about 20% of their enrolled student body. While this varies from college to college in that community college district, traditionally-aged students are not representative as a sample for community colleges.

Also, like two of the three students in my pilot study, there may be students who were eligible to attend a four-year institution, but never applied to attend any university after high school. These students would also be considered undermatched (Smith et al., 2012). However, this study adhered to a strict definition of academic undermatch to avoid confusion as to the eligibility of students who gained admission to a four-year institution.

### Limitations

The use of funds of knowledge as a framework in this study is limited to examining the knowledge and values within the home only and does not include information about the reciprocity between families, or the interconnectedness between households. This does not mean these knowledges do not exist. All the parents who were born outside the U.S. spoke of having continued close communication and contact with their families who remained outside the U.S.

All the parents maintained that their nuclear family was of primary importance, often citing how infrequently they connected with extended and other non-family peers. Second, it may also be due to a loss of meaning in translation. The parent interview questions were created with an English-language dominant family in mind. The questions were predicated on the ability of the family to understand common phrases and terminology in English.

As mentioned earlier, I hired a bilingual graduate student, who was familiar with qualitative interviewing techniques to complete the four Spanish language interviews. There is something about losing meaning in translation; so much so, that though the question was posed in what I felt was correct in language, the phrasing may have implied something different,

especially in context to the conversation that was being held prior to the question. I felt I did my best to interject as needed, to get to the substance of what I felt may have not been addressed. This is also a limitation of the study: conducting an interview, created in English with English-dominant speakers in mind, with a bilingual translator.

APPENDIX E  
UNABRIDGED STUDENT FINDINGS



## Introduction

In the student findings, I present the student narratives. Then, I answer research questions one, two, and four. Research question one is “Navigating the Path to College,” question 2 is the “The Role of the Family and College Enrollment,” and question four is “Experiences at the Community College.” To analyze their transcripts, I used community cultural wealth as a lens to identify the capital within the home and family that existed. This was done in relation to a subheading that emerged from research question one, “Why the Community College?” and research question two. All forms of capital in community cultural wealth can and do overlap. Although community cultural wealth identifies six forms of capital, only aspirational, familial, social, and navigational capital are central to addressing the specific research questions discussed earlier.

### Choosing the Community College: Recounting Their Stories

The narratives of each student are presented below. Each student’s story is unique and it is important to give a voice to each student’s experience. There were, however, similarities across the student experience that are further developed after the narratives.

#### *Abraham*

Abraham was born in Mexico and the first in his family to attend college. Abraham was four years old when his family immigrated to the U.S. First, they moved to California, then to Rhode Island six months later. He lived in Rhode Island for two and a half years before moving with his family to North Texas in 1998, when he was eight years old. Abraham is the eldest of four siblings, the youngest of whom was only four at the time of our interview. A few of his older cousins, with whom Abraham is not close, went to college before him but dropped out.

Abraham started college in Fall 2009 and is still attending Golden Triangle University (GTU). He has been continuously enrolled and is in excess hours. As I mentioned in the introduction, excess hours is when a student exceeds the number of semester credit hours required, by at least 30 semester credit hours (SCH), for completion of the degree program in which the student is enrolled. The student is then charged tuition at a rate not to exceed out-of-state tuition and fees. At the time of our interview, Abraham had about 36 SCH left to complete his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Abraham was not in the top 10% of his class and said he did not take dual credit or Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school, but he did identify with having above average achievement in high school ("A"/"B" honor roll). He applied to three colleges: 1) Kendall Polytechnic Institute, a highly selective, private, STEM-focused college on the east coast; 2) Cooper State University, a large, public, somewhat selective, four-year HSI (it was not designated as such when he applied) in North Texas; and 3) Rockview College, an open access college, in the Metropolitan Community College District (MCCD). Abraham was denied admission to Kendall Polytechnic, something his mother said was heartbreaking for her to see. Abraham was admitted to Cooper State, but decided to attend Rockview College instead.

Abraham: I started talking to my advisor at the time. [...] From high school, yeah. I guess she picked up that I didn't know too much about it [applying to college]. We started looking at Cooper State, which I ended up applying to and actually got accepted. Aside from that school, I didn't really know much other schools.

Interviewer: Then why did you choose to go to Rockview?

Abraham: I saw the financial need. I was also concerned when I saw the prices of the university. [...] I think that seeing those numbers turned me off, away from it, knowing that my parents couldn't help me at the time.

Abraham is the only student about whom I feel uncertain whether he will complete the bachelor's degree. His mother and his girlfriend are scared that perhaps he's lost the *ganas*, or drive, to complete his degree. Abraham started college at Rockview College in Fall 2009 and transferred to GTU in Fall 2011. He has not yet completed his bachelor's degree. At the time of our interview, he had about 12 classes left to complete his degree in electrical engineering, but due to the excess charges for tuition and fees can only afford to take two classes a semester. He also works more than part-time to cover costs.

### *Amalia*

Amalia is the second youngest of eight children. Her parents were born in Mexico and worked in factories both in the U.S. and in Mexico. She spoke with great sincerity about her father losing his job the summer before she was going to start college at Mustang State University, one-hour north of her home. This heavily impacted her decision to start at the community college first.

She also talked about her resistance to schooling. She described being disengaged with her education in high school. Amalia felt discriminated against because she spoke Spanish as her first language. She spoke mostly about her English teachers and her interactions with them through high school.

Amalia: I think it's just been specifically my English teachers. There have been English teachers who I've been able to work well with, but there's also been teachers that I've really struggled with. I'm not even sure why or how. I just felt like there was a lot of tension between us. I feel like I have a really outgoing personality, and some teachers can work with that by putting me to engage and work with the material that I have, but if it's way too structured, and there's not a lot of space for me to work with, then we just clash. I had to get removed, removed in the sense that I would have to go to ISS [in-school suspension], or I'd just have to go sit out in the hall, or I'd have to go to the office, or I'd just stay in the room, but I just wouldn't participate. That's how they would be okay with it.

Interviewer: You said you had to go ISS, in-school suspension? Was it more because of the conflict with your teachers?

Amalia: I guess I would be disrespectful to them, or I felt like I was being disrespected, so I would retaliate and try to get out of class because I didn't feel like I was doing much in there anyway. I might as well just sit in the hall and talk to people walking by.

Interviewer: Is that because you felt your learning styles weren't really matching their teaching?

Amalia: I feel like that might have been some of it, but I also think that they were at times just racist too.

Something I mentioned in the literature review is how students of color often exist within racialized contexts in their schools (Reddick et al., 2011). Amalia was very much aware of the racialized context in which she existed in her school. She spoke of feeling her teachers were racist towards her and that she felt disrespected by them. These feelings, coupled with her issues with English language acquisition, are likely linked to her subsequent disengagement from school.

Though she was born and raised in the U.S., Amalia's first language was Spanish, not English. She spoke about her feelings with the English language and English classes. She even admitted that she was at a second-grade reading level in her sophomore year of high school.

English. It's been my, I guess, nemesis. Math and science, I would say that I was pretty good in. Those things made a lot of sense to me, but when it came to English, grammar, I had an accent, so those things would mix. Then I would feel very frustrated. I wasn't in ESL to I guess learn to speak English, but I was in I don't even know, it's called the read/write. I was at a second-grade level when I was a sophomore in high school. I had to read, learn everything.

Amalia admitted that because of her disengagement from and resistance to schooling, she only considered attending college because of her involvement with the Talent Search program at her high school. The Talent Search staff within her high school set high educational attainment goals for Amalia. This person also created a sense of trust among her students.

[M]y counselor in talent search, not only did she provide college information for us, but she also gave out ... She went to *quinceñeras*, and she was part of our social lives. She was just really like a network of college resources, of emotional and social support. She embodied a lot of things because she genuinely cared about us going to college. I think that a lot of the times there was just a lot of guilt on me, why I have to go to school. I have to go to school for my parents, for my siblings, but also for this white lady who is really badass who thinks I can do something.

### *Linda*

Linda is the youngest of three and the only daughter. Both her brothers are much older, with the brother closest in age to her being more than six years older. Her brothers graduated from the same high school in North Texas as Linda and they both started at a community college after high school. Unfortunately, both her brothers dropped out of college within a year of starting. Linda spoke of the pressure to perform, but also to complete. Linda attended a magnet high school in North Texas and graduated in the top of her class (not top 10%). Linda was admitted to Pioneers of Texas University (PTU) and Cooper State University. She was more interested in attending PTU, but enrolled at Urban Centre College (UCC) in the fall following high school graduation. It was convenient, inexpensive, and familiar to her since she completed dual credit courses in high school through UCC. She did not feel, however, that the community college was the best place for her to start. Because of her academic achievement in high school, coupled with the completion of dual credit courses, she felt over prepared for attending UCC.

I guess for somebody coming out of a regular high school it's a little bit of a jump. Since it was a magnet school ... and I took AP courses and I took dual credit, especially; so, I got a taste of community college. It's just like, it's exactly what I was doing in high school.

Linda began to cry during our interview because she was upset. While she was not the only student who cried, or became visibly emotional during the interview, she was the most upset. She was angered and she was scared. She was scared by the fact that her brothers started at

the community college and failed to persist. Both have re-enrolled in associate degree programs, one for business and the other for nursing, but for her their dropout and extended time to continue weighs heavily on her. She was afraid that by going to the community college first, she too would endure the same fate.

*Ana*

Ana was hesitant to follow her parents' wishes and stay in South Texas to attend the community college. Ana is one of four children, an only daughter with three brothers, two older and one younger. Both of her parents and her two eldest brothers were born in Mexico. Her father came to the U.S. as a migrant worker, traveling between New Mexico and California for work. Her father sent all the money he earned back to Ana's mother so that she could pay bills and save money for them to buy a house in the U.S. The home her parents still live in, and the one Ana and her brothers grew up in, is the house her parents purchased with those savings.

Ana describes where she grew up as a barrio. This area she says is "...low-income class, there is a high violence rate, a lot of teen pregnancies at the school that I attended and there was a lot of drugs, gangs; it wasn't a safe community at all." Despite her environment, Ana credits her mother in creating the educational aspirations for her and her brothers saying, "[The] only reason we ended up going to college is my mom pushed us really hard to go to school."

In recounting her story, about her college choices and why she made the choice to attend the community college, Ana, now an adult, rationalized her choices. She tempered her thoughts and emotions with what she remembered she wanted at the time. She talked about how her parents wanted her to stay at home and attend the local community college. Her parents felt attending the community college was a better option, because of finances.

I had a lot of grants and scholarships to start at Palomino Community College (PCC) ... and then my mom and dad sat me down. I won't forget this conversation, "You are not leaving this house, you're going to go there for two years..."

"One we can't afford it, for you to go to a four-year university, because that was expensive. So, a community college is cheaper and you're going to stay here for two years," like they were already telling me what I was going to do. "When you're done you're going to go to San Ygnacio and you're going to get financial aid to help you out because we can't afford to do any of that."

When we spoke, Ana remembers how she felt at the time, saying she refused to accept this as an option. She was determined to go to a four-year college since she was admitted to four public universities, Roadrunner State University, Golden Triangle University, Divine Providence University, and Hays State University. Ana was determined to go to Hays State, but as I describe later, she decided to follow her parents' wishes and enrolled at PCC. She later transferred to Hays State after attending PCC.

### *Ernesto*

Ernesto is the second child of eight. He is also the eldest male son. He was born in Mexico and immigrated to the U.S., specifically Austin, TX, when he was one-year-old. His family was deported seven and a half years later, while he was in elementary school, and then returned to Austin several months later. When he was 15 years old, his family moved to the southern region of North Texas and he transferred high schools.

Even though Ernesto graduated in the top 10% of his high school class, he says that he never took school seriously. During our interview, he reported having been held back in the second grade because of his inability to speak English fluently.

Ernesto: In elementary school I repeated second grade. I had problems talking. I couldn't pronounce my "R's" correctly.

Interviewer: In English?

Ernesto: I believe in English and Spanish. It was holding me back. I don't think I really cared about school until college. In high school, I didn't really care about high school, I mean about my education or my grades.

Ernesto admits that the classes that he cared about were math and science. Because of his love of those two subjects, he completed AP courses in physics and calculus. He passed the physics AP tests for college-level credit.

Aside from his self-reported disengagement from school, Ernesto spoke about his interest in going to college. His AP physics teacher helped him and a friend reconsider their ability to pursue higher education. His teacher's expectations and confidence in his abilities helped Ernesto to get serious about applying to colleges to pursue engineering as a major, "[I]t was my physics teacher. He kept pushing me to go to college. He kept asking me what college would I go to and that I should become an engineer since I'm really gifted in physics".

After graduating high school, Ernesto immediately enrolled at Rockview College in the summer and decided to stay for the fall, even though he had gained admission to Golden Triangle University (GTU), Cooper State University and Plinth State University. Ernesto is undocumented and spoke of remaining at the community college to save on costs. He also spoke about his friend Christopher who attended GTU right after high school, but left to attend Rockview in his second year because of his grades. Ernesto said that his friend's inability to stay at GTU affirmed his choice of staying at Rockview for the first two years of college.

### *Monica*

Monica earned her bachelor's degree at Golden Triangle University (GTU) in December 2015. She transferred to GTU from Fountain Lake College in Fall 2013. As a senior in high school, Monica applied and was admitted to GTU and Ralph W. Steen State University, another



public, four-year college southeast of North Texas. Monica decided to live at home and attend Fountain Lake College.

Monica was not top in her class, and described herself as an A or A/B student, grade-wise. She also spoke about not being encouraged to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school. Being placed into higher-track curricula prepares students for college (Oakes, 2005) and AP courses are higher-track courses that prepare students for college (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), but disproportionately enroll more White, Asian, middle- and upper-SES students (Oakes et al., 2002).

I didn't take any pre-AP, out of elementary school I didn't take any pre-AP because my teacher's never were, like, they told people they should take it and I had A's or A/B's but they never were like, "Oh, you should take it," so I took it to mean that I shouldn't take it

Hearing her say this was disheartening. Teachers spend so much time, in any given day, with students (Jarsky, McDonough & Nuñez, 2009) and their perceptions of student abilities can influence student's perceived self-efficacy (Oakes, 2005).

Monica also used comedy to explain some of the choices she made regarding college enrollment. In one of her more humorous responses during our interview, Monica simply stated, "I mean, I wasn't itching to get out of the house." We laughed, but she then explained that unlike her peers, she was okay staying home and attending Fountain Lake to save money. She was concerned about how much college would cost, though she said her parents were ready to help her and support whatever decision she made. While she is the first in her family to attend college, and the eldest of two children, Monica is the one of two students in the study whose parents were born in the U.S.

### *Risa*

Risa is from Southwest Texas, and now lives in the North Texas community. Risa is Abraham's girlfriend and is affiliated with the same Latinx Greek-Letter sorority that I belong to. When I reached out to my contacts, Risa first provided Abraham's contact information. After talking with her about the study, she volunteered to participate since she met the student participant criteria. I have known Risa for almost five years, but this interview provided the opportunity to get to know her beyond our sorority affiliation. She shared with me how she made her college choices when she was deciding on where to enroll after high school.

Risa has two sisters, one older and one younger, and transferred from Hill Country Junior College (HCJC) to attend a Pioneers of Texas University (PTU) in North Texas; both of her sisters attended PTU right after high school. Risa and her sisters were born in the U.S., but both her parents were born in Mexico and immigrated to Texas. Risa spoke of her parents' willingness to do anything for her and her sisters as all three sisters went through the challenges of attending PTU, which is more than six hours away from home.

Risa's mother was her champion, helping Risa to participate in a pre-college program to earn college credits the summer before fall enrollment.

This program is, they would get high school students that applied that were in financial need. Most of us were Hispanic students. You apply through the Workforce Commission people. My mom knew about it because my older sister went through it. I don't know if my sister found out about it and told my mom or whatever, but my mom was like, okay, we need to go here and find out like when to apply and do this.

Even though Risa doesn't remember how her mother knew about this program, she just remembers how strongly her mother encouraged her to do it. This program at HCJC was part of the reason Risa decided to stay at HCJC before transferring to a four-year college and moving to North Texas.

*Aaron*

Aaron's parents were financially prepared to take on the cost of attending a four-year college, yet he too was concerned about the expense to attend a four-year college. Aaron is one of two students in the study whose parents were born in the U.S. He was the first in his immediate family to earn a bachelor's degree, but both his parents attended a two-year college. Aaron's mother attended Eaglefoot College, but stopped out after a few classes, and his father has an associate's degree from a recently closed for-profit technical school.

Aaron also felt academically over prepared while attending the community college. Both he and his younger brother attended private Catholic schools from pre-Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in North Texas. The private Catholic high school in North Texas he attended identifies as a Catholic college preparatory school and boasts college enrollment for school alumni at variety of top tier colleges in the state of Texas and nationally (BLHS, 2016).

Interviewer: Were there expectations of you to go to college at your high school?

Aaron: Everybody was like- It wasn't even a question- like, why are you going to this school if you're not going to college? That was kind of...Everybody went to college.

Aaron was also a baseball player throughout middle and high school and then played college baseball with Maple Flower College, the community college he enrolled to college. Aaron admits that his love of playing baseball heavily influenced his decision to attend the community college. He applied and was admitted to Cooper State University (CSU), Arkadelphia State University in Arkansas, and four other private, religiously affiliated colleges. Only Terrace Baptist University (TBU), a private Christian college, offered him admission and a spot on their baseball team. His father, Steven, said that after visiting TBU Aaron was not impressed by the location and facilities and immediately ruled that college out of his choice set.

## *Cael*

Cael was the last male student I interviewed for this study. His was by far the most moving student interview. Perhaps it's because I am not used to seeing Latinx men become openly emotional and cry in front of women. I'm also a stranger asking to peek into his world for an hour or two. Nonetheless, talking about his parents, their aspirations and sacrifices for him and his siblings moved him to tears. Cael is the fourth of five children and youngest of four brothers.

Cael grew up in North Texas, on the southeastern part of one of the larger metropolises in the region. Cael is the first in his family to be born in the United States. His eldest three brother and his parents were born in Mexico. Cael's described his parents as being completely supportive of him and his siblings in pursuing their education.

The mentality I always had from home is my mom always told me to follow my dreams and pursue education, because she knew that would give me a better life. My dad, he's been working in construction for the last 25 years, and he's like, "Well, if you want my job, you don't need college, but I want you to do something different. I don't want you having the same job as me." It's always ... I've always had kind of that mentality, because my parents have always been like, "We don't want you to live this life. We want you to live a different life."

Cael applied and was admitted to four public universities in Texas, including Golden Triangle University (GTU), Ralph W. Steen State University (RWS), Sam Rayburn State University (SRSU), and Cooper State University (CSU). Cael ultimately decided to attend Eaglefoot College where he excelled in his studies. Cael was also one of three students who decided to take a year off from school, after completing the associate's degree at Eaglefoot. He used that time to find scholarships to pay for GTU, where he transferred to complete the bachelor's degree.

*Isabel*

Isabel was the only student in the study who did (does) not identify as Mexican or Mexican American. She is, in fact, a 21-year-old refugee from Colombia. Her mother moved her and her siblings to the U.S. after her father was killed.

Isabel: Well I was born in Colombia. We came here under a refugee program because our dad was in the military, he was killed in the guerrilla. I don't know if you know about that?

Interviewer: In Colombia?

Isabel: Yeah, in Colombia. They were going to kill us; so, we went into the program and now we're here.

Isabel moved to the U.S. at seven years of age, living primarily in a suburban community in North Texas. Isabel has an older half-sister from her mother's first marriage, who still lives in Colombia. Her older brother started at Bear Brook College but dropped out after a year to help take care of their mother, who is unemployed due to chronic health issues. Even though she was admitted to GTU and Clark Christian University, Isabel decided to enroll at Bear Brook as well and lived at home during her time at the college. She did not complete an associate's degree at Bear Brook before transferring to GTU. After her interview, however, Isabel sent me a text message for assistance on reverse transferring her credits from GTU to Bear Brook so she could complete the associate's degree.

GTU is more than a 45-minute commute by car from Isabel's home. She lives at home and commutes to GTU by train, and then bus, to take her classes since her mother uses the car. It is at least a two-hour commute, one way, from the train station nearest Isabel to GTU. In her interview, Isabel spoke about how this commute limits her ability to be more involved on campus. This, however, is only a minor inconvenience. Isabel is extremely close to her mother and siblings. The support she receives from home encourages her to continue her classes.

### *Janet*

Janet is the only daughter and eldest of four children. She is the first in her family to go to college, but had cousins her age out of state and in Mexico attending college at the same time as her. At the time of our interview, Janet was preparing to graduate in May. She was very excited, noting that she would be the first in her family to earn a bachelor's degree. Like some of her peers in this study, Janet moved around a bit. She was born in California, moved to Mexico, then came back to Arizona. At 15, during her sophomore year of high school, she moved to Texas.

Despite moving, she was able to get into AP classes in her senior year, noting that though she attended a high school affiliated with a magnet program she was unable to apply for or enroll in any of the magnet programs because she moved to the school in the middle of her sophomore year. Janet maintained that education was important to her and was disappointed that she did not feel challenged in her high school classes. "I guess I wanted it to be more challenging for me, like how it was in my old school [in Arizona] and it was, 'I don't even have to do my homework and I'll be fine.'"

Janet applied and was admitted to GTU, RWS, and Erath State University. She was concerned about paying for college, telling me that she even held a part-time job in high school to help pay for things that she felt her parents would not be able to afford.

I started working as soon as I was 16. As soon as I was able to work, I started working. My dad, he would have enough for rent and food and stuff, but it wasn't enough for my needs...that I needed stuff. My first phone was when I was 17. I had to work for my first phone. I think the first time I bought a laptop, stuff like that - that's needed for school, I had to get a job and get it on my own because my dad couldn't afford it. That's why I decided to get a job.

Janet quit her job after her senior year of high school because her dad wanted her to focus on college and not stress about balancing work and school needs. She decided to attend Eaglefoot College, one of the colleges within the Metropolitan Community College District

(MCCD), “because it was cheap,” and she received a tuition scholarship from MCCD. Janet, like Cael, took time off after earning her associate’s degree before transferring to GTU.

### *Miranda*

Like all the participants in this study, Miranda is a first-generation college student. She is the eldest sibling of two, and the first to attend college. Miranda was born in México, in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato. At the age of eight months, her parents immigrated with her to the U.S. so that Miranda’s grandparents, who were already living in the U.S., could help her parents provide a better life for her. Miranda told me at the start of our conversation that she is undocumented. In her own words about leaving Mexico, “I don't really remember. I've never gone back over there, so I've been here practically my whole life.”

Miranda considered herself a top performer in high school, completing honors, pre-Advanced Placement (AP), AP, and dual credit courses. In her home, she felt her parents held high aspirations for her education, and even higher expectations for her achievements, “[W]henver we had report cards come in, like, if my grades weren't A's and above there would be a huge discussion.” She was motivated to perform well because of those expectations, and the knowledge that her educational accomplishments would continue to help her and her family overcome obstacles. Miranda was admitted to Golden Triangle University at Metro City, Urban Baptist University, and Sam Rayburn State University. She decided after high school graduation to attend Eaglefoot College, which is close to home, to save on costs.

Miranda, like Janet and Cael, took time off after earning the associate’s degree at Eaglefoot College before transferring to GTU. Miranda took a year off to save money. Her concern about paying for college, especially as an undocumented student, was so great that after earning her associate’s degree she took a full-time job for a year to save money to pay for her

bachelor's degree. She saved over \$10,000 and transferred to GTU. The cost to attend college for Miranda and the other students in this study was a burden for which they felt they bore the responsibility because their families did, and still do, so much for them.

*Josefina*

Josefina is the eldest of three daughters and the first in her family to attend college. Though she never said in her interview she was undocumented, during our interview she spoke of completing the TASFA, which the Texas Application for State Financial Aid. To be eligible for funding from the state of Texas, to attend college, undocumented students must complete this form, which is almost identical to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and submit to the college they plan to attend. Her mother Martha confirmed during her interview that Josefina is undocumented.

Regardless of her immigration status, Josefina performed very well academically, throughout K-12. She attended a magnet high school in North Texas, completing various AP and dual credit courses before enrolling at Rockview College. Josefina was accepted to GTU and Cooper State University, but declined to enroll at either institution. Like her peers in this study, Josefina cited finances and limited financial aid as a primary concern and burden.

Josefina completed an associate's degree at Rockview and transferred to GTU. Unfortunately, Josefina still had a lot of lower-level courses that she needed to take for her Biology degree that she did not complete at Rockview.

Josefina: Then it's like, I didn't take Physics one or two, which, they're Core classes, the two Math classes that I need, well needed and what else...

Interviewer: Did you take Bio 1 or 2 though?

Josefina: I took Bio 1. I took Anatomy and Physiology, but that didn't count as Bio 2. Actually, it doesn't count as anything because I still need to take Animal Anesthesiology. That's another thing. I took Gen-Chem, like both Gen-



Chems. I took them here and then O-Chem, I'm taking here. Yeah, it's like a lot of things, which is like, that's bad because they're really expensive here. Over there, they're like six hundred bucks.

During her interview, Josefina expressed her frustration with having to take courses like General Chemistry at GTU. She wished that she would have known to take that and other freshman and sophomore science courses at Rockview, instead of the elective courses she completed toward the associate's degree. The courses were less expensive at Rockview, but Josefina seemed genuinely upset that she was unable to move forward in her major at GTU without these courses and would take an additional year to complete the bachelor's degree than what she had anticipated.

### Navigating the Path to College

The first research question asks, how do Latinx students describe their pathway to the community college? Students in this study described several ways they navigated the path to college. The major themes that address this question are: access to resources but limited information and last-minute decisions. I used the student narratives, comparing across analyses and saw these two issues as common themes that arose from the codes. I was also interested in a deeper understand of why the student choose to attend the community college. Using community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a lens in analyzing the data, the following themes arose: making strategic choices and degrees of familiarity. Below is a discussion of the themes.

#### *Access to Resources but Limited Information*

Choosing to attend the community college versus a four-year college to which they gained admission was, for these students, a path that was well-intentioned, well-resourced, yet limited. Eight of the 13 students in the study participated in some precollege outreach program: a) Talent Search, b) Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), c) a program

sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission in South Texas, and d) Knowledge is Freedom<sup>4</sup>, a regionally, well-known high school precollege program in North Texas. The remaining five students relied on teachers, counselors, coaches, and family to provide information about college applications, college search, and choosing colleges.

Regardless of how students said they had acquired information about going to college, their overall knowledge about college contained some crucial gaps, such as incomplete knowledge and understanding about college costs, financial aid, scholarships, major exploration, or career development, that could have made a difference in their decisions to attend a community college or four-year college. All the students in the study were reluctant to say that they had everything they needed when they were deciding which college to attend. One student, Linda, captured the overarching sentiment of many of the students in this study,

I guess the school system is just really, I guess they don't want to kind of like hold your hand through it, but sometimes I guess you kind of need that information to help you get through it, like the information to be more broken down and more explained to you. I think the education system doesn't really put a lot of emphasis on everything you have to do when you're applying for college. They don't explain everything to you, and you kind of find out as you go.

Despite these gaps in knowledge, students drew on their navigational capital to maneuver through these systems of education and maintained resilience to survive and learn from these experiences and help others.

Miranda was especially honest about her perceptions of the guidance she received from precollege programs and how she realized there was so much more information she needed.

Interviewer: What type of information did you get when you went to Knowledge is Freedom and AVID. Could you describe that for me?

Miranda: Yeah. The type of information, basically it was like AVID, it was one professor and whatever we wanted to do she would kind of help us with it. I don't know. The more I think about it the more I think they were there,

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<sup>4</sup> Knowledge is Freedom is a pseudonym for a well-known, regional college resource program in North Texas

but they weren't really there. They helped us a little bit, but not even, because for AVID we wanted to go to all these universities and we want to go visit them and yeah, we saw how pretty they were, but we never learned anything about financial aid.

We only went to go visit pretty campuses, and that was it. Based on how pretty it was is whether a lot of people were like, "Yeah, I'm going to come here," but we never took a look and thought, "Oh what majors are here? What do they offer? What is their financial aid? How much is it going to cost you?" Things like that that really matter, they didn't do. They only took you to campuses. For Knowledge is Freedom, it's like they helped you a lot with SAT and ACT's and getting you prepared for that, but it's like they didn't help you get prepared for actually going into college or what you were going to do after you took the SAT or ACT. I'm sure a lot of us took it just to take it.

Miranda's words illustrate the importance of having more complete knowledge about college (such as cost, financial aid, major exploration, etc.) to find the best college fit. She shares later that, "I would have loved to go to a four-year university straight out of high school if I knew like I wasn't going to struggle. I feel like in my situation it was the best choice I could have made." Miranda felt going to a four-year college straight out of high school would have been a struggle, financially. She was not alone in feeling this way. Eleven students felt that they could not afford college, yet they did not have a complete understanding about the cost of college.

When talking about college and describing his pathway to college, Abraham spoke about the cost of college. He says his parents, at the time, could not afford to help him to pay for classes. In his narrative, Abraham talks definitively about how he feels he bore the responsibility for the cost of college.

I was also concerned when I saw the prices of the university. And again, not knowing financial aid, not understanding financial aid, I think that seeing those numbers turned me off, away from it, knowing that my parents couldn't help me at the time. I was fresh out of high school. [...] I was kinda freaked out by those numbers.

Later in our interview, he talks about finding out how friends at more expensive, private colleges, would get quite a bit of aid to pay for college (tuition discounting).

Abraham: [...] I know after I started university, college and even once I was here, I found out about other universities that were much more expensive that provided students that went there with more financial assistance than even here, which I was confused about how is that... how does that work?

Interviewer: How did you find out about that?

Abraham: Just through friends that ended up going at other universities. We would just talk about it whenever we would catch up or whatever. Just talking about financial aid like, "How much did you get?" "I got this much." "How much did you get?" I had no idea that much.

Abraham specifically talked about receiving assistance with applying to, and searching for colleges from his high school guidance counselor. He knew that he had to complete the FAFSA but he was largely unaware, as were all the students in the study, that some colleges can and do offer more grant aid or engage in tuition discounting. This occurs especially at private colleges to which many of the students in the study applied. Though students applied to these private colleges, they consistently said the cost to attend was too great or that they could not afford to attend.

#### *Last-Minute Decisions*

No student said they had initially planned to attend a community college. Doing so was not a first choice for any student in the study and for some it was not even a back-up option. All the students made the decision to attend the community college just months before classes began in the fall. In fact, the choice to attend the community college was made as late as May or June, right after high school graduation, all the way until August right before classes started.

Janet had applied and was admitted to Golden Triangle University (GTU) and Ralph W. Steen State University, a college in East Texas. She ultimately enrolled at Eaglefoot College, about 15 minutes from her home.

Janet: I was just like, "I want to go somewhere far, but not too far, so Texas." I wanted to do their nursing program there. They had a good nursing

program there at [university in East Texas], but I decided not [to attend]. I had already scheduled my orientation. I think I even paid the fee, and I didn't end up going.

Interviewer: When did you finally decide to go to Eaglefoot? When did you make that decision?

Janet: Towards the end of senior year, starting the summer after I graduated, because I jumped right into it. I started going there visiting their advisors to see what classes I needed to take. That was early in the summer.

Janet was not the only student in the study who had applied to and was admitted to a four-year college, registered for orientation, and then decided that summer to attend a community college instead. Risa actually attended orientation at Roadrunner State University, registered for classes, and accepted her financial aid award package. She decided to attend Hill Country Junior College not too long after that orientation. Janet and Risa, like their peers in this study, opted to enroll at a community college the summer before classes started in the fall.

Ernesto applied to three colleges (including GTU) in North Texas. He said he did not want to travel more than three hours away from home, so he kept his search for colleges close to the North Texas region. Even with having been admitted to all three colleges, Ernesto decided to enroll at Rockview College a month before classes started in the fall.

Ernesto: In the summer I was taking college classes at Rockview and I wasn't thinking about going to Rockview at first. When I was taking the summer classes, it was when for sure I wasn't going to go to [public four-year university]. I decided to just stay at Rockview. It was because I was taking classes already at Rockview in the summer.

Interviewer: When did you make the decision to just stay at Rockview?

Ernesto: I'd probably say it was late July.

Because Ernesto is undocumented, he spoke of having concerns about financing his education. Like Janet and several other students in this study, Ernesto received a tuition scholarship from the Metropolitan Community College District; Rockview College is one of

seven colleges within the district. Having taken classes at Rockview prior to his fall enrollment, coupled with the fact that he received the tuition scholarship, staying at Rockview was the better choice for Ernesto.

Both Janet and Ernesto's stories depict how students in this study made their college choices late. While the literature indicates Latinx students decide to apply to college, if at all, late into their senior year (Martinez & Cervera, 2012), there is little about exactly when or how late this group of students make the choice to enroll at a college.

### Why the Community College?

As I mentioned above, students, for the most part, had access to resources at their schools or through precollege programs to help them search for and apply to college. Yet all students felt there was more information they were not being given, like an unexplained set of procedures, about how to get to college. Like Linda's statement earlier, students did not have their hands held through the process, "They don't explain everything to you, and you kind of find out as you go."

In choosing to attend the community college, students drew from both Navigational and Social Capital to decide where to enroll in college. They drew from their social capital as they were informed by family, peers, and others in their networks about their experiences getting to and through college. They have some degree of familiarity with the community college, through their relatives' or peers' own attendance or through their own dual credit enrollment.

### *Making Strategic Choices*

To some degree or another, every student interviewed felt that attending the community college was a cost-effective alternative to enrolling directly at a four-year college. The narratives from Amalia and Ana give more perspective about navigating the choice of attending the community college as strategy to minimize overall debt incurred, relative to their siblings and

peers. Their stories echoed what students throughout the study have stated: choosing to attend a community college was not their first intention, but it was a strategic option to manage their concerns about cost and affordability. Ana and Amalia specifically heeded advice from the relatives who attended college before them to attend the community college and delay taking out student loans.

As I spoke with Amalia through our interview, she was thoughtful about her choices. She realized that she had a great Talent Search counselor who helped her navigate the college search process, but Amalia remained somewhat resistant to schooling, especially in high school. So, what led her to choosing to enroll at a community college instead of the four-year college she was admitted to?

I think that it was just really scary to think about going and me having been, really, taking school as a joke and then going into something really serious like a four-year university. I was like, I'm going to waste a lot of money going there not knowing what to do, and then I'm going to have to transfer to a community college because I'm not going to be able to do it. I think that that's what was really ... If I'm going to do this, then I should at least be strategic about it. I think that that's the biggest reason; two, my dad; and I told everyone my family's financial problems.

Amalia acknowledged that in being strategic, she considered her prior schooling environment and resistance to schooling to make a choice that was financially sound for her and her family.

Ana, the defiant high school senior, refused to accept the community college as an option. She felt her female cousins, her role models, were the ones who were trailblazers and showed her what it meant to be an independent woman. And though she didn't want to go to Palomino Community College (PCC), her siblings and those same cousins told her that the benefits of staying at PCC would be reaped over time. They told her that going to the community college would be a better financial decision.

So, they all suggested, "Why don't you start at the community college in [City]? I know you don't want to do that, but you'll save yourself two years of student loans, because

they haunt you even after you have your job, and just do that.” I was like, I don't want to I just want to leave. They're like [her brothers], “you won't regret it later, just try to suck it up with mom and dad for two years, you'll save yourself two years of college debt instead of a university and then all you have to pay off is the last two years at a university. You know, it's just being financially smart, we just don't want you to go through the same thing as we did.” So, that was their biggest advice, the loans, which I'm glad I did because, I followed their advice and it helped out that route a lot.

Though reluctant to do so, Ana enrolled at PCC after high school. Because she had earned so many scholarships, along with information from her Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Ana did not incur any debt during her time at the community college, taking out loans only after transferring to a university. For her, this was pivotal to controlling her overall indebtedness, in comparison to her siblings, cousins, and peers.

Like Ana and Amalia, students felt that attending a community college helped to reduce the amount of loan debt they had. This is particularly important when considering seven students received a scholarship to cover tuition at a community college and four received enough grant aid through their college, because of completing the FAFSA, to pay for tuition. The parents of the other two students paid for tuition at the community college. None of the students in this study incurred loan debt at the community college.

### *Degrees of Familiarity*

Nearly all students mentioned some degree of familiarity, during high school (or earlier), with the community college in which they decided to enroll. Attending the community college was familiar to these students because of their social contacts. A few students enrolled in dual credit courses through that community college, taking classes at both at their high school and at the community college. Students also mentioned having a sibling, friend, or relative who started at the same community college before the student enrolled.



Two of Cael's brothers attended Eaglefoot Community College a few years prior to his own attendance at Eaglefoot College. Cael's concern about the cost of college was noticeable throughout our interview.

Cael: [...] My brothers had both gone to community college, and I kind of saw that's the cheapest thing, and kind of would be like if my parents had to help me, that would be the best thing, just because it was affordable.

Interviewer: And you said your older brothers went to community college?

Cael: Yeah. They both went to Eaglefoot. One of them went, but I don't think he finished. [...] The other one got an associate's, and that's where he stopped.

Cael was one of the seven student participants who received a tuition scholarship to pay for attending the Eaglefoot College. The scholarship alleviated his concern about the cost of college. That scholarship, along with being familiar with the college because of his brothers' prior attendance, put Cael at ease with his choice to attend Eaglefoot. The cost to attend college for Cael, and many others in this study, was at times too much to bear. This was part of the reason that Cael began to get emotional and cry during this interview. He felt that the burden of the cost was his to endure, as his parents had made enough sacrifices for him and his siblings.

He also credited his sister-in-law as someone who successfully modeled the community college-university transfer, something his brothers did not do.

I saw it [the community college] definitely as a good place to start. One of my sister-in-law's, she also went to community college first, and then she graduated from [Public Four-year College], so I kind of saw ... She's like, "Yeah, I saved some money doing this." I was kind of like, "You know, maybe I should do that." I ended up getting ... They have the [Tuition Scholarship] program in [MCCD], so I ended up getting that for my grades. I was like ... It wasn't crazy selective, but you kind of show them your grades, and just ... I don't even think there was an interview. It's just like I write a paper why I think I qualified and deserved the opportunity, then general FAFSA stuff, and I ended up getting that, so I get community college completely paid for through that program.

Having that interaction with his sister-in-law validated Cael in choosing to attend Eaglefoot. He felt affirmed that this was the right choice.

Aaron's cousin Jared, who started college a year before Aaron, attended Maple Flower College to play baseball. Aaron described his relationship with his cousin Jared as being really close since their parents are related (discussed further in the parent findings) and they grew up together. Jared attended Maple Flower for one year then left the college to attend a Division I (D-1) athletic program at Sweatt State University, a historically black college in Southeast Texas.

Inspired by his cousin's achievements, and hoping to have his own success in college baseball, Aaron followed Jared to Maple Flower.

The college I ended up going to was Maple Flower and my cousin went there, played there one year and went D-1. I was like, "Man." I see this coach who's trying to push his players into bigger universities. I was like, "I like that. Maybe I could do that." I didn't even take a tour of the college. I just heard that my cousin...[he] went to go to take me to try out, and everything went well.

Aaron was familiar with the college and his cousin helped him by taking Aaron to try out for the team. Then, Aaron was even more encouraged to attend Maple Flower because, "One of the coaches that I knew from ten years old, he's a family friend, he knew the coach at Maple Flower." Aaron felt like he had a lot of connections to that college that could lead to more face time with coaches and recruiters, as well as more time on the field playing.

Some students did not have family, like siblings or cousins, attend community college, but others in their peer networks began at the community college and gave students an alternate route to pursuing their educational goals. Monica admitted that she felt attending the community college was a different path from the one she felt most of her classmates were taking. When I asked her about the colleges she applied to and schools she looked to attend, she pointedly remarked that she didn't have to be like everyone else and attend a four-year college first.

Moreover, Monica's decision to attend the community college had been affirmed through her peer network.

I did know somebody who went to Fountain Lake [...] She went to Fountain Lake first and then transferred to, I think she transferred to Cooper State University. I saw that successful path of education. I was like, "Oh, that's a viable option."

For Monica, attending the community college was a solid pathway to completing her bachelor's degree. In seeing those peers who went to the community college first, she found a feasible way to reaching her goals.

Most of the students took dual credit courses through the community college in which they eventually enrolled. Linda completed almost 30 semester credit hours at Urban Centre College, then enrolled at the college full-time after graduating from high school. Josefina said Rockview was the college where she completed her dual credit courses, noting that she would travel to the campus to attend courses with her high school peers. She was on that campus for classes while in high school.

Interviewer: Then, why did you choose to go to Rockview?

Josefina: I feel like that was the only ... Well, not really. Walnut Hill College was closer to me, but I decided to go to Rockview because that's where I took my dual credit class. I knew how it looked and where to go and where was this. Not entirely, because I would still get lost. I had more experience there, let's put it that way. [...] I think I felt more comfortable starting out that way, especially because I knew like where most of the things were.

Though she admits she was not entirely familiar with the campus, the scholarships she received to pay for classes, along with her familiarity of the college, led her to enroll.

Risa's familiarity with her community college is unlike any of her peers in this study. Risa participated in a pre-college program through her local community college, which is also a residential community college. Hill Country Junior College (HCJC) gave Risa the opportunity to live on campus and take classes during the summer after graduating high school. She was already

planning to attend the four-year college three hours away from her hometown, but after attending the pre-college program through HCJC's main campus (an hour from her home) she decided to attend that college instead.

Risa: I didn't make my decision of not going on to Roadrunner State University until after the Workforce College Program.

Interviewer: When was that?

Risa: It was like August.

Interviewer: Did you already go to the orientation?

Risa: Yeah I did. Everything was set to go. I had my classes. I went to orientation. My financial aid was done. Everything was good [...] I went to orientation and then like pretty much after orientation, two days after that I'm like I don't know ... Because when I was at [Pre-College Program], they had a basketball team there, so I talked to the coach [...]. The coach asked me what are my plans, and stuff like that. And he told me, "We have a college team, a basketball team here. I would like for you to try it out and do it, try up for the team". That's what actually I ended up doing. This thing at Hill Country Junior College, playing, because there my dorm was paid. It was a lot less, and it was close to home.

Risa's involvement in the pre-college program, living on campus and taking classes, was a large reason why she decided to attend the community college first. Her experience with the pre-college program, her familiarity with the campus, its location, and the personnel were among the deciding factors for her to stay closer to home and attend the community college. This situation supports previous research that suggests that psychosocial factors, such as visiting and engaging with a college campus has "the power to move students from the back seat to the front seat of their college choices," (Nora, 2004, p. 1999). The student in this case, however, opted to stay at the community college, rather than enroll at the four-year college.

## The Role of Family and College Enrollment

For the questions regarding family and parents, and their role in college enrollment, students had some interesting responses. Many of them had very deficit-oriented perceptions about the knowledge their parents could impart to them while they searched for, applied to, and enrolled in college. Based on their words, and my dialogue with students, it may be that they have internalized messages received about their parents, family, and/or community and the knowledge or ability these people in their lives possess to help them get to college.

While their parents, family, and/or community may or may not have college knowledge, because of language barriers, understanding the educational system, etc. (Auerbach, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005), students may have internalized this to mean that their families are not able to help them because they do not know anything. Yet, students could identify the ways in which their parents and family helped them create their educational ideologies and the meaning of education within the home and in the lives of students. In the parent findings, I discuss how and what knowledge existed in the home that has not been utilized or capitalized on with regard to college knowledge and educational attainment.

To understand and frame the themes that have emerged from the student narratives and to learn and from and document the cultural wealth of the student and the family, students drew from aspirational and familial capital. The parents and families of students maintained aspirations for their child's opportunity for advanced educational attainment that helped students to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals," (Yosso, 2005, p.78). Parents provided their children with *consejos*, or advice, about how their jobs are not valued, drawing on familial capital to encourage their children to pursue higher education to gain upward social mobility.

*The Promise of Opportunity to Fuel Aspirations*

Just two of the students who participated in the study had parents who were born in the U.S. The remaining 11 students whose parents were born outside the United States consistently spoke of the opportunity and promise of a life much different than the life their parents had in their home country. Even with some of the student perceptions about how their parents' college knowledge was limited, the promise of opportunity and the idea that their families moved to the States with the hope and desire for increased social and educational mobility, was evident in student's interviews.

In our interview, Isabel acknowledged that her mother's knowledge about college is limited: "I'm not expecting her to know because she didn't come to a university. I don't think she would know." Yet, Isabel also recognized how much her mother wants her to continue pursuing her education, because her mother was unable to do so.

Isabel: She didn't complete college, she started going to college in Colombia. She didn't have the opportunity, so she wanted us to have a better future. She was like "Yes, I want you guys to go to college; I want you to have what I didn't have, the experiences."

Interviewer: Okay, was she talking about the opportunity?

Isabel: Yeah. Especially because it's different in Colombia than it is here. Education-wise it is different; better education and more opportunities here [in the U.S] than over there.

Isabel is one of the few students in the study to report parental education beyond high school. Her mother received some postsecondary education in Colombia, but Isabel noted, "[I]t's different in Colombia than it is here. Education wise it is different. [There are] better education and more opportunities here than over there." She continued to describe that the college education her mother received in Colombia would only be comparable to high school-level education in the United States.

Nonetheless, Isabel's ideas about the promise of educational opportunity were fueled by her mother and the rest of her family in Colombia. Isabel spoke about her brother not completing college and how her grandmother tries to encourage her brother and Isabel to keep going to college. Her grandmother knows that there are more opportunities in the U.S. than in their home country.

My grandma tells him to [go to college] because my mom keeps her updated. You need to go back to school because [being a] professional, you're over there you have this better opportunity. Over there, they hear that we have a lot of opportunities. My mom tells my grandma how I'm already in college; she says keep it going. She always tells me I'm doing great and I'm making my mom proud. Everyone over there is proud of us of what we have accomplished so far.

The accomplishments of Isabel and her siblings are points of pride for the extended family, accomplishments that were obtained through initial enrollment at a community college.

Linda also spoke of her parents' desires for her and her siblings to attain an education in the U.S. She and her brothers were all born in the United States, unlike their parents who were born in Mexico. Linda expressed the aspirations her parents have for her and her brothers to go to school and have the opportunity for a much different life.

[M]y parents always, they always put pressure on us to do well in school. [...] They could have easily just said, we had our kids here but we're going to take you guys back to Mexico and we're going to raise you guys there. They thought, this is the land of opportunity, this is the land where you guys can, you guys were born here, you guys have way more opportunities than we had back where we were from. They just wanted us to take advantage of those opportunities that were here.

Linda felt that attending college was a step in the direction of fulfilling the hopes and dreams her parents held for her and her brothers. However, Linda was one of the students who did not feel that attending the community college was the best decision for her. During our interview, there were a few times where I stopped the interview to give her the time and space to cry and be

emotional. Though she disagreed with her parents about going to the community college because it would be more cost effective, she was able to recognize the support they provided her.

You know, it was always kind of like, they wanted us to have the life that they didn't have kind of thing. Both of my parents lived in poverty when they were in Mexico. They had bad lives over there, my dad especially. He, there were some days where they wouldn't even have anything to eat kind of thing. To go from living that kind of lifestyle and being introduced to a completely different lifestyle here, it's just like he sees so many opportunities for us to take as far as school and work and stuff like that. He just wanted us to take advantage of that stuff that he especially didn't have.

Her parents' aspirations are a source of strength and conflict for Linda. On the one hand, Linda understands the sacrifices her parents have made and knows that her educational achievements have actualized the hopes and dreams of her family. On the other hand, Linda felt pressured by her parents' aspirations to continue beyond the community college, though she admits she is fearful of navigating the path through the community college to a university.

#### *Consejos as a Source of Support*

Connections to family created a sense of support for these students and helped to inform their decision to attend college, especially through *consejos*, or advice, about work. Through their *consejos*, parents conveyed the importance of going to college and that they wanted and expected more for their children, in terms of their educational attainment. This was especially true for students whose parents immigrated to the United States and held blue-collar jobs.

Abraham learned his work ethic from his parents. He would go to work with his mother and father. Abraham spoke about the messages he received from his parents regarding college when he would go to work with them.

I think the fact that I saw my parents work so hard, and like I would go work with my Dad and come home really, really tired. Even as a teenager, I would come home tired and not want to do anything. He's like, "This is what you want to do for the rest of your life? You should really think about going to college. I don't want you to come home and just be too tired to do anything else." I don't remember if it was My Dad or my Mom or both. They'd say, they wanted me to be an attorney or a lawyer or something like that. They



said, “A professional with a coat, with a suit.” A suit isn’t my thing but the professional part, I did grasp that.

Abraham’s parents not only taught him about the ethics of working, but also the value placed in those professions in society. His mother cleans houses and his father lays floors. While these professions are decent jobs to provide for a family, their view of the nature of the work and its perceived value is something his parents have provided, through their *consejos*, in an effort to show Abraham why it is important for him to continue his education. When talking about going to work with his father, Abraham communicated his awareness of what going to college meant to him and his parents.

[T]here’s more probable cause of injury on a job like that. Your main tool is a blade, a knife. You’re cutting, at the time, it was really mostly carpets. You’re cutting a lot, now he’s doing more laminated type of floors or wood. Still, you’re dealing with a bunch of tools so you have a higher risk of injury. That’s another reason for it too. That and there’s no such thing as medical health in that field. There’s no benefits, no retirement plan. There’s nothing like that involved in that. It’s whatever you put aside on your own or your investment.

The messages of Josefina’s parents have resonated with her. She appreciates everything her parents have done for her. Because she is undocumented, Josefina can only complete the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA) to determine eligibility for state financial aid. While she received the tuition scholarship through the Metropolitan Community College District, she only received a small grant at Golden Triangle University (GTU). Her parents cover the remaining tuition, pay her rent, and buy her groceries. So, when she talks about going to college and the implications for attending college, she realized that her parents ingrained a sense of understanding that education would provide her upward mobility.

I feel like it was mostly for yourself also to learn more things but also to get a better job or even have a job. Truth is they don't even hire you if you just came out of high school. Not saying that those jobs are bad, but they would always tell us like, "What's the difference between being a doctor and working at a fast food place?" Obviously, you need a degree, it was mostly that.

Josefina also carried with her the messages her father spoke when it came to work and the value of education. Josefina's mom no longer holds a full-time job, as she is the primary caretaker for Josefina and her sisters. Josefina's father is a plumber and is the sole bread-winner for her family. Plumbing is a needed profession and well paid. Her father, however, has told Josefina that a college degree can be the difference between giving out orders and taking them.

My dad's a plumber, right, but when he's, like all talking out...what does he tell me? I don't know plumbing, but when he's trying to put some pipes and everything, and he always has to do all the physical work, like shoveling all the dirt. He's like, "It's real tough. If I had a degree I could probably be the one saying, oh you have to shovel this up and that's it."

#### Experiences at the Community College: The Good and the Bad

At the outset of this research, I was eager to understand how students would describe their experiences at the community college and if attending the community college would have an impact on their overall educational attainment or career decisions. I felt it important to have the student voice in the latter inquiry as research has indicated that only 7% of Latinx students who attend the community college with intentions to transfer to complete the bachelor's degree actually do so in a seven-year time span (Arbona & Nora, 2007).

As far as the student experiences, I felt it important to examine the ways in which students described their experience, considering their first choice was to attend a four-year college. Overall, most students were happy with their choice to attend, or were indifferent about attending, the community college. Two students, however, were extremely disappointed with attending the community college. The student experiences are outlined below, followed by the impact of community college attendance on educational and/or career attainment.

*The Best Choice for Me (The Student)*

Ana was disinclined to attend PCC. She wanted the experience everyone else in her family had, leaving home to attend a four-year college. She was eager to leave and have new experiences. But Ana followed the advice of her siblings and cousins to attend PCC. While she was, at first, unenthusiastic about this decision, Ana said that attending the community college was “one of the best decisions” she made.

It helped me out in the long term a lot. I don't regret it, going to a community college, because I started at a community college for the first two years at [Palomino Community College], because of the amount of scholarships and grants and because I applied for financial aid early, because of my brothers and cousins, I was able to have those first two years paid off with money left over to buy a computer because my parents couldn't afford it.

Ana is the oldest student in this study. She spoke with more insight than many of the other students in this study. I assume this is due to the experiences she has had and the ability to reflect on her college choices from both her parents and her own perspective. In any case, she was very happy with attending PCC first. She really enjoyed the experiences she had at PCC and knows that had she started at the university she wanted to attend, things would be much different.

Yes, I was very pleased. I didn't think I was going to like it that much, because I wanted to start at a four-year university and then I was really, really pleased because of the financial aspect. I was very pleased with the group of people I met. Especially from across [the border], I got to interact with that group which is a very different dynamic. It's just a different mindset, so I knew if I had gone to a university like [university north of home] I wouldn't have met that type of group because it's a different mentality. So, I was very satisfied, my professors were great too, they were very supportive. Then the friends I made at the learning center where I worked as a tutor, they were great too. It was a good community.

Because of PCC's position to the Texas-Mexico border, geographically, Ana found herself in classes with students who would “come across” the border daily for school. She talked about her own feelings being “*ni de aquí, ni de allá*”, neither from here nor there, as she was raised in a border town in Texas. She identifies with Mexican culture and heritage, and can speak

Spanish fluently, yet she has had to maneuver through her life as an American, understanding and knowing American culture and speaking English fluently, too.

Monica was also happy about her choice to attend the community college. She says that while she does not often find herself able to give advice about going to college, she does tell people that her experience at Fountain Lake College was a positive experience and one of the best choices she has made.

I've told a lot of people that I'm really glad I went to community college first. That is probably one of those, I feel like that's one of the best life choices I've made, personally. I'm really proud to say, "This went really well for me, and I did this." Whenever I think back on it I was like, "I can't imagine what would happen if I did it another way." I wouldn't have, not I wouldn't have been as happy, but I'm really happy with the choice I made.

Monica knew early on that she was comfortable taking her time at the community college before enrolling at a university. She found this pathway to be more engaging for her. She felt more engaged at the community college because she felt that though she excelled in her classes in high school, for the most part she was "under the radar." She was smart enough to get by. She was not close enough to the top of her class to receive attention for her academic accolades, but she was also not at the bottom or requiring the additional attention for those labeled, "at risk."

Once I was there [at Fountain Lake College], I was able to be more interactive in my learning and there were really awesome professors and there was, like, fifteen people per class. Like, participating, you're not as invisible when there's only fifteen people. There's just really good professors and the learning environment was really welcoming and very easy to work in. I really liked it and I was like, "I don't want to actually leave here! Can't get my bachelor's here, though."

At Fountain Lake, Monica felt that she was able to excel. She felt visible to her professors because of the small class sizes and was able to excel in that learning environment.

At Eaglefoot College, Cael discovered his love for school and became a more focused student, more concerned about his grades. He says,

Once I got to college, it's kind of where I got tired of being the middle of the road student. I just kind of fully exercised my potential and really got into the books. I kind of had more of an idea of what I wanted to do and really hit the books, and I have been ever since I started college.

This experience helped Cael to realize that he wanted to be a more competitive student. He used this experience at Eaglefoot to create his mark in college.

Cael: Definitely at Eaglefoot was the first time I had one professor who was telling us about the honor society. It was like my first semester at school, and he was like, "You have to get a 3.5 and at least have 12 credit hours." That was my first goal. That was my new thing. I was like, "I'm going to make goals, and set them for myself." I was sitting like the third row, from school, because someone was like, "You've got to sit up close. You can't sit in the back of the class anymore, you know?" I was like, all right, I'm going to sit up front, take notes, be more active about learning, definitely be more involved. That was my first goal in college was to get in the honor society. That's the first thing I did when I got to Eaglefoot. I did that. Got in the honor society.

The next year that I was there, I became a student ambassador for the school. That was definitely my thing now, to get involved and make the most out of my education. I feel like when I was in high school, I just didn't know how ... didn't really know how to get involved or actually do stuff to distinguish myself or to develop myself.

Interviewer: You felt you were able to at Eaglefoot?

Cael: Yeah, I felt like that's the first experience where I was like, "Okay, I can do this." You're feeling it out. I was doing well in my classes. That was the first time I was making all As.

This renewed spirit of making the most of his experience made Cael feel going to Eaglefoot was a good choice, the best choice for him. It is because of this dedication to his studies that Cael earned a Terry Scholarship to transfer to GTU. The scholarship covers \$13,000 per academic year and is renewable for up to three years of undergraduate study. Since Cael is also a Pell recipient, and received the tuition scholarship through MCCD, he is confident in his ability to complete his bachelor's degree debt free. This is a point of pride for him, especially as

he maintains concerns about his parents' ability to help him pursue and finance his bachelor's degree.

### *Disappointing First Choices*

Students' experiences at the community colleges they attended varied widely. Some of the students became involved on campus through tutoring or honor societies. But for two of the students, attending the community college was a choice filled with disappointment and latent anger. Linda and Aaron, interviewed at two distinctly different points in time at their life – Linda was in her first year of college at the community college, and Aaron was weeks away from graduating with his bachelor's degree – were very disappointed in their choice to go to the community college first. Notably, these two students were the only two who self-reported their family SES to be over \$60,000 a year. They both had a negative tone to their voices in recounting their narratives. It's as though they felt they missed out on something more, both socially and academically, by not attending a university first.

Linda, as I mentioned earlier, felt attending the community college was not part of her plan. Plus, she felt both her brothers were exemplary students, much like her. Yet, she saw their journey, how they dropped out, and did not want that for herself.

It's just like, I guess sometimes I just don't want to end up in the same situation that they were in. Especially, my parents are really big inspirations for us and I just don't want to kind of let them down. I just feel like, of course I'm different from them, but it just feels like I'm repeating the cycle, kind of thing...

You know, sometimes I feel like, you know I worked really hard in school and I did all these things in school and I've like, my brothers, they've both been to community college and they both dropped out and I just didn't want to go down that same path.

Going to a community college did not match Linda's personally held ideas about educational attainment, saying, "I guess you can say it was always my dream to go to a four-year. That was just kind of like where I pictured myself."

Every student was concerned about how expensive it would be for them to go a four-year college. They were all concerned about how their parents would pay for college. Linda, on the other hand, while concerned about the cost to attend college, did not show the same concern for how her parents would pay for this. Linda was also the only student who did not state that she would bear the burden of the cost of college, nor was she as concerned as the others in the study about the financial relief of choosing to attend a community college. She was, however, upset that she was ineligible for grant aid through the FAFSA.

I didn't go to a four year because of my financial situation. Basically, it was that my parents are, we're a middle-class family, you know. We're definitely not on the lower end of middle class but we're not on the higher end of middle class either. We're just kind of right in the middle where we don't qualify for benefits or we don't qualify for this, but we have to pay this, you know? I didn't qualify for a lot of scholarships or financial aid or FAFSA. I got nothing from FAFSA. Absolutely nothing. They didn't offer me a penny.

Other participants were more concerned about how they, themselves, would manage the costs for college, or felt it was their responsibility to finance their education. Ana's parents told her to go to a community college because they said attending a university was expensive. She also had scholarships and was eligible for federal grants by completing the FAFSA, but felt her siblings and cousins helped her come to the decision to attend a community college. Linda, however, seemed resentful about her parents asking her to attend a community college first, because they felt a four-year college would be too expensive. When I asked about her taking out student loans, she immediately shook her head no. "My parents were like, you know, my parents didn't want to get a loan. That was just the end of it. They didn't want to do loan[s]."

During our interview Aaron, had a visibly negative tone to his voice when talking about his experience at Maple Flower College. In our conversation, Aaron was reactive and had very little positive to say about Maple Flower College.

Aaron: I was just like, "This is silly." Just the teachers that were there were just not good. There was one teacher that I liked there, out of two years, and it was an art teacher. He was great, just forward thinking and the way he taught the class and how you were learning without even realizing that you were learning. It was awesome.

Interviewer: Was there anything that you liked about Maple Flower?

Aaron: I liked that it was cheap. Saved me a lot of money. Honestly, I have very negative feelings toward that school.

Interviewer: Just because of your own experience?

Aaron: Yeah. The classes, I didn't take anything out of it.

Complicating matters further, Aaron admits that a major reason for attending the college was because of the athletic program in baseball and his desire to play for a Division I college, and then play professionally. As I mentioned earlier, Aaron followed in his cousin Jared's footsteps by attending Maple Flower College. His desire to try and do what Jared had done, i.e. play baseball at Maple Flower and play for a Division I college team, was something Aaron regretted. He said "[T]he only thing I cared about was playing baseball." Aaron felt his passion for baseball was not a good reason to decide where to go to college.

His words and expressions during our conversations demonstrated that he blamed the community college, for his negative experiences in the classroom and feeling underprepared for transferring to a university. But he also spoke of his internal blame, that he had a "chip on his shoulder" when it came to playing baseball at Maple Flower, as though he felt entitled to playing time. Aaron went on to say that in giving advice to his younger brother, Saul, about going to college he would tell Saul to go to just go to a university and then worry about playing baseball. Aaron said he told Saul, "Dude, don't worry so much about this baseball stuff. Just don't make it everything, because it's not. There's so much of the world out here."



Linda's and Aaron's narratives are particularly interesting because of the many intersecting identities they carry and understand. They are Latinx and both are first-generation. Both students are middle-class and ineligible for federal assistance such as Pell. Aaron's parents are on the higher end of middle-class and provided him the opportunity to attend a private college prep school. I present their narratives because of the juxtaposition of their identities, they identify as Latinx and as having middle to upper income families. Even though Linda and Aaron indicated coming from middle to upper income homes, their experiences more closely match the literature on students from low income families (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Smith et al., 2012), and low income Latinx families (Kurlaender, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Nuñez & Kim, 2013).

*Defying the Odds: Staying the Course to Complete*

In Table D.1 in the methods, I provide details about the students with whom I completed an interview and who have already graduated with their bachelor's degree. To date, six students have already completed a bachelor's degree. One student is slated to graduate by May 2017. The remaining six students are on target to earn their bachelor's degree by May 2018.

In the demographic questionnaire, all the students listed their expectations to complete at least a bachelor's degree. Though they undermatched by attending a community college, students did not find this as a deterrent to their goals for educational attainment. If anything, some students became acclimated to a learning environment that required them to rethink what it meant to be a student. In Monica and Cael's case, this environment challenged them to aspire to more competitive goals of being honors students. Unfortunately, for Linda and Aaron, they did not feel the community college was an academically challenging environment, which led them to question the choice of going to a community college first. Though all students are on a trajectory

toward completion, I would be remiss to not include the obstacles some students encountered along the way.

### *Taking a Break*

Miranda, Janet, and Cael took some time off between completing their associate's degrees and transferring to Golden Triangle University (GTU). Miranda used the time between completing her associate's degree at Eaglefoot and transferring to GTU to save money to pay for school.

I decided to get enrolled into community college and I just started there. Did my basics. I didn't work at all. I took a year off because I knew I needed to get money for my four-year college. I took a year off and I was working at a clinic. It was a primary care clinic. What I did there was receptionist and slowly I started building myself up to a medical assistant. They were paying really good and it was a decent job, but somehow I was motivated to go back into school.

I know it's really hard after you take a break to go back to school, and that was one of the things I was really scared of, that I wasn't going to be able to go back. Now I'm here at GTU. I'm double majoring in rehab studies and speech language pathology.

As mentioned earlier, Miranda saved \$10,000 to pay for her cost of attendance at GTU. Because she is undocumented paying for classes is challenging since she is ineligible for federal aid. Miranda wanted to be sure that once she transferred to GTU, she would not have to depend too much on her parents for financial assistance.

Janet wanted some time off to think about what she wanted to do. She admitted that in transferring high schools from Arizona to a larger, urban high school in North Texas, she became disengaged because she was not challenged. She also talked about not feeling academically challenged at Eaglefoot College, since she took Advanced Placement courses in high school. She knows she could have done better in her college classes, especially since she wanted to pursue a nursing degree at the time. After earning her associate's degree, she just needed time to think.

I finished my associates in December of 2013, so that was done. And then I took off that next semester because I was done and I needed to transfer to where I was going to go to, but I didn't transfer until the fall. It was half a year off, the summer and spring semester. It was a good time to really figure out what I wanted to do.

Janet decided to come to GTU to major in rehabilitation studies. She used the time off to continue mulling over her major. Janet says she felt she needed to “really think about what I wanted to do, what major.” When she decided to transfer to GTU she said, “I was more mature and I already knew what I wanted.”

Cael also took time off to figure things out. Though his brothers attended Eaglefoot College before him, the next step of moving from the community college to the university was something completely unknown to him. He wanted time to think more deeply about where to transfer and how to pay for college.

I was like, "You know, I'm just going to school now because I'm supposed to go get this degree, because now everyone's expecting it from me." I really wasn't sure, and I kind of had that ... I wouldn't say like a mental breakdown, but I was kind of just ... I got really stressed out, and didn't really know what to do next, because I hadn't seen it be done in my family, so I was kind of just like, "What do I do now?" I've matched where my brothers stopped, and I don't know what to do next.

Cael took a year off and did a paid internship with a non-profit in North Texas. Working full-time gave him purpose and affirmed the work he wanted to continue as a Sociology major. He also mentioned that he was initially planning to attend Cooper State University, on a scholarship but changed to GTU. During a follow-up meeting, he confirmed that he also used the year off to find scholarships, including the Terry Scholarship he earned to attend GTU.

### *Obstacles to Completing the Baccalaureate*

Abraham transferred to GTU as an engineering major without having completed calculus, which is the math course the department prefers students come prepared to take at GTU, or to have completed prior to attending GTU (N. D'Souza, personal communication, January 25,

2016). When he transferred to GTU, Abraham had only completed college algebra, which meant he would have to complete all his required math courses at GTU, something he realized he should have completed at the community college.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you were going into excess hours, was it because you had to retake courses or?

Abraham: Yeah, a few courses. A few of the math courses.

Interviewer: How far in math did you get at the community college?

Abraham: Just with college algebra.

Interviewer: Did you think about taking some of those [math] courses at the community college?

Abraham: I have actually, now that I'm retaking some of them, I've been retaking them there [Maple Flower College].

Abraham admits that while he loves his engineering courses, he has had difficulty with the math courses. In the past year, he has started to receive signals and messages from his advisors in engineering and student support services that he should consider changing his major; but he has the *ganas* to finish. He is determined to earn this degree.

Interviewer: Do you feel optimistic about finishing them [remaining classes]?

Abraham: Yeah. [...] I'm going to do it even if it takes me a little bit longer but, especially after I've been doing it for so long, I have to.

Abraham's situation is extreme, but is similar to the existing literature that demonstrates that Latinx students who begin at the community college and transfer to a four-year college tend to take longer to complete the baccalaureate (Arbona & Nora, 2007) if they do at all (O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010).

Most of the students in the study who were at the four-year when interviewed encountered issues with the transferability of courses. Isabel mentioned being a bilingual

education major and having to stay an additional year at GTU to complete the degree with teacher certification since the courses she completed at the community college did not count toward the teaching program. Josefina also spoke about having to take an extra year of courses because she still has required courses for her Biology major to prepare her for medical school. Josefina said that she was told her associate of science degree would transfer to GTU, which it did; but she did not know that she should have focused on taking more science classes, like organic chemistry and physics, and less on the general electives in the associate's degree she did earn.

### Summary

In the student findings, I addressed three of the main research questions for this study. The first question, how do academically qualified Latinx students describe their pathway to the community college, is addressed as students navigated the path to college with access to resources but limited information. Students made last-minute choices on going to college – deciding as late as August to attend a community college, instead. The cost for college was a big part of every students' choice to attend the community college, but it was a choice they felt they made strategically. Students also felt that the ways in which they interacted with their community college, through dual credit, pre-college programs, or because someone in their network (family, siblings, or kin) had attended prior to their enrollment, made them more familiar with that institution and helped them to decide on attending that community college.

What role does family play in the student's college choice? The role of parents and family on college enrollment is essential for creating the foundation from which students begin to conceptualize what it means to obtain an education. The aspirational and familial capital provided to these students, and from which they drew when making their college choices, served

a critical role in demonstrating what a college education means, in terms of upward mobility. I would even argue that these aspirations and the *consejos* parents provided carry the students through the pipeline to transfer and completion, even when it seems harder to do, as Abraham's story shows.

How do students describe their experiences at the community college? Not everyone had the same experience at their respective community college, even if they attended the same high school or came from the same neighborhood. Ultimately, however, only two students had extremely negative views on their experience. For the most part, the community college is but one stop on the students' journey to their educational destinations. Students were not deterred from continuing to pursue a bachelor's. In fact, even the students who took time off did so only to stay focused on completion; Janet to contemplate her major, Miranda so she could manage paying for classes, and Cael to figure out how to move forward with his educational goals. There remain, however, obstacles in transferring to a four-year college from a community college that persists, even for students who are clearly determined to complete a bachelor's degree. These problems are real and speak to barriers that exist in the pipeline. While this is beyond the scope of this study, it does highlight the work that must continue within community college and university partnerships in aiding transfer students to baccalaureate completion.

The students' perspectives on their parental involvement and assistance are crucial as I explore the parent information in the parent findings. The parent data I analyzed is from the parents of five of the students – Abraham, Aaron, Isabel, Janet and Josefina. The parents' stories highlight and provide more depth about their interactions with their children's education and college decisions.

APPENDIX F  
UNABRIDGED PARENT FINDINGS

## Introduction

The ways in which students described family and parental support for their college decisions is one part of the story. To better understand how parents influence and support their children in going to college, I contacted the parents of the students with whom I completed an interview. I interviewed six parents (both parents of one student completed an interview) regarding their family's history of migration to North Texas and their perceptions and understanding about their child's educational attainment.

In presenting the findings from these interviews, I start by providing a detailed narrative of each family, which I have created based on the interviews of the parents and the students. I used both the student and parent interviews to co-construct the family narratives. After the family narratives, I address how parents perceive their role in college access and choice, the ways in which culturally based practices of the household support student success, and the perceived barriers to educational attainment. Six major themes have come from the data. Those themes are 1) opportunities and aspirations, 2) pre-existing college knowledge, 3) language and bilingualism, 4) an "*échale ganas*" mentality, 5) challenges of uncertainty, and 6) contending with inequitable opportunities.

To analyze the data from parent interviews, I used funds of knowledge as a framework to understand what practices, knowledge, and supports in the home existed to help their children maintain their educational goals and make their college decisions. I was also able to identify the ways in which parents and family help their students to succeed in college and through graduation. I also incorporated community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a lens to analyze parent data, specifically focusing on the linguistic capital that exists in the home, and which



fosters the development of social and intellectual skills through the ability to communicate in more than one language.

### The Bejarano Family

I interviewed Raquel Bejarano, the mother of Abraham, twice in January 2016. Including Abraham, she has three sons and one daughter. I met Raquel at her home in North Texas for our interviews. She preferred Tuesday and Thursdays before the later part of the afternoon, as her youngest attended pre-school nearby. Because our interviews were in mid to late January, the Bejarano home still had lingering decorations from Christmas and some additional winter décor. Pictures of Raquel's children and family were everywhere throughout her home. In fact, before leaving the first interview, I walked by the living room where a rather large, poster-sized portrait of the family hung. In the portrait, Raquel was still pregnant with the youngest, but she, her husband, and three eldest children were in the picture. For Raquel, family is everything.

Only Raquel, her husband Tomás, and their youngest child lived in the home. The eldest three, Abraham, John Luke, and Christina, all live in Denton and attend Golden Triangle University (GTU). Raquel had mixed emotions about her children's decision to all attend GTU, so far from home (a little over an hour drive from their home). The three shared a bedroom in a house they rented with friends. Raquel knew they tire of each other quickly and can get on each other's nerves. She would have preferred that they each had their own, separate space, so they could all be comfortable. Shortly after I completed both interviews with Raquel, there was a fire at the house Abraham and his siblings were living in. In a follow-up with Abraham, he told me that he and his siblings still lived together after the fire, just to save on costs for themselves and their parents.

Raquel moved to the U.S. for the first time more than 25 years ago. Her brothers and sisters came to the U.S. first and sent money home to Mexico to take care of the family. Raquel soon realized that she wanted to take her chance in the U.S. to try to achieve the American dream. She moved to Rhode Island and met Tomás, who came from Mexico on his own, too. In the U.S., they fell in love and began living together. They returned to Mexico soon after to get married, but stayed for four years. Abraham, John Luke, and Christina were all born in Mexico.

When Raquel and Tomás decided to come back to the U.S., they first went to California. Six months later, they moved back to Rhode Island where they lived for two and a half years. Because of Tomás' allergies, they could not continue to live in that climate. Raquel had (and still has) family in North Texas, who assured them this location would be better on his health and good for the family. So they moved and have been in North Texas for over 20 years. Raquel said the plan was always to return to Mexico and build a home there, but with the children getting older, it was not easy to just remove them from their environment and uproot all they knew to move back to Mexico.

*[P]ues el plan era venirnos unos años y trabajar y hacer algo para regresarse a México, pero pues ya empezaron a crecer mis hijos y ya no es fácil planear o hacer lo que uno tenía planeado porque empiezan a crecer y uno empieza a ver que la vida es mejor aquí.*

[W]ell the plan was to come for a few years and work and do something and go back to Mexico, but then my kids began to grow older; and it isn't easy to plan, or do what one had planned, because they start to grow up and you begin to see that life is better here.

The idea that living in the U.S. is better than living in Mexico permeated every facet of our conversations. The other two parents in the study who were born in Mexico and migrated to the U.S. also touched on this. Education, however, was not the reason Raquel gave as to why living in the U.S. was better. Raquel said that economics and healthcare were initially her real concerns about moving back to Mexico with the kids.

Interviewer: *¿Y tomaron en cuenta como la educación de los niños? ¿Ustedes pensaron en eso en ese tiempo, como que a lo mejor aquí tendrían mejores posibilidades de obtener una educación o eso era secundario?*

And did you consider the education of your children? Did you think about it at that time, that maybe here they would have better opportunities of getting an education? Or that was secondary?

Raquel: *No, pues al principio no, porque eran chiquitos, no piensa uno mucho y como no tuvimos estudios, pues también no teníamos – no estábamos enfocados en eso. Pero cuando ya estuvieron, ya empezaron está la escuela, ya esa es la razón de que uno dice, “Si me voy para México no sabemos cómo estemos allá.” Económicamente nunca estuvimos bien cuando estábamos allá. Así es que pensábamos.*

*Mi esposo sí ha querido regresar, pero yo siempre pienso que él – aunque yo no hablo inglés y no tengo estudio, pienso que es mucho mejor aquí. Porque en México pues los trabajos están muy mal, y si no tiene una carrera, pues es lo mismo aquí, con la diferencia que yo analizo o pienso en también aparte del estudio, pienso en el médico; en México si uno no tiene dinero, usted cae al hospital, pero si no tiene dinero no lo atienden, no lo atienden; lo vivimos con experiencia propia.*

No, I mean at first no, because they were young, we didn't think about it much, and since we don't have degrees, well also we didn't - we weren't focused on that. But when they already were, already starting school here, then that was the reason we said, "If I'm going to Mexico, we don't know how we'll be there." Economically, we were never good when we were there. So, that's what we were thinking.

Yes, my husband did want to go back, but I always think that he - although I don't speak English and I don't have a degree, I think it is much better here. Because in Mexico, the jobs are very bad, and if you don't have a career, I mean it's the same here, with the difference that I think of apart from having a degree, I think of the doctor; In Mexico if you don't have money, and you end up in the hospital, but you don't have money they won't attend to you, they won't; We lived it with our own experience.

Raquel had the experience of living in Mexico and not being able to get medical assistance at the hospital for her son John Luke when he was a baby. That experience, with others she hinted at but did not expand on, affirmed her and Tomás' decision to stay in the U.S.

Even though Raquel and Tomás' decision to stay in the U.S. was more about the opportunities and possibilities available to their children, Raquel spoke of family and friends who she felt have been important to her here in the states. In our conversations, she continually focused on the importance of her family and her faith. It was her family that helped her move to Texas from Rhode Island; and with her friends from the church choir she was part of, she gained a second family of people who supported her when her mother passed away. During our interview, when asked what the most important lesson she has taught her family, she said, “[Y]o pienso que el amor a la familia y el respeto,” (“I think love of family and respect”). As I reflect on her interviews, and Abraham's, the idea of family and faith is at the heart of their conversations.

#### The Galarza Family

When I interviewed Janet, and asked for a parent or guardian whom I could contact for interviews, she offered her father Jaime. I was surprised at the fact she provided her father's name and contact information. I had interviewed at least 12 students before her, all of whom said they would like for me to contact their mothers – if they provided a parent or guardian contact at all. Though I have interviewed other parents for other projects prior to this study, I was extremely nervous to meet with Jaime. Mostly, I was curious to know how he, as a father, would receive the questions I had planned. And, as with all four Spanish speaking parents, I was nervous about how well received I would be since I had someone else asking the questions, inserting my own side questions as the conversations progressed.

Nonetheless, Jaime was such a calming force and was incredibly generous with his time. As soon as we arrived (the Spanish Language interviewer and I), we were greeted and welcomed into the Galarza home. We entered to the dining room and were asked, “¿Quieren algo de

*beber? ¿Una agua, te, o soda?"* Would you like something to drink? A water, tea, or soda? From there, I felt like I was visiting a family friend; there was a feeling of familiarity between us.

The first question we asked specifically referred to Jaime and Janet's father-daughter relationship. Jaime laughed and began telling us about how, as a family, they are close. He said that he always offers advice to his kids, and if they want to they will take his words seriously. Then, he spoke immediately about Janet and her navigating between institutions – moving from Eaglefoot College to Golden Triangle University (GTU).

*[Y]a ahí en la universidad no es igual que el colegio, o sea, el colegio los maestros te empujan más, y acá si tú quieres no estudias; pero sabes que no vas hacer nada. No vas a pasar tus clases ni nada y no te van a regalar nada. Entonces acá ya...después saben que es por sí solos y no porque les están diciendo.*

There at the university it isn't the same as the community college, that is, the community college teachers push you more, and here [university] if you want you to, don't study; but you know that you won't do anything. You won't pass your classes or anything and they won't give you anything. So then here... then they know that it's for themselves and not because someone is telling them to.

As he spoke of Janet's education, he insisted that she was dedicated to her studies and made the family proud by graduating from GTU. We interviewed Jaime the Wednesday after Janet had participated in commencement ceremonies. Aside from the obvious pride he carried for Janet's accomplishment, Jaime shared his experiences of moving from Mexico to California, onto Tucson, Arizona, and then North Texas.

In 1986, Jaime left his family's home near León, Guanajuato, Mexico to come to the U.S. to work and use his income to build a home in Mexico. He was 16 years old. He moved to California, where a few of his older brothers were living, and began working at a restaurant as a dishwasher. He continued working for restaurants for 10 years, working his way up to busboy, then cook. Until 1994, he would return home periodically to León to visit family. It was around this time that he was having difficulty with his immigration status in the U.S., plus he and his

wife, Teresa, had just had their first child. He had been with his wife Teresa for some time before he came to the U.S., and he married her at the age of 21. Teresa moved to California with him, and within the next seven years, they had their first three children, Jessica, Rafael, and Angel.

Around 2004, Jaime and his family followed his brothers and sisters to Tucson, Arizona. There he worked for over three years manufacturing and installing granite. After those three years, the recession began to hit the U.S. economy, and Jaime lost his job. Teresa had family in North Texas, two sisters, who encouraged them to come and work in the region. When Jaime told this story, he pointed to a black sedan in the driveway and told us,

*Y ya cuando me vine de Arizona para acá, nada más lo que...en ese carro negro que está allí, nos vinimos. Mi esposa y los tres estos, todavía no tenía el chiquito, los tres ellos y lo que cupo de ropa nada más en la cajuela, así nos vinimos; dejé todo allá.*

And when I came from Arizona to here, nothing more than...in that black car that's there [points to car in the driveway], we came. My wife and these three [children] – we still didn't have the youngest – the three of them and whatever clothes fit in the trunk, that's how we came; I left everything there.

Though he does not speak about it, as I mention in the student findings, Janet felt those moves were difficult for her both socially and educationally, especially because they moved in the middle of her sophomore year of high school.

Jaime also spoke of his ability to quickly find work here in North Texas, working first with granite, then moving on to working in maintenance and repair. Now he oversees maintenance for apartment properties. He bought his current home three years ago, moving his family from an apartment to this home. He acknowledges that through this hard work and perseverance, he could provide for his family. He asked Janet to forgo working while completing her remaining time at GTU so she could focus on school.

These details are points of pride for Jaime, but his ability to provide for his family did not supersede his commitment to his family and children. Jaime said that as a parent he has fostered

an open dialogue and communication with his children. He maintains an authoritative presence, and as a father commands respect from his children, yet he also wanted to have a relationship with his children so that they would not fear telling him where they were going, or whom they were with. Rather, he said, the open dialogue allows him to know where they are and what they may be doing. He spoke of how, in traditional Latino homes, “*la esposa siempre le da la última palabra al papa.*” (“The wife always lets the father have the last word.”) Not so, for Jaime. He feels that he and his wife share the responsibility for those decisions.

#### The Muñoz Family

“*Gané la lotería con mi familia*” (I won the lottery with my family), Adela Munoz said when asked how she would describe her family. Adela was excited to talk about her daughter, Isabel. Adela was not at loss for words to say not only how much she treasured and cared for each of her children, but also the accomplishments each have attained, as well as her attempts to help them achieve more.

The aspirations Adela holds for her children, so that they can achieve their goals, are immense. For example, Adela wakes each morning at 5:00 am to make breakfast for Isabel, then drive her to the train stop so she can catch an early train to GTU. Upon Isabel’s return home, Adela prepares a quick lunch so Isabel can run an after-school program for the children who live at their apartment complex. In fact, Adela worked for the apartment management company when they first moved to these apartments and helped Isabel obtain this job.

Adela is a loving mother who not only does for her children but is actively involved in helping people who live in her apartment community complete forms for medical care and education, as well as helping her neighbor find a lawyer after having a car accident. As much as she is involved with her community, Adela has no other family here in the U.S.

Adela and her three children fled their home in Colombia 18 years ago. She explained that her husband was part of the military in Colombia and became an investigator for the army:

*Es que mi esposo era militar y cuando él se retiró de la milicia se hizo como investigador, como algo privado del ejército, y él se infiltró en las guerrillas para poderlas detener y a él lo descubrieron. Por intermedio de él cogieron a un cabecilla en las FARC que está todavía en la cárcel y él nos sentenció a todos a muerte. Los seis militares que lo cogieron a él, incluyendo mi esposo, a todos los mataron, y les mataron familias.*

My husband was in the military and when he retired from the military, he became an investigator, a private investigator for the army, and he infiltrated the guerrillas to detain them and he was discovered. Through him they [the military] caught a ringleader in the FARC, who is still in jail, and he [the FARC ringleader] sentenced us all to death. The six soldiers who took them [the investigators], including my husband, killed them all, and killed their families.

After hearing their family was threatened with death, Adela and her children took a 26-hour bus ride from Bucaramanga, Santander Department in Colombia to her husband's family home. There she lived for three unpleasant years, as her in-laws blamed her for her husband's death. She recognized that her family's safety was still at risk, so she fled with her family to Ecuador for a year. When she began hearing rumors that the guerrillas who killed her husband were looking in Ecuador for those on the run, she applied for a refugee program for herself and her children.

Though Adela is happy to have her family with her in North Texas, she said that coming to the U.S., let alone Texas, was far from her first choice. She was 39 when she came to the country and knew that here, speaking English would be a difficult feat for her:

*Entonces por ampararme porque había mucha guerrilla y les llegó un comentario que podían detectarme a mí porque por colombiana, porque soy blanquita, porque era diferente y a los ecuatorianos. Entonces el acento y todo eso y, yo tenía más marcado, lógico, allá. Entonces me dijeron, "Métase al programa." Me metí al programa y fui una de las ocho familias escogidas para salir del país. Y lo primero que pedí era no venir acá porque creo que yo sabía qué me iba a pasar con el idioma, yo como que presentía esto.*



*Yo no sé si era que Dios me manda señales, yo decía, “Mándame para Suiza. Mándeme a Europa. Mándeme para España. Mándeme a donde fuera.” Era sorteado. “Aquí está.” Que Dallas, ay Dios mío. ¿Dónde es, un monte? Y todo mundo creyendo que era monte. Y dije, “Bueno, nunca he vivido en el monte, nos tocó, qué más vamos a hacer.” ¿Y qué podíamos hacer?*

So, to protect myself, because there were a lot of guerrillas and they got word that they would be able to find me because I'm Colombian, because I'm white, and because it was different from the Ecuadorians. Then the accent and all that and, I was more pronounced there, of course. So, they said, "Get into the program." I got into the program and was one of the eight families chosen to leave the country. And the first thing I asked was not to come here [the U.S.] because I think I knew what was going to happen with the language, I had a feeling like this.

I don't know if God was sending me signals, I said, "Send me to Switzerland. Send me to Europe. Send me to Spain. Send me wherever." It was a toss-up. "Here it is." That Dallas, oh my God. Where is it, a mountain? And everyone was thinking it was a mountain. And I said, "Well, I've never lived on the mountain, it's our turn, what else are we going to do." And what could we do?

Adela and I shared similar feelings about our language acquisition abilities, English for her and Spanish for me. This was something that we talked about before our interview. She mentioned that she has taken the test to become a naturalized citizen twice but has failed each time on the same question because of her inability to understand English.

Nevertheless, Adela came to the U.S. with her children and \$20.00. She was terrified. She remembers coming around November or December and the host family, with whom she lived for some time, prepared a turkey dinner for her and her children. She said, "*Y nosotros no comemos pavo. [...] Ay, Dios mío, cuando estos niños, 'Mamá, ¿qué es eso? A nosotros no nos sabe bien eso. ¿Eso qué es mamá?'*" ("And we do not eat turkey. [...] Oh, my God, when these kids, 'Mom, what's that? This doesn't taste good to us. What is it mom?'"). It was a major change in culture, food, and life.

Moreover, Adela has an elder daughter from a previous marriage, Sofia, who lives with Adela's mother in Colombia. Since leaving Bucaramanga 18 years ago, Adela has not physically

seen her family, as her mother is in poor health and Sofia has two children of her own. Despite all this, there was a tenacity Adela conveyed throughout our interview that left me inspired.

### The Gonzalez Family

When I interviewed Steven and Renee, I could clearly see that faith and religion were central to their family unit. Having been raised as devout Catholics in North Texas, and having experienced the public schools here, Steven and Renee decided that their sons, Aaron and Saul, would attend private Catholic schools. They were very candid about their feelings in putting their sons in private school. Both Steven and Renee felt that because of the smaller class sizes and personal attention, the boys would have a better life and more opportunities for success. Steven explained his feelings about his children's education:

I think we made the commitment to put them in private school, Catholic school one, because we always wanted them to have a better commitment to the Catholic faith, a better understanding. I wanted the environment to be more of a learning environment instead of what the public school offers. Not to say that the public schools weren't good enough, but you have all the challenges and the distractions. You have a lot more challenges and a lot more distractions that aren't conducive to a good learning environment, in my opinion. I just thought that the Catholic private school was a better environment, would be a good way to say it. If I had the opportunity to put them in there, I wanted to and that was one of those things.

Steven and Renee grew up in the same town and the same neighborhood in North Texas. Though they didn't go to the same high school, they met each other because they were parishioners of the same church, and because of their siblings. Renee is one of 12 and Steven is one of six, and the only son. Steven hung out with and attended high school with Renee's brothers. Steven's cousin Barry married Renee's sister, Nelly, and their son, Jared, is just a year older than Aaron; Aaron and Jared are very close. During our interviews, Renee's brother dropped by to chat with Steven a bit. So, family is very important to the Gonzalez family, as they have close ties to their extended family.

The bonds between their family and their church are extensive. The church they grew up attending is the same church where they, and most of their siblings, were married. It is the church where Aaron and Saul were baptized. It's the church that is affiliated with the private Catholic school that Aaron and Saul first attended. When Barry and Nelly's eldest daughters began attending the same school, Renee and Steven were newly married, with no children (they are 10 years younger than Barry and Nelly). Because they were close to their nieces and were already involved with the church, Steven began coaching the girls' basketball team. Steven and Renee devoted countless hours to the church and school. Once Aaron and Saul began attending, however, they realized that their sons were not being challenged in the classroom, so they moved about 20 minutes north to a more affluent parish and Catholic school. Renee had noticed clues that her children were not being pushed to excel at the first school.

Watching the boys do their work and stuff like that, I was telling him and I just said, "Man, Aaron doesn't study, he's getting hundreds, and he goes... it doesn't make sense. How does he not study and make a hundred? How does he do that? I don't know. Maybe they're not challenging him enough or something." Saul was doing really good and I said, "I really do think they need to go somewhere else, somewhere, because they're not being challenged. He's not studying and he's making a hundred. I have a problem with that. He's like, "What are you talking about. What?" We ended up changing. He didn't want to because of all the investment he had in there. I'm like, "We got to do what's right for the boys, you know, what's good for them."

Steven then explained his take on the educational opportunities for their sons.

On one hand, I could clearly see what she was indicating because I saw it myself. There wasn't much of an academic challenge and with my involvement, I saw the budget. I knew how much of a struggle they were having. I didn't know exactly what kind of school would be a better school, but I knew something had to be different. I was committed to try and make that change there, but it became too much of a burden [...]

Though family was important to them, by moving they moved farther from family, they also stressed the importance of providing a substantially better education to their sons than they felt they received at public school. Steven and Renee did not complete bachelor's degrees, but Steven completed an associate's degree at a for-profit technical school that recently closed its

doors. He downplays his degree, but he credits it and the skills he learned at that school with landing his job at a multibillion-dollar technology company headquartered in North Texas.

Renee attended Eaglefoot College but never completed her associate's degree. Steven and Renee wanted their sons to complete at least a bachelor's degree and took the steps necessary to ensure they could attain that level of education. What they did not expect was the overall effect Aaron's college education would have on them, as parents, and on their family. Renee was especially concerned about the relationship she would have with Aaron after he earned his bachelor's degree.

At times, I get scared because I'm thinking, "What are these schools teaching you? Where is what I taught you?" But it's -- I struggled with that [...] he reassures me, "Mom, it's not that I forgot, or I'm forgetting where I came from, who I am, and what you taught me. It's just that there's more to that than just that piece, or that core that you..." And he goes, "I'm just trying to make it stronger." And it's hard for me because not coming from a college level mentality, if you will, you know? All mine is common sense and wisdom that I received from my mother, from my day to day. But listening to him and seeing what it has made him into is like, "Oh, wow." You know, that's pretty amazing.

Once Renee made that statement, I joked that I would begin to cry, but then she did begin to cry. She spoke about the changing role, as a mother and parent, which she has begun to experience with her sons. She said, "It's amazing what college can do to your kids and the power that it provides for them." It was in this statement that she summarized the essence of what I, and other higher education researchers, hope to convey through our work.

#### The Villarreal Family

I met Martha at a Starbucks for our first interview and noticed her youthful appearance. At 43, she was the youngest parent interviewed for the study. She also had a great sense of humor and had kept laughing quite a bit during both interviews. When we met at Starbucks, she apologized for not being able to do the interview in her home, as her husband's family was in

town from Oklahoma. She shared that this is the only family they have living in the U.S. Martha's family is from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

As she spoke of family, Martha spoke about the pain of living undocumented in the U.S. and not being able to return home to visit her family, especially when her eldest sister passed away as they were very close. This was the sister who told Martha that Josefina was a bright student and they needed to take advantage of her talents. Her sister told her, “*‘Esa niña tiene un potencial bien grande’, dice, ‘explótala’. Así me decía: ‘Explótala, porque ella va a llegar.’*” (“‘That girl has great potential,’ she said. ‘Exploit it.’ So, she said to me: ‘Exploit it, because she will go places.’”) We laughed, as this is not something one would expect to hear, but she said that was just how her sister was. Her sister encouraged Martha to continue to help Josefina make it further in life. When Martha heard of her sister's passing, it was incredibly difficult for her since she was not able to mourn with her family.

The struggle of not being able to return to one's home country was something that the four parents born outside the U.S. spoke frequently about. Martha was the only parent who remains undocumented, but the others struggled with issues regarding their visas, residency status, and the process to obtain citizenship. Martha was also very forthcoming about the fact that Josefina was also undocumented. The family is a mixed status home, as the younger daughters Pamela and Natalie were both born in the U.S. and are citizens. Martha told us that she was not concerned about the effect that Josefina's status would have on obtaining a college education, as they had not had any issues. But when Josefina transferred to Golden Triangle University, Martha changed her mind.

*Sí, yo se lo saqué [DACA], porque le dije: “No hija, gracias a Dios no ha tenido ningún problema por el seguro”. Le digo: “Vamos a esperar”. Y ya dije: “¿Sabes qué? No quiero que – porque te vayas a desanimar si no lo sacamos, o que digan algo, que te*

*empiecen a hacer” – digo, “mejor aquí como la gente...ya es más grande, y hiere más, y los sentimientos, y no” – por eso fue que lo sacamos. Cuando ella estaba en el UNT.*

Yes, I got it for her [DACA], because I said: "No sweetie, thank God, you've never had a problem regarding your safety." I told her, "Let's wait." And then I said, "You know what? I don't want for – because you're going to get discouraged if we don't get it, or you're told something, that you start doing - " I say, "better here as people...you're already older, and it would hurt more, and your feelings, and no” – that's why we got it. When she was at GTU.

Initially, Martha was not concerned for her daughter's safety, but she did not want Josefina to feel discouraged at any point while attending GTU because she did not file paperwork for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals).

Martha continued to emphasize that although she was no longer in her home country and did not work full-time, so she could tend to her daughters, she would do anything to help them succeed. She stressed this as she told us how she gives advice to parents like her on how to get their children to college.

*Y, ya me preguntan que cómo le hicimos, que – dice: “Pero, es que tú, tú si no sabes inglés, este, ¿cómo le hicieron?” Le dije: “No, yo iba y yo le decía a mi hija: “Tú dime dónde, y cómo”. Es que no me acuerdo la palabra ahorita... Que, que yo nomás le decía que – le digo: “Tú dime rana y yo salto”. O sea, pa’ onde quiera quería ir. “Y mamá, llévame acá. Mamá llévame a allá, y mamá esto...” Antes de que manejara. Ahora ya maneja y ya nomás me dice: “Mamá, ¿puedo ir?” Porque pa’ todo me pide permiso.*

And, they [other parents] ask me how we did it, that – they ask: "But, it's that you, you don't know English, so, how did you do it?" I said: "No, I went and I told my daughter: "You tell me where, and how." I just do not remember the words right now... That, I just told her that – I told her: "You tell me jump, and I'll ask how high." I mean, wherever it was she wanted to go. "And Mom, take me here. Mom take me there, and mom this..." Before she was driving. Now she can drive and she just asks me: "Mom, can I go?" Because she still asks for my permission.

Martha took Josefina everywhere she needed to go to enroll in college. Martha said she would even drive her daughter to school, or to the bus stop to catch a bus. Whatever Josefina needed, Martha was there to help her. Even though she was willing to do this, she reminded Josefina that “...*todo sacrificio tiene su recompensa.*” (“Every sacrifice has its rewards.”) She

said this was the most important lesson she hoped to impart to her daughters. She reminds Josefina of this each time she sees her struggling with classes or feeling down about school. Of everything that Martha shared, this was the most meaningful to me as it was clear to see the sacrifices Martha has made to see Josefina be rewarded with her education.

#### Funds of Knowledge: Opportunity and College Knowledge

Funds of knowledge refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge asserts that families can do help their children using the accumulated knowledge within the home that is not traditionally recognized as having value (Kiyama, 2008). Kiyama (2008; 2010) and Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) suggest that, in regard to higher education, families do have knowledge about college, that should be activated through, “concrete strategies or actions that will enhance students’ chances of enrolling and succeeding in college” (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012, p.12). The funds of knowledge within each home varied. Each family ranged in the amount of knowledge and understanding of college within the home. The following themes emerged 1) opportunities and aspirations; and 2) varied and existing college knowledge. They are discussed below.

#### *Opportunity and Aspirations*

Every family in this study spoke not only about their educational aspirations for their children, but how those aspirations were rooted in their belief of the overall opportunities available to their children in the United States. The four parents born outside the U.S. held onto the idea of the American dream, and that served as a basis for believing their children would have an abundance of opportunities in the U.S. that they may not have had in their home country.

Some of the families interviewed never intended on staying in the United States permanently. Jaime said his main reason for coming to the U.S. was to work and earn money to build a house on the land his father owned back in Mexico. The end goal was never to stay in the U.S. Both the Galarza and Bejarano families expressed having the intention of moving back to Mexico. Working in the U.S. was a means to an end: building and establishing a home for their families in Mexico. Yet, once these families had children, this made moving back almost impossible.

Both Jaime and Raquel spoke about their choice to stay in the U.S. In their opinion, the opportunities for economic stability and social mobility were better in the U.S. than in Mexico. Jaime admitted that technology and lifestyles are now more comparable in the two countries than in the past. The real difference is the way in which upward social mobility is achieved. Mexican-born parents perceive the opportunity for their children to move into a different, or higher, social class is perceived as more attainable in the U.S. than in Mexico.

I began the parent findings by telling the story of the Bejarano family. When she talked about living in Mexico, Raquel stated, “*Económicamente nunca estuvimos bien cuando estábamos allá.*” (“Economically, we were never good when we were there.”). For Raquel, the consideration of educational opportunities in the U.S. was an afterthought, but as Abraham got older, she felt that was another benefit of living in the U.S. Raquel constantly spoke of how she would do anything for her children. To that end, when she and Tomás were deciding whether to go back to Mexico, she realized that they did not know how their children would adjust educationally and emotionally to moving from the U.S. back to Mexico.

Jaime, on the other hand, was more focused on having his children understand that they had many more opportunities available to them in the U.S., especially if they continued to pursue



their education. In addressing his own children, Jaime said it was important for them to understand how times have changed:

*Miren, yo lo que quiero que ustedes entiendan es que en el tiempo mío y de tu mamá ya no es como ahorita. Ustedes sí tienen la oportunidad de estar aquí [en los EE.UU.] y ustedes deben de estudiar porque ustedes, sí, lo van a necesitar.*

Look, what I want you all to understand is that in my and your mother's time it's not like it is today. You all have the opportunity of being here [in the U.S.] and you all must continue to study because, yes, you're going to need it.

In Jaime's perspective, there are more opportunities in the U.S. than were available to him and his wife in Mexico. He believed that if someone in the U.S. did not continue to pursue a degree beyond high school it is because that person did not want to do it.

Parental aspirations among the participants of this study were incredibly high. Moreover, each parent expected their child to complete at least a bachelor's degree, with all of them, except for Steven, saying they expected their child to earn a graduate degree. The aspirations that Jaime maintained for Janet were high because of Jaime's own beliefs about the potential for someone in the U.S. to do well with an advanced education.

Adela also believed that being in the U.S. afforded her children more opportunities than she had in Colombia. Adela, as I mentioned in her family narrative, did not want to come to the U.S. Ultimately, however, she has seen what Isabel could achieve because of their life in the U.S. Adela said, “[E]so es lo que decimos, que en este país es de demasiadas oportunidades y hay que conocerlas.” (“[T]hat's what we say, that in this country there are so many opportunities and you need to know what they are.”)

More than any parent, Adela makes a point of talking about how the community college has been a place for her family to have a chance to succeed and pursue their educational goals. Adela and her three children have all attended Bear Brook College. At the college, Adela took

courses to learn English so she could become a citizen. Isabel started her education at Bear Brook, and her sister, Diana, was to start college there in the fall of 2016. The ability for the Muñoz family to go to college, and do so with minimal concern about cost, began at the community college.

As the only parents born in the U.S., Steven and Renee also talked about opportunity, but their understanding and description of opportunity was different than the other parents. They felt that enrolling their sons in private, Catholic schools was the educational opportunity for change in their family. Steven and Renee spoke about their own experience in public schools in the 1980s and how they felt, over time, public schools would not be best for their children.

Steven said that enrolling Aaron and Saul in Catholic schools was more about improving their education, while Renee was opposed to them attending public schools because of her own experience. She went on to say, “You know, I just wanted them to have better opportunity and be around teachers who would observe and invest their time on a more individual basis. I knew that the [public] schools were overloaded where we were.” She wanted more for her children and, having experienced public education herself, took the chance to enroll her sons in a private, Catholic elementary school. While they both maintained they did not feel their children were necessarily superior to public school kids, they did acknowledge that the schools their sons attended provided unique advantages that revealed additional opportunities during the college search and choice process.

Overall, the parents in this study held high aspirations for their children’s educational achievements. The funds of knowledge within each home demonstrate how parents born outside the United States recognized that the U.S. provided their family with more economic opportunities than in their home country. These personally held beliefs about the opportunities to

be more financially stable then also engendered among parents the aspirations for their children to achieve an education far beyond their own attainment. Perceived opportunity may have differed among families, as Steven and Renee were born and educated in the U.S. Their personally held beliefs about opportunities were slightly different, in that they were more focused on education.

#### *Varied and Existing College Knowledge*

All the parents helped their children in their pursuit to go to college in a variety of different ways. To some extent, each family had existing knowledge in the home about college and college-going. The breadth and depth of college knowledge, however, was incredibly varied among families. No one family had everything or felt they knew all they could, or should, know to help their child search for and apply to colleges. Though knowledge varied widely, from having the assistance of a college search tool, to not understanding the difference between a community college and four-year university, each student still chose to attend the community college, not a four-year university to which they were admitted.

#### *Parent Involvement and Access to Resources*

Renee and Steven were the family who, by far, had the most resources and tools available to them to help Aaron get to college. As their narrative mentioned, both were born and educated in North Texas and sent both sons to a private, Catholic prep school. Per our conversation, Renee and Steven credited a guidance program provided by the school with assisting them in the search for colleges for Aaron.

Renee: They [the school] gave us a program, it was called Navigance. And it was for the parents and it was for the student. So, the student had their login and so did the parents and so through that we could go in there and kinda look at different schools, what they offer, what could they major in, so it was like a tutorial that we could take ourselves in within this program that would kind of...

- Steven: Help us with our decision.
- Renee: Make your decision...Narrow it down, anyway.
- Steven: Helping us pick the right college. It had a lot of filters like location, size, cost...
- Renee: And they [counselors] had meetings on this all the time. "Okay, it is time for you, you should be at this point for your child. Okay by this point applications, approvals are going to be sent out. They should be already done." I mean they started sophomore, end of sophomore into junior year, preparing.
- Steven: I don't know what we... how we would have helped him had we not been a part of that program.

Since both of Steven and Renee's sons attended the same high school, they spoke about the different ways in which they used this program for both sons. Aaron, a participant in this study and the eldest, was the first to head off to college. Steven and Renee recall that year being a very difficult one for their family. Their sons are four years apart, so as one was graduating from high school, the other was graduating from middle school, about to enter high school.

Having Navigance provided by the high school helped them to keep track of the process. Renee admitted that the program provided by the school was the reason they felt more prepared to help Aaron: "I'm grateful that the school helped prepare us, because if not, guess what? It would have probably been just last minute." They continued speaking with me about how they learned from Aaron and approached college-going and the Navigance system differently with Saul. With Aaron, they wanted him to follow his dream and did not want to hinder him from doing so, but when it came time for Saul's college search and applications they were more tempered in their approach to helping him. They spent more time explaining to him why going to college was much more than somewhere to play ball. It also helped that Aaron had brother-to-brother conversations with Saul about this.

Steven and Renee relied on that program, and input from their extended family. Aaron is very close to his cousin Jared, who also attended Maple Flower College to play baseball. Jared transferred to a Historically Black University in Southeast Texas to continue playing baseball on scholarship. Aaron wanted to do the same, but Renee wanted Aaron to apply to top-tiered schools like Notre Dame, Rice, or even the University of Texas, in addition to the small, private, liberal arts colleges and community colleges he was considering because of baseball. Steven admits that he was not too concerned about where the college was located, he just wanted Aaron to pursue his dreams of playing baseball. Steven wanted to support Aaron to take a chance:

We talked about the school type. We went to go see a few of them. We didn't go to many, but he wanted to play baseball. I mean, I know that sounds kind of corny now, but not even corny, but maybe not appropriate reason for making your decisions; but that was what he wanted to do.

Steven and Renee, while having a lot of resources at their disposal, wanted to support Aaron, no matter what his goals were. Being able to play baseball was the principal reason on which Aaron based his college choices, which Steven and Renee confess was probably something they should have been more involved with.

Some parents had little knowledge about the higher education system in the United States, but could draw on other experiences to help their child search for, and apply to, colleges. Adela spoke about how she would always help her children with whatever it was they needed help. Adela, who was not educated in the U.S., was still incredibly involved with Isabel's college search and choice process. She helped Isabel apply to college, apply for scholarships, and apply for the FAFSA. Adela did not understand, and still is unclear about, higher education in the U.S.; yet, she continually found herself helping Isabel with applying to colleges. From helping with the essays, to finding recommenders, Adela spoke passionately about helping Isabel with these tasks.

Interviewer: *¿Ayudaba a Isabel a aplicar a las universidades?*

Did you help Isabel to apply to universities?

Adela: *Sí – con todas, sí – que todos piden. Todos piden. ¡Dios Santo! Y yo le decía, con lo de las universidades, estamos actualmente aplicando a universidades con Isabel. Nos ha tocado ir a pedir varias recomendaciones en la YMCA, de los profesores...Entonces, sí, siempre se les ayuda. Ahora es menos lo que le ayudo porque como ya cogió el estilo, ya sabe, ya tiene la experiencia. Entonces le dije: “¿Escribiste el ensayito?” – “Sí mamá” – Pero como ya saben cómo lo hago, yo, de corazón, casi quiero hacer llorar a la gente con lo que escribo, entonces ellas saben que ellas tienen que hacerlo. [...] Es menos lo que ha necesitado mi ayuda, porque ya es más avanzado. Ya eso lo hago cuando iniciaron, yo les ayudo, a las dos igualito. Tengo la experiencia de Isabel, la seguí con Diana, pero nos tocó aprender con Isabel y nos fue bien, no nos fue mal.*

Yes - with all, yes - they all asked. Everybody asked. Dear God! And I said, with universities, we are currently applying to universities with Isabel. We have had to go to ask several recommendations at the YMCA, teachers ... So, yes, I always helped her. Now, it is less that I help her because she already knows the style, you know, she already has the experience. So, I'll say, "Did you write the essay?" - "Yes, Mom" - But since they know how I do it, I, in my heart, almost want to make people cry with what I write, so they know they must do it. [...] It's less help she has needed, because it's more advanced now. That, I did when they started, I helped them, both the same. I had experience with Isabel, I did the same with Diana, but we had to learn from Isabel and we did well, we did not go wrong.

She shared how she would help her daughters write these essays by taking ideas the girls had and writing them out in Spanish. The girls would then rewrite the essay, translating it to English and editing it further before sending it out. Adela attributed her own educational background as the foundation for her ability to help her children. In Colombia, Adela did not complete college, but she studied public accounting for two years after graduating from high school there. She felt that her own education was the reason she could more readily assist Isabel in comparison to the parents of Isabel's closest friends.

She also mentioned attending a college fair in a more affluent suburb near her North Texas home. There, counselors and staff helped students to complete the FAFSA and answer questions about paying for college. The counselor at the event told Adela and Isabel that it would be best to send Isabel to the community college first to alleviate concerns about cost.

*[L]a consejera que estuvo en el evento, ella fue la que dijo: “Yo te recomiendo, piénsalo bien, te recomiendo hacer los dos años de básico en el college. No vas a tener ningún costo con lo que tú vas a hacer, porque yo sé que tú apruebas eso, del FAFSA, y de ahí tienes que asesorarte y pasarte para la universidad. Pero da lo mismo tomar el básico en la universidad, en la GTU, que tiene el mismo valor, que el valor no monetario, valor académico, que lo que tú lo hicieras”. Entonces, allí fue donde nosotros tomamos la decisión y ya ellos, los consejeros de la high school, les ayudan a inscribirse para el Bear Brook, cuando ya están definidos.*

The counselor who was at the event, she was the one who said: "I recommend that you, think it over well, I recommend you do two years of basic courses at the college. You are not going to have any cost with what you are going to do, because I know what you'll be approved for, the FAFSA, and from there you should be advised to transfer to the university. But it's the same as taking the basics at the university, at GTU, which has the same value, not monetary value, academic value, for what you will do." So, that's where we made the decision and they, the counselors at the high school, helped them sign up for Bear Brook, when they were ready.

Hearing about the community college and the opportunity for Isabel to avoid going into debt to enroll in college was a bonus for Adela. She was concerned with how to help Isabel pay for college even though she helped her to apply for quite a few scholarships.

Martha was equally committed to helping Josefina find her way to college. Like Adela, Martha was her daughter's cheerleader. In her interview, Martha shared that she did whatever was necessary to help Josefina with applying for college. Martha was unfamiliar with the process to go to college and what was required, but she told her daughter, “*Tu dime rana y yo salto,*” (“You tell me to jump, and I’ll ask how high”). She described driving her daughter to the nearby university so Josefina could complete the admissions application and financial aid process through the TASFA (Texas Application for State Financial Aid).

Martha cautiously helped Josefina apply for DACA. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This policy, implemented in 2012 under the Obama administration, provides that “certain people who came to the United States as children and meet several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal” (USCIS, 2017). Of the three undocumented students interviewed, only Josefina was confirmed as having completed DACA paperwork. In any case, Martha noted that Josefina had no real troubles during through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and did not feel DACA was necessary.

*Yo no se la saqué. Yo se la sa... Como ella nunca había batallado, y como todavía estaba en que sí, que no, y que van a deportar a todos los niños que lo, lo hicieron.*

*Lo que hice yo, fue esperar a que ella entrara a la universidad.*

I didn't let her take it. I let her... Since she had never struggled, and since it was still a matter of if they would or wouldn't deport the children who, who did it.

So, what I did, I waited until she went to a university.

As mentioned in the Villarreal narrative, Martha was thankful that she never had to worry about Josefina's safety in the U.S., but she did not want Josefina to get saddened or distracted from going to college without DACA, so she helped her complete the paperwork when Josefina decided to transfer to GTU.

Martha was prepared, though, if Josefina could not attend college in the U.S. Martha had planned for Josefina to return to Juárez to live with her mother (Josefina's grandmother) and attend college in Mexico so that Josefina could study and pursue her college goals.

*Yo le decía que, si ella no podía entrar aquí que se fuera con mi mamá a Juárez, y allá le pagábamos la universidad. Sí, yo le decía, “No, no, si no se puede aquí, te vas allá con mi mamá, y nosotros te mandamos, igual allá son menos años. Ya nomás revalidas tus materias allá a ver qué te piden, y te vas para allá,” y dijo: “Ah, pues no, pero no me gustaría esa opción porque para dejarte.” Y como mi mamá la ha visto mucho, así como su mamá, “es mi mamá también.” Le dije, “Pues te vas”. Y no, pero no, mira, hasta la fecha no, así batallado, batallado mucho, no.*



I told her that if she couldn't get in here that she would go to my mother's in Juarez, and we would pay for her to go to a university there. Yes, I told her, "No, no, if you can't here, you'll go over there with my mom, and we will send you, since there it's fewer years. You would just have your materials reevaluated there and see what they ask of you, and you'll go there," and she said: "Well, no, I wouldn't like that option because I'd have to leave you," And since she sees my mom a lot like her mom, "she's my mom too." So, I said to her, "Well, you're going." And no, but no, look, to date no, to have struggled like that, struggled a lot, no.

Martha was prepared to support Josefina's college goals and desires in any way. She was eager to help her daughter by any means necessary. She drove her to colleges, helped her find scholarships. Knowing the political environment that had been brewing during the last year regarding Mexico and the border, Martha would have even let her daughter return to Mexico, so Josefina would have some opportunity to pursue an education and career beyond that which Martha and her husband had obtained themselves.

#### *Limited Information with an Abundance of Support*

Knowledge about college was limited in the Galarza home. Jaime was the only parent interviewed who was unclear about the financial assistance his daughter Janet received to attend college and stated that neither he, nor his wife Teresa, helped Janet with applying to colleges. Despite this, Jaime still had a general understanding about college, applying for college, and the difference between a community college and four-year college.

Jaime knew that because he and his wife did not go to school in the U.S. and never attended college, Janet would need to seek assistance from teachers in her school to help her apply and go to college.

*Como nosotros no sabemos tanto de escuelas...no sabemos de computadora ni nada. Yo siempre lo que, y todavía le digo, "Mira Janet, tú tienes que tener quién te guíe más, a quién enfocarte. Agárrate de un maestro que será bueno, que te guíe a dónde quieres llegar. Porque hay tantas formas de ayudarte. ¿Yo qué te puedo decir? Yo no sé de escuelas, no sé ni cuál es buena ni cuál es mala. Entonces nosotros no tenemos mucho eso." Siempre uno no nada más dice, "Pues trata de buscar quien te ayude y quien te oriente."*

Since we don't much about schools...we don't even know anything about computers. What I always, and I still tell her, "Look, Janet, you need to find someone to help guide you, someone to look to. Get a hold of a teacher who will be good to you and will help guide you where you want to go. There are a lot of ways to find help. And what can I tell you? I know nothing about schools, I don't know which is good and which is bad. I mean, we really don't have that [means to help her]." I always have told her, "Well, try to find someone who will help you and who will guide you."

Jaime communicated that he was unfamiliar with all that was needed to help Janet. But even telling Janet to find someone to help her demonstrates that Jaime has a general idea that getting in to college is a multi-step process, or at least one that demands more than what he and his wife could offer in assistance to Janet.

Jaime and Teresa were always involved in their children's schooling. Jaime spoke about accompanying Janet or her brothers to field trips, or going to parent nights at the school. They even attended a few sessions at Janet's high school to learn more about applying to college and financial aid. He was glad to have had this information and to know that it is possible for Janet to go to college, but he wished that he had more information about the pathway to college. What Jaime did not know was that Janet could have attended a university first, something he wished she had done in the first place, "*Yo pensé que primero era el colegio y después la universidad.*" ("I thought that first is the community college, then the university.")

Raquel admits that she was marginally involved with the college application process, but she said it was partly because of her inability to speak English and Abraham's own willingness to let her help him. When I asked Abraham about assistance with applications and scholarships, he did not mention help from his mother. But Raquel remembers when he was applying to colleges that he would come to ask questions, then retreat to his room.

*Y muchas veces no me decía ni para qué era, "Oye mami, que esto y que lo otro." Y le contestaba y luego, "¿Para qué es?" "Oh, es que estoy haciendo algo." Y no me decía que era, hasta después, "Oh, te estaba preguntando porque –" Okay. Y muchas veces no*

*me decía, hasta después me daba cuenta para qué era esa información [para sus aplicaciones a la universidad].*

And a lot of times he wouldn't tell me what it was for, "Hey mom, what's this or that." And I would answer him and then later, "What is this for?" "Oh it's because I'm doing something." And he wouldn't tell me what it was for until later. "Oh, I was asking you because -" Okay. And a lot of times he wouldn't tell me, until later I realized that it was information for [his college applications].

Raquel also attended college fairs with Abraham, only to find that the information was available only in English. She blamed herself for not knowing more English, feeling that this would have enabled her to help Abraham more than she was able.

*Y digamos, en algo que yo le estoy diciendo, me dijeron y yo no le estoy comprobando. En cambio, si yo hubiera hablado inglés y lo hubiera leído, yo agarro la misma información de él y aprendo lo mismo que él está viendo y le hubiera podido – pienso que sí lo hubiera podido ayudar más. Porque sí todo lo que les daban, toda la información que les daban era puro en inglés.*

And you know, I'm telling you, they could have told me something and I'm not checking it out. Instead, if I had spoken English and read it, I would've had the same information as him and learned the same thing he was seeing and I could have – I think I could have helped him more. Because everything they gave them, all the information they gave them was only in English.

Raquel focused on how her inability to know or understand English held her back from helping Abraham.

Raquel eventually became aware of the difference between a community college and university from her own work. Raquel spoke about her current job, cleaning houses, and mentioned that a woman she works for always asked about Abraham and where he was going to school. The woman was a teacher and always told Raquel the importance of sending Abraham to college, especially a university. When Abraham was rejected from a well-known, technical school on the east coast, Raquel asked him what his backup plan was, knowing that he had applied to another university. She wanted him to attend a university, but saw that he became discouraged to attend after visiting with his high school counselor.

*Él estaba con un consejero que a él le dijo o lo aconsejaba que era bueno que entraré a un colegio porque eran las mismas clases que iba a hacer en una universidad los primeros años, y que entraré a un colegio y después ya en cierto tiempo se fuera a la universidad, que no se graduará del colegio. Y yo siempre pensaba, pues no, yo no sé mucho de estudio, pero [de] personas que me platicaban a mí, yo pensaba que perdían tiempo en el colegio.*

He had a counselor who told him or advised him that it was better to start at a community college because it was the same classes he would take at a university in the first couple years, and he would start at a community college and then after a certain time he would go to a university, that he would not graduate from the community college. And I always thought, well no, I don't know much about school, but [from] people who have talked to me, I thought he would lose time at the community college.

Raquel, like many of the other parents, was and remained uncertain about the future of their children. Of the five families interviewed, only two families have had their children graduate from college (Janet and Aaron).

On the whole, existing college knowledge and familiarity with getting to college, to some extent, was available in each home. The pre-existing college knowledge within each home was extremely varied. Steven and Renee were provided a college search system from their student's high school that required them to actively work with Aaron as he was searching for, applying to, and choosing colleges. They had nieces and nephews who had already enrolled in and completed a bachelor's degree by the time Aaron was looking to go to college.

Within the Spanish-dominant homes, there was pre-existing college knowledges within each home that many of their students could not speak about. Adela helped Isabel to write essays and took it upon herself to search for scholarships. Martha was ready to help Josefina at the drop of a hat, telling her, "*Tu dime rana y yo salto,*" ("You tell me to jump, and I'll ask how high"). Martha was also prepared to send Josefina to Mexico so she could go to college. Raquel's pre-existing college knowledge was informed by a woman she worked with who earned a bachelor's degree and encouraged her to have Abraham go to a four-year college. Jaime was the most

unfamiliar with college, but knew that going to college was in Janet's best interest to have increased social mobility. Jaime, like other parents, recognized that he may have some limitations in his own knowledge so he encouraged Janet to find someone who knew more. That in itself, recognizing one's limitations in helping one's child to pursue their goals, is part of understanding the funds of knowledge within each home.

#### Funds of Knowledge and Cultural Wealth: Bilingualism and Ideologies Supporting Success

The themes in this section discuss the way 1) language, the ability to speak or not to speak Spanish, was valued in the home and 2) how an *échale ganas* mentality was the way parents could support their students through college. Spanish-speaking parents felt bilingualism was a perceived benefit for their children and that teaching their children to speak Spanish was a way to preserve their culture. An *échale ganas* mentality supplemented the parent's limited knowledge about success in college by constantly affirming and encouraging their children.

#### *Language and Bilingualism: Costs and Benefits*

The importance of knowing the language of the home was crucial for these families. For the Gonzalez family, English is the only language spoken, and that was very important to Renee, that the language of the home remain primarily English. She reflected in her interview, however, that her sons' inability to communicate with their grandmother (her mother) was also something she had not thought about until they were already out of high school.

My mother is from Mexico. My dad was born here. He's from Waco. All she spoke was Spanish to us. My dad spoke English to us, but my dad passed away when I was, like I said, twelve. When I went to school, I had such a hard time asking questions, [because of] my Spanish, so I said, "I'm not doing that to my kids," because I was outcasted a lot.

Renee recognized the value of language much differently than in the Spanish-dominant homes. She learned to speak English in school more than 40 years ago, a much different environment regarding the perception of language acquisition and bilingualism in K-12. She also

spoke about being made fun of in school by her peers because she had problems pronouncing words correctly.

In school, I remember having such a hard time. I would be embarrassed. I wouldn't ask, I wouldn't ... I wanted them to get involved in school, I wanted them to learn. I didn't want them to feel ashamed. I didn't want that for them, so I said, "I'm not going to teach them Spanish."

She made a choice to only teach her kids to speak and learn English in the home. In our interview, she told me that she regrets not teaching her sons Spanish. They know a few words in Spanish, but not enough to hold a conversation.

Renee: I taught my kids nothing. I mean, yes, sure, "*mande*", yes ... Just the small little words and I do regret it. At the same time, that was my reason for not teaching them unfortunately Spanish was because...

Interviewer: Your own feelings about being made fun of in school?

Renee: Yes.

When we interviewed, Renee was aware of how speaking Spanish provides additional opportunities to those in the job market. She said in her interview that she has even told Steven, her husband, "Oh my gosh, what have I done," in regard to not teaching their children to speak Spanish.

The Spanish-dominant families felt their children's ability to speak and understand both Spanish and English was a valuable skill for them to acquire. In her interview, Martha felt that Josefina's career opportunities would be better for knowing both Spanish and English. She said, "*Le digo, porque es mejor que digan que tú sabes dos idiomas y a donde vayas te van a pagar más. Porque una persona que sabe varios idiomas vale más que una.*" ("I say it's better to say that you know two languages and wherever you go you're going to be paid more. Because a person who knows several languages is worth more than one.")

With all four of the Spanish speaking families, learning the language of the home was incredibly important. At home, the main language to communicate with parents is Spanish. Raquel also felt that it would be advantageous, career-wise, for her children to know both languages. Like Renee, she has experienced discrimination for speaking Spanish, but not at school. Raquel told us a story about having to visit the emergency room when she was sick.

*[E]n el hospital, como yo no hablo inglés, me dio tristeza una vez que yo tenía una infección. Y mi esposo se había venido, mis hijos eran chiquitos, entonces se había venido y como yo no hablaba inglés, a mí ya me tocaba. Cuando la emergencia, que son tantas horas, a mí me tocaba, pero como no hablaba inglés me sacaron, me sacaron.*

[I]n the hospital, since I don't speak English, one time I had an infection and I was so sad. And my husband had come, my children were small, so they had also come and since I didn't speak English, it was my turn. When [in] the emergency [room], which is so many hours, it was my turn, but since I didn't speak English they took me out [of line], they took me out.

Though Raquel understands English, she could not respond in English to tell the health care employees what was wrong with her when it was her turn to be seen. The interpreter was at lunch, so she was told she would have to wait longer to be seen. Another woman, who was bilingual, stepped in to help Raquel because it was unfair to keep Raquel waiting for medical assistance. It is an event that she still remembers and holds in her mind as a reason why it is important for her children to know both languages. Raquel believed that her children would be the ones to help others in a similar situation.

This is why Raquel believed that for her children to know both languages is great, but she also relies on them, especially Abraham, to help her navigate an English speaking world. When she visits the doctor for her youngest son, Raquel knows when she has a bad interpreter or a good one. So, her children knowing both languages is good, but she spoke of the importance of going beyond just understanding and knowing both languages.

*Pues al español ya lo saben, al inglés para que lo sepan traducir porque no es lo mismo que tú hables. Yo les digo a mis hijos, "No es lo mismo que tú hables los dos idiomas a que tú me sepas traducir a mí." Porque con mis hijos a veces yo les decía, "Dile esto y esto." Y ellos se ponían a comunicarse... Eres intérprete, no eres el que toma las decisiones.*

Because Spanish they already know, English is so they know how to translate because it's not the same as how you talk. I tell my children, "It's not the same thing, that you speak the two languages until you know how to translate what I am saying." Because with my kids sometimes I tell them, "Say this and this." And they start communicating...you're an interpreter, you are not the decision maker.

Raquel blames herself for not being fully immersed in the English language, saying that both she and her husband spent their time working to provide for their family; they let that take precedent over learning English.

The other three Spanish-speaking families know English and speak it to some degree. Jaime must speak English for his job, but is dominant in Spanish as a reader and writer. He prefers to speak Spanish at home, but understands what his children are saying when they speak English at home. Both Adela and Martha spoke about attending classes to learn English. Just as I had my reservations about speaking Spanish, they (Adela and Martha) felt the same about speaking English.

Just like Raquel does with her children, Jaime, Adela, and Martha rely on their children to help with translation and navigating an English-speaking world. This reflects the linguistic capital that their children have carried with them that is often ignored. The *cuentos*, *dichos*, and *consejos* (stories, sayings, and advice) that are passed on to their children are ways in which parents transmit their knowledge and begin to teach lessons and transmit funds of knowledge within the home. The linguistic capital for the children of these families lay in the knowledge that has been passed to children through the child's role as interpreter and translator for their parent. In speaking with Abraham, he talked about he and his siblings having to be the Spanish-



language broker for their parents making calls to utility companies to pay bills. Through this, he and his siblings have learned the importance of knowing both languages, which also influenced Abraham's reason for going to college.

My parents, they struggled a lot. My Mom doesn't really speak English. She understands it. She can say a few words here and there. My Dad kind of speaks it. Sometimes he thinks he knows what he's saying. I'd be like, "Hey Dad, do you know what you're saying?" I see those struggles. That's just a language barrier, I know.

*An Échale Ganas Mentality: Family Encouragement to Move Forward*

Something that each of the Spanish-speaking families mentioned, as far as the ways in which they tried to continue to support their children, is that they constantly told their student to "échale ganas" or "give it your all." This phrase was used in every conversation with the Spanish-speaking parents. These parents all mentioned that their ability to help their children with college was limited to financial (paying for tuition, buying food, or helping them pay to fix cars) or emotional (attending college fairs, waking early to make breakfast, or *échale ganas*) support. This idea, to *echar ganas*, is part of the way in which parents find a more substantive way to give their children advice to keep their priorities in line.

With Abraham, Raquel knew that while he is very serious about school and can be shy or quiet, she still gave him advice about keeping his priorities straight. She said, "[T]ambién que le eche muchas ganas a la escuela. Que piense que no sé – cómo se dice, o digamos que tiene una invitación para una fiesta. Que le dé prioridad a la escuela, no a la fiesta." ("I also wanted him to really give it his all with school. He thinks I don't know – how do you say it, or let's say he is invited to a party. He needs to prioritize school, not the party.") Raquel reinforced with Abraham that there will always be parties, celebrations, and fun to be had. She wanted him to understand that it was important to maintain his will to study and stay in school. She said that by staying up late and partying he would not get any work done and it gets to be distracting.

Jaime insisted that he and his wife, Teresa, were confident that Janet would persevere through college. He commented that Janet was the type of person to set goals and meet them because she remained focused. He also knew, as her father, that there were times she would be stressed, or maybe struggled with a class or two. To that, he said that he would remind her keep her head high and push forward.

*Yo la miraba, que ella le estaba echando ganas porque tenía que valer la pena de ir hasta allá no nada más a – y yo le dije, “Mira, échale, ya nada más te falta un año, ya te falta nada más medio año.”*

I watched her, she was giving it her all because it had to be worthwhile to go there [university] not just to - and I said, "Look, you can do it, you only have a year left, now you only have half a year left."

He encouraged her to keep going, to keep pursuing her goals because he knew that was the best way he could help her to achieve more.

Martha pressed Josefina to always aspire to achieve more. Martha would take Josefina with her to work, cleaning houses. Josefina would see the homes of these families and tell her mother that one day she would be like the boss and have a big home with a large closet filled with lots of shoes. In supporting her daughter, Martha would tell Josefina to keep the will to move forward.

*Échale ganas, yo sé que tú tienes muchas ganas de estudiar, tú vas a ser alguien en la vida, más grande. Mirame a mí...” Siempre comparándola conmigo, en la forma, que yo le decía – “Mi trabajo no es denigrante ni nada, sino simplemente es más abajo del que tú te puedas – o sea que yo quiero un mejor futuro para ti, ¿me entiendes?”*

Give it your all, I know you have the drive to study, you're going to be someone in life, much bigger. Look at me..." I always compared her to myself, in a way, so I told her – "My job is not degrading or anything, but simply it's lower than what you can – that is, that I want a better future for you, do you understand me?"

Martha let Josefina know that college was important and that the drive to push onward would give enable Josefina to live a life much different than her parents. Each time Martha spoke

about Josefina's journey in and through college, the phrase "*échale ganas*" was soon to follow. Martha felt that this form of moral support helped Josefina to know that her mother not only cared for her, but was hoping for her daughter to continue to do better.

As mentioned earlier, recognizing one's limitations in helping one's child to pursue their goals, is part of understanding the funds of knowledge within each home. Telling their children to *echar ganas* represents the way in which parents acknowledged their own limitations in their knowledge about college. Parents understood that because they had no prior experience in college, they could not necessarily provide direct assistance to their children in putting together a class schedule, or with studying for an exam. Indirectly, however, parents recognized that they could be a foundation of support for their children.

#### Funds of Knowledge and Perceived Barriers to Educational Attainment

As positive as parents were about their children, their achievements, and the ways in which education has helped their families, there were also challenges when continuing to reassure and encourage their students to attend college. Parents felt that though they were supportive of their student's educational goals, there were still barriers to reaching these accomplishments that parents knew were outside of their control.

Parents remained uncertain about their student's ability to complete college because of issues with transfer and adjusting to attending a university. Through all 10 parent interviews there was also an understanding, to some degree, of inequitable opportunities within the educational system or in the process of applying and searching for colleges and scholarship. I share the following themes, the challenges of uncertainty and contending with inequitable opportunities, to recognize the ways in which searching for, choosing to attend, and persistence

through college(s), regardless of knowledge, support, or ideologies within home, can remain burdensome to families.

### *Challenges of Uncertainty*

All the parents in this study talked a great deal about “not knowing” or being unaware of the challenges ahead, for their children. While students spoke about their parents “not knowing” about college, or how to help them, parents were more concerned about “not knowing” what was to come for their children. As of Spring 2017, Renee and Jaime’s children have graduated from Golden Triangle University (GTU). Raquel, Martha, and Adela’s children are still enrolled in GTU. I spoke, in the student findings, about Abraham, Raquel’s son, who is in excess hours at GTU, and who is working full-time and continuing to take classes. Abraham does not expect to complete his bachelor’s degree until Fall 2017 or Spring 2018. When I interviewed Raquel in January of 2016, she was incredibly worried about Abraham.

When we spoke about Abraham’s enrollment in college, Raquel was uncertain about Abraham’s desire to continue his degree. When asked, what concerns she still had for her son, Raquel immediately replied that Abraham was taking a long time to complete his classes. She told us he graduated from high school in 2009 and that he transferred to GTU in 2011. Raquel was also very much aware that classes taken at the community college did not transfer towards his program of study. In her mind, she felt Abraham was becoming discouraged, especially with how long it was taking him to finish school.

*[E]stá tardando mucho y en parte lo miro como que está perdiendo sus ganas de estudiar. No me dice nada y por la razón de que yo le digo, “Oye, te veo muy desanimado.” Y él, “Ay mamá, es que estoy bien ocupado.” Y luego como que me doy cuenta que no hizo gran cosa y digo, “Oh no, él está perdiendo como-” Como que lo miró que está perdiendo sus deseos de estudiar. No sé si yo estoy equivocada, pero estoy sintiéndolo así. Porque yo pregunto a él por cosas de su escuela y como que no está interesado en decirme.*

He's taking a long time and I partly see it as him losing his desire to study. He doesn't tell me anything and for that reason, I'll tell him, "Hey, you look really sad." And he'll say, "Oh mom, it's because I'm so busy." And later is when I've realized he hasn't done very much and I'll say, "Oh no, he is losing, like -" Like, I look at him and how he's losing his desire to study. I don't know if I'm wrong, but I'm feeling this way. Because I'll ask him things about his school and it's like he's not interested in telling me.

She was crying, intermittently, while speaking to us about this and Abraham's persistence through college. Raquel goes on to say that she thinks Abraham should have gone directly to a university after graduating from high school.

Raquel has a friend who is a retired teacher. During her interview, Raquel spoke about this woman's knowledge about college and how she helped Raquel to encourage Abraham to attend college. Because of the knowledge this friend passed to Raquel, about the importance of attending a university and being involved on campus, Raquel felt that Abraham would be more involved with the university, with his friends, and his major, if he had gone directly to a university. Raquel maintains hopes for him, however, keeping her faith in God and praying for Abraham. She also aspires for him to pursue a master's degree in engineering, because she knows that is what he wants to do. She is hopeful for him, but is also uncertain about his ability to complete his degree and is very concerned for him.

Raquel wasn't the only parent concerned about their child's ability to graduate. Even though Janet was scheduled to graduate, and did, around the time of our interview, Jaime told us that one of the biggest concerns he had was whether she would graduate or not. Jaime said, "*Lo que más me preocupaba era que no se fuera a graduar.*" ("What worried me more was that she wouldn't graduate [from college].") He was insistent, throughout his interview that while he, as a parent, could push Janet forward and encourage her through all her struggles, he could not make the final decisions for her.

Jaime was concerned about this because he noticed a change in Janet's attitude toward school once she transferred from the community college to GTU. He said that he felt the university was harder, at least for her, because she was studying more than he remembered from when she attended Eaglefoot College. He felt that she was applying herself more to her classes and talking more with her professors.

*Ahorita en la universidad, ya acudía más a los maestros, con los maestros ella tenía una pregunta y se quedaba o a veces hablaba mucho con los maestros y los maestros le ayudaban de una forma u otra qué hacer para poder sobresalir de esta materia o de esto. Pero ella tenía – sí, tuvo que hacerlo esa manera, sino, de otra manera te podías quedar allí.*

Right now, in the university, she went to the teachers more, she would stay and ask questions of the teachers or sometimes she talked a lot with the teachers and the teachers helped her in one way or another what to do to excel in this matter or that. But she had to - yes, she had to do it that way, so that way she could stay there.

For the most part, Jaime was confident in his daughter's ability to achieve anything she set forward as a goal. But there were other parents who were equally uncertain about the transition from a community college to university.

Parents expressed concern that attending the community college was "easier" than attending the university. Anecdotally, there are many people I have come across who share this sentiment. But, for the students in my study, particularly for those whose parents I have interviewed, many felt over prepared to attend the community college. Nonetheless, parents felt the shift in academic rigor when students began attending a university and noted the behavioral changes associated with it.

Renee and Steven were happy to have Aaron go to the community college. For them, it was cost-effective and they knew Aaron could pursue his dream of playing baseball in college, then professionally. They knew, however, that Aaron was not being challenged with his education. Renee compared it to the experience she had with Aaron in the first Catholic school

he attended, she knew then he was not being challenged. Both Renee and Steven spoke of the Catholic high school Aaron attended, St. Dominic's, was extremely geared toward college preparation for both students and parents. Steven admitted that, "It was almost like all the preparation that we did just kind of got pushed back to the back burner." They felt that Aaron was over prepared to attend Maple Flower College. Aaron also shared this with his parents. He told them that as soon as he transferred to the university, he experienced a bit of a shock with the amount of studying he needed to do. Renee was astonished by Aaron's admission that he put little effort in to his classes at Maple Flower and had to "re-learn" better study habits.

Tending to the uncertainty, the knowledge within the home was to recognize the changes within their students. These parents were intuitive and attending to the changes in the behaviors of their children, which caused them to ask questions of their children about their experiences in college. Just because parents may not have understood the curricular needs, the knowledge in the home, the intuitiveness of the parents, led them to understand that their students need more support. Based on the reasons parents told students to *échar ganas*, it stands to reason these uncertainties increased the parent's need to reinforce an *échale ganas* mentality.

#### *Contending with Inequitable Opportunities*

Not only did some parents feel uncertain about the future for their students, all of them spoke about the ways in which they felt certain circumstances surrounding their child's desire to attend college were unfair. Each parent shared a story, opinion, or instance about a point in time while their student was searching for or applying to college and scholarships that demonstrated how inequitable opportunities exist for those with little or limited knowledge about higher education.

Jaime pointed out his idea of culture and the culture of college-going that already exists for White people. He opined that yes, K-12 schools should continue motivating students to attend college, just as parents should, and just as students should hold their own motivations. What he said next, however, got at this idea that perhaps Latinx culture is not like Whites, because they have been here for generations, knowing the importance of a college education.

*[E]stamos en un promedio nosotros los latinos muy bajo en estudio de – que no llegamos siempre arriba. Entonces esto se lleva mucho tiempo, es que toda la generación, pues la generación blanca, ellos tienen ya eso desde 200 años atrás, entonces ellos ya tienen eso. Todos, desde que ellos nacen ya saben que se tienen que graduar de la universidad, ya lo traen aquí. Nosotros los latinos apenas están queriendo varios. Entonces todavía no lo traemos en la sangre, de que como, mi abuelo se graduó, mi papá y mi mamá y mis tíos...*

*Posiblemente sea por lo económico, que no tenemos los recursos, o también es una tradición, es una tradición también. Como, “Oh, pues en mi familia nadie se graduó, ¿yo por qué me voy a graduar? Allí nos quedamos.”*

We are on average ourselves, Latinos, very low in schooling – that we don’t always rise to the top. So this takes a long time, it’s that the entire generation, well the white generation, they’ve already had that since 200 years ago, so they already have that. Everyone, from when they’re born already knows that they should graduate from the university, and they already have that here. We, Latinos, are barely wanting more. So we don’t carry it in our blood, that like, my grandfather graduated, my dad and my mom and my uncles...

It could possibly be economically, we don’t have the resources, or it’s also a tradition, it’s a tradition as well. Like, "Oh, because nobody in my family graduated, why would I graduate? We’ll just stay here.”

Jaime has an understanding that Latinxs in the U.S. are still behind their White peers, educationally. He shared some numbers he remembers hearing about the educational attainment of Latinxs.

He carried these ideas with him to also push Janet further. From this statement, Jaime is aware that there are disparate outcomes and trajectories for Latinx students, not because of deficits in culture, but in his opinion because Latinxs do not have the history of educational attainment like their White peers. These ideas are not inculcated in the same way for Latinx



students as they are for White students. His words reveal how other Latinxs may perceive themselves in this greater society.

While Jaime's ideas about inequities between Latinxs and White people was largely abstract, Martha's experience with perceived inequitable opportunities was concrete. She helped Josefina in whatever way she could; from driving her to school, to helping her find and apply for scholarships. Martha wanted to make sure Josefina would always feel supported in her endeavors. She shared that she learned a lot from helping Josefina that would help her when preparing her next daughter, Pamela, for applying and searching for colleges. Then Martha started talking about how there were so many requirements and rules, especially for applying for scholarships, that it made the process difficult and confusing.

Martha believed that there were a lot of people who may want to go to college, but did not because there were not enough scholarships or grants available to them. She said, “[H]ay niños que ya no van ni a la escuela, ya no siguen porque no hay becas, ¿me entiende?” (There are kids who don't even go to school, they don't continue on because there aren't scholarships, you understand me?) She went on about how there were so many rules to getting scholarships that it was harder for poorer kids. She then told us that she experienced the same when helping Josefina apply to a scholarship from a large, international, well-known food chain, McDonald's.

*Yo me peleaba mucho con la beca de McDonald's, porque aplicábamos y no: “Para poder aplicar esta beca tienes que ser residente legal o ciudadano”, y luego le decía – yo hasta una vez con una chamaca nada más le dije: “Oiga, a mí nunca me pidieron los papeles para entrar a comprar a su tienda. ¿Qué me hubieran pedido los papeles para entrar a su tienda, y verá que no, toda la gente no iría! Porque la mayoría que estamos aquí no tenemos papeles”, y nomás la muchacha se quedó así, “Pero es que mire, no está en nuestras manos poderla ayudar”, porque yo sí me peleaba, y este era eso. Luego le digo, imagínese, todos los que han – no, pues entonces no nos vendan. Para que no tengan ninguna tienda. Y Josi, “Ay mamá,” le digo: “¿Pues es que dime qué niño no va a comer ahí?”, ante todo hispano, ¿verdad? Y Josi: “Ay mamá,” le digo: “Es que es la verdad”.*

I fought a lot with the McDonald's scholarship, because we applied and nothing: "In order to apply for this scholarship you have to be a legal resident or a citizen," so then I said - I even once said to a girl, "Hey, you never asked for my papers to enter and buy from your store. If you would have asked me for my papers to enter your store, and then you would see that no, all the people wouldn't go! Because most of us here don't have our papers," and the girl just kept on, "But look, it isn't within our power to help her," because yeah I did fight, and this was it. Then I tell you, imagine, all those who are - no, then don't sell to us. For that they wouldn't have any stores. And Josi, "Oh mom," I said, "Well, tell me what child isn't going to eat there?" most of them Hispanics, right? And Josi: "Oh Mom," I said, "It's the truth."

As she recounted this story, the tone of her voice started to change and it was clear she was upset. That wasn't the only scholarship that Josefina could not apply to because of her status as a non-citizen or permanent resident of the U.S. The process however, was discouraging for both Martha and Josefina as they became more aware of what opportunities were available for Josefina to attend college.

Renee also felt that applying for scholarships and financial assistance was confusing. She acknowledged that her time was limited to help her sons fill out these forms, but she felt lost in the process.

I don't know anything about scholarships. I don't know anything, anyhow, anyway, any source to help me. I look at that stuff and it is like Greek, because they require so much information, they require all your tax stuff and it is so overwhelming that it is almost discouraging to even fill it out.

This is particularly interesting to have heard, as Renee and Steven had, in my opinion, the most help from their children's school to assist with the process of going to college. Yet, when it came to finding additional assistance to finance college, they both felt out of their league and unable to provide adequate assistance.

Nevertheless, throughout their interview, Steven and Renee described the Navigance system and this tool's ability to help them stay on-track in helping and guiding their sons in searching and choosing colleges. They doted on this system, but Steven ultimately realized that

this was not the reason they put their children in private school. They wanted Aaron and Saul to have a better learning environment for that would be more supportive than what they experienced in public schooling. These additional tools, like Navigance, were unintended perks of being enrolled at the school. Something that, to some degree, Steven felt was unfair.

Yeah but that is one of the things that, and it just almost seems unfair that it is only available to people that can afford it, or the people that make the sacrifice to do that. Because I think that that is just a huge advantage over people that don't know or don't have that capability or have that resource available.

It was a sacrifice on both Steven and Renee to have the financial costs associated with private school education. Steven felt tools like Navigance, however, should be provided to all students. In his mind, these tools could be helpful to all students and families, especially those who did not attend these private schools.

Parents were conscious about the guidance their students received. Assistance provided to students within schools, as provided in the student findings, demonstrate that there is a varied spectrum from which students could receive guidance about college. Parents, to some extent, understood this. Raquel knew that Abraham had his sights set to attend a four-year college. I spoke earlier about Abraham getting denied by a well-known, technical school on the east coast and how he followed his guidance counselor's advice to attend a community college.

Raquel seemed surprised about this choice, as she described the change in Abraham's demeanor. After receiving advice from his counselor, Raquel noticed that he was more concerned about the cost of college. When she told him what her friend from work had said about the importance of attending a university first, Abraham retorted that she (his mom's friend) had the means to pay for college, whereas Raquel and Tomás did not. She spoke about him applying to the school on the east coast, saying, "*No le importaba el costo. Y ya después como*

*que sí le importaba. No sé.*” (“The cost wasn’t important to him. And then afterward, it was like yeah it was important to him. I don’t know.”)

Cost was important, however, to Adela and Isabel. That’s why Adela helped Isabel apply for every scholarship she could find. She helped her apply for a scholarship from a soda company, one from the city they lived in, and one from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for their city. Though Adela was concerned about cost, she was committed to sending Isabel to a university. However, as I mentioned earlier, Adela and Isabel went to a college fair where counselors advised Isabel to attend a community college.

It is important to emphasize that counselors advised students to attend a community college because of the perceptions by students and parents about the cost of attending college. Yet parents did not, and some still do not, feel that the community college would be the best option for their student. Every parent expressed concern that in transferring to a university their student has had to take at least one year longer than anticipated to complete college. Although Adela has become more of an advocate for the community college, not every parent felt that way. Jaime, Raquel, and Steven and Renee have all said that in retrospect, they would have been more adamant that their child go directly to a four-year college to minimize loss of credits. This highlights some discrepancy in opportunity. While I can only speculate the reasons for this advice, aside from what has been shared by students and parents, the question remains as to whether this guidance is provided equitably across students.

Recognizing the inequitable opportunities demonstrated the knowledge of each home, in the capacity by which parents understood the societal context their students would face as they entered college and became adults. Yes, there are opportunities in the U.S. and through school choice, in Steven and Renee’s case. However, these parents also recognized the ways in which

there were also challenges in the process of searching for colleges, applying for scholarships, applying to colleges, or just by being newer Latinx immigrant in the U.S.

Because Steven and Renee were born in the U.S., they understood this as they enrolled their sons in private catholic education. But they also recognized how “unfair” it was that just because of their choice to enroll their children in such a school that they would be privy to tools like Navigance that, as Steven pointed out, “...[I]s just a huge advantage over people that don’t know or don’t have that capability.” Raquel was truly concerned and wholly unclear why the high school counselor would direct Abraham to attend a community college, especially as she strongly feels Abraham should have just started college at a four-year college. Martha, in her interview, demonstrated how she would not hesitate to become an advocate for her daughter, especially because of Josefina’s inability to apply for scholarships solely based on her citizenship status. Jaime’s perceptions about Latinxs and White culture informed how he continued to hold high aspirations and expectations for Janet.

### Summary

Though the funds of knowledge within the homes of these families varied, these parents were more knowledgeable about college than some of their children spoke to in their individual interview. I admit, the existing knowledge about college within the homes was wide ranging and limited. Parents themselves admitted their limitations regarding the ways in which they could help their children. Perhaps what is clearer is that these parents were committed to their children’s education and formed beliefs about college that were largely guided by what their children would share with them.

Spanish-speaking parents felt that by teaching their children the language of the home they imparted to their children the importance of their culture, something that Renee admits she

missed the opportunity to share with her sons. By teaching their children to speak Spanish parents felt they were preserving their culture. For some of the parents, because of their limited English abilities, the students became language brokers for their parents and learned to navigate two worlds through language.

By forming an *échale ganas* mentality, parents felt they were better able to support their students in their goals to complete college. The idea, to *echar ganas*, is phrasing parents use as a form of encouragement, like saying “give it your all” or “give it your best shot.” Steven and Renee encouraged Aaron to never give up and put his best effort in his studies, they just said it in English. Even so, the message was the same. Parents wanted their children to go higher and further than they had. This encouragement was a way for parents to show their children that while they may not have the direct knowledge to help them get through college (that is, subject matter knowledge), they were supporting their children to reach their goals.

Because students of the parents interviewed did take longer to graduate, or have not yet graduated, some parents remained uncertain about the future. Even through the uncertainty, parents remained hopeful and supportive. The intuitive feelings that parents have about their children were evident and parents did not hesitate to share the concerns they have about their child’s ability to persist in college to earn a baccalaureate degree.

More than their students, parents were aware of the inequitable opportunities to pursue college knowledge and information. Parents were perceptive to the ways in which their children may not have the same chances to earn a scholarship or complete the bachelor’s degree as their White or documented counterparts. In the face of these inequitable opportunities, parents worked harder to support their children and continue to do so.

APPENDIX G

COMPLETE DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

## Introduction

The objective of this study was to understand what influenced Latinx students to enroll at their community college rather than a four-year institution to which they were admitted. Four research questions guided the study. The questions centered on the following: navigating the pathway to college for Latinx students, analyzing the perceived role of the family in college access, identifying the knowledge and practices within the home that support college-going and success, and finally, understanding the experience of students at the community college.

This discussion will first discuss the theoretical frameworks used in this study, including why I chose to add community cultural wealth for student findings and funds of knowledge for only parent findings. Then, I discuss the findings of this study using the principal theme of each research question to frame the discussion, and how these findings relate to the literature on college access. Next, I provide a full section on academic undermatch and college choice, relating these topics to the findings. Finally, implications for practice, policy, and research, including recommendations for each are provided.

### Rethinking Theoretical Frameworks

Originally, I planned to use only funds of knowledge as a theoretical framework in this study as a one size fits all approach for all data collected. Because I was uniquely concerned with expanding the framework to understanding college access and choice, I assumed that there would not be any issues to using the approach in examining student interviews. Unfortunately, that was not the case. It could have been the way the questions were asked, or even because of the age of the students I interviewed, that I did not find it useful to use the framework with the student data, but rather the parent data.



As I interviewed each student, the comment I continued to hear the most was, “[M]y parents didn’t know anything about college”. I would ask and probe, but students consistently felt that their parents were unable to aid in the college choice process. Ana is the eldest student in the study, and was more reflective of her experience relative to her parents’ contributions. While she acknowledged their limitations, she was able to convey the knowledge within her home, as well as between her home and the home of maternal aunt, that helped her to apply to colleges, enroll, and graduate with her bachelor’s degree. Linda, by contrast was the youngest student interviewed and described her parents’ knowledge as limited and their contributions minimal. She also had some personal issues and possibly resentment toward her parents for their insistence that she enroll at a community college. The remaining student interviews varied between these stories.

Based on their words and conversations, these students had very deficit-oriented perspectives about the knowledge of their parents and families. Students could talk to the support of their parents, for their academic endeavors, but could not speak to the funds of knowledge within the home, e.g. helping students to write essays for scholarships. The inability of students to speak to the funds of knowledge in the home maybe related to the messages students receive through the public school system which can represent their parents as powerless to assist them with formal processes (Monzó, 2016).

Parents are the primary people from whom data has been collected in studies on funds of knowledge (González, 2005; Kiyama, 2008; 2010; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), so I continued to use the framework to understand the role of the family in college choice and the culturally based practices of the household that support college-going and student success as told to me by parents.

To illuminate the language these students used, and to understand the cultural knowledge and practices within their households, communities, and social contacts as told to me by the students, I added Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) as an additional theoretical framework for this study. The framework helped to highlight the ways students spoke about their experiences and what institutional agents hindered or helped in the process of applying to and enrolling in college. I identify how students describe their reasons why they chose the community college and the role of their family in college choice using a community cultural wealth lens to interpreting the student data.

### Navigating the Pathway to College

My first research question asked, how do academically qualified Latinx students describe their pathway to the community college? Each student spoke of their own, similar yet unique pathway to the community college. Students described a wide range of resources that were made available to them throughout their process of searching for and choosing colleges.

However, students consistently felt that there was still information that they were not given. The literature indicates that low-income, first generation students rely heavily on the guidance and knowledge of their high school counselors in seeking assistance to apply to college (McDonough, 1997; Radford & Howell, 2014). Many must rely exclusively on counselors and high school staff to provide them with all of the information regarding how to get to college (McDonough, 1997, 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Yet, the students in this study felt those they looked to for help were not all that helpful.

Linda's statement, about teachers and counselors not wanting to "hand hold" students through this process even though she and students like her need the additional assistance, resonated with other students. When Cael, Abraham, and Risa attended a meeting I held for

student participants to complete member checks, they read that statement and felt it described their experiences in high school. They felt validated by Linda's words. The fact that students recognized Linda's statement as accurately reflecting their experience means students they felt the people they turn to for help are not providing them the help they want. I understand the need to balance doing the work for someone and helping them to find information. Based on what students are saying, this balance is not always struck and students are on the losing end.

When students have resources available to them through precollege outreach programs like Talent Search, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), or programs sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission, and a regional precollege program – which are largely designed to get students to a four-year college – but feel they still need more assistance, there is an issue that should be addressed. Precollege outreach programs are instrumental in helping underserved populations navigate the way to college (Loza, 2003), including the students in this study. These programs, however, are not sufficient to equalize opportunity of access for these groups. Similar to the literature on Latinx students who participate in these precollege programs (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011), the students in this study who participated in these programs had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with college information, college visits and information about the pathway to college, but they needed more.

There are concerns that precollege outreach programs are understaffed (Perna, 2002; Swail & Perna, 2002). Based on this study, the students who participated in these programs did not feel there weren't enough staff in those programs, but rather not enough focus, by staff in those programs and in their schools, on the importance of college costs and the ways in which sticker price differs from the actual price students and families will pay. This continues to support existing research that Latinxs choose to attend colleges with lower costs (Kurlaender,

2006; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010; Paulsen & St. John, 2002), such as community colleges.

### *Last-Minute Decisions*

Contrary to the literature that Latinxs apply to fewer than two colleges, if they applied at all (Hurtado et al., 1997; Turley, 2009) the students in this study applied to at least two four-year colleges, with some adding that their guidance counselors or teachers encouraged them to apply to a community college as a backup. That students heeded the advice of these school agents, supports existing literature stating accessing information about college from teachers and counselors can increase college application behaviors for Latinx students (Gonzalez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

It is also noteworthy how late in the process these students made the decision to attend a community college. Martinez and Cervera (2012) demonstrated in their research that college applications, if any are completed at all, are done late into a student's senior year. There is little research, however, about exactly when, or how late, Latinx students make the choice to enroll at a college. Deciding or changing one's mind about where to go to college has immediate repercussions for financial aid and scholarships. Most universities award financial aid to freshmen relatively early in the year, sometimes as early as six months prior to fall enrollment.

Because this group of students chose to attend the community college so late, there was no time to indicate on their SAT or ACT to send scores to those community colleges. While students did not indicate any unfairness in taking an SAT or ACT test, as had been found in the literature (Walpole et al., 2005), making late decisions to attend a community college has immediate consequences for enrolling in college-ready courses. Like universities, community colleges have procedures through which students can place directly into college-ready courses

based on their ACT or SAT scores. Not a single student originally planned to attend a community college. The community college is an open access institution, so test scores are not needed, and students did not send them.

I had not anticipated remediation to have a bearing on this study, so I did not ask students about taking developmental courses. During our conversations, a few students shared that they had taken some developmental/remedial courses at the community college. Those who shared that they enrolled in remedial courses were surprised to learn that if they had submitted their scores, and if the scores were high enough, they may have been exempt from taking remedial courses. I cannot assume everyone would have been eligible, but not even having that knowledge has real costs associated with it.

Crisp and Nora (2010), however, found that Latinx students who enrolled in at least one developmental course at the community college increased the likelihood of transfer for that student. Similar to those findings, for the students who confirmed they had taken a developmental course they have all transferred to a four-year college. At least two of those students who completed developmental courses have graduated with a bachelor's degree.

### *Making Strategic Choices*

Attending community college as a strategic option, for these students, helped students to navigate what they perceived as high college costs and unaffordability to attend a university. Seven of the students took on college loans once they transferred to the university, which may speak to the issue of being averse to taking on debt. Perhaps the aversion to taking out loans is shortsighted (Cunningham & Santiago, 2008) and is due to limited knowledge and access to information about financial aid (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coco & Moeller, 2008) and college costs. The cost of college tuition can be overestimated by parents and students (Pender, Hurwitz,

Smith, & Howell, 2012). Because of the limited knowledge on actual college costs and tuition, "...[S]ticker prices play a prohibitive role in the college choice process for families whose net price may, in fact, be manageable," (Pender, et al., 2012, p. 2).

Nevertheless, choosing to attend a community college as a strategic option has, for these students, served as a navigational tool to maneuver into, and through, higher education (Yosso, 2005) and control overall debt. Gonzalez Canche (2014) notes that overall debt incurred by students who start at a two-year college, transfer, and complete the baccalaureate, is about the same as students who start at the four-year. In his study, however, there was no disaggregation by race/ethnicity, nor by whether those who started at the community college and transferred to the four-year debt-free had comparable levels of indebtedness, compared to their peers who started at a four-year college.

All the students in this study transferred to the four-year college debt free. Ernesto, Miranda, and Josefina are undocumented and are ineligible to receive federal student loans; Aaron and Linda's parents paid for their college; and Cael earned a Terry Scholarship so he should theoretically remain debt-free throughout the bachelor's degree. The remaining seven students have taken out student loans in college. These students are making assumptions about indebtedness relative to their peers, which can be a strength rather than deficit specifically as it relates to incurring debt through college.

The ability for students to draw on their navigational capital to enroll at the community college demonstrates a nuance of why Latinx students undermatch. The students' choices are limited because they do not have the information necessary to make accurate decisions about college costs and net price of an institution (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Pender, et al, 2012; Roderick, et al, 2008). Similar to existing literature (Kurlaender, 2006;

Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Nuñez & Kim, 2013), the students in this study did not enroll in a four-year institution they were qualified to attend because they perceived the net price of the institution to be out of reach.

Since they did not have the information and perceived the costs to be out of reach, yet they wanted to go to college, these students drew on their navigational capital to maneuver through institutions that were not built with them (first-generation, Latinx students) in mind. Even though they undermatched by attending a community college, which is what Pender and colleagues (2012) indicated could happen for students with limited information about college costs, these students still persisted. They all found a way to go to college that, for them, was a perceived bargain in terms of cost, and then transferred, to complete a degree which is not always likely for this particular population of students (Alexander, et al, 2007; Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2004; O'Connor, et al, 2010).

### *Degrees of Familiarity*

Students made choices about going to college with influence from their social networks. Whether it was a sibling or cousin who attended the same community college prior to the student's enrollment, taking dual credit classes through that college, having the direct advising from a guidance counselor, or because of participation in a summer bridge program, the students in the study appeared to have more familiarity and a better understanding of the community college. These findings continue to support previous research that has suggested that students are likely to enroll in colleges and universities that are known to them through their connections to brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, or other relatives beyond the traditional family structure (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

As Yosso (2005) notes, students drew on their social capital, the people, networks, contacts, and resources to provide them support to navigate through institutions and chose to attend the community college. They were all eligible to attend a four-year college, but the people in their network reinforced attendance at the community college. Something said by a few students that also reinforced their choice to attend a community college was seeing their friends who left for a four-year college fail and come back within an academic year to attend a community college. Only two or three students talked about it, but it's certainly interesting to consider in terms of the ways in which social contacts influence college attendance.

Ernesto, for example saw his best friend, Christopher, attend Golden Triangle University right out of high school and then return the next year to attend Rockview. Ana's older brothers left their home to attend a four-year college but in their second year came home to attend Palomino Community College (PCC). For Ernesto, seeing what happened to Christopher reinforced his own decision to stay at the community college. Ana, on the other hand, felt her brothers' inability to stay enrolled fueled her parents' concerns for her to attend PCC first. Though the growing literature on academic undermatch outlines a variety of ways that students undermatch in terms of college selectivity (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Rodriguez, 2015b; Smith et al., 2013) and try to identify why, because of academic preparation, finances, or income levels (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Kurlaender, 2006; Pender et al., 2012; Smith, et al., 2013), there is a dearth of research that examines the influence of peers and other social contacts in academic undermatch.

#### Role of Family: Student and Parent Perceptions

The second research question in this study asked, what role does family play in the student's college choice? The ways in which the family can, and does, play a role in a student's



decisions about college are perceived differently by the student and by the parent. This section will discuss how these different perceptions provide a richer, more distinctive, understanding of the ways family influences college access and choice.

### *Opportunities and Aspirations*

Students felt that their parents' aspirations, hope and dreams for them to be successful were rooted in the parent's concept of opportunity in the U.S. Eleven students had parents born outside the U.S. The concept of the accessibility of upward social mobility, for parents born outside the U.S., serves as the foundation on which those families maintain aspirations and believe in the opportunities that exist in the U.S. These beliefs are embedded in the very fabric of this country, in the idea of the "American Dream," from which it is hard to break. The perception that opportunities are at the disposal to all who want them is the reason why these families chose to come to the United States. However, evidence suggests that moving into a higher social class is not as attainable as we believe it to be (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012).

Understandably, this may look completely different, or may not even exist, for other Latinx groups in the United States, such as Puerto Ricans in New York or Cubans in Florida. That is a limitation of this study, but one that merits continued investigation, as Latinx communities are not homogenous but may have similar experiences, especially those comprised of people who have immigrated to the United States. For the two students, whose parents were born in the U.S., opportunity and aspirations are similar, yet also different. In my interpretation, it is not the parents' hope for educational or economic opportunity for their children that is different, but the parental desire for continued social mobility through educational attainment. Parental aspirations are similar but opportunity is associated much differently since parents born

and educated in the U.S. have their own feelings and perceptions of education since they have their own experiences from which to draw.

### *Consejos and Existing College Knowledge*

Most of the students felt their parents were incapable of helping them navigate the college search and choice process. What they did say is that the *consejos* their parents provided engendered a desire to continue pursuing an education beyond high school. Their parents supported going to college by showing their children the work they do and how their work may not be valued.

Parents, on the other hand, felt more involved with the process than students let on in their interviews. The ways in which the Spanish-speaking families could help their children apply to college, apply for scholarships, or attend college fairs demonstrated their willingness to not only be involved in their child's future college attendance, but also their capacity for assistance that may have been overlooked in the student interviews. For the English-speaking parents, the breadth and depth of their college knowledge was, perhaps, more developed than other parents. Then again, Steven and Renee were born and educated in the U.S. in a majority-minority community. Their familiarity of college and college-going was also informed by the experiences they have had in the U.S.

The characterization by students of the guidance and assistance from their parents may be due to student's age. Ana was the eldest student interviewed and had a more thoughtful position on her parent's knowledge and assistance than other students. Linda was the youngest, had only graduated high school eight months prior to our interview, and was not thoughtful of her parents, but rather focused on her disappointment with attending the community college.

## Knowledge and Practices that Support College-Going and Success

The third question that this study asked was, what are the culturally based practices of the household that support college-going and student success? The home and family supported students in so many ways. Language, which was a major finding in this study, is a way that Spanish-speaking families felt they could preserve their culture and pass on to their children. These parents admitted that at times, their children were language brokers, helping them to navigate an English-speaking society. Parents also felt that by reaffirming their children and telling them, *échale ganas*, when they saw they were down or discouraged, was the best way to help their students succeed.

### *Language and Bilingualism*

Parents felt that by teaching their children Spanish, the language of the home, they were equipping them with a skill that would make them more marketable to be employed. Parents drew from their own experiences, the knowledge within the home about the need to be able to speak both English and Spanish. Yosso (2005) also refers to this, the ability to speak Spanish and navigate both an English language society and the Spanish language of the home as linguistic capital.

Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) stated that funds of knowledge emphasizes, “strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households’ functioning, development, and well-being,” (p. 139). Often, the four parents who were interviewed in Spanish, needed their children’s help in translating and navigating an English-speaking world. In this study, the students who learned Spanish at home did so in the home as the four parents described this as a method of preserving their culture. For these students, speaking and understanding Spanish was the primary way that students learned *cuentos*, and *dichos* (stories and sayings) which Yosso

(2005) suggests is how students have been “engaged participants in a storytelling tradition,” (p. 78). Parents also passed on to their children, as funds of knowledge, consejos (advice). Similar to previous literature (Valdés, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002), the parents in this study taught lessons and gave their students advice about life in general transmitting their knowledge to their children.

### *Échale Ganas Mentality*

Parents emphasized the concept of telling or helping their student to *echar ganas* at school and with studying for class and exams. The idea, to *echar ganas*, is phrasing parents use as a form of encouragement, like saying “give it your all” or “give it your best shot.” Parents acknowledged their own limitations in their knowledge about college. Kiyama (2008; 2010) found that parents held high aspirations for their children’s educational goals and formed educational ideologies about college that, while positive, were incomplete. In this study, the parents recognize their limitations in helping students in accessing, transitioning to, and persisting in college. By telling their children to *echar ganas*, parents found a way to use the knowledges they do have as parents and as the students’ base of moral support to help their children the best way they knew possible.

Many would see their children become stressed or appear discourage, so they told them to not give up and *echar ganas*. Parents felt that once their students were in college there was even less they could do to help them. Overall, however, parents felt it their duty to support their children mentally and emotionally as they moved through college. Some would still drive them to catch a train, buy groceries, or even cook them breakfast. But the most important thing parents felt they could do, including the English-speaking family, was to be a foundation of support for

their child's well-being in college. Telling their students to *echar ganas*, parents felt this was a way to let their students know that they cared about them.

### Experiences at the Community College: The Good and the Bad

The last research question I sought to answer in this study was, how do students describe their experiences at the community college? Not everyone who attended the community college expressed a positive emotion when talking about their experiences. All of them reported the cost of college as a major reason for choosing to attend the community college but once they enrolled at the community college, there were a variety of different experiences that students described.

#### *The Best Choice for Me (The Student)*

Ana spoke about the student interactions at Palomino Community College that really made her experience worth every moment. Monica and Cael spoke of how they felt they were able to establish an academic identity at the community college. Both described being students who were “under the radar” at their high schools, since most of the attention goes to students who are already at the top of the class or those in need of the most help. At their respective community colleges, each student felt visible and achieved higher GPAs. Because of this, Monica received what she felt was a sizable scholarship from an honors organization to transfer to GTU. Cael, though he took time off, was able to apply for and receive an academically competitive \$13,000 scholarship to transfer to GTU.

#### *Disappointing First Choices*

Though the only two students who voiced their negative experience in undermatching, Aaron and Linda's experiences with attending the community college are worth further investigation. Both attended high schools that focused on preparing students for four-year colleges. Their experiences inform us of how Latinx, middle-class, academically prepared

students who attend college prep high schools can, and do, choose to attend the community college. Moreover, it provides a more robust understanding of the emotional effect of academic undermatch on these students.

### *Defying the Odds*

All students in this study took longer than four years to complete a bachelor's degree, with one approaching his ninth academic year in college with no bachelor's degree earned. The 2017-2018 year will be Abraham's ninth year in college. When I met with him in December 2016 to complete member checks with students, he did not anticipate completing his degree until Spring or Summer 2018, at the earliest.

Nationally, Latinx students moving from the community college to the university encounter issues along the path. The literature on Latinx students in college has demonstrated that this group of students is less likely to complete a bachelor's degree, relative to their White and Asian peers (Fry, 2011), and that few transfer from the community college to a four-year college and complete a bachelor's degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Long & Kurleander, 2009). The ability for each one of these students to persist through attending a community college, then transferring to a university and persisting to earn a bachelor's degree is atypical, as compared to the stated literature.

Other research suggests that aspirations and expectations may account for the ability of community college students to earn the bachelor's degree. Wang (2009) found that students who, by 12<sup>th</sup> grade, had expectations to earn a bachelor's degree were more than three times more likely than their peers, who expected less, to have earned a bachelor's degree. She goes on to suggest that, "Perhaps the baccalaureate aspiration and the value placed on education reinforce each other to keep the students from straying off the route to earning a bachelor's degree as they

planned in the 12th grade” (Wang, 2009, p. 582). Given what I have learned from the students in my study, I agree with this statement. The fact that 13 students have successfully transferred, with six having completed a bachelor’s and two on the way by May 2017, speaks to their efforts towards their progress. I would also add that students’ expectations to complete a bachelor’s degree were, in large part, formed and reinforced by their families’ aspirations for them to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Having students get in to college is one thing; preparing students for the challenges they may face so that they persist through college is a separate issue. Teachers and counselors in K-12 schools may help prepare students for getting in to college, but that will not help them stay. Students’ perceptions of their ability to remain committed to their educational goals are important (Wang, 2009), especially considering how parents described the resilience of their children. Based on this study, however, I would add that the support of the family, from an *échale ganas* mentality to the *consejos* provided, helped students get through the pipeline.

### Revisiting Academic Undermatch and College Choice

#### *Academic Undermatch*

Understanding how and why Latinx students choose to attend a community college is of great importance. Overall, Latinx students who begin their postsecondary education at the community college are unlikely to complete a bachelor’s degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Kurlaender, 2006; Long & Kurlander, 2009). Moreover, even when students are qualified to attend a four-year college, through completion of rigorous courses such as Advanced Placement, Latinx students opt out of such choice (Kurlaender; 2006; Rodriguez, 2015b). When Latinx students are eligible to attend a four-year college, and choose to attend a community college, they have academically undermatched.

Academic undermatch among Latinx populations can occur more often and at higher rates than among their White peers (Roderick et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2012). Much of the literature on undermatch continues to examine this issue as problematic among low-income students in choosing a highly/very selective university, or a non-selective institution, sometimes combining community colleges and non-selective four-year colleges in to the same category (Radford & Howell, 2014; Rodriguez, 2015b; Smith, et al., 2012). In contrast, Bastedo and Flaster (2014) noted that research on academic undermatch should do more to investigate the reasons why low-income students choose to attend a community college instead of a regional, public, non-selective, comprehensive university. This study was designed to address this particular issue as Rodriguez (2015c) in supporting Bastedo and Flaster's (2014) work noted that, in regard to the categorization of institutions based on selectivity, "determination of cutoffs gets quite murky," (p. 589).

The literature on academic undermatch also tends to focus on students who are high-achieving (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Hoxby & Turner, 2015) or, in combining college selectivity (Radford & Howell, 2014; Rodriguez, 2015b; Smith et al., 2012) center the conversation on those students with higher levels of academic qualifications that are likely to be eligible to enroll in more selective institutions. The findings from this study continue to support Rodriguez's (2015c) suggestion that middle-ability students be examined more closely since the literature focuses on high-achieving or at-risk students. Specifically, she states, "...[V]ery little is known about how middle-ability students make their decisions and whether they are good matches. The middle-ability group is the less the sensational of the two, but they are a much larger share of college enrollments," (Rodriguez, 2015c, p. 591).



Indeed, the students in this study ranged in academic ability. Using the State of Texas' top 10% percent plan (Tienda & Niu, 2006), the law allowing students in the top 10% of their class access to all public institutions in the state, as an indicator of high-achievement, only two students, Risa and Ernesto, self-identified as being part of the top 10%. The remainder identified as being just outside of the top 10%, but far from being considered an at-risk student.

It is also worth considering how race/ethnicity and class affect undermatch. Using the income quartile information provided in a recent report (Cahalan, Perna, Yamashita, Ruiz, Franklin, 2016) almost all of the students in my study were in the bottom and second quartile, meaning their family incomes were \$65,496 or less. Only Aaron and Linda were in the third quartile, with family incomes ranging from \$65,496 to \$116,466. Similar to the research on Latinx college enrollment and family income (Nunez & Kim, 2013; O'Connor, et al., 2010), Linda's and Aaron's family income did not prevent them from academically undermatching by attending a community college versus a four-year college.

### *College Choice*

In the literature review, I discussed in more detail two college choice models that are relevant to this study, but do not account for the college choice processes of low-income or Latinx students. The first, Hossler and Gallagher's Model of College Choice (1987) asserts that students move through three phases, predisposition, search, and choice as students make the decision, search for colleges and choose to attend college. This model does not account for community college choice among low-income or minority students. While I believe that predisposition, search, and choice are relevant, for this study it looks very rushed for the students I interviewed. Consistent with Martinez and Cervera's (2012) work many students in this study are applying very late to go to college, which would fall in the search category. Choosing

colleges, which there is little research about when this happens specifically for Latinx students, happened in the months after high school for the students in this study. Based on the students interviewed in this study, predisposition happens as late as 11th grade, search occurs as late as senior year, and college choice may be made as late as a few weeks before class starts.

Somers and colleagues' (2006) research proposed a framework for understanding what factors influence the decision to attend community colleges. Their framework is rooted in combining econometric models of college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999), which assumed students are rational actors actively cogitating about their college choices using cost-benefit analysis to produce a set of choices, and status-attainment models (Jackson, 1982) that are based in sociological theory and concern the interactions of social, individual, and aspirational factors to influence college choices.

Unfortunately, this framework does not include or account for Latinx student choice to attend the community college since the students in the study identified as White, Black, Native American, Asian, or Other (Somers et al., 2006). However, the findings from this study do support Somers and colleagues' (2006) work, but should also add how parental aspirations are important to traditional students enrolling at the community college. As discussed in the community college choice model (Somers et al., 2006), educational aspirations are framed as student aspirations. Rather, the findings from this study show that parental aspirations shape student aspirations and, similar to Yosso's (2005) own description of aspirations, support students to imagine opportunities beyond the environment they currently find themselves situated in.

Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice is important to discuss as she provided a more robust understanding of the multiple layers that influence student college

choice. More specifically, Perna stated, “the proposed conceptual model assumes that college enrollment decisions reflect an individual's ‘situated context’,” (2006, 116). After completing a thorough analysis of existing college choice literature, Perna’s model conceptualizes student college choice through four layers: 1) individual habitus, 2) school and community context, 3) the higher education context, and 4) social, economic, and policy context (2006).

Habitus can be defined as “... [an] internalized, permanent system of outlooks and beliefs about the world that an individual learns from his or her immediate environment” (McDonough, 1994, p. 430). Individual habitus in Perna’s research (2006) recognized this and included demographic characteristics, cultural, and social capital in this layer. The school and community context layer reflected organizational habitus as conceptualized by McDonough (1997). This is particularly shaped in understanding how students are aided or impeded in their college choices by the resources and systems within their schools and communities.

Acevedo-Gil’s (in press) *College-Conocimiento* Framework reframes college choice by integrating Perna’s conceptual model by with Anzaldua’s (2002) *conocimiento* pathway. Acevedo-Gil conceptualizes *College-Conocimiento* as a “serpentine process where Latinx students reflect on the college information that they receive in relation to their intersectional experiences when preparing for college,” (in press). In this framework, Acevedo-Gil provides seven non-linear stages exploring college choice at an individual level, 1) El Arrebato: Deciding to Go to College, 2) Nepantla: Searching for College Information, 3) Coatlicue: Anticipating College Obstacles, 4) El Compromiso: Planning and Applying to College, 5) Coyolxauhqui: Choosing a College, 6) A Clash of Realities: Conflicts with College, and 7) Spiritual Activism: Self-Advocacy and Peer Support.

Each stage is named for Anzaldua's (2002) *conocimiento* and is then informed by issues and experiences students face as they process and choose to go to college and where. In this *College-Conocimiento* framework, the students can move in to another stage and move back in to others. This framework is culturally relevant and specifically focuses on exploring the complexities of college choice for Latinx students. Latinx student enrollment to college has increased, yet most Latinx students choose to attend community colleges even when eligible to attend a four-year university (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Kurlaender, 2006). The need to better understand Latinxs college choice and enrollment is imperative.

#### Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

This study suggests practical implications for both university and community college practitioners. By using asset-based frameworks, institutions can acknowledge that many of these students come to college with a variety of experiences that can be built upon to guide them to successful outcomes such as transferring to a four-year college and persisting through graduation. Luna and Martinez (2013) suggest that K-12 schools work more closely with colleges and universities provide clearer information on the pathway to college that includes parents, where parents also gain from having this information. Previous research confirms that when parents are better equipped with college knowledge, they can and do help their children (Auerbach, 2004; Fann et al., 2009). These outcomes are imperative to increased Latinx participation in college (Fann et al., 2009) and to the success of Latinx transfer students due to low transfer and bachelor's degree completion rates for this group of students (Arbona & Nora, 2007; O'Connor, et al., 2010).

Students and their families have a wealth of knowledge from which to draw. Parent and family orientation programs are one place to implement asset-based approaches to working with

Latinx students and their families, but there are some issues with this. Parent and family orientation programs tend to only serve parents and families for whom university attendance is a family tradition, i.e. parents have at least a bachelor's degree. These programs can also be expensive. The Latinx students in this study were painstakingly aware of money and costs for college. Getting students to ask their parents to pay for an optional program that can be as expensive as \$200 for two parents is not realistic. Furthermore, orientation comes too late in the process: Janet spoke of registering for and not attending orientation and Risa attended orientation then decided not to go to the university.

#### *Financial Aid Awareness*

Higher education practitioners must find ways to work with high schools in disseminating timely and accurate information about financial aid and the costs of college. Students need to hear from universities about scholarship opportunities and grant funding, as Latinx students are more likely to have unmet financial need for college (Long & Riley, 2007). Students in this study received better financial aid and scholarship information from their respective community college. Considering that many of these students made last-minute decisions to attend a community college, they received this information at a much later date.

Traditionally, universities have internal financial aid deadlines in March to distribute institutional and state aid available at that institution. Because Latinx students tend to apply to college much later in their senior year (Gonzalez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012), and because the students in this study felt that information about college, including financial aid, was not readily available, information about financial aid deadlines need to be made available to students no later than the fall of their senior year. Now that the FAFSA can be filed as early as October of

the prior year a student plans to enter college, this information must be given as early as junior year of high school.

It is important to get accurate information about financial aid as students and families are often confused, or even deterred, from applying for aid (ACSFSA, 2005), which is similar to the students and families in this study. The students I interviewed knew they needed to complete the FAFSA, but that was the extent of their knowledge. This finding supports research that states Latinx students knowledge about financial aid is highly dependent on the resources available to the student as they apply for aid (Gross, 2011; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). And while Kim (2004) notes that Latinx students may not be aware of how to apply for aid, what type of aid is available, or the net price of different colleges after aid is received, parents are also unaware about applying for aid, particularly Spanish-dominant parents who were not educated in the U.S.

Disseminating information about financial aid should not be limited to just the work of financial aid officers, but admissions officers, advisors, and other personnel on campus should be able to engage with prospective students and their families to have these conversations to help guide students to selecting a four-year college. Parent and family programs personnel are people within the university community who specifically dedicate the majority of their time to educating and helping parents of incoming students. These professionals are uniquely positioned to benefit from incorporating asset-based frameworks in their approaches, as well as partnering with other outreach programs and admissions events that specifically focus on events with families.

#### *Recruitment and Outreach in Spanish*

Community colleges and universities that participate in college fairs at local high schools and within regional areas should provide more information in Spanish for parents. Only two

students of the 13 had parents who were fluent in English. Four of the five interviews with parents were in Spanish. Those Spanish-speaking parents went to college fairs with their children where little to no information was provided in Spanish. It is hard to assume parents will help their students when materials that can aid college attendance are not provided in their native language. The K-12 independent school district (ISD) to which 10 of the 13 students' high schools belong is almost 60% Hispanic. Ana and Risa attended high school outside of North Texas, but near the Texas-Mexico border. Their school districts enrolled 90% or more Hispanic students. Amalia was the only student in this study who attended high school in a predominantly White school district. For the Spanish-speaking families interviewed, their students attended schools that were majority-minority and enrolled between 55-84% Hispanic students.

Not all Latinx families speak Spanish, as Renee and Steven's interviews were in English. However, per the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), almost 34% of the families in this county and school district speak Spanish at home. From that 34%, only half reported speaking English "Well or Very Well" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Based on that information, colleges and universities recruiting students in these ISDs, or others like them, should provide Spanish language materials.

#### *Pre-college Programming with Costs in Mind*

Finally, though the ability of many college prep programs to inform Latinx students about getting into college should not be ignored, perhaps it would be worth expanding programs to explicitly focus on the actual costs of college and the importance of completing scholarship and FAFSA information early. These students have a general understanding of money and finances. Like Janet and Ernesto, there may also be students who work while in high school not just to help family but to not feel that their college financial needs are a burden to the family.

These students have a basic understanding of finances and costs. To provide additional services or programs that tap into this knowledge, either from the work experiences of the student or from their home experiences of translating and interpreting, would help students like those in this study. For example, students would learn that though cost of attending Private University X is \$50,000 a year, it would be best to see what the financial aid package looks like before ruling it out of their choice set. Because institutions engage in tuition discounting, particularly private colleges, students may see that they would receive a large, if not total, discount, and the estimated costs of attendance may be reduced. Outreach programs would do well to prioritize this information and dedicate time to specific goals in helping students understand college costs and financial aid.

#### Implications and Recommendations for Policy

The students in this study were eligible to attend a university but chose to attend a community college. One of the more frequently cited reasons the students in this study chose to attend a community college, rather than a university was finances. Students may have perceived their decision to attend a community college as strategic, drawing on their navigational capital to enable them to continue to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Though others argue that overall indebtedness for students who transfer from a community college to a university is the same as students who started at a four-year college (Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014; Gonzalez Canche, 2014), the perceptions of costs of college are very real for these students.

And for those students who have transferred, like those in this study, there are a variety of ways in which transferring to a four-year college can be difficult. Students in this study cited not knowing early enough that certain courses would be better to take rather than the ones they completed prior to transfer. Lowry (2015; 2017) contends that more should be done to support



the pathway from the community college to a bachelor's degree. This is especially true for students who undermatch and attend a community college, even when academically qualified to attend a four-year institution (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2010) as research consistently shows that Latinx students who start at a community college are less likely to transfer and, if they do, less likely to earn a baccalaureate (Alexander, et al, 2007; Arbona & Nora, 2007; Fry, 2004; Kurlaender, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; O'Connor, et al, 2010). Below are implications and recommendations for policy on rising college costs, excess hours, and supporting transfer.

### *Rising College Costs*

Rising tuition prices have coincided with growing demand for higher education. State appropriations for higher education have declined, shifting of the burden of the cost for higher education away from the taxpayer and on to the student (Johnstone, 2004). Because higher education systems are in competition for resources with other public goods (Johnstone, 2004) this affects tuition increases. Taxpayers are burdened with the cost of supporting not only higher education, but K-12 education, health care, and similar programs. As a response to declining state support, tuition has increased to compensate for, and alleviate, the increased costs for services (Ehrenberg, 2012).

Fernandez and Fletcher (2014) maintain that rising tuition costs and failure of financial aid to keep pace with such increases may be likely be a catalyst for creating transfer that is financially motivated, that is students opting to attend a community college to save money rather than attend a four-year institution. If what Fernandez and Fletcher (2014) suggest is true, yet overall indebtedness for community college students who transfer to complete a baccalaureate is the same as their peers who begin at a four-year college (Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014; Gonzalez

Canche, 2014) then policymakers should continue to review how college costs continue to affect student enrollment.

Though policymakers, particularly in the state of Texas, have touted efforts to control overall college costs, like a \$10,000 bachelor's degree (Koppel & Belkin, 2012), such efforts rely on community college enrollment to keep costs down. Really, it may be in the best interest of policymakers to revisit state appropriations, relative to cost, to genuinely impact how students, particularly Latinx students, determine college choice. This directly affects academic undermatch as sticker prices increase, first generation, low-income, and Latinx students who were eligible to enroll at a four-year college will not, and will opt instead to go to a community college (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010; Nuñez & Kim, 2013; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Rodriguez, 2015, b).

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, declines in state appropriations to public higher education, resulting in increased tuition, signal to students and families that costs for higher education, are not a state priority. This in turn affects the ways in which families view costs for higher education. Returning to a policy environment that increases state appropriations for higher education, while curbing tuition increases, or even causing a reduction in tuition, more effectively demonstrates that policy makers are truly invested in, and care about, low-income students and price sensitive Latinx students who want to go to college.

#### *Excessive Hours*

Students who take too many courses in pursuit of a bachelor's degree are at risk of being in "excess hours." In this study, Abraham is one of the students who is in "excess hours" and I suspect others may cross that threshold before completing their degrees. In Texas excess hours begin when a student exceeds by at least 30 semester credit hours the number of semester credit

hours required(SCH) for completion of the degree program in which the student is enrolled. The excess hours rule (Texas Constitution and Statues, n.d.) is one policy where the state “punishes” an institution based on student completion by withholding state funding for that enrollment. The subsequent cost is then shifted to the student who is responsible for paying the additional tuition and fees incurred. This additional rate is set not to exceed out-of-state tuition and fees.

Full disclosure: I have been intimately affected by this policy. My partner took 14 years to complete his bachelor’s degree and we had to pay for six hours of tuition at the excess hours rate. His financial aid, plus the generous tuition scholarship he received because of my full-time employment at the university, was the only way we could afford this. The cost was almost double the initial charge for tuition.

With that said, I understand the policy may be well-intended in trying to get universities to put students on a path to a timelier graduation. However, students who began at a community college and have transferred to the university may be disproportionately affected by this policy as research contends that students who start at a community college often take more courses than are needed for their program of study (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). Given issues that surround the transfer process and the larger proportion of Latinx students enroll at a community college, Texas state policy makers need to evaluate if there are disparate effects of this policy on students, including Latinx students, who begin at a community college.

#### *Supporting Transfer to the Baccalaureate*

Though students drew upon their navigational capital to maneuver through the community college and get to the university, this does not mean they did not encounter issues. Students stopped out for some time or were unable to transfer courses toward their degree program. Others were unaware that certain courses would have been better to take at the

community college for the degree program they intended to complete. The problems students encountered along the pathway have implications for transfer policy in the State of Texas.

Transferring between institutions of higher education within the State of Texas has written regulatory policy outlined in the Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter B. According to the Texas Secretary of State website, “The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) is a compilation of all state agency rules in Texas. [...] Each title represents a subject category and related agencies are assigned to the appropriate title,” (TXSOS, n.d.). Though this policy exists, it provides a general guide by which institutions, both community colleges and universities, send and receive transfer students. Each college has the autonomy to create transfer policy that fits within these guidelines. Unfortunately, this means that students considering transfer to more than one university will get different outcomes of how and to which programs their courses will transfer.

Transfer has recently come under further scrutiny by state representatives in the Texas Legislature. Leaders in the State of Texas have challenged four-year colleges to keep costs down and offer bachelor’s degrees for \$10,000 (Koppel & Belkin, 2012). One way this can be accomplished is if students start at a community college, then transfer to a university to complete the bachelor’s degree (Watkins, 2017). The problem that state representatives have become more aware of, but that has been documented in the literature for the last ten years, is that the pathway to transfer from a community college to a university is riddled with roadblocks (Alexander, et al., 2007; Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Ovink, 2017).

Recent research and reports suggest that community colleges should provide students clearer pathways that map courses needed and show them how to move from the college to a university (Bailey, Jenkins, Fink, Cuiianne, & Schudde, 2017; Schuetz, Rosenbaum, Foran, &

Cepa, 2016). These guided pathways provide “courses in the context of highly structured, educationally coherent program maps that align with students’ goals for careers and further education,” (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015, 1). This approach calls for institutional reforms that require more collaboration and conversations between community colleges and universities. Because of the structured nature of guided pathways, course options are limited to those courses that are best for the student’s intended program for transfer. For example, if a student is interested in pursuing an electrical engineering program, the guided pathway would clearly outline all of the math courses required at the community college that would be better for the student to complete before transferring to the university.

In their report to the Greater Texas Foundation, Bailey and colleagues (2017) emphasized the lack of incentives for effective transfer policy in Texas. They stated, “Texas has weak or counterproductive policy incentives for two- and four-year colleges to strengthen transfer outcomes,” (Bailey et al., 2017, 9). Moreover, there are fewer incentives for students to transfer since there is little to no state-level financial aid to support transfer (Bailey et al., 2017). While the overall recommendation is to provide guided pathways to students (Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2017) there are no clear recommendations to incentivize transfer policies.

Further, in an article by Watkins (2017) in *The Texas Tribune*, state representatives spoke about punishing colleges for not improving transfer between institutions stating, “Some impatient lawmakers are wondering whether they should be focusing their energy on punishing schools where students struggle to transfer credit, rather than spending more money on new classroom options,” (para. 14) Policies that aim to punish universities and community colleges, in the State of Texas, have in fact had deleterious consequences on students more so than the colleges.

Perhaps Texas state representatives should reconsider the incentives available to community colleges and universities for transfer. It may also be of benefit for the state to put money toward the outcomes they desire by specifically creating or designating state-funded aid to transfer students. Though private scholarships and university grants and scholarships exist, the amounts awarded vary and students may have to meet increased competitive requirements to be eligible for such aid. Considering the state's current agenda to have at least 60% of residents in the State of Texas earn at least some postsecondary credential, in an effort to boost overall completion rates in the state (THECB, 2015), such incentives would help to further these initiatives.

#### Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Academic undermatch requires some unpacking on part of the researcher, as I did in my review of academic undermatch. College access and choice, especially for communities of color and historically underrepresented groups, is a far more complex issue. It requires a deeper understanding of not only the ways in which students make a personal choice to even consider attending college, look for schools, and then choose a college, but also the circumstances that surround these issues. How were those ideas of going to college fostered? By whom? How is that supported? To whom do student go for help? Does their high school offer the curriculum needed to get in to college? Can they afford to attend?

#### *The Complexities of Access and Inclusive Frameworks for Latinx Students*

Though there is research that qualitatively examines the more complex nature by which students are choosing to enroll at community colleges rather than four-year colleges (Freeman, 2016; Lowry, 2017), much of the existing, quantitative, literature assumes a certain level of agency, on the part of the student, in college access and choice. Holding students accountable for

their decisions regarding college choice without acknowledging the structural inequalities that exist, as students navigate the path to college, reinforces deficit-based understandings of college access and choice.

Based on the data from parent and student interviews, it is clear undermatch happened for a complex number of reasons, including having incomplete information and direct guidance to not attend a four-year college. Rather than picking apart academic undermatch by selectivity of college (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013), or by assessing test scores and possible versus actual admissions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Hoxby & Avery, 2015), research on academic undermatch must continue to uncover the complexities of college access and why students make the choices they do.

Findings from this study affirm the need for more inclusive frameworks that focus on Latinx students. The students in this study made choices about college with limited information as they perceived school agents to not provide more detailed information about college they wanted. Students made very late choices about which college to attend and made choices about college that, though demonstrated their tenacity to pursue their educational goals, may have been different if more information was provided to them earlier on. By using inclusive frameworks on college choice, like Acevedo-Gil's (in press) *College-Conocimiento*, research on Latinx student college choice continues to elevate the complexities and realities of students. Future research should re-examine Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice and include Latinx students like the ones in this study. Such re-examination may result in changes to the time element in the model, especially given the existing literature on student applications to college (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). By revealing the intricacy of the process to search for and enroll in college, we uncover the systems and structures that lead to unequal

opportunities in access to information about college. Research should seek to dismantle these structures to engender equitable access to all institutions and for all persons.

#### *Including the Parent/Family Voice in Latinx College Access Research*

Moreover, recognizing that the student perspective on college access is just that, one perspective, research on college access and choice should continue to include parent and family perspectives. Some studies focus on highlighting the parent voice on issues of college access and choice (Auerbach, 2002, 2004; Kiyama, 2010), while others focus on the student (Freeman, 2017; Lowry, 2017). By including the narratives and stories of the family and the students, a more balanced understanding of the context within which students make their decisions can be drawn. The parents in this study provided a wealth of knowledge about their student, specific to a situation that was not always available by just speaking with the student.

To add to this, it is because a funds of knowledge framework was employed during data analysis of parent interviews that the data revealed a broader awareness of the circumstances in which students made the decision to attend college. Students said their parents did not know much about college and were of little assistance, which taken on its own is true. Parents, however, showed that there is more to the story than what the students offered in their interview.

#### *Acknowledging the Heterogeneity of Latinx Students*

Although this study provided a great deal of insight on academic undermatch among Latinx students and their families input, it is worth noting that this group was largely a homogenous group of one subset of Latinxs. Except for Adela and Isabel, who identified as Colombian, students and parents in this study identified as Mexican or Mexican-American. While Mexicans are the largest sub-group of Latinxs in the U.S., of the 55.4 million who identified as Latinx, 64% identified as Mexican, and Puerto Ricans were the next largest sub-



group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Also, east coast Latinx groups are predominantly from the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico). These groups have different educational enrollment and attainment patterns in the U.S. (Motel & Patten, 2012; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006).

Future research on academic undermatch among Latinxs must focus on students who do not identify as Mexican or Mexican-American. Do they have the same or similar issues? Does parental involvement look the same? Is language as great an issue? Additionally, to not only find more and different sub-groups of Latinx students, future research on academic undermatch among Latinxs should be done on the east coast. Florida, New York, and New Jersey are among the eight states holding a combined 74% of the nation's Latinx population; however, those Latinx sub-groups are primarily Cubans (FL), Puerto Ricans and Dominicans (NY & NJ) (Brown & Lopez, 2013).

As a New York-born Puerto Rican, having lived in both New York and Texas, I can only speak to my experience. Though I have encountered similar issues as the students in my study, it is not the same. Of course, I started searching for colleges more than 16 years ago, so there is also that difference. But, more importantly, two major differences are language and immigration status. Although my mother and I were born in New York, my grandmother and grandfather were not. Even before they left Puerto Rico, they spoke English. Growing up, I was never discouraged to speak or learn Spanish. It was expected for me to do so and learn from family along the way, though I am technically third generation stateside. In Texas, however, I have known people like Renee, who are Mexican or Mexican-American and were made fun of for speaking Spanish or were actively discouraged from learning to speak Spanish.

Furthermore, Puerto Rico and Mexico both have contentious relationships with the U.S., which are too numerous to detail in this discussion. It is worth mentioning, however, because Immigration to the U.S. by persons from Mexico has been hotly debated, whereas Puerto Ricans can travel freely in the U.S. because of the island's status as a commonwealth. Coming to the U.S. still has its own issues for Puerto Ricans, though. It is painfully clear that with the new U.S. presidential administration, Mexico and Mexican immigrants to the U.S. will remain a point of contention.

Besides language and sub-group identification differences, future research on academic undermatch should continue to examine differences in generational status for Latinx students both in terms of college enrollment and immigration status to the U.S. On college enrollment, I did not intend to only interview students who were first generation in college. When I sent out emails and surveys, I was concerned with meeting the criteria I set to recruit students, which mentioned nothing about being first in the family to go to college. Smith, Pender, and Howell (2013) found that academic undermatch is more common among students whose parents have no college degree than for those whose parents have a college education. So, for those students who have parents that have attended college and do undermatch, what does that look like? Additional research is needed to understand the reasons and influences for those students and examine the differences that exist, if they do.

#### *Immigrant Issues in College Access*

As for immigrant status in the U.S., that needs to be examined further. Five students in this study are part of the 1.5 generation (Awokoye, 2012), having been born outside the U.S. but moving here at a young age. Six students are second generation, having been born in the U.S. to parents born in Mexico. Two students are third generation, having at least one parent born in the

U.S. to a Mexican-born parent. Immigration status and educational achievement, especially in the context of academic undermatch, is important for future research. In their seminal research study, Kao and Tienda (1995) found that the U.S. born children of foreign-born parents benefit greatly, more so than their first, third, or subsequent generation peers. These children benefit from the optimism of their parents and English language proficiency (Kao & Tienda, 1995). They go on to say, "...immigrant parents' optimism about their offspring's socioeconomic prospects decisively influences educational outcomes." (Kao & Tienda, 1995, p. 17).

A recent study by Callahan and Humphries (2016), however, pointed to some issues in the college pipeline for immigrant students. They suggested that immigrant undermatch occurs more often for those students who are English language learners during K-12 schooling. Specifically, these students opted to attend a community college rather than a four-year university. The researchers suggested that because of their high school math coursework, completing calculus or pre-calculus, theoretically they could have been eligible to attend a four-year college (Callahan & Humphries, 2016).

Also, because of the political climate, anti-immigrant sentiment roused by the current presidential administration, and the relative unknown circumstances surrounding undocumented students in the U.S., including the state of Texas with its large Latinx population, research on the immigrant population has become more difficult to complete, but necessary given the environment immigrant students now face. Based on Callahan and Humphries' (2016) work, the present study, and others that may be forthcoming, research on academic undermatch must continue to explore immigrant generational status and college enrollment outcomes.

## Conclusion

Choosing colleges is a complex process informed by a variety of people, resources, and institutions. Latinx students academically undermatch more often than their peers by choosing to enroll in community colleges even when they have been or are eligible to attend a university (Kurlaender, 2006; Radford & Howell, 2015; Smith et al., 2013). These students are likely to be the first in their family to go to college and rely on their counselors, teachers, and others within their network who have attended college to critical information about college. This includes information about applying to colleges, applying for financial aid, scholarships, financial aid awards from colleges they have been admitted to, and cost of attendance.

This study found that academic undermatch occurred very late for most students, with some students waiting until August to make the decision to attend a community college rather than the four-year college to which they had gained admission. Students felt their high school counselors and teachers helped, but still did not provide crucial information they wanted. Overall, students felt their choice to attend the community college was strategic and was supported by their families. Though this is very important as it aided in overall enrollment regardless of institution, it may speak to the continued need for additional resources on/about financial aid and college costs so that students can make more informed decisions. Especially since Latinx students may opt to undermatch and attend a community college given increases in sticker prices (Rodriguez, 2015b) and limited knowledge about costs and financial aid (Kurlaender, 2006; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2010; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). The parents of students who were interviewed demonstrated that college knowledge in the home existed, though it varied between families and was limited. Nonetheless, these parents supported their

students through college and wanted them to achieve an education beyond what they had obtained, or could imagine attainable.

This study also revealed that issues with transfer and parental concerns about their students' future were evident. These issues and concerns speak to the many ways in which educational practices and policies should be improved to better serve Latinx students.

Additionally, the funds of knowledge within the homes of Latinx students should be further researched to enhance the literature on the understanding and use of funds of knowledge in college access and choice.

APPENDIX H  
STUDY PROTOCOLS

## 1. Student Participant Recruitment Email and Script

[Student Name],

My name is Catherine Olivarez and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education program at the University of North Texas. I am recruiting Latina/o community college students who were admitted to a four-year institution, but may now be attending (or first attended) a community college.

This study seeks to understand how Latina/o students came to the choice of enrolling at the community college, versus a four-year institution. I am interested in understanding how these students perceive the role of their family and external forces in influencing college choices. Participants will be requested to participate in an interview of 30-60 minutes. Interviews will take place at a location of the participant's choosing.

Participants for this study should meet the following criteria:

1. Participants should identify as a Latina/o. A Latina/o is a person whose ancestry or familial descent is from a country of Latin origin (Latin America, Central America, the United States and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean).
2. Participants should have been admitted to a four-year institution, but declined to attend. Examples of four-year institutions include, but are not limited to: Golden Triangle University, Pioneers of Texas University, etc.
3. Participants should have attended a community college after declining to enroll at a four-year institution to which they gained admissions.

**For example:** if you are a Latina who was accepted GTU for the fall 2015, but decided to attend Eaglefoot College (a community college) instead, then you would meet the criteria to volunteer to participate.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the following survey. Once you complete the survey, you will be contacted within 48 hours to about participating in an interview. Participants may receive a cash incentive for completing an interview. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at [catherineolivarez@my.unt.edu](mailto:catherineolivarez@my.unt.edu).

Thank you,  
Catherine Olivarez  
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Program  
University of North Texas  
[catherineolivarez@my.unt.edu](mailto:catherineolivarez@my.unt.edu) | (210) 833-3467

## 2. Participant Recruitment Survey

1. I agree to participate in an individual interview

- a. Yes
- b. No

*If No is Selected, Then Skip to End of Survey. If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip to “Thank you for agreeing to participate...”*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please note the individual interview can be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you.

2. Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please provide the days/times that you are most available to schedule an individual interview:

\_\_\_\_\_

Because the focus of this study is to understand college choice, it would be helpful if you could answer a few questions about yourself and your college choices.

6. My ethnic/racial identity is: (can choose more than one)

- a. White
- b. Black or African American
- c. Latino or Hispanic
- d. American Indian or Alaska Native
- e. Asian
- f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- g. Other

7. Did you graduate from high school on the Recommended Plan or higher?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. Did you apply to a four-year\* college or university during high school? \*For example, Golden Triangle University, Pioneers of Texas University, etc.

- a. Yes
- b. No



9. Were you admitted to a four-year college or university?

- a. Yes
- b. No

10. After graduating from high school, did you attend a community college?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. Please list the college(s) you gained admissions to below:

---

Thank you for participating. You will be contacted soon regarding participation for the study.

3. Student Demographic Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Cell#: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin? Check all that apply.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Dominican   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Puerto Rican                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Nicaraguan  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Argentinean                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Salvadoran  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Cuban                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Colombian                          | <input type="checkbox"/> No               |

With whom do you live? (Circle one):    Self            Parents            Family (not parents)  
Friends

Distance of current institution from home: \_\_\_\_\_ Miles

Do you have any dependents?    Yes    No    If yes, how many:

Do you work? (Circle One): Yes    No    If so, how many hours per week? \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Information**

What is your parents' and siblings highest level of education? (Please check)

Educational Level	Father	Mother	Sibling 1	Sibling 2	Sibling 3
Some high school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High School/GED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Some college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Associate's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bachelor's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Master's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctorate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mother's Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Income (Circle one):            0K-29K            30K-59K            60K-99K            100K+

**Your Educational Information**

**High School:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year Graduated:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When you were in high school did you participate in any of the following programs?**

<b>College Preparation Programs</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Upward Bound	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talent Search	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
AVID	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gear UP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other: Please list _____		

**How many colleges did you apply to?**

**Besides GTU, please list the colleges you applied and were admitted to:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Institution:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Number of credit hours completed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Number of credit hours in progress:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you attend school part-time or full-time? (Circle One):** Part-time / Full-time

**Which best describes your educational expectations?**

- \_\_ Complete a workforce certification, and then complete an associate's degree.
- \_\_ Complete an associate's degree, and then pursue a job/career.
- \_\_ Complete an associate's degree, and then transfer to complete a bachelor's degree program
- \_\_ Complete the bachelor's degree, and then pursue a job/career.
- \_\_ Complete the bachelor's degree, and then pursue graduate or professional school.
- \_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Student Participant Protocol Questions

##### **Pathway to college:**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
  - a. What K-12 schools did you attend?
  - b. How did you perform academically in school?
  - c. Did you take any advanced courses (AP/IB/Honors)?
  - d. Were there expectations to go to college, when you attended these schools? (from teachers, counselors, staff at the school)
2. When did you decide that you wanted to attend college?
  - a. Tell me about how old you were and why you decided this is what you wanted to do.
3. Who did you go to for college information?
  - a. What type of information did you receive and how helpful was it in getting you through the process?
4. Why did you choose [Community College]? Why not [University]?
5. Were you ever able to visit [University]? Why or Why not? [Probe on experiences with visiting campus, if they have; probe why they never came to campus if never visited]

##### **Role of Family and Kinship Networks on College Access/Choice:**

6. Have you had any conversations with your parents/guardians about going to college? Please tell me about that.
7. What kind of messages did you receive at home about college?
  - a. While you were in high school, what kind of support did you receive from your family about going to college?
8. How did your parents, primary caregivers, and other family figures help with the college planning process?
  - a. Did they take you on college visits?
  - b. Did they help you write your essays?
9. What role did your family play in searching/choosing colleges?
10. Did family members encourage you to apply/attend specific schools?
  - a. Did you know family members (siblings, other relatives) who attended the schools you applied to?
11. What are some areas you wish your parents or primary caregivers had been able to help you with?
12. Now that you're in college, what do you wish your parents or primary caregivers had known then?
  - a. What do you wish they knew about college now?

##### **Household Practices that Support Student Success**

13. What kind of support do you get from your family?
  - a. How would you like your family to support you?
14. How does your family demonstrate support, now that you are in college?
  - a. Did they send you a care package during finals week?
  - b. Offer to do your laundry?
15. Do you live at home? (Follow up from Demographic Questionnaire)

- a. If yes, tell us about your home dynamics now that you're at [college]. If not, how often do you see your parents or primary caregivers?
  - b. How has your relationship with your family and home dynamics changed now that you're in college?
16. What is some advice that your parents or primary caregivers have given you since you've started college? Tell me about a specific time(s) they gave you advice.
17. Have you given advice to other people about college? Who?

**Current Experiences at the community college:**

18. Tell me about your experience here at [community college].
- a. What about [Community College] do you like?
19. Do you feel connected to the campus? Why or why not?
20. Do you feel like you have the support necessary, at this institution, for your success in college?
21. Describe how satisfied you are with choosing to attend this college.
- a. Do you feel this was the best choice for you?
  - b. Were you prepared to attend this college?
22. Do you think you would have performed differently at [University]?

**Final Questions**

23. Is there anything you've learned about going to college that you're now sharing you're your family or others?
- a. If yes, can you describe when, where, and how you share that information? If no, why not?
24. Is there any information or resources that you feel you still need to be successful in college, or to reach your educational goals? (examples: tutoring, advising, financial aid information, etc.).

5. Parent Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Cell#: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin? Check all that apply.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Dominican   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Puerto Rican                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Nicaraguan  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Argentinean                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Salvadoran  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Cuban                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Colombian                          | <input type="checkbox"/> No               |

I am (Circle One): Parent Legal Guardian Sibling Other Family Member Other: \_\_\_\_\_

I reside within:  10 miles of campus  11-25 miles of campus  26-50 miles of campus  
 50 -74 miles of campus  75+ miles of campus

Please indicate ALL levels of education & country it was obtained. Check all that apply.

Education Level	USA	Mexico	Other Country
Elementary	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Middle School	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Less than high school	[ ]	[ ]	_____
High school graduate/GED	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Attended college; did not complete degree	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Associate's Degree (A.A., A.S., etc.)	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Bachelor's Degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Master's Degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Doctoral Degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Don't Know	[ ]	[ ]	_____
Not Applicable	[ ]	[ ]	_____

Please provide the age and gender the children within your home

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Which best describes your educational expectations for your child?

- Complete an associate's degree.  
 Complete a bachelor's degree.

Complete a master's degree or professional degree.

Complete a doctoral degree.

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Parent/Guardian Oral History Protocol Questions

(adapted from Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Kiyama, 2008)

### **Background of Family**

1. If you could describe your family, both your immediate and extended family, what would their characteristics be?
2. How long have you been living in [City/Metropolitan Area]? When did you come to [City/Metropolitan Area]? How did your family come to [City/Metropolitan Area]?
3. Can you talk a little bit about the history of your family's migration to the [City/Metropolitan Area] community? (search for extended history) What was the primary reason for coming to [City/Metropolitan Area]?
4. Do you have regular contact with other families in the city? What is the nature of that contact?
5. Where do you consider home? How often do you visit your home of origin?
6. What language is spoken at home?
7. What do you think are the most important lesson you've taught your children? Why?

### **Employment/Career Knowledge**

8. What type of job do you currently hold? What types of jobs have you had in the past? Did you receive training for these jobs? Can you describe that training?
9. How long have you been in your current job? How long were you in your previous jobs?
10. What were the reasons for changing jobs?
11. What types of informal jobs have you had? (i.e. garage sales, flea markets) What is the children's role with these jobs?
12. How did you learn the skills for these informal jobs? Do you feel like these skills are also being passed to your children? How so?
13. Does anyone in the household volunteer for anything in the community? If so, please describe the nature of the work.

### **Focus: Social/Kinship networks**

14. Do you have relatives that live near or around [City/Metropolitan Area]? How many [City/Metropolitan Area]? Please describe your relationship with them. If you have a chance for the family to get together, when does that happen? Is it often? What does your family do when they get together?
15. Do you have many of your friends live near or around [City/Metropolitan Area]? Please describe your relationship with them. Do your families get together? If so, when does that happen? Is it often? What do your families do when they get together?
16. How would you describe your friends? What are their characteristics?
17. What type of community organizations are you involved in? (i.e. church, sports, etc) What is your role in these organizations?
18. Do you offer your services to any of your friends or acquaintances? For example, taking care of their children, offering advice about jobs or school, etc.



## 7. Parent/Guardian Participant Second interview Protocol Questions

### **Open/Continue from Oral History Interview**

1. Follow up from Demographic Questionnaire about where interviewee was educated.
  - a. Then continue: What do you think about the education [Student Participant] has received here [City/TX/US]?
  - b. How do you think school here compares with the school you went to? Did you like your experience in school?
2. How many schools has your child attended (elementary – high school)?
  - a. Could you describe the schools?
3. Did you know the teachers or staff at the schools your child attended? Were you able to talk to them about your concerns for your child's educational needs?

### **Role of Family and Kinship Networks on College Access/Choice:**

4. Have you had any conversations with your children about going to college? Please tell me about that.
5. Before your student went to college, how much did you talk to them about going to college? What did you talk to them about?
6. Describe your experience helping your child decide which college to attend.
7. How have you helped your child with the college planning process?
  - a. Did you take your child to visit different colleges?
  - b. Were you able to help them with their college applications/essays?
8. Have you ever visited [Name of the Community College the student attends]?
  - a. Can you describe your experience?
  - b. Have you ever talked with a faculty member at the college?
9. Have you ever been to the University of North Texas?
  - a. Can you describe your experience?
  - b. Have you ever talked with a faculty member at the university?
10. What role did you play in helping your child to search/choose colleges?
11. Did you encourage your child to apply/attend specific schools?
  - a. Did you know any other family members (siblings, other relatives) who attended the schools your child applied to?
12. What are some things you wish you were able to help your child with, as it relates to colleges/college-going?
13. Now that your child is in college, what do you wish you had known before your child started attending [Community College]?
  - a. Is there anything you wish you knew about college now?

### **Household Practices that Support Student Success**

14. What kind of support have you provided to your child, while they were in high school?
15. What kind of support have you provided to your child, now that they are attending [Community College]?
  - a. Have you sent or made your student a care package during finals week?
  - b. Do you offer to do their laundry? [probe about other household tasks if student lives at home]
16. What is your relationship with your son/daughter like now that they are in college?

- a. Does your student live at home? (Follow up from Demographic Questionnaire) If yes, tell us about your home dynamics now that they're at [college]. If not, how often do you see your child?
17. What is some advice that you have given your child since they've started college? Tell me about a specific time(s) you gave him/her advice.
18. Have you given advice to other people about college? Who?

**Wrap-up**

19. At this point in time, what is your biggest concern or worry for your son/daughter as they continue pursuing their education?
20. What information do you still need that would be useful to help your son/daughter succeed in college?
21. What is the highest level of education you hope your child will complete? [Follow up from Demographic Questionnaire]

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