

HISPANIC FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY
SUPPORT PROGRAMS

by

Katelynn Elizabeth Wheeler

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to understand the Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. Only 54% of Hispanic students graduate from public universities within six years, and the rates are drastically lower at private for-profit schools. Additionally, for those Hispanic students who do graduate from college, the chances of continuing to graduate school are slim, with only ten percent of Hispanic students enrolling in graduate school, compared to 64% of white students. With statistics such as these, universities need to create useful and valuable support systems for Hispanic students that will lead to higher graduation rates and the encouragement to further their education. The central question of the study was: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students see university-provided support programs to be? The self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) guided the study. The study used a qualitative design, specifically, a single case study design, with multiple units of analysis. Journal prompts targeting open-ended questions, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups obtained the data. To analyze the data, manual coding and explanation building were utilized. The findings of the study revealed that Hispanic first-generation students are receiving most, if not all, of their supports from school organizations. The findings also revealed that a school's orientation is a crucial support that is currently failing. Recommendations for future research include taking a closer look into the experience of students from underserved populations who attend a college that incorporates a valuable orientation process.

Keywords: First-generation college students, Hispanic, support programs, social capital

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT..... | 3 |
| Acknowledgments..... | 4 |
| List of Tables | 10 |
| List of Abbreviations | 11 |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION..... | 12 |
| Overview..... | 12 |
| Background..... | 12 |
| Historical..... | 13 |
| Social..... | 16 |
| Theoretical | 17 |
| Situation to Self..... | 18 |
| Problem Statement | 20 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 21 |
| Significance of the Study | 21 |
| Research Questions..... | 23 |
| Definitions..... | 25 |
| Summary..... | 26 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 27 |
| Overview..... | 27 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 27 |
| Origins of Self-Determination Theory..... | 27 |
| Modern Interpretations of Self-Determination Theory..... | 28 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Self-Determination Theory and Current Research | 29 |
| Related Literature..... | 31 |
| Social Capital | 32 |
| Academic Summer Preparation Programs | 39 |
| Financial Assistance..... | 45 |
| Organizations | 50 |
| Alternate Pathways to College..... | 55 |
| Further Insight into Hispanic First-Generation Students | 59 |
| Summary | 62 |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODS | 63 |
| Overview..... | 63 |
| Design | 63 |
| Research Questions..... | 64 |
| Setting..... | 65 |
| Participants..... | 65 |
| Procedures..... | 67 |
| The Researcher's Role..... | 68 |
| Data Collection | 69 |
| Journal Prompts | 69 |
| Interviews..... | 70 |
| Focus Groups | 73 |
| Data Analysis | 76 |
| Trustworthiness..... | 78 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Credibility | 78 |
| Dependability and Confirmability | 79 |
| Transferability..... | 80 |
| Ethical Considerations | 80 |
| Summary | 81 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS | 82 |
| Overview..... | 82 |
| Participants..... | 82 |
| Enrique..... | 83 |
| Veronica..... | 83 |
| Aurora | 83 |
| Sofia | 84 |
| Julie..... | 84 |
| Juan | 84 |
| Vanessa | 85 |
| Marisol | 85 |
| Joaquin | 86 |
| Isabella | 86 |
| Thomas..... | 87 |
| Maria..... | 87 |
| Results..... | 87 |
| Theme Development..... | 88 |
| Research Question Responses..... | 120 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Summary | 127 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION..... | 128 |
| Overview..... | 128 |
| Summary of Findings..... | 128 |
| Discussion..... | 129 |
| Theoretical Literature..... | 129 |
| Empirical Literature | 131 |
| Practical Considerations..... | 134 |
| Implications..... | 136 |
| Theoretical Implications | 136 |
| Empirical Implications..... | 138 |
| Practical Implications..... | 141 |
| Delimitations and Limitations..... | 143 |
| Delimitations..... | 143 |
| Limitations | 144 |
| Recommendations for Future Research | 145 |
| Summary | 146 |
| REFERENCES | 148 |
| APPENDIX A: PERMISSION REQUEST | 161 |
| APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER | 162 |
| APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL..... | 163 |
| APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM | 164 |
| APPENDIX E: JOURNAL PROMPTS..... | 167 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS | 168 |
| APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS | 169 |
| APPENDIX H: THEMES & RELATED CODES | 170 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Table 1..... | 66 |
| Table 2..... | 89 |

List of Abbreviations

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Socioeconomic status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the United States, as of July 1, 2018, the U.S. Census estimated that 18.3% of the population was Hispanic, making it the second-largest racial origin, and predicted to reach 111 million by 2060. However, “Among the three largest ethnic/racial communities (Black, Hispanic, and White) in the United States, Hispanic educational attainment is the lowest,” (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Although colleges are attempting to provide support services to these vulnerable students, there has not been enough progress. There is a limited amount of research exploring the perspective of the students on support programs that directly ask the students their assessment of these programs so that they can be more impactful on success.

Chapter one of the study provides background information for the research, including historical, social, and theoretical concepts, as well as how the researcher relates to the study, including acknowledging biases. The problem statement, the purpose statement, and the significance of the study are also in chapter one. Chapter one concludes by highlighting the research questions, explaining key definitions, and wrapping up with a chapter summary. This research is vital to understanding the support programs that Hispanic first-generation college students consider to be the most useful so that universities can create a better pathway to academic success for this group of students.

Background

Despite fair representation of Hispanic students in four-year universities, college completion rates for Hispanic first-generation and second-generation students are the lowest of any ethnic group at ten percent below the national average (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). This deficit remains steady even with an increase in total undergraduate enrollment from the years

2000-2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The low completion rates are a critical issue for Hispanic first-generation college students because they are leaving college without a degree and with an immense amount of debt, setting them even farther behind when entering the workforce (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Historical

In 1993, first-generation college students earned 31% of bachelor's degrees awarded (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). However, during this same time, research was already revealing that first-generation college students were facing unique challenges in the university setting. First-generation students lacked both social and cultural capital as a result of their parents not having college preparation and experiences to share with their students. The students had to instead rely on their self-determination to access higher education opportunities and navigate the college environment (Rondini et al., 2018; Clayton et al., 2017). These students were also less prepared academically and faced alternative obstacles such as potentially having children of their own or having to work full-time (Reid & Moore III, 2008). Additionally, those who came from low-socioeconomic backgrounds faced financial difficulties, resulting in an unhealthy amount of stress, and making them less likely to persist in the university-setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Adams et al., 2016).

By 1999, 37% of students enrolled in university were first-generation college students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) revealed that in the U.S., the population of first-generation undergraduate students remains steady, with about a third of the population identifying as first-generation.

Unfortunately, although the number of first-generation college students who are enrolling in postsecondary education is stable, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to first-generation

college students has declined from 31% in 1993 to 20% in 2008.

Historically, the study of first-generation college students is uninformative to the present-day situation and complexities. Researchers such as Grayson (2018) researched first-generation students in the 1960s, but even his research could be deemed uninformative to today's challenges because his study focused on the experiences of mostly White first-generation students, and the racial makeup of first-generation students has expanded as the nation's diverse population has grown. Grayson's research discovered that White first-generation students in the 1960s did not struggle in college the way that today's first-generation students do, and instead, did well at the university level. Grayson's research not only showed that these students thrived academically in the university environment, but it showed that they participated in extracurriculars, as well as formed meaningful bonds, all of which are challenges for today's first-generation students.

Grayson's (2018) research attributed the difference to an economic perspective versus a difference in racial or ethnic backgrounds. He explained that in the 1960s, the economy was considered more resilient. He also concluded that the educational system has drastically changed over the last sixty years, and students today are entering university less prepared based on the diminished rigor of present-day K-12 schools. Lastly, Grayson stated that the level of closeness in the university-setting has decreased, potentially based on class-size. All these factors are what Grayson attributes to the entirely different historical experience of first-generation students.

In contrast, Gándara (2015) studied Hispanic education and believes that focusing on improving Latino education is imperative for the future of this population and the future of the nation. Gándara explained that from 1980-2010, the number of Hispanics grew from 14.6 million to 50.5 million in the United States. Gándara pointed out that this increase occurred due to births in the United States and not primarily due to immigration, and that the U.S. Census Bureau

estimates that Hispanics will make up about one-third of the population of children in the U.S. by 2036.

Gándara (2015) explained that the deficit between the education of Hispanics compared with other races, particularly Whites and Asians, actually begins in kindergarten. Hispanic students are less likely to attend preschool compared to any other racial group, resulting in Hispanic students entering kindergarten behind their peers in both reading and mathematics. Gándara stated that most of the time, the deficits remain for these Hispanic students and are never corrected, resulting in a high dropout rate in both high school and college for this group of students.

Gándara (2015) pointed out that there have been many theories as to why this population is not achieving academically, including exploring genetic inferiority. According to Herrnstein (1973), the leading hypothesis that she supports is that poverty is the problem. Gándara explained that many Hispanic parents are working more than one job to support their families and do not have the time or capability to help their children with academics. Additionally, poverty ultimately locates these students in neighborhoods that are underserved and underfunded and lack educational resources and opportunities. Gándara also noted that poverty coincides with illness, which results in students missing more school. Lastly, Gándara explained that when Hispanic students do require language assistance, schools ultimately enforce an all-English curriculum, which goes against research-based practices and only hinders the students.

The problem is that universities struggle to meet the needs of these students due to a lack of knowledge. Further, there are not enough studies conducted that directly ask the students how they need to be supported, and if the support programs put into place are useful or need to be modified. There is research that focuses on attrition rates, but there is not research on student

perspective. This current study aims to fix that error and fill the gap in the literature.

The only way to understand the situation is to go directly to the source, the students themselves. Student perspectives are the only way to know what needs occur, what support programs require eliminating, what adaptations can take place, and what types of supports would be useful that have not been put into place yet. Researchers need to focus on student perspective, and colleges need to utilize this newfound research as they design support programs. Currently, lack of knowledge of those who are creating and maintaining support programs is to blame for the lack of changes in graduation rates, and the only way to solve this problem is to conduct research on student perspective and share that knowledge with universities in the United States.

Social

First-generation students enter college less prepared for several reasons. First-generation students lack the social and cultural capital needed for college success, mainly due to their parents' lack of education (Moschetti et al., 2017; Jack, 2016; Atherton, 2014). Additionally, many of these students come from high school backgrounds that lack the academic rigor required to succeed in college, and as a result, are entering college unprepared for the rigorous coursework that is expected (Gibbons, Rhinehart, & Hardin, 2019; Murillo & Schall, 2016). These students may also be unfamiliar with how to access financial assistance, particularly scholarships or grants, and will, therefore, need to support themselves financially while attending school (Wibrowski et al., 2017). Furthermore, previous research shows that first-generation students need professors who are equipped with the skills to teach them, as well as advisors and counselors who understand their culture and their needs and can help them in their adjustment to their new setting (Storlie et al., 2016).

Researcher Andrew Martinez (2018) insists that Hispanic first-generation college students face a unique set of struggles. Martinez explains that “Latino college students are at a higher risk for not completing a postsecondary degree when compared to other racial and ethnic minorities...” (p. 1). The family’s expectations of assistance financially, the need for proximity to help with other tasks, and a robust cultural ideal of loyalty to family may make it problematic for a first-generation college student (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017).

Many Hispanic first-generation students have additional obligations outside of their coursework as well. These students have family commitments, such as assisting with siblings or providing financial assistance (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Their families often require proximity to home, which in turn affects college choice.

There has been a significant amount of research conducted on first-generation students and, specifically, Hispanic first-generation students. Researchers continue to study support programs with a variety of different types of applications. Implemented support programs include those that focus on social capital (Schwartz et al., 2018), mainly in the form of counselors or mentorships (Tello & Lonn, 2017; Storlie et al., 2016). Additional implemented support programs include summer bridge programs, meant to assist with academic preparation (Becker et al., 2017), and support programs that focus on financial aid, organizations, and alternate pathways to college (Hébert, 2018; Luedke, 2018; Storlie et al., 2016). However, conducted research continues to focus on the success of the support programs on student retention and attrition rates (Becker et al., 2017).

Theoretical

The theory guiding this study is the self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT focuses on the three psychological needs that

everyone must have fulfilled before they can act in a self-determined or motivated manner: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy may be translated as independence or volition, while competence means that the student is skilled enough to complete a task or assignment correctly on their own. In an educational context, relatedness refers to social and academic connections, typically in the form of friendships and mentorship.

SDT is crucial for Hispanic first-generation students because they must be able to act in a self-determined manner to succeed in college, and the college environment is entirely foreign and new to them. Concerning this study, the support systems must focus on meeting the three psychological needs that SDT mentions: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, an exciting aspect of this study following SDT is that previous research does not highlight the importance of meeting all three psychological needs simultaneously, but typically prioritizes one need over the others. The results of this study, based on student perspective, will reveal if all three requirements are crucial to creating a motivated student, or if support systems that focus on one need versus all three are essential. If the support systems do focus on one need versus all three, the results will imply that the three psychological needs are ranked and not of equal importance.

Situation to Self

My motivation for completing this study stems from two different circumstances. First, my two closest friends are Hispanic first-generation students. I have witnessed the struggles they encountered at the university-level, specifically during their first year. Both of my friends felt that they were unaware of how to succeed upon entry and did not think that their respective universities knew how to assist first-generation students. Specific problems my friends encountered included: Taking out loans due to a lack of understanding on how to access

scholarships and grants, taking time off from school to work, and a lack of a culturally trained quality mentor or advisor. As described by Tello & Lonn (2017), advisors and mentors need to be culturally aware of how to work with Hispanic first-generation students, because if they are unaware, their services will be rendered ineffective.

Secondly, my motivation derives from the volunteer trips I have participated in and my knowledge of how important education is to different ethnicities, specifically those who come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (SES). Earning a diploma or degree is the main route that will determine which types of job opportunities are available to these at-risk students. For example, on a two-month volunteer trip to Cambodia, I noticed that the students who were able to earn an education held jobs such as tour guides, owning a store, or working in a high-class hotel. In contrast, not having an education forced students into tasks such as picking up trash, selling small decorations on the street, or begging for money. It is difficult for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve college-level status, so when they do, it is vital that the universities are providing the appropriate services and supports that could assist them in persevering.

I am approaching this study from a constructivist paradigm. In Dr. Fred Malicci's video *Paradigms and Assumptions*, Dr. Malicci of Liberty University explained that constructivism is a crucial aspect of qualitative research. Constructivism focuses on interpretation and is about perspective. With constructivism, the participants' views are the focus, regardless of if they are factual. An understanding between the researcher and participants is critical in this paradigm. Additionally, the philosophical assumption I will be utilizing is methodology. The methodology will allow me to alter my research as I collect and analyze the data; therefore, my research will be adaptive as I continue learning through the data collection and analyzation process.

Problem Statement

First-generation college students not only suffer the typical difficulties that all students entering college will encounter, but they also deal with a unique set of challenges that come with being the first in their family to attend college (Gibbons et al., 2019). Some difficulties that first-generation college students may encounter include not feeling as academically prepared, feeling disconnected from peers, having lower self-esteem, and feeling as if they do not matter to their university (Gibbons et al., 2019; Costello et al., 2018). Additionally, these students, due to their lack of social capital from family and friends, may enter the college environment, unaware of what it takes to succeed (Atherton, 2014). These feelings and this lack of awareness lead to a higher risk of dropping out or failing in the university environment.

Universities have limited knowledge of the pathways to success for Hispanic first-generation students. As a result, the implemented support systems are failing to close the graduation gap between first-generation and traditional students. With a race that constitutes almost a fifth of the country and is growing, it is vital to understand which support systems Hispanic first-generation students perceive as the most useful. Few studies provide an in-depth understanding of student perception of support programs, as most tend to focus on attrition rates as a measurement for program success (Becker et al., 2017). A single case study design with multiple units of analysis will allow the researcher to focus on participants in two different four-year universities in Big State, one public university and one private university, which will assist in verifying consistencies amongst student perception. The problem is a lack of research contributing to the understanding of what supports are in place that supports Hispanic first-generation college students to persist to completion.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to increase the understanding of Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. At this stage in the research, Hispanics will be generally defined as “A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race,” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). For this study, the term *Hispanic* will be used and will represent both Hispanic and Latino students, as per the definition from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019). Additionally, the definition of a first-generation college student is, “An individual, neither of whose parents completed a baccalaureate degree” (U.S. Department of Education Definitions of Low-Income and First-Generation Students, 2020). The theory guiding this study is self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985). The SDT suggests that an individual must meet three psychological needs before they can become motivated or self-determined: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The support systems that universities provide to first-generation students need to focus on fulfilling the three psychological needs of the students so that they can become self-determined and, therefore, academically successful.

Significance of the Study

The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) found that in 2016, the median annual earnings of Hispanic full-time, year-round workers, ages 25-34 was \$33,900. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) further broke down those earnings for Hispanics by differentiating income by the level of education. Hispanics, ages 25-34, who worked full-time year-round, and had earned less than high school education, earned about \$25,000.00 per year.

Those who received a high school diploma earned approximately \$30,000.00 a year, while those who earned a bachelor's degree or higher earned about \$49,300.00 per year.

A significant motivation for this study is the difference in income between those with a four-year degree and those with only a high school education. Over ten years, the difference in earnings between a Hispanic high school degree holder and a Hispanic who holds a bachelor's or higher amounts to about a \$193,000 difference. Therefore, the need for Hispanics to attend college and leave with a college degree is not based on the idea of participating in the meritocracy, but instead, about improving socioeconomic status, especially for a population that experiences 50% more poverty than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau).

Schwartz et al. (2018) conducted a study on first-generation college students. They found that even though there have been attempts to increase enrollment of first-generation college students into four-year universities, retention is still a problem. The result is that these students leave their university early, with no degree and an immense amount of student debt. The researchers explained that new approaches are vital as universities scramble to address the disparities in graduation rates.

Researchers such as Schwartz et al. (2018) focused on the role of social capital regarding closing the graduation gap between first-generation and traditional students, while other researchers, such as Wibrowski et al. (2017), focused on a support program that targeted skill-acquisition. Both studies focused on different types of applications that could assist first-generation students and promote their successful completion of four-year degrees.

This study builds on research such as Schwartz et al. (2018), Wibrowski et al. (2017), among others, and aims to discover which support programs are the most helpful for first-generation students, whether it be programs targeting social capital, programs targeting skill-

building, or programs such as those that focus on peer mentoring (Plaskett et al., 2018). The difference between this study and those mentioned is the means of measurement when determining which programs are considered auspicious. This study focuses on the students' perception when deciphering which support programs are the most useful to their perseverance. In contrast, other studies focused on measuring the usefulness of support programs by either the attrition or retention rate of this population of students.

When it comes to Hispanic first-generation college students, the entire experience is a significant transition culturally, academically, socially, and financially (Irlbeck et al., 2014). To assist this group of students with the change, the specific programs that are the most impactful need to be identified. This study contributes to the previous research by focusing on student perceptions and providing four-year universities with additional information employing journal prompts, focus groups, and interviews. In doing so, these universities can prepare to support this specific group better, and as a result, shrink the graduation gap and provide these students with more opportunities moving forward.

Research Questions

The central research question of the study is: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students perceive university-provided support programs to be? Becker et al. (2017) explained that many studies that focus on the success of first-generation college students investigate academic retention versus student perception. Hispanic first-generation and Hispanic second-generation students are dropping out of college in higher numbers than any other ethnic group in the nation, even with an increase in numbers at four-year universities (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Therefore, student perceptions in terms of what they consider as the most valuable support programs are vital in closing the graduation-gap.

Sub-question one of the study is: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation college students perceive as the most helpful during each of their years in college? It is essential to note the various supports necessary as the students' transition into different years of college. Becker et al. (2017) discovered this while researching student perceptions of an academic summer bridge enrichment program. Feedback for the program revealed that students who transitioned beyond year one still wanted extension services and mentor check-ins instead of services minimized as they transitioned beyond freshman year. It is essential to know what the students think is imperative, not just during year one, but through each year at the university.

Sub-question two of the study is: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation students view as unhelpful, and why? Studies on first-generation college students focus heavily on the support systems that do work, versus the ones that do not work. The significance of this question lies in allowing universities to understand which support programs are rendered “unhelpful,” therefore allowing their allotted time and budget to focus on useful support programs.

Sub-question three of the study is: What barriers do Hispanic first-generation students experience that might cause them to leave college without a four-year degree? As a study led by constructivism, this research focuses on the participants' perceptions. “...[R]esearchers had found that first-generation college students were more than twice as likely to leave a 4-year institution before their second year than students whose parents earned a bachelor's degree,” (Hébert, 2018, p. 96). This sub-question focuses on the participants' perception of the actual barriers that are preventing them from success, which directly results in the graduation-gap between first-generation and traditional students.

Definitions

1. *First-generation college students* – An individual, neither of whose parents completed a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Department of Education Definitions of Low-Income and First-Generation Students, 2020).
2. *Hispanic or Latino* – A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). For this study, the term “Hispanic” will be used and will represent both Hispanic and Latino, as per the definition from the National Center for Education Statistics.
3. *Cultural capital* -- Cultural capital relates to knowledge and understanding of what it means to be in college (Bourdieu 1986a; Bourdieu 1984; Ward et al., 2012).
4. *Social capital* -- The information, support, and resources available to an individual through connections and networks of relationships (Beel & Wallace, 2018; Bourdieu, 1986b).
5. *Academic retention* – Institution centric measure of matriculation to degree completion (Cotton et al., 2017; Kerby, 2015; Berger et al., 2012). For this study, the terms “retention” and “persistence” will be used interchangeably.
6. *Student attrition* -- The departure from or delay in successful completion of program requirements (Ascend Learning, LLC, 2012; Tinto, 1975).
7. *Socioeconomic status* – Status of a person based on their income, occupation, and educational attainment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).
8. *Summer bridge program* -- Summer bridge programs are designed to ease the transition to college and support postsecondary success by providing students with the academic skills and social resources needed to succeed in a college environment (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

9. *Support program* – Academic or nonacademic systems set in place to aid students.
10. *Cultural mismatch* -- Tensions between the culture of the students' communities and the middle-class culture of the university-setting (Duncheon, 2018; Stephens, 2010).

Summary

The Hispanic population in the U.S. encompasses about a fifth of the nation. Yet, Hispanic first-generation and second-generation students account for the lowest college graduation numbers of any ethnic group (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). The university-level struggles are not being appropriately combatted, likely due to limited knowledge of those developing the support programs. Further inquiry into these challenges and the quality of supports offered at colleges is vital. The purpose of this case study is to understand how Hispanic-first generation college students perceive university support programs. I chose a single case study design with multiple units of analysis to study and understand this problem, with an emphasis on an exploratory and holistic focus.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter two of the study provides the theoretical framework and related literature. The theoretical framework expands on the theory that supports the research: self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985), which states that an individual must fulfill three psychological needs before they can act in a self-determined manner. The related literature communicates the importance of this topic, focusing on standard support systems that have been analyzed by previous researchers, as well as alternate pathways students may take to better prepare for college. Chapter two ends with a summary, which describes why this research is essential to deciphering which support programs best assist Hispanic first-generation college students.

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985) guides this study. Researchers Ryan and Deci (2017) suggest that every individual must fulfill three psychological needs before they can act in a self-determined or motivated manner: Autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy translates to independence. Every individual needs to feel as if they can select their task, as well as work independently on that task, therefore achieving something on their own. Competence means that the student feels that they understand the job in front of them and that they have the confidence to complete it thoroughly and succeed at it. Relatedness refers to feeling connected to others, usually through establishing relationships.

Origins of Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory derived as an argument to behavior theorists, such as Pavlov (1897), Watson and Rayner (1920), and Skinner (1936). Pavlov helped form the concept of

classical conditioning, which is a form of behaviorism. Pavlov's main experiment involved conditioning a dog to salivate at the sound of the bell because the bell was an indicator that food was about to be served. Classical conditioning formed as a reflex or response and therefore produces a conditioned stimulus.

Skinner (1936) added the concepts of rewards and reinforcement, referring to this newer model as operant conditioning. However, both classical and operant conditioning are forms of behaviorism; each theorist's work helped to shape the behaviorist theory. Present-day behavior theorists such as Weiler (2005) and Cheng and Yeh (2009) have continued to add on to the broader approach. They suggest that behavior is motivated more by extrinsic factors than intrinsic factors.

As previously mentioned, the behaviorist theory led to the creation of SDT. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) argued against the explanations of behavior theorists, particularly in the education setting, stating that if a reward is the only concept serving as a student's motivation, or they solely want to avoid punishment, then the motivation is exclusively extrinsic. Their sense of motivation will not remain consistent over time. The researchers argued that only intrinsic motivation could create a long-lasting feeling of motivation in individuals, and as a result, SDT was created (Alkaabi et al., 2017).

Modern Interpretations of Self-Determination Theory

Haerens (2019) explained that SDT serves as a guide for studying education and student motivation. She stated that researchers use this theory as they seek to understand what motivates students at every level of education. Educators look to SDT as a framework to know how to organize classrooms and to best interact with students. Haerens (2019) further explained that educators use SDT to understand how to support their students, and how to adopt a teaching style

that supports students' needs so that students are engaged while having their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness met. SDT also relates to education in the sense that it focuses on the development of intrinsic motivation for students while ridding classroom environments of extrinsic motivation, such as rewards and punishments. Educators use SDT to decipher how to teach students to value activities that are not viewed as fun and do not have a bonus aside from self-fulfillment (Haerens, 2019).

Self-Determination Theory and Current Research

SDT directly relates to this research because for Hispanic first-generation college students to thrive in the college environment, they will need to be self-determined and feel highly motivated. Based on the SDT, for this self-determination to take place, the students must feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Each of the three notions relates to past and present research on Hispanic first-generation college students, making the research topic and the theory closely align.

This study aligns with SDT because the created support programs assist Hispanic first-generation students need to focus on building autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Because this study focuses on highlighting the student perspective, it will be critical to analyze if the students give equal importance to support programs that focus on building autonomy, support programs that focus on building one's competence, and support programs that focus on building relatedness. The research will use SDT as a guide when interviewing the students, including the questions created to discover which support programs assist the student with becoming a self-determined and self-motivated scholar. This research has the potential to challenge SDT depending on the results identified. Still, it will use SDT as the primary guide to decipher vital support programs and the underlying reasoning for the usefulness.

According to Wibrowski et al. 2017, autonomy, or a sense of independence, can be achieved by Hispanic first-generation college students when they have a firm understanding of how to navigate the college environment. Hispanic first-generation college students may not understand how certain aspects of this new environment work, such as how to access financial aid, how to locate additional help with assignments, or how to find other resources. Hispanic first-generation college students may require a peer mentor that could assist them with questions they may have for the development of autonomy (Plaskett et al., 2018). With peer mentoring, these students will be comfortable enough to seek out the answers to their questions or the solution to their problem, and in doing so, can learn enough to become autonomous in their newfound environment.

Competence is also a significant aspect of Hispanic first-generation college students flourishing in the college environment. Hispanic first-generation college students may be entering college unprepared for the rigor in their college classes, often due to a lack of challenging coursework in their high school environment (Hébert, 2018). Aside from the difficulty of coursework, additional skills need to be learned, such as study habits. Hispanic first-generation college students need to be able to perform well in their courses to develop feelings of competence.

Relatedness is essential for Hispanic first-generation college students. Relatedness could be developed through peer mentoring, as discussed with autonomy, but it could also grow through the process of understanding social capital. Due to their background, Hispanic first-generation college students do not often have a sense of social capital amongst their family and friends. They may enter college, unaware of its importance. These students need assistance in developing an understanding of social capital, as well as practicing methods of increasing their

social capital, such as learning how to reach out to their advisors or professors, a skill that is noted in research as hard for first-generation students to perform (Schwartz et al., 2018; Nichols & Islas, 2016). If a student can feel more connected to their professor, or build a relationship with an advisor, then they can start creating that sense of relatedness on their campus.

Through their research analyzing the commitment of college students concerning the SDT, Davidson and Beck (2019) discovered that each of the three psychological needs described in the SDT related to a different aspect of student commitment. The researchers had initially hypothesized that the student's responsibility to their institution and their commitment to their degree would be more substantial if they achieved the three demands.

The data revealed that when the students felt that they achieved competence, then they were more likely to feel highly committed to completing their degree. On the contrary, when the students thought that they met their need for interrelatedness, they were more likely to feel a strong commitment to their institution. Meeting autonomy was the only one of the three essentials that resulted in the students feeling connected to completing their degree and holding a secure positive connection to their institution.

Once autonomy, competence, and relatedness are established, then this group of students can begin to feel self-motivated and self-determined. Concerning this research, developing support programs helps to meet those psychological needs. The student's perception will allow the researcher to decipher, which support programs will best help the students achieve their psychological needs.

Related Literature

There has been a vast amount of research on Hispanic first-generation college students and the support programs that are put into place to aid them as they work towards a college

degree. The different support programs focus on social capital, academic preparation, summer programs, skills-learning, and programs that combine a variety of supports. However, despite much research, a specific approach that serves as the most useful in supporting the students has not been found.

Social Capital

Research shows that a common problem for Hispanic first-generation students entering the university environment is their lack of social capital (Moschetti et al., 2017). First-generation students do not have the social connections associated with understanding the college experience, including an understanding of how to thrive in this new environment. This group of students cannot obtain the necessary social capital within their family and their immediate connections, such as their friend group. Researchers agree that social capital is vital for the success of Hispanic first-generation students, however, the debate lies in the type of social capital that is necessary, with some arguing that counselors or peer mentors are the key, while others push for the idea that this population requires a broader network to benefit from social capital truly. Social capital is vital for success in the college environment, and students must learn how to develop it (Plaskett et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017; Storlie et al., 2016).

High School and College Counselors

Researchers Storlie et al. (2016) focused on the counselors as the best form of a support program for Hispanic first-generation college students. The researchers believe that counseling services need to begin in high school for these students. If high school counselors could encourage these students to take more rigorous classes, then they could enter college more academically prepared. Additionally, high school counselors could provide workshops that focus

on the upcoming transition into college, therefore resulting in the students and their families understanding future expectations in terms of their transformations.

Storlie et al. (2016) interviewed multiple students during their research and obtained a substantial number of personal stories that attributed Hispanic first-generation college success to their high school counselors. One of the participants described the support their high school counselor had provided them to get into college. The student explained how the high school counselor was the one who helped obtain waivers for the application fees and even paid the cost for the student to sign up for the ACT. Additionally, the counselor was the one who scheduled the college visits and helped the student become familiar with their new environment.

High school counselors are critical for not only preparing students for college but truly emphasizing college enrollment, as well as serving as the primary contact for students in need of assistance accessing resources (Green, 2018; Vega, 2016). Still, college counselors are vital for assisting students in their transition into college and journey through graduation. College counselors are a crucial support for Hispanic first-generation college students. Students develop their own identity by focusing on individuality, versus their role in a collectivist family unit. College counselors should host workshops to assist students in forming their own identity. These workshops may be inclusive of the students' families so that they feel support as they embark on becoming more autonomous (Storlie et al., 2016).

College counselors could also hold information sessions in two different forms. The first type is workshops that provide useful information. The information provided should include topics such as internships, work-study programs, how to create a resume, how to access financial aid, how to apply for scholarships and grants, etc. The second type of workshop should focus on skill-building. Hispanic first-generation college students have stated that they feel a sense of

prejudice from their peers who come from different backgrounds, as well as feelings of sexism, classism, and overall discrimination. The workshop must focus on developing skills to deal with those negative encounters and how to react in a way that the student who is the victim does not harbor negative feelings (Storlie et al., 2016).

Researchers Tello and Lonn (2017) also highlighted how counselors could be the most vital support program. Tello and Lonn believe that because of their first-generation status, Hispanic first-generation college students do not have the social or cultural capital needed to succeed in college. Hispanic first-generation college students are entering their new atmosphere, trying to figure out their identity. As a result, they need counselors who understand who they are and what they need. Counselors should be culturally aware, understand the Hispanic culture, such as the notion that family comes first, or their need to build a bond with someone to feel more comfortable and avoid having to act overly professional (Yeaton, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Counselors' cultural awareness should also include an understanding of hesitancy for different cultures to contact the counselor and be willing to take the first step in organizing interactions (Sampe et al., 2019).

Counselors are an essential support program for this unique group of students because they can increase a student's cultural capital and social capital by providing them with useful information and a feeling of relatedness. Cultural capital relates to knowledge and understanding of what it means to be in college, and social capital refers to the data, support, and resources available to an individual through connections and networks of relationships (Ward et al., 2012; Bourdieu, 1986b). As explained by Storlie et al. (2016), outreach programs should be inclusive of the student's family and friends because of their dominant role in the student's life, and these programs should supply families with critical information. These programs provide information

to increase a student's cultural capital, such as how to prepare for college, expectations, activities that the student may partake in, and other information such as financial aid or additional resources and how to access them (Tello & Lonn, 2017).

Additionally, counselors can focus on building relatedness with the students in multiple ways to reinforce social capital. Counselors should not just solely host on-campus events but should also hold fewer formal interactions within the community. Counselors need to be accessible to the students and have a strong presence in their life, aside from the student visiting the counselor's office. Counselors need to build a strong enough bond with the students that they are then able to focus on psychosocial support, providing the students with the comfort to confide in them if they feel isolated or even unfairly targeted due to their race or socioeconomic status (Tello & Lonn, 2017).

Mentors

Aside from counseling support, Samayoa (2018), Tello & Lonn (2017), and Storlie et al. (2016) discussed the importance of relationship-building, either in the form of diverse faculty, or an overall mentorship-type program. Moschetti et al. (2017) argued that peer mentoring was a better solution to a Hispanic first-generation student's lack of social capital versus a college counselor. Through a three-year study at a Hispanic serving institution (HSI) in Southern California, researchers discovered that undergraduate peer mentors helped incoming Hispanic first-generation students integrate into their new environment by providing both emotional and academic support. The mentors were all undergraduate students, giving the new students someone relatable to refer to (Moschetti et al., 2017).

Of the 458 students in the study, 97% of the participants reported that the peer mentor was highly useful. The participants explained that their peer mentor introduced them to other

mentees, as well as introduced them to faculty and staff, therefore growing their social integration. The participants also reported that because of their assigned mentor, they had someone to refer to when having questions about resources and someone to inform them about upcoming events or activities. This type of support system enhanced the students' lives, as they stated that it helped them integrate (Moschetti et al., 2017).

Plaskett et al. (2018) also investigated a peer mentoring program, which specifically focused on matching incoming Hispanic first-generation first years with upperclassman peers who came from a similar background, precisely their socioeconomic status. The pairs agreed to meet weekly and hold discussions about how to access resources, how to understand their course sequences, and which courses to select while following study requirements, as well as how to form relationships with other students and faculty. These conversations were extremely open, leaving the new student feeling less stigmatized because they have a confidant who went through a similar process (Plaskett et al., 2018).

Plaskett et al. (2018) discovered that the most successful peer mentorships focused on the personal bond that developed between the two students. The students agreed that it was useful having someone to refer to for advice and tips, but the developing friendship was the most valuable aspect of the support program based on student feedback. These findings demonstrate that the worthiness of the support program was based on social capital (relationship building) more so than access to resources.

Researchers Garcia and Ramirez (2015) also highlighted the importance of mentors for Hispanic first-generation students in the university setting, mainly to increase social capital. Although Garcia and Ramirez agreed that mentorship is vital, they explained that utilizing a faculty member as a mentor may be especially beneficial. They explained that a positive

mentorship between a minoritized student, in this case, a Hispanic first-generation student, and a faculty member, may lead to increase persistence for the student, as well as increased self-efficacy. The faculty member may serve as a vital resource for helping the student make important decisions, such as selecting a major. Furthermore, building a relationship with a faculty member may positively affect academic success as the faculty member may serve as a resource for assisting with classwork and homework, as well as providing guidance and insight into a particular field (Ortega, 2018; Valle, 2017; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015).

Broader Networks

Unlike the other previously mentioned researchers who argued that a developed relationship needs to form with either a college counselor or a peer mentor for assimilation to occur, Schwartz et al. (2018) claimed that a student needs a broader network in terms of social capital and not solely one crucial relationship. Schwartz et al. (2018) argued that these students need a bigger web of support and that one significant relationship is not enough to accumulate more considerable social capital in the student's life.

Research assessing a six-week summer program involving diverse public universities in the northeast focused on understanding and building students' social capital. The students were taught the importance of social capital in terms of the doors that opened in a person's life based on connections, and why having a more extensive support system may be beneficial. The students had to search for mentors in their social networks. Moreover, reaching out to both familiar and unfamiliar people to grow their networks, as well as practicing their interview skills, was explicitly taught. The program concluded in a networking event where students could make additional connections (Schwartz et al., 2018).

The findings of the study revealed that the participants felt significantly more comfortable, reaching out to their professors when they had questions or needed assistance. They also discussed how these new skills improved their relationships with their professors, and in return, their academic progress became positively impacted due to their newfound ease with asking questions. The students left the study with an understanding of social capital building techniques, and the importance social capital plays in their lives (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Research conducted by Azmitia et al. (2018) provided the same conclusions as that of Schwartz et al. (2018), which is that students benefit most from a broader network. Azmitia et al. studied 214 students at a public university in Northern California, 79 of which were first-generation, with 21% of those students identifying as Hispanic or Latinx. The study focused on the students' ability to remain resilient and to persist in college despite all obstacles. A heavy emphasis of the study was the academic and social support groups that assisted the students in their perseverance.

When asked to identify the different sources of belonging that they had at their university, the most common answers provided by first-generation student participants were, “[P]eer groups, residential colleges, academic departments, ethnic student organizations, sports teams, off-campus volunteer groups, and student government,” (Azmitia et al., 2018, p. 94). These identified avenues of social capital presented the students with a sense of family and belonging within their new setting. These findings support those of Schwartz et al. (2018) as each of the identified answers were larger groups versus individual people. The students did not identify peer mentors, advisors, or even academic instructors as the forms of social capital that assisted them in feeling connected, but instead, designated groups, departments, organizations, and teams that allowed them to be part of a broader network.

Academic Summer Preparation Programs

Schwartz et al. (2018) highlighted a summer support program that focused on social capital, which appears to be a common trend in terms of support programs for Hispanic first-generation college students. However, research proves that academic summer bridge programs increase inclusion, preparation, and academic success for Hispanic first-generation students (Pazargadi, 2018; Becker et al., 2017; Frischmann & Moor, 2017; Wibrowski et al., 2017). Summer support programs do vary in what is considered the most imperative aspects of college preparation for this group of students. Wibrowski et al. researched a skills-learning summer support program, while Becker et al. emphasized a summer support program focusing on academic enrichment. Both summer programs focused on preparing students academically for collegiate environments.

Summer bridge programs serve as a method to address the academic unpreparedness of first-generation students. Duncheon (2018) studied eight [Hispanic] students from the same low-performing high school. Despite all eight of the students' high level of achievement throughout high school, they still struggled in the university setting. During interviews, the students reported receiving C's and D's in college even though they had achieved A's and B's in high school. One of the participants in Duncheon's study was the valedictorian of their high school and ended up on academic probation in college. The other participants reported having a difficult time with reading and writing in college, despite their success in their AP English classes in high school. Duncheon's study provides insight into the reality that even those who performed well in their high school setting may still need academic assistance as they transition into college.

Skills Learning Support

Summer bridge programs can also serve the nonacademic needs of Hispanic first-generation students. Some previously mentioned nonacademic needs that Hispanic first-generation students may identify as useful range from assistance with financial aid, to practice taking notes, and even how to read a class syllabus correctly (Clemens, 2016). Duncheon (2018) explained that this population struggles with habits such as goal setting, meeting deadlines, time management, and the ability to seek help. The participants in her study, despite being high achievers in high school, still experienced confusion over their professors' expectations and felt invisible on campus and to faculty. Summer bridge programs may serve as a method to adjust the lack of "inequitable pre-college opportunities" that Duncheon's research describes.

Wibrowski et al. (2017) researched a summer bridge program as a means of a support system. The program emphasized self-regulation to prepare students for the upcoming academic rigor and course requirements. The students in this program were not accepted initially to the college based on the original specifications and participated in this summer program to enter the college. Students became a part of learning communities that taught study skills, and they participated in courses that explicitly taught how to self-regulate.

These students became part of a Skills Learning Support Program (SLSP), and they remained a part of the program throughout their first 30 college credits. The SLSP continued to work on self-regulation with the students during their first year of college and emphasized the importance of expectations and positive thinking about their abilities. Wibrowski et al. (2017) argued that summer bridge programs that focus on academic preparation, partnered with learning communities that assist students throughout their first year of college, have the potential to close

the achievement gap between Hispanic first-generation college students and their traditional counterparts.

Summer Support: Academic Enrichment

Becker et al. (2017) researched a summer academic enrichment program meant to assist Hispanic first-generation college students in their transition. Students in this study became part of a group referred to as *GenOne*. This summer program required students to take one core class to understand the academic rigor that is necessary for college. Additionally, the students had to log a certain amount of study hours each week, which continued to be a requirement through their first year of college.

The GenOne program also provided students with a counselor, as well as the opportunity to expand their social network through required monthly meetups and frequent social gatherings. GenOne also provided extra resources for the students involved, and placed an importance on the students' emotional wellbeing by making sure that they taught skills that allowed students to feel cared for as part of a community, and become more robust in terms of tolerating stress (Becker et al., 2017).

The research conducted by both Schwartz et al. (2018) and Becker et al. (2017) revealed that summer bridge programs could improve social capital and could also assist students with entering the college environment more academically prepared. Academic preparation has been a significant problem for Hispanic first-generation college students. A vital aspect of both programs was the continued assistance throughout the students' time in college versus solely providing the students with help over the summer. In the research conducted by Becker et al. (2017), one of the main pieces of feedback from the participants was the need for the services to remain constant throughout their four years in college instead of the services solely weening

away. The feedback proved that the assistance should begin the summer before entering college and should continue throughout the entirety of the students' college program, as it is considered highly useful.

Covarrubias et al. (2018) also researched summer bridge programs in two different studies. Covarrubias et al. wanted to focus on what they referred to as “borderline applicants,” students whose grades and standardized test scores did not qualify them for four-year institutions. Covarrubias et al. had 34 participants partake in a summer bridge program before entering a four-year environment for which they did not initially qualify. The results of the study confirmed that the students who participated in the summer bridge program, those whose high school grades and standardized test scores were below par, ended up academically outperforming regularly admitted students after their first year of college. Since underrepresented students, such as Hispanic first-generation students, typically fall into the “borderline applicants” population, this study reveals that acceptance into a university, with the agreement of attending a summer bridge program that focuses on academics, may be an exciting option for Hispanic first-generation students.

Online Opportunities

Research by Eblen-Zayas and Russell (2019) echoed the importance of summer bridge programs but also recognized that these programs can be expensive for institutions and may not align with the students' schedules. Online opportunities over the summer may eliminate some of the struggles first-generation students are faced with. Although some research has argued that students do not perform as well in an online format, recent research has proved otherwise (Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Recent research revealed that if the professor focuses on building rapport with

the students, through resources such as videos updates, individual emails, and personal comments, then there will be lower attrition rates and higher grades (Glazier, 2016).

Eblen-Zayas and Russell focused their research on a summer bridge program created by a four-year university based on the need for improved quantitative skills. The university recognized that although students were required to complete three courses focused on quantitative reasoning exploration, it also did not offer remedial classes for those who were not as academically prepared. The university designed its six-week summer bridge program to counteract this problem.

The summer bridge program studied by Eblen-Zayas and Russell (2019) was different because it was entirely online. The university designed it to be fully online to address budgeting issues and conflicts with students' schedules. The university also lent the participating students' computers and hotspots to combat technological matters. The summer portion of the program was six weeks, which was fully online, and then the program continued through the first ten weeks of the fall semester, at which time the students would meet face-to-face once a week. Once fully completed, the students would have earned six college credits at no cost.

The goals of the program were to strengthen the students' quantitative skills, as well as assist the students with creating a connection to their new college environment before they arrived. The participants were chosen based on ACT and SAT scores, as well as the results of their quantitative skills assessment. The quantitative skills assessment revealed if their needs coincided with the topics addressed by the program. A total of 20 students participated in the program. Although first-generation students were not the aim, research proved they first-generation students do benefit from an increased engagement at a higher rate (Eblen-Zayas & Russell, 2019).

Eblen-Zayas and Russell (2019) explained that the six-week program focused on synchronous learning, as well as flexible scheduling. Also, because the university emphasized using alumni as resources, the summer program offered twice as many alumni sessions that students had to attend to ensure that they could meet attendance regulations. The program's focus concerning sharpening quantitative skills was: Adaptive learning via ALEKS software, the problem of the week questions, and a campus data project. The main elements designed to build a connection to the campus were: Weekly Google Hangout meetings with a small team and a student coach, weekly Google Hangout meetings with alumni, a class blog that students had to contribute to three times a week, and weekly panels with alumni. The synchronous learning format provided students with a vast amount of consistency and feedback from their knowledgeable instructors, allowing them to feel seen and comfortable in their interactions, which in return made them feel connected to their university (Trammell & Aldrich, 2016).

The program received an extremely positive response. The students who evaluated the program recommended it to incoming students at a rate of 100%. Additionally, every student who participated in the program effectively completed their first term in college. Lastly, the pretest and the posttest on ALEKS showed significant gains for the participants (Eblen-Zayas & Russell, 2019).

The summer bridge program studied by Eblen-Zayas and Russell (2019) revealed that summer bridge programs might be an option at all universities, even those who may be struggling with the financial aspect of designing these programs. The online aspect of the program can help with the financing aspect, as well as the challenge of students having to be on campus full-time during the summer. If universities could lend students the technology needed to implement the program, as well as design an online course that could benefit students both

academically and socially, then the results could yield a variety of beneficial effects for underrepresented student populations.

Financial Assistance

Research shows that financial setbacks were one of the determining factors affecting whether or not Hispanic first-generation students could attend college, and if they managed to attend, if they were able to persevere (Rubio et al., 2017; Storlie et al., 2016). Many Hispanic first-generation students find themselves under a massive amount of economic pressure in the university environment, with some working up to two full-time jobs during their school breaks, and one part-time job while school is in session (Storlie et al., 2016). Pratt et al. (2017) explained that financial insecurity is the main factor that influences student retention because economic instability affects work responsibility, academic achievement, and the ability to form relationships on campus. Equally worrisome is the fact that financial strain results in higher student employment hours, which researchers link to a deterioration of students' mental well-being (Peltz et al., 2019). Financial insecurity in first-generation students accounted for 50% of withdrawals from the university (Pratt et al., 2017).

Alternatively, even students whose families are able and willing to help can find themselves still suffering an immense amount of pressure. In an interview conducted by Storlie et al. (2016), a student described their family being willing to lose their home so that they could support them financially with their degree, with hopes that the degree would create a more economically stable future. Finances are a significant problem for Hispanic first-generation students and one that researchers are currently in search of a solution.

Financial Aid and Student Retention

Financial aid has been linked to increased student retention because it lessens the financial burden and strain for the students (Wohlgemuth et al., 2007). Latino et al. (2018) researched the effects of accelerated learning programs and financial aid on Hispanic first-generation and Hispanic non-first-generation college students. The researchers noted multiple ways that financial aid impacts underrepresented students. The students would not need to work as many hours and could focus on acclimating. Financial assistance also helps with the student's feelings of self-worth. Lastly, financial aid helps the students pay for classes so they may remain enrolled, increasing their chances of completing their degree. The researchers were able to understand better if their theories aligned with the students' reality by using a population of 2,499 Hispanic students.

Latino et al. (2018) discovered that financial aid did increase student retention for Hispanic first-generation college students from their first to the second year of college. 78% of Hispanic first-generation students who were receiving financial assistance returned for a second year or college versus only 60% of Hispanic first-generation college students who were not receiving financial aid. The researchers concluded that financial assistance has the potential to play a significant role in improving the retention rates for underrepresented populations of students.

Can Financial Aid Close Degree Completion Gaps for First-Generation Students?

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) conducted a randomized experiment to test that exact theory, does financial assistance have the potential to close both persistence gaps and degree completion gaps for students from low-income families? The researchers focused on 13 public universities across Wisconsin. The research focused on a new private program called the Wisconsin Scholars

Grant (WSG), which assisted students through need-based grants, awarding up to \$3,500 per year, with a maximum grant amount of \$17,500 per student.

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) acknowledged a significant problem with the correlation between a student's family income and the ability to graduate with a four-year degree. The researchers noted that children who come from families that have a higher income are six times more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree by the age of 25 than those children who come from lower-income families. Research also reveals that students from lower-income family's factor in college costs as one of their main decision-making factors, ultimately leading them to either community colleges or public institutions (Paulsen et al., 2002). The data identifies a need for financial assistance, but the researchers continue to explain that scholarships and grants are becoming more focused on merit-based and performance-based recipients versus need-based; therefore, financial aid is becoming difficult to access.

However, despite the difficulty in obtaining financial assistance, the benefits of those who may receive help are evident. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) explain that this assistance allows students to increase their academic performance in multiple ways, such as having the ability to purchase books and materials for class. Furthermore, financial aid could help students cut back on the number of hours they have to work, which allows them more time to prepare better academically. The ability to work fewer hours is especially important because research reveals that these students are entering the university environment with lower levels of academic preparation. The extra allotted time could also allow these students the opportunity to spend time better adjusting to their new environment (Pratt et al., 2017).

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) wanted to test if financial aid was an effective way to address income inequality in the university environment. The WSG was granted based on a lottery

system, with the full sample for the research totaling 1,500 students. The focus of the study was to test retention rates, academic achievement, and on-time degree completion based on the financial assistance provided. The research also accounted for individual differences such as level of academic preparation and first-generation status.

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) findings revealed that the first cohort, initiated in 2008, showed significant increases in completing a bachelor's degree within four years. When analyzing all three groups, the grant increased retention rates by one to three percentage points per term, and retention rates received the most considerable boost the semester after students received the award. The findings also revealed that after three academic years in college, 70% of the grant-recipients remained enrolled. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) also discovered that the grant assisted with the improvement of grades and GPA. The students who did receive the award improved their GPA by .08 on average.

More specific findings by Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) did show a peculiar trend. Less academically prepared students entering the university environment revealed positive benefits, such as increased retention rates, and a higher chance of degree completion. Goldrick-Rab et al. highlighted that this piece of evidence proves that awarding aid to those students who are more advanced based on merit is counterproductive when those students who are less academically prepared showed great strides when assisted.

On the other hand, the findings of Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) revealed that first-generation students did not benefit from the grants in terms of completing the degree within four years. These findings show that financial aid alone is not enough to completely close the graduation gap between first-generation students and their counterparts. Financial assistance may help those who are entering less academically prepared, but with the multitude of circumstances

that affect first-generation students, financial aid alone is not enough. There need to be added support systems in place. Yes, financial assistance is a proven must, but it cannot stand alone for Hispanic first-generation college students, which is why additional support programs are essential (Perna, 2015).

The research of Baker et al. (2017) may be able to explain certain aspects of the findings of Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016). Baker et al. also studied the effects of financial aid on college success. Although Baker et al. did not focus on first-generation students, they did draw certain conclusions about how financial assistance and degree completion are linked. Baker et al. found that financial aid had a greater impact on short-term persistence. For example, financial aid increased student retention from year one to year two. However, on the other hand, financial assistance was less likely to impact long-term outcomes, such as the completion of a degree within six years. The researchers admitted that the type of financial assistance might play a role in this inconsistency, which is why students need to understand the different forms of aid.

Understanding Financial Assistance

Based on the research conducted by Katrevich and Aruguete (2017), who studied first-generation students and the effects of mathematics intervention programs also highlighted the importance of students understanding the different forms of financial assistance. A major dilemma for first-generation students lies in being unable to access financial aid due to not understanding the process, or even being unfamiliar with the jargon and what terms such as “FAFSA” even mean (Taylor & Bicak, 2020). At the university where Katrevich and Aruguete conducted their research, financial aid counseling was mandatory to understand the differences between loans, grants, and scholarships, as well as to understand the expectations about how and when to pay back certain forms of assistance. The university in the study also utilized

scholarship outreach programs, educating students about different funding sources, including local, national, and private. Having a solid understanding of financial assistance may also play a role in how useful it may be for vulnerable populations, such as Hispanic first-generation students.

Furquim et al. (2017), who studied the data from more than 100,000 students in a large public university, echoed the importance of students understanding the different forms of financial aid and assistance. In their study, Furquim et al. revealed that first-generation college students borrow money more regularly and in larger amounts than their peers, leaving them in more debt post-college. Furquim et al. suggest that if these students had a better understanding of the various types of aids and loans, then their debt would not be as high. The researchers explained that programs such as work-study reduce the amount of debt that a student builds, but other forms of aid such as grants and scholarships can reduce the amount of debt by more than fifty cents per dollar of debt. They explained that awareness is a huge aspect of how students borrow money and because first-generation students have parents who are less likely to prepare for college by saving, this knowledge is essential to ensuring that this population of students does not continue to leave college with a large amount of debt.

Organizations

Organizations provide Hispanic first-generation students the chance to become part of a smaller community within a larger university setting, as well as opportunities to gain useful information, insight, and assistance. There are three aspects to organizational support: Academic organizations, student organizations, and student affairs organizations. Academic organizations focus on different programs and openings aimed at assisting this specific population of students. Student organizations are organizations led by other pupils and focus on a specific culture or

background in hopes of bringing a greater sense of togetherness. Lastly, student affairs organizations are specific jobs that are devised by the universities to make the transition and the success of diverse groups of students more attainable.

Academic Organizations

In hopes of designing adequate support programs, Hébert (2018) studied ten high-achieving first-generation college students to understand what they had in common. Hébert discovered that despite their difficulties that these ten students faced during their upbringings, they still thrived in the college environment. Each of the ten students was able to identify at least one support system they had in high school, usually in the form of a teacher. Their support systems were also useful in selecting AP-level courses and honors courses in high school, so they were more academically prepared when they entered college.

Upon entrance to college, the students explained that they received an invitation to the honors college, as well as received the option to participate in the Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP). OSP targeted first-generation students from low SES backgrounds and focused on building a small community within the more substantial college atmosphere. The OSP also provided access to resources and allowed the students to take courses that were taught by trained professors who were specially prepared to work with this population of students (Hébert, 2018).

Some of the students also received an invitation to participate in a program called the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, created for first-generation college students. Like other support program suggestions, this program highlighted a summer aspect, in the form of a six-week course where students conducted intense research. Through this program, students became better prepared for advanced studies and the potential of graduate school (Hébert, 2018).

Aside from the small community support, accessible resources, and summer support that assisted with researching skills, the ten students also complimented the extracurricular activities that they participated in at their college, which contributed to social acclimation. Other helpful support programs included the opportunity to study abroad, workshops conducted at the Office of Undergraduate Research, and accessible mentors and advisors (Hébert, 2018; Demetriou, 2017).

Azmitia et al. (2018) also studied the different ways that first-generation students were able to thrive and preserve in college despite all obstacles. Academic organizations played a significant role in assisting first-generation students in their ability to continue in their new environment. The data from the interviews revealed that academic organizations, such as student government and specific academic departments, were especially useful. Still, the most notable academic organization mentioned was a program called The Campus Connection.

The Campus Connection was an on-campus volunteer organization. This organization allowed the first-generation students the ability to volunteer in K-12 classrooms that mostly consisted of low-income students and migrant students. The organization even provided the first-generation students' free transportation to make participation more doable. These organizations not only allowed them to feel that they were giving back and contributing to society by assisting with the education of younger students, but it allowed them to build a family-like community within a large college campus (Azmitia et al., 2018).

Student Organizations

Student organizations that emphasize a race or ethnicity have the potential to engage students in their new environment based on their promotion of cultural awareness (Luedke, 2018; Demetriou, 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017). These organizations not only assist the students with

their academic needs, but they promote and create friendships within the larger university, a notion that has been proven to increase students' self-efficacy and, in return, their academic success (Cheong et al., 2019). Luedke conducted interviews with 17 first-generation [Hispanic] students that attended one of two predominantly White institutions in the Midwest. Luedke was aiming to discover how [Hispanic] student organizations create social and cultural capital for Hispanic first-generation students in hopes of finding ways to increase retention and graduation rates for this specific population.

Through the interviews, Luedke (2018) found that these types of student organizations create a family-like bond among the students. The students described seeing a sense of both social and cultural capital that immensely assisted their journey and adaptation in their new environment. The students described the positive benefits gained from participation in the organization. The students felt that they were able to better network as they received advice about which courses to take and obtained information about available internships. They also made closer connections with staff and received academic support and guidance. For example, their peers reviewed papers for them or even assisted them with babysitting duties. Lastly, they received information about career development and preparation, for instance, receiving support with completing graduate applications. Overall, there were many benefits, but the mention of creating a family in their new environment was one of the most prominent.

Colleges are continually looking for new ways to enhance the college experience for underrepresented populations, such as Hispanic first-generation students, and student organizations that focus on race or ethnicity have the potential to do so. Research has found that institutions may lack funding for these types of programs (Luedke, 2018). However, with the vast amount of evidence stating that these programs are beneficial to underrepresented

populations, regarding academic support, academic guidance, and career development and preparation, the funding needs to be delegated appropriately to this form of support systems. These groups do have the potential to exist without institutional support, but the result is an inconveniently large amount of time designated for fundraising.

These organizations could resolve what researcher Duncheon (2018) described as a cultural mismatch, which is occurring across four-year universities. Through her work studying high-achieving Hispanic first-generation high school students who were entering the college environment, Duncheon explained that cultural mismatch occurs during campus integration. Duncheon described cultural mismatch as the tension between the culture of the community that students originate from, and the culture of American universities, which is predominantly a White middle-class culture. Culture-based student organizations may lessen cultural mismatch, as these organizations provide students with a sense of empowerment as they embrace and continue learning more about their own culture (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017).

Student Affairs Organizations

In universities around the nation, there are individuals appointed whose position focuses on ensuring the success of diverse populations of students, including Hispanic first-generation students. At prominent state universities, it is common to have advocates who function under different vice presidents while having a common goal of success for diverse groups of students. At one big state university, their website references these advocates under three different vice presidents. The various functionalities range from College Assistance Migrant Programs to Equity Programs, to Centers for Diversity and Inclusion. These designated services are standard amongst large universities in the U.S. as the population continues to grow more diverse, and the need for equity in educational attainment is crucial. While the effectiveness of these roles is not

clear or supported by data, it is an intentional effort on behalf of many colleges and universities to have designated advocates for underserved populations.

Alternate Pathways to College

Two alternative pathways to having a better chance of success at the university-level are Early College High Schools (ECHS) and dual enrollment programs. ECHS would be in place of a traditional high school setting, while dual enrollment programs encourage students to earn college credits while still attending a traditional high school. Both options provide students the opportunity to enter the university setting better prepared and on a faster route due to their previously obtained college credits. Alternate pathways are an option to consider for Hispanic first-generation students who are uneasy about the transition from a traditional high school setting to a university setting.

Early College High Schools

Another topic to explore regarding Hispanic first-generation students is alternate pathways to the university environment. One option to explore is Early College High Schools (ECHS). ECHS are typically located on either a two-year or four-year college campus and serve underrepresented populations to improve their access to higher education (Ari et al., 2017; Barnett et al., 2015). The benefit of attending an ECHS versus a traditional high school is that the students have the potential to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree. Even more beneficial is that the college credits earned at an ECHS are free of charge to the students and their families.

Allen (2016) researched ECHS by interviewing one [Hispanic] male in Northern Texas to document his experiences at the ECHS he attended. Mark (pseudonym) was a Hispanic first-generation student. He had become interested in attending an ECHS in middle school when his

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) teacher informed him that he could earn college credits at no cost.

Mark graduated from the ECHS with 77 dual credit hours. From his interviews, Allen (2016) learned that Mark thought ECHS was demanding timewise, not allowing for much of a social life, but Mark did graduate feeling prepared for college. One of the main benefits noted in the interviews was that the small class sizes allowed for more of a mentorship-type bond with the professors, and as a result, Mark received a lot of support. Upon entering college, Mark understood the expectations of the environment, as well as the sacrifices he would need to make, both of which previous research identifies as concepts that cause first-generation students to struggle.

Edmunds et al. (2017) also studied the impact that ECHS has on student preparedness for the college environment. Edmunds et al. explained that students who attend ECHS not only graduate from high school at a higher rate compared to traditional students, but they also are more likely to have the courses they need when applying for college. Students who graduate from ECHS are also entering college with a similar level of preparedness as a traditional student, despite ECHS targeting students who are underrepresented in higher education.

Edmunds et al. (2017) explored two different samples to verify that ECHS graduates have the courses they need to enter college and that ECHS students are graduating at higher rates than traditional students. The researchers discovered that 91% of ECHS students had the required courses to enter college compared to 84% of conventional high school students. Additionally, they found that ECHS students graduate at a 3.6% higher rate than traditional high school students.

However, the most important findings came from Edmunds et al. (2017) interviews with college professors and other essential staff members. When asked about the ECHS graduates that these four-year professors had encountered in their classrooms, the professors noted that the students were either “somewhat prepared” or “very prepared.” The professors also noted recognizing a smoother transition into the four-year college environment for those students who had graduated from ECHS. The professors stated that the ECHS graduates were either “about as well prepared” or “better prepared” compared to their counterparts.

Why All of the Positive Feedback about ECHS Graduates? Edmunds et al. (2017) researched the reasoning behind all the positive feedback of the ECHS graduates. The researchers explained that individuals categorize college readiness into three different categories: academic preparation, academic behavior and attitudes, and understanding of the college process. ECHS focused on these three concepts and implemented practices to ensure that ECHS graduates entered the four-year college environment prepared.

The concept of “academic preparation” required ECHS to focus on the level of rigor and to ensure that their material was like the material that the students would encounter at a four-year university. ECHS concentrate on test preparation, as well as research and writing skills, all of which are prominent in four-year classrooms. This aspect is especially vital because Edmunds et al. (2017) findings from the interviews did highlight a need for higher quality writing skills from ECHS graduates.

Regarding “academic behavior and attitudes,” ECHS utilize AVID programs, as well as advisors to work with and mentor the students. ECHS also uses seminars that focus on college readiness skills. These skills include but are not limited to notetaking, time management, and study skills. Additionally, ECHS discuss and model appropriate behavior that will be necessary

for the four-year university environment. Lastly, ECHS especially highlight the importance of self-advocacy and teaching the required skills that will allow them to do so (Edmunds et al., 2017).

“Understanding the college process” is the final focus of ECHS to prepare their graduates for the four-year university setting. ECHS plan college visits and they assist their students with planning for college and even applying to college. ECHS also recognizes the importance of the family dynamic for many of their underrepresented students, so they make sure to educate the parents on the college process as well. ECHS does this through student-led conferences where the student may bring together the staff and their families through these discussions (Edmunds et al., 2017).

ECHS is an alternative pathway for first-generation students and other underrepresented students to better prepare for the four-year university environment. ECHS allows for the opportunity to gain up to two years’ worth of college credits at no extra cost and promotes a smoother transition into the university environment due to the exposure to higher-level academic rigor and support from professors to work on essential skills that will allow for success. Underrepresented students, such as Hispanic first-generation students, will need to seek out this option because, as revealed in the interviews conducted by Allen (2016), the ECHS option is not openly advertised to all students and is not always easily accessible. However, many states are now trying to increase the amount of ECHS based on research-proven success (Mokher, 2019; Bush, 2017).

Accelerated Learning Programs

When ECHS is not an option based on lack of state funding or lack of space in the program, another pathway to college success for Hispanic first-generation students is accelerated

learning programs, such as dual enrollment or AP courses (Lile et al., 2017; Grubb et al., 2016). Latino et al. (2018) investigated how accelerated learning programs affected both Hispanic first-generation students and Hispanic non-first-generation students in a four-year university environment. Latino et al. described three ways that accelerated learning can improve the academic results for both Hispanic first-generation and non-first-generation students. Students will: experience a higher level of academic rigor, experience nonacademic aspects of college, and have fewer credits to take once they enter the four-year university setting.

Latino et al. (2018) used a sample of 2,499 Hispanic students to discover the effects of accelerated learning. The findings revealed that the GPA of high school Hispanic students participating in the dual enrollment program was higher than those who did not attend, 2.64 v. 2.37. Additionally, there was an increased GPA during freshman year for dual enrollment participants. The findings also revealed that accelerated learning programs could prepare students for the academic demands of college based on rigor. Still, it can also better prepare students for the nonacademic demands of college, such as the increased level of autonomy. The findings, therefore, proved that utilizing dual enrollment programs is an additional method to decrease the achievement gap.

Further Insight into Hispanic First-Generation Students

Irlbeck et al. (2014), researched motivational factors and the support systems for Hispanic first-generation college students. The conducted research at the College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources (CASNR) at Texas Tech University (TTU) supported previous evidence that social capital is essential. The students suggested needing professors who could serve as their mentors and providing study support. The findings also supported the need for colleges to be inclusive of the students' families, potentially by including them more in

orientation programs. Lastly, the results revealed that these students need a better way to receive information about getting involved, for example, in extracurricular activities. They need this information given to them to become more involved with the school so that they can socially acclimate (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), emphasized the importance of support programs that assisted students in remaining financially stable and that assisted with their academic skills and preparation. The researchers did acknowledge new struggles, such as the need for culturally relevant resources and a welcoming climate. Still, they identified the most valuable support programs as those that focus on finances and academics, contradicting other research that values social capital over all other support programs.

There has been a difference in opinion as to which support programs are the most beneficial. Some support programs, for example, focus on social capital. However, social capital can come in many forms. Researchers Storlie et al. (2016) argued that counselors were the most basic form of social capital, starting in high school and then entering college. Tello and Lonn (2017) mimicked that notion, agreeing that counselors were an essential support program for Hispanic first-generation college students.

Other researchers, such as Moschetti et al. (2017), agreed that social capital was crucial for this group of students. Still, instead of regarding counselors as the key, they argued that peer mentoring was more beneficial due to relatability, resulting in more seamless acclimation. Plaskett et al. (2018) mirrored that belief. Through research findings, they highlighted that because of the similarities between the Hispanic first-generation college student and their peer mentor, a bond formed, which is even more beneficial than the information that can be provided by the mentor.

The argument for social capital is a common one in terms of support systems for Hispanic first-generation college students, and it is the type of social capital that is debatable. Schwartz et al. (2018) challenged the belief that counselors or peer mentors were the keys to growth for these students because their research revealed that one relationship is not enough. An entire network of contacts was crucial.

The alternative to focusing on social capital as the best way to support Hispanic first-generation college students is the focus on academic preparation. Researchers such as Becker et al. (2017) and Wibrowski et al. (2017) turned their attention to summer bridge programs that prepare students academically, with a secondary focus on their social life. Summer programs allowed students to take classes that would aid them in understanding the upcoming rigor and expectations, as well as learn vital skills such as self-regulation and study habits.

Of course, alternative research has provided additional findings and suggestions such as college programs that focus on Hispanic first-generation students and allow them to feel supported by appropriately trained faculty, and the opportunity to explore part of a small, tight-knit community (Irlbeck et al., 2014). In addition to the opportunity to take part in extracurriculars, the students mentioned study abroad programs as useful (Irlbeck et al., 2014). Alternative research also contradicted other research, as it suggests that financial and academic support is the ultimate form of a support program and supersedes all others (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017).

This study has the potential to fill in the gaps in the literature by utilizing the student's perspective to determine which of the discussed support programs is most useful. Previous studies considered students' opinions, but only in terms of completing surveys that asked open-ended questions or participating in interviews. Still, the students have yet to gain the freedom to

outline what they need and what they do not find helpful. Additionally, the student's perspective will also present the opportunity to identify additional needs that have not been supported by any support program thus far, resulting in the opportunity to create new and improved processes.

Summary

There has been a lot of debate as to which types of support programs are most useful to Hispanic first-generation college students. The discussion lies in where the focus of support programs should be, whether that be on social capital, on summer academic preparation programs, or on other types of support programs that build small communities and offer additional resources. Universities are having a difficult time identifying which support programs are the most useful, and at the same time, graduation rates of Hispanic first-generation students are not rapidly improving.

Most of the research on support programs for Hispanic first-generation college students base the findings on student attrition rates, not on student perception, which is where the gap in the literature lies. It is through the perception and experience of the actual students that colleges can identify which support programs are most useful, as well as what is still lacking based on their needs. Student perception can help determine which support programs are useless. As a result, colleges can focus their attention and their budget to necessary support programs that will assist with closing the graduation gap between Hispanic first-generation college students and their counterparts. The student perspective is vital to identify which support programs are the most valuable.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. I chose a case study research method, specifically a single case study design with multiple units of analysis, with an exploratory and holistic focus. Chapter three provided the research design, research questions, the setting, the participants, the procedures, and the researcher's role. Chapter three also focused on data collection, including an understanding of the three different methods used. Also examined in this chapter were data analysis and ethical considerations. This research was vital to understanding which support systems were considered the most helpful based on the perspective of Hispanic first-generation college students. This knowledge will assist universities in creating a better pathway to academic success for this group of students.

Design

This study used a qualitative design, which was appropriate because to identify unique challenges that this group was facing, I needed to be able to understand the perspectives of the participants. I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation to identify which support programs were the most helpful. The qualitative design highlighted the students' perspectives so I could then analyze the different themes and patterns that emerged as a result of their words and stories, which is a specific quality of qualitative research (Yin, 2018).

A case study design was appropriate for this study because its central question is a *how* question, which is a factor in case study research (Yin, 2018). Additionally, I had no control over the behaviors in the study and was unable to manipulate the behaviors or statements of the participants. Yin (2018) explained that a key aspect of case studies is the study having a

contemporary focus versus a historical one. Hispanic first-generation students, although not a new population of students, was a contemporary research study, as researchers had only recently begun gathering information as to how to improve retention and graduation rates for these students.

The specific design was a single case study design with multiple units of analysis. The multiple units of analysis were necessary because I wanted to focus on two separate college settings to verify that the information obtained at one university could be transferred to other locations and yield the same results. One university was public, and the other was private, which also verified transferability. The case study was also exploratory, as the purpose of this research was to prove that further investigation was necessary (Yin, 2018).

I was open to the nature of the study developing and changing throughout the research process, because I could gain unpredicted information. I allowed the data and conclusions to be adaptive as new information was discovered, which meant that I used a holistic approach during my research. Yin (2018) explained that the holistic emphasis might be difficult due to the nature of the study changing and even addressing different questions than assumed. Still, I was flexible, which allowed this approach to yield exciting results.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students perceive university-provided support programs to be?

Question One: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation college students perceive as the most helpful during each of their years in college?

Question Two: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation students view as unhelpful, and why?

Question Three: What barriers do Hispanic first-generation students experience that might cause them to leave college without a four-year degree?

Setting

Big State hosts one of the largest Hispanic populations in the country, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, so this setting was an appropriate place to study Hispanic first-generation students. The specific sites were two four-year universities, one of which is public, and the other is private. The four-year public university, which I referred to as Big Public University, hosts around 30,000 students. Big Public University is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), as Hispanic students account for about 30% of the total student population, more than any other race. Additionally, Hispanics account for about ten percent of the faculty at Big Public University. Big Public University is more affordable compared to other universities in Big State, with tuition rates averaging about \$5,000 per year.

At the four-year private university, which I referred to as Small Private University, the student population is significantly smaller, with about 4,000 full-time undergraduate students. At Small Private University, Hispanic students account for about 20% of the student population. The faculty also hosts a smaller number of Hispanics, with less than ten percent of the faculty identifying as Hispanic. Small Private University is significantly more expensive than Big Public University, with tuition costs averaging about \$50,000.00 per year.

Participants

In this qualitative case study, the selection of participants was through criterion-based sampling and purposeful sampling. Criterion-based sampling is described as each of the cases meeting the criteria (Patton, 2015), while, “The purpose of a purposeful sample is to focus case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry’s purpose, primary questions, and data being

collected,” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The selection criteria were students who identified as Hispanic and possessed the following qualifications: Identify as first-generation students, working toward an undergraduate (or recently graduated with an undergraduate degree) at one of the two selected sites, completed at least two years of college, taking courses in-person, and is a full-time student. The age of the participant had to be under 25. The sample size was 12 participants.

Table 1.

Demographics of Participants

| Participant' Pseudonym | College | Gender | Age |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----|
| Enrique | Small Private University | M | 19 |
| Veronica | Small Private University | F | 24 |
| Aurora | Small Private University | F | 22 |
| Sofia | Small Private University | F | 22 |
| Julie | Small Private University | F | 22 |
| Juan | Big Public University | M | 19 |
| Vanessa | Big Public University | F | 20 |
| Marisol | Big Public University | F | 22 |
| Joaquin | Big Public University | M | 20 |
| Isabella | Big Public University | F | 20 |
| Thomas | Big Public University | M | 22 |
| Maria | Big Public University | F | 22 |

Procedures

The first step necessary to conduct the study was to gain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). Afterward, I obtained permission from the two institutions (Appendix B), which required additional IRB's processes based on the requirements and protocol of the two sites. Following approval from the IRB and approval from the two universities, presidents of Hispanic-based organizations within the universities distributed a letter (Appendix C) to their members, as well as a description of the criteria for the participants. The letter also provided information regarding how to contact me if they met those criteria and were willing to participate.

Once contacted by participants, I needed to gain a sample size of at least 12-15 students and make sure that the participants met all the requirements. I then distributed consent forms (Appendix D) to the participants. After I received consent, I distributed my first form of data collection, the journal prompts, which the participants completed on their own and returned to me. After the participants completed the journal prompts, I began conducting the two additional forms of data collection, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. I audio recorded both the interviews and the focus groups so that I could transcribe the data as I began the data analysis portion of the study.

Data analysis was the final step procedure-wise. Through manual coding and analysis, I generated themes, patterns, and conclusions. I used the process of explanation building to analyze the data (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), explanation building is both inductive and deductive. I began this process by creating an initial theoretical statement relating to the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985), and then I compared my incoming data to that statement and revised if needed. During this process, I

compared my statement and findings to competing explanations to see if my findings were reliable.

The Researcher's Role

My role in this study consisted of taking a constructivist approach. My entire purpose was to interpret the information being provided to me by the participants. While explaining the news, I needed to keep in mind that the results may not be able to be generalized, because each of the participants comes from a different background and has had different experiences, therefore, their outlook and opinions will vary. Utilizing a constructivist viewpoint, I had to act with the belief that there is no “one single reality” due to the uniqueness of each participant.

An essential part of my role was to be aware of my biases. As previously mentioned, one of my main inspirations for this study is my two best friends, who are both Hispanic first-generation college students. Through these relationships, I had created my own biases related to this study. My two friends had each expressed to me different obstacles they had encountered at their universities, such as lack of support from advisors due to cultural unfamiliarity, or a lack of knowledge on how to access financial aid resources. These friends of mine have no relationship with one another, and each attended different universities.

I entered this study with the opinion that Hispanic first-generation students were not having their needs met by universities, so I needed to be aware of my biases and not allow them to affect my interpretation of the information. Yin (2018) stated that one way for the researcher to check for biases is to check if they are open to accepting evidence that contradicts their views. Checking if I was open to opposing views was an essential method that I used to make sure that I interpreted all my data with an open and unaffected mind. I also used audit trails to make sure I focused on the participants' perspectives and interpreted them accurately.

Data Collection

To achieve triangulation, there were three different forms of data collection in this study. According to Patton (1999), triangulation occurs when a variety of different forms of data are collected to verify the results. The first form of data collection was journal prompts that focused on open-ended questions. These journal prompts served as a form of data collection but also allowed me to understand the experiences and opinions of the participants before formally meeting with them in the one-on-one interviews. The second form of data collection was the individual interviews. Listed below are the fifteen predetermined interview questions. Focus groups were the final form of data collection. There were two different focus groups hosted, one at each campus.

Journal Prompts

The first form of data collection that I distributed was the journal prompts to the participants who met the criteria (Appendix E). The journal prompts were distributed through Google Docs and asked the following eight questions:

1. Growing up, how did you feel about school and your level of academic achievement?
Please explain.
2. What were the most significant factors that made you decide to go to college?
3. Upon entering college, what were your feelings about being considered a first-generation student?
4. What was the cause of your feelings when identified as a first-generation student?
5. What factors have contributed to your perseverance in college?
6. Why are these specific factors so important to your success?
7. How do you think being a first-generation student has affected your college experience

thus far?

8. What advice would you give to other Hispanic First-generation students as they begin their college journey?

The purpose of the journal prompts was so that I could gain background information about the participants before the observation. The journal prompts were brief but focused on open-ended questions that I generated. The journal prompts allowed me an informal introduction to each participant before beginning the one-on-one interview process.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were a vital part of the case study. “Case study interviews will resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries... [Y]our actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid” (Yin, 2018, p. 222). Yin (2018) explained that interviews assisted in explaining key events, as well as helped the researcher understand the participant’s perspective. The following 15 questions were predetermined (Appendix F). The one-on-one meetings were a maximum of an hour and a half each, in a setting determined by the participant based on their comfort level. An example of an environment may be a public library or a nearby common meeting place, such as a Starbucks. I used the following 15 questions in the one-on-one interview:

1. Can you please introduce yourself to me, anything you think is essential, as well as your educational background up to today?
2. What made you want to go to college?
3. Why did you choose this specific university?
4. How did your family feel about your decision to go to college, and why did they think this way?

5. Describe how your college experience has met, or not met, your expectations.
6. What do you feel has been the most challenging aspect of being at a university?

Please explain.

7. How do you think your college coursework compares to the coursework at your high school?
8. Describe the extent to which any of your new friends have helped to guide you in your journey to a college degree.
9. If you have had access to a counselor or advisor, how have they assisted you with your transition?
10. How do you think your college experience compares to the experience of your peers?
11. How has (or hasn't) your college supported you in this transition?
12. How has your college supported you in your transition into college life?
13. Can you think of any additional supports that your college could provide that would be helpful to you?
14. How would those other supports assist you in adjusting to college life?
15. What role do you think your self-efficacy has played in your success thus far?

Questions one through four were to help me gain an understanding of who the participant was and how they felt about school growing up. The items provided me with clarity on what made the participant want to go to college, especially since they were the first in their family, and how their family felt about that decision. Question five helped me understand how their college experience aligned with their original expectations and hear if they were feeling challenged so far or if they thought the transition had been smooth.

Questions six through nine were essential because they asked the participant about some of the primary information that research on Hispanic first-generation college students had highlighted. The problems focused on challenges that previous research mentioned, such as academic rigor (Becker et al., 2017; Wibrowski et al., 2017), finding connections (Moschetti et al., 2017), and being assisted by a culturally aware advisor or counselor to increase social capital (Storlie et al., 2016). These questions allowed me to hear the participant's perspective on the central issues that previous research had highlighted.

Question ten asked about the participant's experience compared to their peers to see if the participant noticed a difference in their experience based on their Hispanic first-generation status. If the participant had not formed many connections, then this question may have been left unanswered. Questions eleven through thirteen emphasized the topic of this research by asking about the support the participant had received from their university. The questions asked about the support systems and if the participant felt that the support systems were useful, as well as asked if there were additional supports that the participant still needed but had not been granted access.

Questions eleven through fourteen focused on the supports that the college had provided to the participant. These questions allowed me to understand how the university had assisted them in their transition thus far, and what gaps still needed to be filled based on unprovided assistance. These questions also provided the participant with the opportunity to describe support systems that still needed to be put into place to assist them, as well as share their perspective on how those additional supports would be beneficial.

Question fifteen was the final question and asked about the participants' self-efficacy and how it had affected their journey and their success. Because I was only interviewing students

who had completed at least two years of college, the participants I interviewed had found some success in their journey, as shown by their perseverance. Researchers linked higher self-efficacy to higher grades and student retention, so this question allowed me to understand if the participants' linked their success to how they felt about themselves and how they perceived their abilities (Haktanir et al., 2018; Mazlan et al., 2017).

Focus Groups

The third form of data collection was focus groups. The focus group initially consisted of five questions designed to initiate conversation between the participants (Appendix G). The initial data analysis of one-on-one interviews generated several questions to follow up with the participants. There were two focus groups hosted, one at each campus. In this scenario, I was less of an active participant, and I focused on identifying commonalities amongst the conversations held by the participants. The seven questions that I generated were as follows:

1. Briefly introduce yourself to the other members of the group as if you have not met them before.
2. What is the decision-making process you went through that led you to the decision to attend college and to attending your specific university?
3. What role did your family play in your education, beginning from your elementary years up through your time at university?
4. What challenges do you think you face regarding your education that you identify as “unique challenges”?
5. What support systems have the university put into place that has assisted you with your unique challenges, and why have those specific supports been so useful?
6. Can you describe additional supports that could be put in place to assist you better

that have not been offered to you thus far?

7. What do Hispanic first-year students need to know before starting college?

The first question served as an introduction, while the second question focused on understanding what motivated the student to earn a college degree and what factors affected where exactly they chose to attend college. An exciting aspect of this question was finding out if the university's support systems had any effect on the participant choosing their specific university. Previous research such as Becker et al. (2017) and Wibrowski et al. (2017) highlighted that some universities offered summer bridge programs to help first-generation students prepare academically. The students may earn college credit before ever starting their fall semester, which could have affected their choice to attend the specific school. Understanding why they chose the university was also impressive because no one in their family had attended college before, so what drew them to the university led to essential conversations amongst the focus group.

The third question focused on understanding the family's role in the participant's education. Understanding the family's role was vital for this study, even though the study's focus was not on the participants' family, because the participants are Hispanic first-generation students, meaning that they are the first in their family to attend college. Both Covarrubias et al. (2018) and Palbusa and Gauvain (2017) studied how conversations with parents about college predicted first-generation students' academic self-concepts. Covarrubias et al. determined that there was a strong link between how a student perceived their academic ability and how successful they were in school. Covarrubias et al. findings revealed that when first-generation students received more emotional support from their families, despite a lack of ability to provide academic support, that the students' confidence in their academic ability increased and as a

result, they received better grades. The findings of Palbusa and Gauvain were similar and additionally noted that first-generation students were more likely than their counterparts to mention their parents as a reason that they wanted to attend college. Understanding if their family was able to assist them with their transition, despite never going to college themselves, affected the type of support systems that the participant needed from the university.

The fourth question asked the participants to identify not only their challenges but challenges they considered unique, which led to conversations about their first-generation status. The fourth question was perhaps the most difficult, depending on whether the participant had established relationships with peers in their new environment because this question did require a sort of comparison amongst themselves and their peers. In her study, Duncheon (2018) described Hispanic first-generation students as feeling a sense of cultural mismatch at their university due to tensions between the culture of the students' communities and the middle-class culture of the university-setting. Duncheon also found that Hispanic first-generation students may experience hostile racial climates and microaggressions in college. Cases such as those found by Duncheon would serve as an example of unique challenges that Hispanic first-generation students may encounter. The fourth question was a better question to have in the focus group versus a one-on-one interview because the participants built on one another's statements and created a conversation about the uniqueness of being a first-generation student regardless of understanding the struggles of their peers.

The fifth and sixth questions aimed to understand the support systems that participants found the most useful that addressed their unique challenges. These two questions were vital because they answered the central question of the study. I wanted to know which support systems that students were finding useful and if there were any other challenges that they were

encountering where they had not received assistance. Researchers tend to disagree about which support systems are the most impactful, whether it be support programs that focused on building social capital (Plaskett et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017; Storlie et al., 2016), summer bridge programs that focused on academic preparation (Becker et al., 2017; Wibrowski et al., 2017), or support programs that decreased the financial burden that the student may possess (Latino et al., 2018; Storlie et al., 2016), I wanted to know if we needed to design new support systems that go beyond social capital, academic preparation, or financial assistance.

The seventh question allowed the participant to reflect and mainly provide advice to Hispanic first-generation students who are on the verge of entering college. This question allowed the participant to analyze all that they have learned thus far and essentially provide advice for newcomers. This question also allowed me to hear their advice and use it to understand additional support programs that may be beneficial. For example, if the participants advised the newcomers to work on their relational skills and their ability to seek out and build relationships because that was the trait that assisted them in continuing, then support programs could be created that focused on skill-building in regards to forming relationships (Havlik et al., 2017). On the other hand, if the participants identified other strengths and forms of capital that the newcomers should utilize, then support programs could be designed around building on those identified strengths (O'Shea, 2016). The answer to this question provided key information into the support systems that need to be set in place for newcomers.

Data Analysis

The data included answers from the journal prompts, and the information obtained from the one-on-one interviews, and the focus groups. I used a recording device to record all the data, and I transcribed all the data before the analysis began.

To analyze the data, I used manual coding, which was followed by generating themes and patterns (Yin, 2018). After I identified patterns and themes, I began to create answers to the research questions. I continued to refer to notes taken, answers obtained, as well as the new information gained from my coding and analysis, because this created answers to my research questions. I concluded from this information if additional information was needed or if there were gaps, in which case, I referred to the necessary step in the data collection process.

The process I used during data analysis was explanation building (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) described explanation building as a form of pattern matching in which one develops an explanation about their case study as they analyze the incoming data. The goal was to create ideas for further studies on my topic, with the possibility of developing new theories as a result of my study. Typically, explanation building is useful for creating new and invaluable understandings into social science theories. Additionally, this strategy resulted in valuable insight into public policy plans (Yin, 2018).

The process for explanation building, as described by Yin (2018) began with forming a theoretical statement, which I formulated around the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985) in relation to the support programs that the participants identified as the most useful. I compared all the data that I gained from the journal prompts, the one-on-one interviews, and the focus groups to the theoretical statement that I created. I altered the theoretical statement as the data was analyzed, and I then analyzed the details again with the newly revised theoretical statement. This process continued to repeat until data was fully analyzed, and I formed a final perspective. I was steadily building an explanation as I analyzed the data. I ended the process by looking at contradicting explanations after I had created my conclusion.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was crucial for the study to produce useful and reliable results. I established trustworthiness through four different methods: establishing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The participants and I built and maintained trust so that the process could be valuable. Trustworthiness was also key in developing a climate where the participants could be open, honest, and vulnerable during the interview processes.

Credibility

To ensure that my research was credible, I made sure that the participants were randomly selected, and I made sure that I did not interfere with the participants' behavior or views. The main reason that I conducted one-on-one interviews before focus groups, despite the advice of Yin (2018) who suggested that researchers conduct focus groups first, was because I did not want any sort of manipulation or interference with the participants' views. I did not want a participant to be persuaded in the focus group by others, or to rethink their original opinions based on the statements of other participants. I wanted the research to be entirely credible as the participants were their authentic selves with no manipulation or interference.

Additionally, I established credibility through the research's ability to be replicated. Replication relied on my ability to provide thorough descriptions of my research. One major aspect of being thorough was to include member-checking as part of my process. I shared my data, my interpretations, and my findings with the participants so that they could correct me if I misinterpreted any of their statements. They also provided me with additional missed information if they felt it was necessary.

Lastly, I established credibility through triangulation. I utilized triangulation in two different forms. I used triangulation by researching two different sites that were unlike. The

sites differed in their size, their cost, the demographics of their faculty and students, and the fact that one is private, and one is public. Additionally, I used triangulation by obtaining data from three different sources: journal prompts, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups.

Dependability and Confirmability

To create dependability and confirmability, I had to be aware of my own biases and ensure that they were not affecting my research. I also utilized an audit trail. I based this research and its findings on a correct interpretation of the perspectives of the Hispanic first-generation students who participated in my study, and not on my own biases. Yin (2018) suggested that one way to check for biases is to check to see if you are open to contradicting information. Member-checking also ensured that my biases did not alter the findings because the participants were able to correct me if they noticed anything that was not accurate.

I used an audit trail to check for dependability and confirmability as well. I carefully detailed the process of collecting data and analyzing it, as well as my process of interpreting the data. I was incredibly thorough during the audit trail by ensuring that I wrote down my reasoning behind the choices I made as I was manual coding the data. I meticulously explained why I chose specific themes and patterns as I analyzed the data, and I was sure to provide a logical explanation during each step.

Like establishing credibility, I used triangulation to establish dependability and confirmability as well. Triangulation was important with this establishment because the three different sources I used to collect data ensured validity. For example, if one of my data collection methods did not provide me with enough information or enough useful information, I relied on the additional sources of data collection for valuable data.

Transferability

I established transferability in two ways. I used two different sites for the setting of my study. One site was a four-year public university while the other site was a four-year private university. Aside from one being public and one being private, they also differed in their tuition, the size of their undergraduate class, and the demographic makeup of their faculty and their students. At both locations, I attempted to understand which support systems Hispanic first-generation students perceived as the most valuable. Because the universities were exceedingly different settings, if the findings were similar, it enabled transferability.

Additionally, I established transferability by being extremely thorough in my writing, especially in the data collection section. I ensured that my study ended with the potential for future studies to build on what I had concluded. I included questions for additional research in my results section. More so, other researchers could replicate the study based on my meticulous descriptions and could decipher if the findings are transferable.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations had to be the focus of the research. I began by obtaining permission to conduct my study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After I received permission from the IRB, I had to obtain permission from the two sites so that I was able to access participants.

Yin (2018) explained that the researcher must begin contact with the participants by having the participants sign consent forms that describe the nature of the study. These forms should also demonstrate that the participant has the right to remove themselves from the study at any point. Yin also explained that researchers must use pseudonyms to protect the participant's privacy, as well as any additional measures. Yin explained never to use deception in the study

and to take special precautions, such as conducting focus groups and interviews in locations in which participants are comfortable, as well as being open to asking the participants directly about how to organize interactions so that they are most comfortable. Furthermore, Yin stated that data security is crucial to protecting the participants, so I needed to ensure that the data collected throughout my study was never accessible to anyone aside from myself, which I ensured by using a password-protected computer that no one else could access.

Summary

Chapter three focused on providing an understanding of the study through an overview of the research, beginning with an explanation of why a qualitative design, specifically a case study design, was ideal for best displaying the collected information. The chapter described the research questions and an explanation as to the importance of each carefully designed item. I highlighted a description of the setting, the participants, the procedures, and the researcher's role in this chapter. I provided explanations of data collection and analysis and explained the ethical considerations needed to protect the study and its participants. I utilized chapter three to give the audience a basic understanding of the critical concepts of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this case study is to increase the understanding of Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. Throughout this study, I aimed to understand the different views of the participants, specifically focusing on what they deemed to be the most impactful support systems that their universities offered or that they found within the university-setting. Within chapter four, I provide a brief description of each of the twelve participants. Following the descriptions, I describe the different themes that emerged after analyzing the data collected from each participant. Lastly, chapter four concludes with revisiting and answering the central questions of the study and the sub-questions.

Participants

There was a total of twelve participants in this study, five of which attended Small Private University, and seven of which attended Big Public University. All the participants identified as first-generation and Hispanic. The participants ranged in age from 19-24 and consisted of students who had completed at least two years of college, including their time at community college before transferring. Each of the twelve participants was a full-time student or had been a full-time student who has since graduated. Each participant partook in in-person classes except in the case of an online-learning model being temporarily implemented by the university due to the global pandemic. Each of the twelve Hispanic first-generation students participated in the data collection process, which consisted of journal prompts that I distributed via Google Docs, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group interview with the other participants from their university.

Enrique

Enrique is a 20-year-old psychology major. In high school, Enrique participated in numerous clubs, as well as sports. In high school, he received the pinnacle award and graduated third in his class. He enjoys being involved and is currently in two different organizations at Small Private University, TRIO success program, and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Enrique serves as the president of his school's LULAC chapter. After graduation, Enrique will attend graduate school and go on to be either a school counselor, a school psychologist, or a social worker.

Veronica

Veronica is a 24-year-old and will be graduating this semester. Veronica spent four years at a local community college before transferring to Small Private University. She is a geological and environmental science major and is considering focusing on a pre-med route after graduation. Veronica lived at home with her family throughout her time at Small Private University and is also one of six children, including two older sisters, two younger sisters, and one younger brother. At her university, Veronica participates in the Service Program, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the women's soccer club.

Aurora

Aurora is a 22-year-old an education major at Small Private University. Aurora graduated this past Spring with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and is currently obtaining her teaching credential before beginning her master's program. Aurora wants to work in special education after graduating from her master's program. Aurora is the younger sister of Veronica. Aurora is part of the Service Program, as well as the Latina-founded sorority, Gamma Alpha Omega.

Aurora wanted to be the first in her family, including her five siblings, to graduate from a four-year university, and she achieved that goal.

Sofia

Sofia is a 22-year-old and is currently in her master's program for speech and language pathology at Small Private University. Sofia will graduate in December of 2021. Sofia describes herself as type-A, assertive, and unafraid to ask for help. Sofia feels that the most challenging college aspect was that her major is incredibly competitive, allotting for only 20-40 slots in their graduate school programs, with hundreds of students applying. Sofia is also part of the Service Program and the Latina-founded sorority, Gamma Alpha Omega.

Julie

Julie is the only participant from Small Private University who was not local to the area. Julie is a 22-year-old Los Angeles native. Julie graduated this past Spring and currently has a list of sixteen law schools where she will apply. Julie wants to be an immigration attorney and has spent every summer of her undergraduate experience interning at a law office. Julie also spent a semester abroad in England, further developing her intercultural communication, emotional intelligence, and professional experience. While attending Small Private University, Julie was part of the TRIO Success Program and the Latina-founded sorority, Gamma Alpha Omega.

Juan

Juan is a 19-year-old junior at Big Public University and is nineteen years old. Juan is a computer engineering major. Juan credits the AVID program that he was a part of in both middle and high school as his main reason for attending college because AVID was responsible for providing him and his parents with information, including information about the application process, finances, and deadlines. Juan has worked hard to step outside of his comfort zone and

start exposing himself to different clubs, with the help of friends he met in his classes. That progress has been hindered due to the pandemic, so he hopes to return to campus and in-person classes again soon.

Vanessa

Vanessa is a 20-year-old junior studying sociology at Big Public University. Vanessa is the roommate and long-time friend of another participant, Isabella. Vanessa grew up in an exceedingly, small town. She decided to go to Big Public University because she needed a change of scenery while still being a short three-hour car ride away from her family. Vanessa also decided on attending Big Public University because she had been accepted to the Descendent Program and the Academic Program within the university, allowing her the opportunity to create bonds and develop a support system before ever stepping foot on the campus. CAMP and EOP have remained Vanessa's two central support systems throughout her time at college thus far, along with her family and roommates.

Marisol

Marisol is a 22-year-old who graduated from Big Public University this past May with a bachelor's in social work. Marisol has continued her education at Big Public University and is enrolled in a three-year master's school counseling program. Marisol selected Big Public University because of her acceptance into the Academic Program and the Descendent Program. These programs allowed her to participate in a summer-bridge program, resulting in a more comfortable and confident attitude as she transitioned into the college environment. On top of participating in the Academic Program and the Descendent Program, Marisol also served as the president of an organization that hosts a recognition ceremony for Latinx students who

graduated; The ceremony is an ethnic ceremony for the students, as it is more personal than traditional commencement ceremonies because it is smaller, and it is bilingual.

Joaquin

Joaquin is a 20-year-old junior at Big Public University and is working on a major in sociology with a minor in counseling. When Joaquin was in fifth grade, he and his family relocated for additional work opportunities and because his elementary school had shut down. Joaquin had only ever known his small town of 800 people, and his move to a larger city and a new scene resulted in Joaquin becoming gang-affiliated by the time he was in middle school. It was not until his junior year of high school that his mindset began to shift, as his counselor started pushing him to change his life path and go to college. With the pressure from his counselor, his teachers, and his family, Joaquin ended up going directly from high school to Big Public University and leaving his gang affiliation behind. At Big Public University, Joaquin is a member of the Descendent Program, has participated in two different internships on campus, and is part of the organization that hosts intimate cultural ceremonies for Hispanic and Latinx students.

Isabella

Isabella is a junior at Big Public University. Isabella is 20-years-old and is studying criminal justice and social work. Isabella is the only participant in the study who was born outside of the United States. Isabella was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States before she was two years old, so she is considered a DACA student. Isabella explained that being a DACA student has led to her having two struggles or two barriers, versus solely having the challenge that comes along with being a first-generation student. Isabella's primary motivation to

graduate with a college degree is to purchase a home for her parents and siblings and be financially secure.

Thomas

Thomas is a 22-year-old junior at Big Public University. Thomas is a computer engineering major. Thomas is the vice president of SHPE (Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers), and he is also a member of an additional program that focuses on salsa dancing. The other organization that Thomas is a part of aims to help students transfer to a four-year university, which Thomas did after attending community college for two years. Thomas credits his success to his ability to hold himself accountable.

Maria

Maria just graduated this past summer, Summer 2020. She is 22-years-old and has now obtained a degree in social work. Maria describes herself as friendly, family-oriented, outgoing, good at teamwork, able to get along well with others, and as someone who prioritizes her family and children. Maria spent two years at community college before transferring to Big Public University. Maria had a baby during her senior year of college. Although she explains that the experience put more obstacles in her way, she ultimately used her child and her child's future as motivation and completed her degree. During college, Maria was part of the Academic Program and credited its learning community as one of her most significant supports.

Results

This section describes the analysis of the data and the generating of the different themes. This section will reveal how the information obtained from each participant resulted in the development of each theme. This section also focuses on answering the central question of the

research, along with the sub-questions. This section will conclude with a summary of the chapter.

Theme Development

My three sources of data included journal prompts, one-on-one interviews, and two separate focus groups. I used the Otter app on my phone to record and transcribe the data from the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups. I carefully went through each transcription to ensure accuracy before I began my line-by-line coding process.

The line-by-line, or sentence-by-sentence, coding process allowed me to understand which codes were most frequent, along with which codes proved interconnected. To establish themes, I used axial coding, which allowed me to identify the relationships between the frequent codes and create appropriate themes. After I developed my seven themes, I started focusing on answering the central research question of my study and the sub-questions. I used the transcriptions, notes, the repeated and interconnected codes, and any additional questions I had generated to answer my questions. Focusing on my central question, and my sub-questions also allowed me to create questions for future studies.

Additionally, to analyze my data, I used the process of explanation building (Yin, 2018). This process consisted of first forming a theoretical statement, which I built around the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985). My first theoretical statement was, “The support programs that students identify as the most impactful will fall under the categories of building autonomy, establishing competence, and creating a sense of relatedness.” As I continued to analyze data, my theoretical statement continued to evolve. By the time I was done analyzing data, my theoretical statement had transformed into “The support programs that students identify as the most impactful will fall under the categories

of building autonomy, established through success coaching; creating competence, achieved through academic support; and forming a sense of relatedness, which occurs through supports that focus on identity and empowerment, as well as supports that focus on one's emotional and psychosocial needs." My final step of the explanation building process was comparing my newly developed theoretical statement to contradicting information. I then concluded my theoretical statement as my absolute perspective.

Using axial and thematic coding, the following seven themes were derived: Academic supports, identity and empowerment, success coaching, emotional and psychosocial support, retention and commencement hurdles, accessibility, and extrinsic motivation to succeed.

Table 2.

Themes & Related Codes

| Themes | Related Codes |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Academic Support</i> | Organizational requirements, staff, summer-bridge programming |
| 2. <i>Identity & Empowerment</i> | Culture, diversity and representation, designated spaces |
| 3. <i>Success Coaching</i> | Workshops, professional development, autonomy training |
| 4. <i>Emotional & Psychosocial Supports</i> | Friends, home away from home, feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance |
| 5. <i>Retention & Commencement Hurdles</i> | Microaggressions and institutional racism, loss of support from first to second year, working, imposter syndrome, family expectations, consideration of population |
| 6. <i>Accessibility</i> | Financial support, DACA status, early interventions |
| 7. <i>Extrinsic Motivation to Succeed</i> | Financial stability, family and upward mobility, purpose |

I formulated the seven themes to answer the central question of the study: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students see university-provided support programs to be? I designed the questions to understand which support programs the students found to be the most impactful in their journey to graduation. The data revealed that most supports that the students identified as highly influential derived from different school organizations. The first theme created based on data analysis and a focus on the central question was: academic support.

Academic Support

Academic support was one of the main themes identified through the analysis of the data. Academic supports focused on a variety of assistance that would help the students succeed academically, resulting in passing grades and overall competence in the different academic subject areas. An essential factor to note is that each of the twelve participants partook in either AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses during high school. Additionally, each of the twelve participants explained that they felt prepared for the rigor of college, with some participants stating that they thought it would be more challenging. However, a frequent message conveyed despite feeling prepared overall was that the difficulty of classes varied based on the professor's style and the specific course content, and the identified academic supports assisted with those discrepancies.

Organizational Requirements. The different school organizations provided many of the academic supports described. However, some of the academic supports were mandatory components of participation. One of the organizational requirements conveyed at both Big Public University and Small Private University was beginning-of-the-year, middle-of-the-year, and end-of-the-year check-ins. Check-ins consisted of meeting with a staff member from the organization and providing an update based on the time of year. During the beginning-of-the-year check-in,

the students would discuss their goals for the year, while the middle-of-the-year and end-of-the-year check-ins would monitor those goals through progress reports and final grades.

Additionally, if students were receiving below-average grades, they were required to ask their professors for an explanation, which served as a form of accountability in the Descendant Program; as Vanessa explained, she stated

If we were doing bad in a class, they expected us to go, and they required us to go in, have an explanation of why we were failing, so it was kind of like, you know, very very centered to us succeeding in classes.... I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to go in and ask my professor for an explanation why I was struggling in the class so I tried my best to get good grades.

Aside from the accountability that resulted from check-ins, organizations, such as the sororities, also required a specific amount of logged study hours each semester. Study hours were proctored and were not optional if the student wanted to remain an active participant. Being a member of an organization came with specific responsibilities, but the result of those responsibilities was an immense amount of support with academics and a large amount of accountability and expectations that made the students hold themselves to a high standard and not allow themselves to fail.

Staff. When questioning the participants about their connection with the different staff members at their university, including professors, advisors, and counselors, it was incredibly rare that a participant noted that a staff member outside of their organizations or outside of their major was impactful to their collegiate journey. Some participants explained that the first two years of general education classes were simply too big to form any sort of meaningful bond. In contrast, others noted that the sole purpose of their assigned advisor or counselor was to remove

the hold placed on their newly created schedules each semester. For example, Juan would meet with his designated counselor each semester to review what classes to take; he stated

Every time I went to my counselor, I felt rushed, like I felt like, “Oh you know, all you need is this paperwork,” and I’m like, “oh, what about this class?” and he’s like, “Oh, you don’t need it,” like go, like next question. I’m like, okay, can I get some more in-depth explanation to like, what do you think about the class, like what’s the class about?

Juan explained that there were numerous times where his friends would look at the schedule his counselor chose and would advise him to drop individual classes because the workload was going to be too heavy. Juan felt that because of their lack of connection and his counselor’s disinterest in knowing him personally, his counselor was “out of touch” to help personalize a schedule for him. Juan felt lucky to have his friends who would step in and help him adjust his schedule.

On the contrary, the participants were all able to identify staff members that either worked for their organizations or taught (or advised) within their major that they found impactful. Since organizations such as the Service Program had their staff members specifically chosen with a focus on diversity and knowledge of how to work with this specific population of students, the participants felt that they were cared about and seen versus being invisible in a large crowd of students.

When Joaquin joined the Descendant’s Program freshman year, he was required to take a one-year seminar class. Joaquin started off feeling shy and remained introverted and to himself in class. He also felt that being Hispanic had resulted in a cultural belief that he should not ask for help, and he should be independent and figure things out on his own. The director of the Descendant Program, who was heavily involved in the day-to-day operations, noticed this about

him and asked to speak with him. Joaquin told the director his entire story about his past and his gang-affiliated lifestyle before coming to university. The director's interest in Joaquin's life made a huge impact. He explained the story of the director encouraging him to apply to give a speech in Washington D.C. for the Department of Education after hearing his back story and telling him that he had something important to share

I started getting really close with her. And she was actually the one who, who invited me to apply, we applied to the speech thing or whatever it was. We applied to go. And I remember the day I got selected, I was working in the fields. I was planting grapes that day. And I remember getting a phone call, and I was back home, and it said [area code], and that was [city of university], and I remember the assistant telling me, "Hey, like guess what?" And I was like, "What?" And she was like, "You're going to Washington!"

Joaquin explained that before the director took an interest in his story, he felt like college was not for him. He credits his overcoming obstacles freshman year of college to her always being there for him and supporting him. He appreciated the fact that she pressured him to be better and to come out of his shell, as he stated, "There were doors to be open, I was just too scared."

Aurora provided another example of influential staff while discussing her experience with her counselor. For the first two years, she would meet with her assigned counselor solely to have him approve her class schedule. Then, during her junior year, she started going to the counselor for her specific major, education. She felt that she received a lot more guidance and interest from her counselor within her major. She viewed her as someone who could solve any problem you had, whether your financial aid did not come through or you did not pass a class. She described her as someone she admired, so much so that she changed her major to special

education after hearing her give a speech about her previous career as a special education teacher. Aurora described her influence on her,

Oh, it's just the way she talks.... She was talking about like what it was to be in special education. I was just like so motivated by that too, and I was just like, oh my gosh, I want to be a special education teacher.

Isabella echoed the feeling of Juan, Joaquin, and Aurora and explained that it is just about someone trying to form the connection and caring to get to know you. All twelve participants spoke positively about their professors, counselors, or advisors within their classes for their specific major or within their organizations. Still, it was incredibly rare to hear a participant view a professor, counselor, or advisor outside of their major and not within one of the organizations attributing to their success.

Summer-bridge programming. Summer-bridge programs served as academic support for many of the participants. The Academic Program offered summer-bridge classes the summer before beginning freshman year and the summer after freshman year. These courses were free and provided the benefit of the participants not worrying about the class being full during the Fall or Spring semester. Furthermore, the courses offered before beginning freshman year of college provided the students an opportunity to make friends, which would benefit them as they would know people on campus when school began. Still, it gave students a preview of what college classes would look like when many of them did not know what to expect.

Marisol did not know what to expect going into college. One of the main reasons she chose to attend Big Public University was her acceptance into the Service Program and the Academic Program. She knew that the Academic Program offered summer-bridge programs, which she felt would better prepare her for her college transition. When discussing how the

summer-bridge program better prepared her for the rigor of college and gave her insight into what classes would be like, she explained,

It kind of got me set up for what I'm going to be looking for like my first year and kind of what classes is going to look like. So yeah, it really helped me prepare for that and as well gave me some units to start off with... I didn't like know the format, what format is, and everything like that, of what college is and all that, so that really helped me prepare for what it looks like and classes and stuff like that.

Again, many of the participants did not know what to expect going into college. Their families lacked specific knowledge and advice to share with them as they were transitioning from high school to college, and they did not have the social capital that allotted them a chance to seek advice from other close relationships. The summer-bridge program provided a vital insight into how college classes are formatted, and the level of rigor expected of them. This insight provided them with essential knowledge versus the uneasy feeling of confusion and fear.

Identity & Empowerment

For many of the participants, going to college provided them with the opportunity to embrace their cultural background. Before entering university, some participants expressed a negative connotation with being known as a first-generation student. Additionally, some of the participants expressed a lack of closeness to their culture before beginning college. College provided the participants with the opportunity to appreciate both their first-generation status and their culture. The participants achieved this newfound appreciation through learning more about their culture, being in the presence of diversity and feeling a sense of representation for the first time, and having designated spaces provided where the participants could find comfort being surrounded by others with similar backgrounds.

Culture. Many of the participants expressed that college allowed them to grow closer to their culture and to learn more about their cultural background. It did not matter whether the participant grew up in a city where other Hispanics surrounded them or if they grew up in an area that lacked diversity; college provided the participants with the opportunity to either embrace their culture for the first time or to grow closer to their culture.

Marisol grew up in an area not too far from Big Public University. Marisol attended an elementary school and a middle school where she felt a lack of representation of other Hispanic students. In high school, Marisol transferred to a different local high school in her area to find a better sense of diversity, but still, it was not until she began attending Big Public University that she began to focus on growing towards her culture. When I first asked Marisol to introduce herself to me and to tell me what she thinks is essential for me to know about her, Marisol stated,

I guess knowing my like I guess like culture, like I'm Latina. And one thing that I have had to work on with myself is like I guess expressing that through my name because when I say my name in English it's like [English sounding first and last name], it is very Caucasian.... So I've been trying to.... Trying to introduce myself within like kind of a Spanish accent.

Joaquin grew up in a small town with many other Hispanics. When he relocated to a slightly bigger town in fifth grade, there was an even more considerable amount of diversity, so he did not express ever having felt disconnected from his culture. However, despite taking a full course load and participating in two internships, he made an effort to join an additional club that focused on hosting intimate cultural graduation ceremonies for Hispanic students. It was in this club that he learned more about his culture and even started learning a traditional Mexican dance

called Ballet Folklórico, something he never thought he would enjoy but learned to love. Joaquin explained,

That's where I got more involved with my personal stuff because it was more towards my culture, you know? So I started learning a lot about my culture within that club, because that's when I started doing Ballet Folklórico.... And honestly, I started liking it, because like I said, I started learning about my traditions and Mexico, the culture, you know, what different, like, type of dances meant.... That's basically where another support system came from.

The participants, despite their access to diversity and a sense of culture in their hometowns, appreciated the opportunity to grow closer to and learn more about the culture within their college environment. The participants developed an even greater sense of pride in their cultural background while attending college. They also learned more about their culture, resulting in additional feelings of knowledge and self-admiration.

Diversity and Representation. The participants in the study focused heavily on the positive impact of being in a diverse environment where they felt better represented, both culturally and based on their first-generation status. It was vital for the participants to see successful professionals who they admired who came from similar backgrounds. For most of the participants, it was their first time having the opportunity to admire someone's life who came from a similar background and to view their lifestyle as a model for the life they wanted to have in the future.

Further into my one-on-one interview with Marisol, she spoke more in-depth about how she transitioned from growing up in a mostly White environment that caused her to feel embarrassed of her background to transitioning to college and finding pride in who she is.

Marisol explained that the representation that she found at Big Public University made her feel honored to share her story for the first time in her life. The representation allowed her to realize her peers had gone through similar experiences and that she had nothing to be ashamed of. She explained,

I never felt like proud of my culture or proud of my background, of like letting people know like oh yeah, my parents work in an orchard, or like do like landscaping and stuff.... So when I went to college, it definitely was something that was like wow, like, I feel so proud of my background and all that.... Just having that representation.... I had peers who had gone through similar experiences or backgrounds.

It was similar for Veronica, who had not heard the term “first-generation” until she was attending community college and felt a sense of discomfort when discussing her status and background. Veronica felt like the term had a negative connotation and felt that it made her appear less able than other students. It was not until she found a sense of representation within the Service Program at Small Private University that she began to feel that the term empowered her. She explained,

I felt like it was sort of like a, like a negative term, you know, or like a box that people wanted to put you in. Because I seen that first-generation, like they get a lot of help and they like, you know, when you look up like statistics like they’re, the less likely to do this and that, and so I felt that it was just so much negativity around it.... But with the program I was able to get into.... They actually empower you a lot, and then that’s where I kind of like gained the confidence in being first-generation.

Diversity and representation are also vital because they allow students to view people who have experienced professional success and financial stability who are relatable, providing the students

with a glimpse of what their lives could look like post-college. Many of the participants explained that they did not have that type of insight before college. For example, Isabella explained, “I feel like I’ve had more or less the type of role models I want to make sure I’m not.” Vanessa added to that and explained the value of the Descendant’s Program bringing in diverse and relatable guest speakers each week and how that transferred to her envisioning her potential differently,

It introduced me to so many people who had already graduated and were just such great examples because their life was like mine. They also came from low incomes, first-generation, and it was very motivating and encouraging to see them so successful just because it’s kind of like, well, if they did it, I can do it, and we all came from you know, the same kind of spot.

Diversity and representation are key to the success of Hispanic first-generation students.

Diversity and representation allow these students to gain confidence in their cultural background and their status as a first-generation student. Diversity and representation also provide these students with the opportunity to envision what their life could look like in the future and a chance to find role models that have lives that resemble the one they are seeking.

Designated Spaces. A common theme in my discussions with the participants was that they felt lost when they transitioned into the college environment and often, they felt out of place. One solution for this problem was the opportunity for the students to have a designated space to go where they could be surrounded by individuals that they viewed as relatable, and where they felt comfortable. These spaces were often provided by organizations, such as the Service Program at Small Private University, or the Descendant Program at Big Public University. These designated spaces not only allowed these students to feel safe, but a major part

of that feeling of safety was that they were isolated from the general population and were surrounded solely by other students that they considered relatable.

Sofia described the designated space provided to her by the Service Program. She describes it almost in the sense of a haven. She explained that originally, the space was incredibly tiny, but she still appreciated the space so much that having to fit 100 people into the area did not deter her from spending her breaks there. She explained,

We have a larger area now, a larger space, thankfully.... It was the community, just going in there, stopping in between classes to just chill and like talk and like have that time to just relax and talk with each other, where like if you are going through something.... It was like that emotional support helped me like keep going.

Most of the participants described how significant these designated spaces were to their college experience. The spaces provided an escape and a sense of belonging because those spaces were part of their organizations, which consisted of students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income homes. Their identities were confirmed and appreciated in these spaces, and they valued this additional support.

Success Coaching

The direct teaching of skills that leads to one's academic achievement falls could be described as success coaching. There are three different subthemes under success coaching: Workshops, professional development, and autonomy training. Through these different practices, students gained skills that applied to their academics and life skills, both of which resulted in feelings of competence.

Workshops. Workshops served as success coaching because they provided the participants with the chance to learn new skills that would contribute to their success. All the

workshops mentioned by the participants were provided by school organizations, although it was mentioned that the student body government also hosts workshops that are available to all students. These workshops were sometimes offered on their own, or they were combined to be a part of a social event that an organization was hosting. These workshops focused on academic skills, such as how to take notes, but they also focused on life skills, such as how to manage stress. Enrique described the workshops offered by the TRIO Success Program at Small Private University, he explained,

They offer workshops every so often, like there's one workshop that offers how to save money, you know how to control your budget. Then there would be other workshops that talk about time management skills, and better, you know, how to do different tasks differently based on the difficulty.

Julie, who is also a part of the TRIO Success program utilized workshops as well. Julie explained that she mostly took advantage of the workshop opportunities during her first two years. Julie stated,

The TRIO Success program, sometimes their socials were a mix of workshops, so they had like resume writing workshops, they had time management workshops. We had like how to manage your stress and stuff like that.

Workshops were a common point of discussion with the participants. All the main organizations, including the Descendant's Program, the Academic Program, the Service Program, and the TRIO Success Program all offered workshops to help the participants acquire essential skills. The participants acknowledged that these workshops taught them skills that proved useful throughout their academic journey thus far.

Professional Development. College did not only provide the participants with a way to grow academically, but it also offered the participants a chance to grow professionally. The participants found that college was the first time that they were presented with opportunities for professional development, which not only better prepared them for their desired future career, but also provided them with a newfound skillset. Joaquin discussed how after he returned from his trip to D.C. with the Descendant's Program, that he was able to obtain two different internships. One internship was a part of the Descendant's Program, while the other was with the Dreamer's Resource Center. Joaquin explained how these internships at Big Public University helped him grow professionally and as an individual,

I think from there, my professional development happened, and I definitely became a little more mature. And when it came to like responsibilities, time management, all that I was learning, all those skills from the trainings that I had with the DRC internship and the [The Descendant's Program] internship.

Julie discovered additional opportunities for professional development when the administrative assistant of the TRIO Success Program encouraged her to take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad. Julie had already been interning at a law firm every Summer since freshman year so she was familiar with a professional setting, but the opportunity to study abroad presented the chance for new professional developments. When I asked Julie if studying abroad in England helped support her growth and her professional development, she said,

Definitely. I would say more so like my professional development.... It really helped with my intercultural communication and kind of like, my emotional intelligence. I want to become an immigration attorney.... I think that going abroad.... Really helped shape like my views about asylum laws and stuff like that.

Professional development opportunities came in a variety of forms for the participants. Some found professional growth through internships, some through options such as studying abroad, and others through the connections they made. College provided the participants with the chance to grow professionally in a way they had not been afforded before. Despite having worked since their teenage years, the participants explained how the experiences they had in college provided them with a completely different type of professional growth.

Autonomy Training. One aspect of succeeding in college that is not always focused on as a teachable concept is the ability to ask questions. The participants spoke at length about how one of the most vital things that they had to learn in college was how to ask questions. Some organizations, such as the Descendant's Program, would provide specific assignments and tasks that required the participants to ask questions or ask for help. This type of autonomy training was vital for this population, especially since many expressed that asking for help is not always common in their culture. For example, Joaquin explained,

Coming here.... I didn't know how to ask. And I think that's one of the hardest things that I have learned how to do.... Coming from a Latino family, I'm just like, I really want to be proud of myself and I want to do this alone.... And throughout my semesters here, I'm just learning that you know, the key to succeeding is the asking for help, it's okay, you don't have to do this alone.

Autonomy training is an essential part of success coaching. For students to succeed at the collegiate level and post-college, they will need to be both confident enough and comfortable enough to reach out and ask questions or ask for help when necessary. Many of the participants expressed that their ability to ask questions led them to new opportunities and experiences that they would not have found if they were too uncomfortable to push beyond their comfort zones.

As established in the self-determination theory, autonomy is imperative for a student to be self-motivated enough to succeed in college (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Emotional & Psychosocial Supports

Emotional and psychosocial supports are an essential aspect of a student's success in college. These supports, which include friends; the feeling of having a home away from home; and overall feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance, provide the students with a sense of relatedness, which results in a more self-motivated and self-determined individual. These supports contribute to students' mental, emotional, and social health and play an essential role in their academic journey.

Friends. The participants mentioned their friends as a critical contributor to their academic success, even if it was not in the sense of directly assisting them with their academics. The participants described support from friends in various ways, including serving as inspirations or even pushing them out of their comfort zones. Veronica told the role her friends have played in inspiring her to want to continue growing,

Yeah, because I always thought that my friends were like, smarter than me, and so it wasn't like a competition thing, but I looked up to them. And it's just like, whoa, I want to be like you guys.... You know, I want to have those kind of intellectual abilities and capabilities.

Juan also mentioned how his friends contributed to his continued academic success and personal growth. Juan describes himself as introverted and more reserved, so he was very hesitant to put himself out there and join clubs and organizations. This mindset led to a lonely beginning in his

college journey. Juan's friends encouraged him to push beyond his comfort zone and served as the facilitator so Juan could feel comfortable joining organizations. Juan explained,

I think due to my friends.... they've pushed for like me to associate myself with clubs.... I'd never gotten my foot into that community, I haven't felt as comfortable.... with my friends, I feel like I have you know those people there to like talk to, like, connect with other people, their way of being the middleman.... that is just a slow transition to me getting involved.

Friendship is a solid part of the foundation of success not only for this specific population of students, but all students. Students became more self-motivated and better able to succeed academically when they form that sense of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Of course, the selected group of friends and their mindset and habits makes a difference, as Vanessa explained when she described how her roommates prioritize school over partying, which positively impacts her. A student's friend group and the support, encouragement, and assistance they provide has a huge impact on the journey to academic success.

Home Away from Home. The Hispanic culture places a huge emphasis on family, so when Hispanic first-generation students leave for college, the transition may be confusing and difficult. It is important for students to be able to find a safe space in their newfound environment. Some organizations, such as the Descendant's Program, focus on being a home away from home for the students. Students are also able to form a familial-like bond with their peers and with the staff members, which results in key feelings of comfort and companionship. Sofia described her relationship with the director of the Service Program,

If you're going through something, our director was like our mom, like she always had an open-door policy like if you need anything come and talk, and so she was always there

for like advice and like about academics and like school yeah, but like life too. I feel like more than anything, it was that emotional support helped me keep going. (Sofia)

Sofia continued to say that an additional director of her previous on-campus job at a center designated to serving a diverse group of students was like her other mom. The participants echoed these feelings during our discussions. The ability to create a sense of family on campus was especially important to them and contributed to their overall wellbeing. These familial-like bonds were typically made with the different organizations' staff members or felt with the various organizations.

Feelings of Belonging, Guidance, and Reassurance. The final subtheme of emotional and psychosocial supports is feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance. The participants frequently mentioned feeling out of place in the college environment. They were uncomfortable asking questions and could not always turn to their family for understanding or encouragement because their family could not fully relate or understand their situation. The participants had to find feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance through different avenues, such as staff members or friends. Isabella described the advisor from the Career Center making an effort to make sure she felt that she belonged,

I feel like he went out of his way to make sure I felt comfortable and that like I knew his story and where he was coming from, like kind of connect with me.... I feel like that's very important.... As a student, in order to feel like you matter in a place that's like scary for you.

It was also important that the students knew where to turn for guidance. Although their families tried to be supportive, they did not have insight into the participants' life in college. The

participants' mentioned the advice and comfort of friends as a prime source of guidance. Enrique described this guidance stating,

I do have five really close friends. Whenever I'm in doubt or I have some kind of concern, I'm just like hey may I have your advice.... It's really helpful.... It goes both ways, sometimes they come to me when they want advice.

Sofia found both guidance and reassurance through professors and staff members within her major, as well as through the director of the Service Program. Sofia emphasized that she felt a lot of anxiety and a lot of self-doubts, especially regarding graduate school. Sofia explained how her American Sign Language professor and the director of the adult clinic within her major helped her persevere,

I was very close to her and she helped push me to grad school.... She was always kind of hyping me up.... And then another professor.... He knew that I doubted myself.... He always pushed me to like, believe in myself, he's like, "No, you're in good condition, you're doing good," he's like, "I want to see you in grad school.... That's where you need to be."

Sofia was fortunate enough to find that guidance and reassurance from multiple staff members on campus. Sofia expressed that she confided a lot in the director of the Service Program, including her feelings of imposter syndrome and fear of failure. Sofia explained,

She would tell me, you know, just relax, and be kind to yourself, like you got this, and she would also be like, there's no doubt in my mind that you're gonna get into grad school.

Essential parts of the participants' academic success were their feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance. These sources provided a sense of relatedness for them, a sense of connection.

These emotional and psychosocial supports contributed to their academic success, but also to their overall mental health and wellbeing.

Retention & Commencement Hurdles

In this study, it was important to identify not only the impactful support programs, but also the hurdles that stand in the way of retention and commencement. The sole pathway to create solutions is to identify them these hurdles. The participants discussed at length the challenges they encountered on their academic journey in college. These challenges included: microaggressions and institutional racism, loss of support from the first to the second year, working, imposter syndrome, family expectations, and the consideration of the population.

Microaggressions and Institutional Racism. One of the identified hurdles for retention and commencement was microaggressions and institutional racism. The participants felt that they were not always valued. These feelings mostly stemmed from their cultural organizations receiving less funding or less attention, but it also stemmed from direct statements made by their peers and their professors.

Julie was one of the participants who expressed feeling like the organization she was a part of was not as highly regarded by the university or the student body government. She was unsure if it was because their organization did not focus on bringing in funding, or if it was because the main focus of their organization was to make a diverse population of students feel more comfortable. Julie mentioned a specific time where she went to speak to the student body government and felt a sense of discomfort regarding her culture,

I don't think I have a difficult name to pronounce but every time that I would meet with the treasurer from student body, she'd be like, "Oh, like, I don't want to butcher names

and I'm not going to bother trying to pronounce it." And I kind of just, I was like oh, it's kind of, okay, I guess. Yeah.

Julie was not the only participant to express these instances of microaggressions. Isabella reflected on a time when the professor asked the students to go around and state where their parents went to college. It was after this incident that Isabella began feeling uncomfortable talking about being first-generation. She explained,

I've had professors be like, "If your parents went to college, tell us where they went to college," so I'd be like wow, that's kind of sad, I'm gonna say they didn't go to college so then there's like three of us out of like a fifty-plus class whose parents didn't go to college so they're able to see that. That was probably like my second class freshman year that our professor asked that.

These participants were lucky enough to have a solid support system behind them on campus, such as their organizations and their friends. However, if other students were to experience these types of situations and did not have additional supports to reassure them that they belonged and were valued, then these examples may not be as easy to dismiss. Microaggression and institutional racism are retention and commencement hurdles because they make certain students feel that they do not belong in the college environment.

Loss of Support from First to Second Year. One item that some participants struggled with, especially those heavily involved in their organizations, was the loss of support from their freshman year to their sophomore year. Joaquin, who was part of the Descendant's Program, described feeling like the family he had created within the organization during his freshman year disappeared during his sophomore year. He struggled with the transition that occurred when the new freshman came in and became the primary focus of the organization. He explained,

They support you your first semesters, but then what happens in your second year, you know, it's like, okay, well, you supported me my first semester, but now what do I do? Joaquin described feelings of having to start all over again in his sophomore year. He had to find new ways to solve problems, new friends, and new resources. He did continue his relationship with the director of the organization, but he was discouraged by the quick transition of being overly involved to completely uninvolved. A quick loss of support from year one to year two may negatively impact students such as Joaquin. Instead, Joaquin suggested continuing some aspects of the support, even if it is a lessened amount, versus the supports feeling like they came to an end.

Working. All the participants held jobs while attending college. Most of them explained that they did not feel like their job affected their ability to succeed academically, and they attributed that to having understanding bosses. However, despite finding holding a job to be manageable, they still felt that it negatively impacted their college experience. Juan explained,

I do work from midnight till eight in the morning, so I try to get some sleep in whenever I can, and I still try to manage my friendships and my connections, and schoolwork, and just being involved with my community.

Joaquin expressed that the most affected area of his life was his social life. He explained that he felt as if he did not have to hold a job, then he could have built significantly stronger bonds. Joaquin explained,

I would have been able to socialize more, you know, like right now for example I'm working you know, like it's hard cause like my weekends like literally I'm working.

Maria also expressed that although working did not impact her ability to succeed academically, it contributed to certain practices that made completing the work more difficult, such as

procrastination. Maria expressed, “I would have maybe focused more on my schoolwork and not procrastinate as much as I did.”

All the participants were taking either honors, AP, IB, or dual enrollment during high school, which resulted in feelings of preparation for the overall content and academic rigor of college, which may be why they could simultaneously hold a job and be successful in college. However, despite their academic success, holding a job still negatively impacted them in different ways, whether academically or socially. Having to balance college life with a job is a hurdle that colleges should be wary of when ensuring retention and commencement.

Imposter Syndrome. The participants expressed an overall feeling that they did not belong in the college environment, especially in the beginning part of their transition from high school to college. Feelings of imposter syndrome appeared to be most present when peers surrounded them that they felt they could not relate to; typically, they identified their White peers in contrast with themselves. Additionally, some of the participants questioned whether their first-generation status and the help they received along the way had heavily attributed to their success, which led to additional feelings of misplacement. Julie explained,

Given my major.... I wasn't surrounded by many first-generation students. Many of my classmates had parents or siblings who had legal careers. In many of my classes I was one of the few women of color and I was intimidated by my peers. I suffered from imposter syndrome and felt that I wasn't smart enough to be in those classes. For the first semester of my undergraduate education, I didn't speak in any of my classes.... I didn't want my classmates to think that I didn't belong.

Fortunately, most of the participants who felt this way had the support of school organizations and clubs. The friends that they identified in these organizations and clubs provided enough

reassurance that the participants were able to persevere despite questioning their placement. However, colleges should be aware of these feelings, especially if the student does not have various sources of comfort and guidance because imposter syndrome may prove to be a barrier for retention and commencement.

Family Expectations. An interesting aspect of this population of participants in the common stereotype of Latino families' closeness compared to other cultures. One notion that I wanted to explore further was how this closeness could also serve as a barrier. The most common theme expressed by the participants was feelings of guilt for leaving their family and going away to college. This guilt led to several of the participants traveling home every single weekend, despite the two- to three-hour length of the trip. Vanessa was one of the participants who conveyed these feelings of guilt; she explained,

Having to move away, not being home and not helping my younger siblings.... I'm the oldest and I feel like that's a responsibility of mine. They see us moving away as a bad thing and personally, I still feel guilty.

Joaquin also felt a sense of guilt. Joaquin was close with his parents and had shared that he never wanted to disappoint them. Therefore, he found it difficult to say no when his parents wanted him to make frequent trips home. Joaquin explained,

For me, I think one of the biggest things was that my parents just don't understand college.... For example, I know my first semester they would always be like, come home, you know, come this, come do that, and a lot of times, you just can't.... It's hard to say no, especially in a Latino family, how do I say that to my parents?

All the participants had listed their families as a reason for why they wanted to attend college. However, trying to balance the immense amount of care they have for their families with college

life's responsibilities proved difficult. It was often hard for participants to find a balance. For example, Thomas found himself traveling home every single weekend despite being heavily involved in his academics and various organizations. He explained that he did so because his parents missed him. The balance of these populations' love for their family and their will to succeed in college could easily be a barrier to retention and commencement.

Consideration of Population. An additional barrier to retention and commencement is when the college's actions do not align with the needs of the student population. Veronica articulated this problem as she discussed how Small Private University is in a city that is mostly low-income families. However, they continue to raise their tuition rates, which are already around \$50,000.00 a year. The participants found it even more infuriating that they had no one to address their questions or concerns with, so they could at least understand decisions such as these that left them struggling financially. Veronica explained,

[Location of Small Private University] is a more low income, I would say first-generation type of community.... So for us to have such a high rate for tuition and not offer as much financial help, it kind of speaks to itself as you guys want to say you're here for the [city name] community, but not many [city name] community members can afford a private school.

Veronica was one of the many participants who chose to attend Small Private University because of the scholarship assistance that acceptance into the Service Program provided. However, what about the students who do not have the assistance of organizations like the Service Program? The participants explained that raising already high tuition may lead students from the community to struggle to return to or graduate from the university. This situation could result in a low retention rate for the college, and high student loans for the students, even if they did not earn the degree.

Accessibility

Accessibility to college is key for all students, but especially for the population of Hispanic first-generation students who do not have the support of their families to help them navigate the college process. Aside from the already difficult struggles of deciphering applications, FAFSA, SAT and ACT scores, and deadlines, three considerations for accessibility that I discovered were financial support, consideration of DACA students, and early intervention programs. Many of the participants did not even realize until junior or senior year that college was an accessible option for them. Supports that make college more accessible is essential for these students.

Financial Support. Finances are a big factor when it comes to Hispanic first-generation students who are deciding if they are able to attend college. Not only do the students need to be able to afford to do so, but they need to understand all their financing options, which may be unfamiliar. Additionally, because the parents did not attend college, they may also be unaware of financing options and may deter their child from considering college. For example, when Aurora first mentioned to her mom that she was applying to Small Private University, her mom knew that they could not afford it and urged Aurora not to apply. Aurora explained,

I love my mom and everything but I'm never gonna forget.... When I was applying and shared with my mom that I applied.... She told me, "Don't even apply, we aren't going to be able to afford it, don't get your hopes up." And I said, "No mom, let me at least try."

Fortunately for Aurora, like several of the participants who attended Small Private University, the Service Program accepted her, which covered most of her tuition through scholarships. However, Aurora only knew about the Service Program because of her sister's knowledge, and had she not had someone to guide her, she may have ended up not applying to college. Similarly,

Joaquin explained that he had never even heard of FAFSA until his high school counselor explained it to him and his parents. He would have ruled out the option to go to college based on his finances if he would not have found someone who explained his possibilities. Hispanic first-generation students need to know that a college is an option. Various financing methods could assist them in viewing college as an accessible and realistic option.

DACA Status. Another important consideration for college being accessible is the consideration of DACA students. Out of my twelve participants, I had one participant who identified as holding a DACA status, Isabella. Isabella explained that her DACA status had affected her college journey in multiple ways. First, she had to change her major because she originally wanted to be an immigration lawyer but knew that her DACA status would prevent her from ever being allowed to try federal cases. Hence, she had to switch to family law. Secondly, DACA students do not qualify for FAFSA or any federal student loans, and they also do not qualify for any financial aid in general beyond four years. As a double-major, this weighed heavy on Isabella. She explained,

I'm a DACA student, so apart from not only being first-generation.... I don't want to say two struggles or two like barriers, but more so like, two factors that go into the fact that I have some restrictions to how far I could go with my career.... I'm kind of in a rush to finish in four [years], due to like financial aid.... We don't qualify for more than four years.

Hispanic first-generation students who are DACA students need to be factored in when considering making college more accessible. Not only should financial considerations be made, but additional guidance and support may be necessary. Fortunately for Isabella, based on her

family's income, Big Public University did not charge her tuition. However, this will not be the case for all DACA students, and colleges should consider accessibility.

Early Interventions. Some of the participants expressed that if it was not for the early Interventions they received in high school, that they would not have gone to college. Early intervention programs, such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) or GEAR UP, are crucial for providing first-generation students with the information and knowledge they will need to go to college. Juan was one of the students who were lucky enough to begin participating in the AVID program beginning in middle school. Juan explained the impact AVID had on him,

My parents at first, weren't aware for college.... I didn't know much about college....and I was in AVID, which was a class that kind of like pushed for it, and that's where I learned most of my knowledge for college. Like I knew the deadlines, because I kept being reminded, but that class kinda like pushed for me in college.... I wouldn't say anything else impacted me as much as AVID did.

First-generation students do not often have parents that could help them navigate the college process. To ensure that college is accessible for this population of students, early intervention programs at the middle and high school level are essential. The programs may be the deciding factor as to whether a student goes to college or not.

Extrinsic Motivation to Succeed

The participants expressed many motivating factors for why they wanted to succeed in college. Some of those motivating factors were extrinsic and consisted of three themes: financial stability, family and upward mobility, and purpose. Although many participants did express intrinsic motivating factors as well, such as wanting to be the best versions of themselves, they

appeared to be mostly motivated by extrinsic motivations that related to their families, their family's situations, and their upbringing.

Financial Stability. One of the main extrinsic motivators was the desire to be financially stable. The participants did want to make sure to assist their parents financially, but they also wanted to ensure that their future and their future family was financially secure, and they believed that a college degree was key in doing so. Many of the participants expressed that their family's challenging financial situation as they were growing up was the main factor in their desire to be financially stable. Sofia expressed this sentiment as she said,

Another factor that made me decide to go was the financial aspect. I wanted to be able to support my family financially since that was something we always struggled with growing up. I want my family to have a good life. I always wanted to secure my future and the future of my own family I would have in the future.

Some participants mentioned a lack of spending money or the ability to take vacations because of lack of funding as consistent situations they viewed during childhood. They did not want that for their future family. The participants felt that a college degree would grant them access to a high paying job that would result in an easier life with less financial challenges. Financial stability was a major extrinsic motivator for the participants' desire to succeed in college.

Family and Upward Mobility. All the participants mentioned their families when I asked why they wanted to go to college. There was a consistent theme of wanting their parents to know they were grateful for everything they had given up. There was also a consistent theme of wanting to provide for their families with the assistance of their college degree. The participants' gratitude made them want to guarantee their families' upward mobility in society, and they believed that going to college was the way to do so.

Maria expressed that she was mainly motivated to go to college to express gratitude to her parents and give back to them due to everything they had given up. Maria was motivated by her parents' desire to have a better life and an easier life than they had. Maria explained,

What made me want to go to college is my parents.... Coming from a first-generation family, Hispanic.... My parents stopped going to school in eighth grade in Mexico.... They migrated over here to the U.S. and they just worked. So you know, I wanted something better for me, they wanted something better for me and my brother.

Vanessa also presented the idea of a better future. She felt that her ability to obtain a college degree would help her family's situation. Vanessa explained,

I feel like growing up low income, kind of told me that education was very very important in order for us to kind of, move up the ladder, you know have a better future.

Additionally, her parents' lack of access to receive an education established Vanessa's appreciation for education. She did not take her education for granted. Vanessa viewed her educational opportunities as a way to take care of her parents. She explained,

Given that my parents are undocumented and that they didn't receive education higher than the 4th grade, made me realize that I was fortunate enough to receive an education.

When I was old enough to understand that education was an opportunity for me to change our situation as a family, I took it upon myself to do everything I could do to attend college.

The participants were extrinsically motivated by their families and wanted to help change their families' situation. For example, an idea presented by multiple participants was to buy a home post-graduation so their family could live in it and not have to rent anymore. The participants'

desire to give back to their parents and show gratitude for their sacrifices made was a common theme found in the study.

Purpose. The final subtheme of extrinsic motivation was purpose. At first, this subtheme was hard to place because I am associating purpose with community service. However, after speaking at length with the participants about why their college experience focused so heavily on community service, I understood that these students consider their majors and career goals with service and how to be of service through their lives and chosen career paths. Julie, who is going to be an immigration attorney, explained the role service plays in her life,

Growing up, I used a lot of community resources, like I was a member of Boys and Girls Club and they would have toy drives for us or food drives and I remember my family going to those events so.... I joined organizations and I participated in.... community service projects. I felt like I was giving back even if it wasn't directly to the community I grew up in.

Additionally, Aurora was another participant who had chosen a service-related major and is heavily involved in community service. Aurora, who is going to be a special education teacher, explained the significance of service in her life,

When helping, like you see that you're actually making an impact and see families that are like, when they say thank you, this really helps out my family, like my kids are so happy.... And it's just rewarding.

Many of the participants chose service-related majors and career paths. This population of students has exhibited an inclination to participate in service programs, which reveals that they associate college with realizing purpose. For these students, going to college means that they could make a difference, and service stands as an extrinsic motivator.

Research Question Responses

This section aims to address the central research question of the study and the three sub-questions. The central research question of the study was: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students perceive university-provided support programs to be? The first sub-question aimed to understand which support systems Hispanic first-generation college students perceive as the most helpful during each of their years in college. Sub-question two of the study focused on which support systems Hispanic first-generation students view as unhelpful, and why that was. Sub-question three questioned what barriers Hispanic first-generation students experience that might cause them to leave college without a four-year degree. The information derived from the journal prompts, the one-on-one interviews, and the focus groups helped formulate answers to these questions, which allowed for further insight into the perspectives of Hispanic first-generation college students and the support programs they identify as the most impactful.

Central Question

The central research question of the study was: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students perceive university-provided support programs to be? The participants expressed a lot of value in the support programs that they experienced. However, the most highly regarded support came in the form of organizations within the school. Organizations such as the Descendant's Program, the Service Program, and the Academic Program provided a lot of support for their members, and the participants' acknowledged those supports. Furthermore, these organizations created familial-like bonds amongst the members and between the students and the staff, providing the students with a home away from home, which was crucial to their sense of belonging.

The Descendant's Program. The Descendant's Program offered various supports to their members, such as frequent check-ins, a mandatory weekly course, workshops, tutoring services, and peer mentors. When discussing the Descendant's Program, Vanessa explained, "They like to call themselves a home away from home, and it really felt like a home away from home." Therefore, not only are they providing their members with academic support and success coaching, but they are also providing them with emotional and psychosocial supports as they make them feel like they belong and that they care.

The Descendant's Program also helped with their participants' professional development. The program would host speakers from the campus and the community every week so the members could make connections and understand the different opportunities that were available to them. Many of the participants also explained that the Descendant's Program offered them internships and jobs after freshman year or connected them with sister programs where they ended up working. The participants felt like much of their professional development in college resulted from the Descendant's Program.

The Descendant's Program also allowed for diversity and representation within the organization, which was essential to the participants. The participants explained that the program specifically chose the staff for this program to be diverse and relatable. Many of the staff members had been first-generation students as well and grew up in low-income areas. This representation provided the students with insight into how their future could look and allowed them to feel more comfortable because people with whom they could relate and trust surrounded them.

The Service Program. The Service Program was the main component in the participants who attended Small Private University to afford to do so. The Service Program covered most of

its members' tuition through scholarships, and the participants I spoke with expressed extreme gratitude for the program. Aurora explained that if the Service Program had not accepted her, she would have been in the same situation as her cousin, who had to drop out of college because she could not afford it; she stated, "To me, it was life-changing. I don't know what I would have done if I wouldn't have been able to get in that program."

Aside from the financial assistance that made college accessible to the participants, the Service Program helped its members get heavily involved in community service, which they enjoyed and appreciated. Veronica had volunteered throughout high school as well, but the Service Program allowed her to find joy in it; she stated, "I didn't start enjoying it and seeing the beneficial part of it for the community until around college."

The Service Program also focused on academic supports, such as a group project related to serving the community. Sofia and Aurora worked together on this project. Eventually, they hosted a festival with different booths set up for the children to explore various educational subject areas in a fun and creative way. Projects such as these were a way for the Service Program to ensure that their participants could create, collaborate, and give back, and the participants valued the experience.

The Academic Program. The Academic Program helped in two main ways. The Academic Program assisted its participants financially. The program would provide their participants with stipends for completing at least fifteen credit hours per semester. Their other form of assistance was the summer-bridge programs that they offered to their members free of charge. The Academic Program offered the summer-bridge program the Summer before college and the Summer after freshman year. The session provided before college was especially crucial

because it allowed the students to make friends beforehand. It gave them insight into what to expect in their courses.

The participants did express other supports that they found useful, such as relationships with professors within their majors. However, almost all the specific supports that the participants' viewed as impactful to their journey and their success came directly from one of these organizations or an alternate organization on campus, such as the TRIO Success Program. The participants attributed their success in college to these organizations that have assisted them along the way.

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question asked: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation college students perceive as the most helpful during each of their years in college? This question was meant to discover if the participants articulated different supports they needed based on how far along they were in their college journey. However, what I found was that they needed the main supports during each of their four years.

Of course, the participants needed the highest amount of support during the first year. This support came from organizations within the school. It consisted of consistent check-ins with staff, mandatory weekly classes, mandatory workshops, assistance selecting classes and navigating the college process, and peer mentorship. This amount of support was essential for the transition from high school to college because of how unfamiliar this population is with what to expect in college and because they do not have the social capital to find guidance and support elsewhere.

However, aside from the heightened amount of support received during the first year of college, the participants expressed needing their other key supports to remain consistent

throughout their entire college journey. These supports looked more like academic supports such as having professors within their major who could assist them, supports to help encourage their identity and empowerment development such as representation on campus, success coaching such as being provided professional development opportunities, and emotional and psychosocial supports such as feeling like they have created a second family or a home away from home on campus. These forms of support are necessary for the entire college experience and do not subside based on where they are in their college journey.

Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two stated: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation students view as unhelpful, and why? This sub-question was meant to understand which supports are not working so that, ultimately, the school could redesign or eliminate them. The support system that the participants identified as not being especially useful was orientation.

Orientation is the school's first opportunity to introduce students to the campus. Unfortunately, eleven of the twelve participants did not feel that orientation assisted them in a significant way. At Big Public University, the school organized orientation so that the participants had to choose between going to an orientation specifically targeting their major or attending a general orientation that included a translator to accommodate their parents. Juan chose the general orientation because he wanted his parents to feel included; however, he felt like he lost the opportunity to meet friends within his major because of the decision he had to make. Juan explained,

There was a computer engineering specific orientation, they have specific sections like, oh if you're computer science go to this orientation date, but if your parents are Spanish speaking, go to this one.... I believe if you went to one of the career specific ones, it was

a little more informed. So, I kind of wish that had that Spanish-speaking one, not just like, you know, isolating non-Spanish speaking only.

At Small Private University, the participants' feelings echoed Juan's. Veronica wanted to include her parents but explained that you had to pay extra to bring them. I asked her what the extra cost was for, and she believed it was fees for food. Aside from the additional cost, Veronica also stated, "I wasn't even sure if they were gonna have like translators there or were they gonna have like a Spanish section, so I was just like, yeah, I don't think so." As a result of the obstacles and confusion, Veronica could not include her parents in orientation, and she also did not find it overly impactful.

The remainder of the participants expressed only one positive aspect of orientation, which was their assistance with selecting their Fall courses. Besides course selection, most of the participants did not find orientation that useful, and some could barely recollect the experience. Orientation was an experience that should have been memorable and impactful, but it proved unremarkable for the participants.

Orientation is the school's opportunity to make the students feel welcome on the campus and make them feel excited to begin this new journey. Orientation may offer the chance to make new friends and to sign up for new clubs. Orientation is also an excellent opportunity to make the students' parents feel included. The family's inclusivity is paramount with a population such as Hispanic first-generation students, where the family plays such a significant role in the student's life (Storlie et al., 2016). However, if the school is not considering how to align orientation design to first-generation students' specific needs, this potentially powerful support system will be rendered useless.

Sub-Question Three

Sub-question three asked: What barriers do Hispanic first-generation students experience that might cause them to leave college without a four-year degree? This sub-question was the focus of the retention and commencement hurdles theme. There were several barriers described that could cause Hispanic first-generation students to leave college without a four-year degree. The identified barriers in this study were: microaggressions and institutional racism, loss of support from first to the second year, having to work, experiencing imposter syndrome, their families' expectations, and the school's lack of consideration for the population that they serve.

Three of the subthemes, microaggressions and institutional racism, experiencing imposter syndrome, and the school's lack of consideration for the population they serve, focus on the students' desire to feel that they belong and are valued. The participants' need to feel like they belonged and were valued was especially crucial when the environment consisted of a specific race or culture different from their own. Julie was one of the participants who experienced that feeling within her major and, coming from Los Angeles, this was not something she was used to. Julie stated, "I've never been in a classroom where everything's kind of predominantly white, and I just felt uncomfortable."

Colleges should be aware of students' need to feel like they belong, or the students could end up dropping out of school because of their discomfort. Additionally, the subtheme of loss of support from their first to the second year shows that it is not enough for the college or organizations within the college to provide support for one year solely and then remove that support starting year two. Joaquin's distress with the support from the Descendant's Program disappearing during his sophomore year revealed that it is not enough to solely provide an immense amount of support for one year and then expect the students to be entirely self-

sufficient. The removal of supports could result in the student not having enough support to remain in the college environment.

Lastly, colleges should consider those specific populations of students, such as Hispanic first-generation students, who are much more likely to hold either a part-time or a full-time job. A consideration that could assist the situation is ensuring these students are offered positions on campus so they at least have the opportunity to still be involved in the community, and which also detracts from having to commute to work. For example, Marisol could obtain a job at the Starbucks on campus, and Aurora was able to find a job at the campus' bookstore. Colleges should aim to find ways to accommodate these students and make their heavy load more comfortable to carry, or the alternative could be the students feeling overwhelmed and having to drop out.

Summary

Chapter four provided an overview of the study. It focused on delivering brief explanations of the participants and insight into who they are. Chapter four also explained the seven different developed themes and the data analysis process that helped dictate the themes. The chapter thoroughly discussed each of the seven themes and the subthemes and provided concrete examples in the form of direct quotes from the participants. Chapter four concluded by answering the central question of the study and the sub-questions based on the information discussed throughout the different themes. The results of the study revealed that Hispanic first-generation students are receiving most, if not all, of their supports from the schools' organizations. Furthermore, the findings revealed that Hispanic first-generation students need consistent supports throughout all four years of their college journey. Lastly, the findings suggested that orientation is a crucial support that is not being developed properly.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to increase the understanding of Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. Chapter five begins with a summary of the findings. Following the summary, this chapter discusses the results and the implications and how they are related to relevant literature and theory. Chapter five also highlights the research's methodological and practical implications and will end with future research recommendations.

Summary of Findings

To answer the central research question and the sub-questions of the study, my data revealed seven themes: *academic support, identity and empowerment, success coaching, emotional & psychosocial supports, retention & commencement hurdles, accessibility, and extrinsic motivation to succeed*. Each of the themes served to answer either the study's central research question or one of the study's three sub-questions.

The findings of the study revealed critical pieces of knowledge for universities to consider. First, Hispanic first-generation students, and other underserved populations, are receiving most, if not all, of their supports from their school organizations. Second, Hispanic first-generation students need a lot of assistance during their first year, but they still require consistent support throughout their college years. Third, orientation is a crucial aspect in acclimating students into their new environment, and right now, that essential support is failing. Lastly, Hispanic first-generation students have a lengthy list of hurdles that they will need to overcome to remain in college until they receive their degree, and to do so, they will need supports that they find impactful.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings concerning the theoretical framework and the empirical background that was reviewed in chapter two. This study was framed by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), and this section will explore how the findings correlated with the theory. This section will also explore how the study's findings compared to the empirical literature cited in chapter two.

Theoretical Literature

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) explains that an individual must fulfill three psychological needs before acting in a self-determined manner: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The study's findings demonstrated that the support Hispanic first-generation students identify as impactful falls under one of the three categories mentioned by the self-determination theory.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) was created to respond to behavior theorists such as Pavlov (1936) and Skinner (1936), who added the concepts of rewards and reinforcements to Pavlov's theory and called this new idea *operant conditioning*. Deci and Ryan heavily disagreed with Skinner and the other behavior theorists arguing that if a student is behaving or succeeding academically for a reward, or to avoid punishment, then this behavior is extrinsically motivated and will not last.

Instead, Deci and Ryan argued that a student's success needs to be the result of intrinsic motivation. They explained that for a student to act in a self-determined manner, they needed to achieve three things, a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If the students could accomplish these three psychological needs, their behaviors and academic success could withstand time and triumph while simple extrinsic motivation fails.

My research revealed that the participants' most impactful supports fell under my first four themes: Academic support, identity & empowerment, success coaching, and emotional & psychosocial supports. These findings support Deci and Ryan's original argument in establishing their theory. The participants I worked with are successful students who are persevering in the college atmosphere. The supports that they identify as useful fall under the three psychological needs that the self-determination theory identifies.

Self-determination theory states that students need to find a sense of autonomy. The third theme, success coaching, established this sense of independence. School organizations such as the Descendant's Program and the Academic Program are hosting workshops that allow them to learn new skills to become autonomous. The Descendant's Program was also inviting weekly guest speakers and community members to help students develop professionally, which attributes to their eventual independence. These organizations are also giving their members assignments that require them to locate different resources, which is essential to becoming autonomous.

Self-determination theory also states that students need to feel competent to become self-motivated. My first theme, academic support, established these feelings of competence. Different school organizations, such as the Service Program, require the students to have a specific amount of study hours completed. Additionally, the Academic Program offered summer-bridge programs to have a solid understanding of college course rigor. These support systems provided by the school organizations are assisting the students in feeling competent.

Lastly, self-determination theory states that students need to feel a sense of relatedness to feel self-motivated. My second theme, identity & empowerment, and my fourth theme, emotional & psychosocial supports, help the students establish relatedness feelings. School organizations, such as the Descendant's Program, focus on recruiting staff from diverse

backgrounds, allowing students to feel represented and allowing them to meet individuals from similar backgrounds who have found professional success. Additionally, all the school organizations that the students mentioned provided them with a home away from home and a sense of belonging. The participants said forming strong bonds with the organizations' other members was easy because they could connect with other students culturally. The organizations provided the students' opportunities to build their social capital and find guidance and reassurance among their newly formed bonds.

All the supports that the participants perceived as impactful could be categorized under establishing autonomy, competence, or relatedness. These support systems help the students to persevere in the college environment and to succeed academically. Each of the twelve participants I interviewed had found success thus far in their college journey, and that success may be attributed to the identified supports.

Empirical Literature

Researchers have conducted numerous studies on Hispanic first-generation students; however, the student's perspective is starkly absent in the literature. My findings agree with some of the empirical literature that surrounds Hispanic first-generation students while differing with other research in this area.

Social Capital

When comparing my findings with other findings that I highlighted in chapter two, some of my findings agreed with previous research, while other findings contradicted previous research. Research around Hispanic first-generation students focuses on their lack of social capital and how they can obtain it in the college environment. Researchers such as Storlie et al. (2016) explained that counselors would be the most significant social capital source in the

college environment, however, the participants in this study did not utilize a counselor and instead, worked with an academic advisor. Other researchers such as Moschetti et al. (2017) argued that peer mentors would be the most beneficial.

My findings suggested that neither the academic advisors nor peer mentors were particularly beneficial to success for this population. A couple of the participants mentioned helpful academic advisors that they met once they began their specific major classes, typically as juniors in college, still, the consensus was that advisors did not help them much apart from registering for courses. Additionally, some of the Big Public University participants explained that they received a peer mentor through the Descendant's Program, yet the impact of peer mentors was limited to answering a few questions. None of the participants, all successful in college, stated that they formed a friendship with their peer mentor.

My findings aligned with empirical findings of Schwartz et al. (2019) because the students clearly needed a broader network to increase their social capital. Many participants I interviewed explained how impactful it was that organizations like the Descendant's Program would bring in guest speakers weekly from the school and the surrounding community. The participants felt that this opportunity allowed them to make several connections, which resulted in more professional opportunities. The participants also described some of the most significant supports on campus, such as friends they met in organizations and staff members, typically within student organizations, who made them feel like they belonged and pushed them to succeed. Like the findings of Schwartz et al. (2019), students need broader networks to feel a sense of relatedness and to feel that they belong.

Academic Summer Preparation Programs

The findings of my study agreed with the findings of Becker et al. (2017), who found that first-generation students, and students from other underserved populations, benefit from summer-bridge programs that focus on academics. The participants I interviewed that were part of the Academic Program stated that the program's most impactful support was the opportunity to take a free course the Summer before freshman year of college and the Summer before sophomore year of college. This summer-bridge program allowed them to understand college courses' expectations and the rigor that the courses entail. It also allowed them to enter college, having already obtained credit in a college course.

Financial Assistance

In the empirical literature section in chapter two, Latino et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of financial assistance and its role in increasing student retention, with which my findings aligned. Almost all the participants I interviewed from Small Private University explained that the most generous support provided by the Service Program was the scholarships that covered most of their tuition. The participants described this support and the organization as “life-changing,” and explained that they might not have been able to attend college if it was not for the Service Program's financial assistance.

Organizations

My findings are most closely aligned with the empirical literature surrounding organizations. In my research, the support programs that the participants identified as impactful all came from the different school organizations. Luedke (2018) discussed the importance of organizations, especially those focusing on a particular culture or race. Organizations such as the Descendant's Program, the Academic Program, and the Service Program did not intentionally

focus on a particular race, ethnicity, or culture, but because they targeted underserved populations in Big State, a vast majority of the members were Hispanic first-generation students.

As a result, the students found the other members to be relatable and found it easy to connect. As Luedke (2018) explained, this allows for increased social and cultural capital development for the organization's members. The participants in my study explained that the relationships they built within their organizations provided them with a sense of belonging, reassurance, and guidance. The participants attributed much of their perseverance in college to these strong bonds.

Methodological Factors

Some methodological factors that happened in my study occurred on their own. For example, due to the global pandemic, I had to video interview the students versus meeting them in person. The video interviews were an improvement during my data analysis because I could go back and replay the interviews. The ability to re-watch the interviews allowed me to study the nonverbal sources of communication from the participant.

Practical Considerations

A crucial problem that I found while speaking with the participants was their lack of enthusiasm surrounding orientation. Not only were the participants unenthusiastic, but some of them also had a hard time remembering orientation, which should serve as a memorable experience for students as they transition from high school to college. Orientation should provide students with a glimpse of a promising future, and it should also provide students with the chance to sign up for clubs or make new friends.

Instead of a significant experience, the participants recalled feeling frustrated by the different aspects of orientation. At Small Private University, there were extra fees for students

who wanted to bring their parents. At Big Public University, those who included their parents had to attend a more extensive general orientation versus the smaller orientation that focused on their major because the university solely provided translators for their Spanish-speaking parents at the general one. The only highlight most participants could recall about orientation was that they got to sign up for courses.

Another familiar premise across my conversations with the participants was that they desired relationships with faculty outside of their major and earlier in their college experience. The participants also did not have a connection with their academic advisor unless the advisor was explicitly connected to the participants' major as well. If students can spend some of their time during the first two years making more meaningful connections with professors, or advisors, then they will be able to increase their social capital.

Hispanic first-generation students may require extra guidance due to their lack of social capital, and their professors should be a source of that assistance. For example, I asked Isabella, a participant with DACA status, if she had the chance to connect with any of her professors. She explained, "I feel like all my classes have been way too big so far to like, [for] them [to] get on a personal level." Isabella attended Big Public University, which has larger class sizes; however, these same feelings were consistent even at Small Private University, where class sizes were small.

It was also consistent that the academic advisors outside of the participants' majors and outside of their organizations were not helpful and only served to allow them to register for classes. For example, Thomas was only able to explain to me one scenario in which he found his advisor to be helpful, "He did help me out with classes. For some reason, I wasn't enrolled or wasn't getting credit for classes.... So, I got that fixed." It is essential that students, especially

populations such as Hispanic first-generation students, find their advisors impactful because they may be struggling with the process of choosing classes and which ones to choose. The students who do not have the assistance of separate advisors in school organizations are especially vulnerable without this connection.

The lack of bonds with the professors and advisors may be a result of a lack of relatedness. Most of the participants expressed that it would have been easier to connect if they could relate to them. Aurora told me she had been reading a book that discussed the disconnect. She stated, “It is about African American families, low income, and how for counseling like the counselors aren’t prepared for what they’re about to hear, what they’re about to see, so that’s why they sometimes can’t do their job successfully.” The need for relatability may also be why the participants found the different organizations' staff much more comfortable to connect with, as the programs chose these staff members to ensure diversity and understand the students’ needs.

Implications

The purpose of this section is to discuss the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. The implications provide the groundwork for colleges to create support systems that will provide students from underserved populations with the necessary aid to help them succeed academically. These implications aim to boost Hispanic first-generation student retention and commencement in colleges across the nation.

Theoretical Implications

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) may provide a useful lens for examining or improving supports because it was developed as a response to behavior theorists and explained that all students need to achieve intrinsic

motivations to succeed. However, applying self-determination theory to the Hispanic first-generation student population or other underserved student populations, rather than describing its general application to all students, may be useful as colleges work to create impactful support programs.

Colleges would be well-served to design support programs around the students' need to feel autonomous, competent, and a sense of relatedness. Newly created support programs should aim to assist students in feeling autonomous. For example, mentors should be provided to the students to ask questions and acquire essential information required to become independent. Additionally, classes, clubs, or organizations should assign students with tasks that would require them to locate resources on campus, so they know where to access those resources on their own in the future.

Support programs could also be created to ensure that students feel competent. Students could achieve competence through free tutoring, free workshops, and opportunities for professional development. Furthermore, summer-bridge programs are an excellent way for colleges to provide students with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the expectations and rigor of college courses, so they feel better prepared. Colleges should create supports that aim to provide students with the knowledge and the skills to thrive in their new environment.

Lastly, colleges should design support programs to help students achieve a sense of relatedness. This piece is crucial, especially for Hispanic first-generation students who may lack social capital upon entering college. Colleges should create supports that help students form bonds with professors, advisors, mentors, and peers. Students will need these bonds to succeed in college because they provide the students with a sense of belonging.

Haerens (2019) explained that when students felt a sense of competence, they were more committed to completing a degree. When a student felt a sense of relatedness, they felt a more substantial commitment to their institution. However, when the student felt autonomous, they were committed to completing a degree, and they felt a strong commitment to their institution. Colleges should ensure that support programs help students feel autonomous, competent, and connected with others. Only then will colleges have self-motivated students who will complete a four-year degree.

Empirical Implications

There have been numerous studies around Hispanic first-generation students, but few that focus on the student's perspective. Based on the findings of the study, the empirical implications provide colleges with insightful methods to improve support programs on campus and to utilize additional resources, such as professors and academic advisors, to assist the students in their collegiate journey. Empirical implications also highlight a consideration for video interviews in the future.

Social Capital

The empirical implications of my findings suggest that schools should provide students with a way to build a broader network to increase their social capital. The Descendant's Program provided weekly guest speakers from the school and the community. Guest speakers are an impactful method to broaden the students' social network and increase their social capital for potential professional opportunities.

Furthermore, my findings contradict previous research that suggests that advisors and peer mentors are crucial forms of support and this tension should be explored further. Colleges might consider professionally training their academic advisors to work with students from

underserved populations so there is a better chance to create a bond, or at the very least, understand how to make the students feel seen. Additionally, the participants I worked with explained that they could ask their peer mentor questions, but a bond did not develop beyond that. When students are assigned peer mentors, schools and school organizations should ensure common interests besides a joint major because a student's major may switch, which may result in a loss of essential social capital.

Academic Summer Preparation Programs

The findings' empirical implications suggest that summer-bridge programs are a significant support for students from underserved populations. These programs provide the students with an opportunity to make friends before school starts, increasing their social capital, and becoming better prepared for their college courses' academic rigor. The students in summer-bridge programs could use this opportunity to gain college credits and learn essential skills that they will need to succeed in the college environment, such as better study habits, note-taking, and time management. Colleges should be implementing summer-bridge programs, free of cost, for students from underserved populations.

Financial Assistance

The study's findings revealed that financial assistance plays a significant role in student retention in college, especially for underserved populations. Many participants I interviewed explained that they chose to attend the specific college because of its financial support. Students selecting a college based on financial support means that if colleges want to support their students' needs and increase retention and commencement rates, they should increase financial assistance.

The Service Program at Small Private University provided scholarships that covered almost all their members' tuition costs. The essential factor in this scenario is that the students did not have to pay this back because it was scholarships. Schools should consider extending financial assistance beyond loans because loans set students back financially, and finances are already a hurdle for many of them. School organizations should provide scholarship opportunities to their members as an incentive and support.

Organizations

Organizations served as the primary source of support for the participants I interviewed. Without the support that these school organizations provided the participants, they may not have transitioned through college so smoothly and successfully. Colleges might consider focusing on supporting their organizations, especially financially. These organizations would benefit from having the budget to assist their members with scholarships, hire diverse faculty, ensure quality training, or host socials, workshops, and professional development training.

Colleges should also ensure that the organizations have a designated space for their members to assemble and to designate as a home away from home. Furthermore, the college should ensure that the organizations that do consist of mostly students from underserved populations are recognized and highly regarded on campus. Many of the interviewed participants explained a lack of awareness or appreciation towards their organization from the college and the student government.

Colleges should recognize that to increase retention and completion rates for students from underserved populations, such as Hispanic first-generation students, they should provide the organizations who host those populations with support, including but not limited to funding. If colleges emphasized the importance of school organizations that serve underserved student

populations, then retention and completion rates may increase. School organizations should be viewed as the most effective support program for these students.

Methodological Implications

The study's main methodological implication was the realization that future research should involve an online platform, such as Zoom, to interview participants. It is valuable to meet with participants in-person to establish a connection and build a rapport, still, researchers should use online video interviews for additional meetings beyond the first conversation. Online video interviews allow for further exploration in nonverbal communication because the researcher can replay the recorded interview multiple times, whereas, in person interviews do not afford this opportunity. The researcher can note the participants' nonverbal communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, or even signals of feelings, such as sweating or consistently looking away better from video recordings. Future research should utilize online videos to understand the information gained from the participants' nonverbal data.

Practical Implications

Orientation serves as the first support system that the college can provide to the students; therefore, it should be impactful. One of the main practical implications concerning orientation is that the school should consider the population. Hispanic students and primarily Hispanic first-generation students have been known to have a close bond with their family (Schwartz et al., 2018), so there should be a consideration that they may want to include their family in the first step of this transition. Students should not have to pay additional fees to include their parents in orientation, and they should not have to worry if the school will provide a translator for their non-English speaking parents. Orientation should be free of charge for the student and their parents. Additionally, orientations should include translators in both the larger general

orientation and the smaller major-specific orientation. A school's willingness to be inclusive of the students' families will only prove to the students that they consider their needs and support them.

Additionally, orientation should serve as an opportunity to enroll in clubs and organizations. As my findings suggest, most of the supports that Hispanic first-generation students identify as impactful come from school organizations; therefore, the schools should promote these organizations during orientation, with the students' opportunity to sign-up. The sooner students become a part of an organization that will provide them with the necessary support to succeed in college, the better, and delaying this opportunity may only result in further hurdles towards retention and commencement. Orientation should emphasize the students' chance to learn about the different clubs and organizations and sign-up before school officially starts.

Furthermore, although it may be common for students to not form bonds with the professors of their general education classes due to either the size of the course or the student's hesitancy to speak with the professor, this is not helpful to students from underserved populations. Because Hispanic first-generation students lack social capital (Storlie et al., 2016), they will need extra assistance during their transition to becoming a college student because they are unfamiliar with the college environment. Professionals should receive training on ensuring that all students succeed in their class and ensure that they are creating an equitable environment.

Joaquin entered the college environment unsure of how to take notes in class. Isabella sat in a class her freshman year of college where the professor asked the students to share where their parents attended college. These situations verify that professors should receive specific training on how to serve the different populations. This training will ensure a smooth transition

and a route to success. Colleges should consider providing the same training to academic advisors, who serve as an additional social capital source for students and are only utilized to approve one's course schedule. The faculty should realize the significant impact they play in these students' lives. The data I gathered suggests that the university should consider providing training to ensure that this reality is understood.

Lastly, colleges should make sure that they are selecting diverse faculty so that the students feel a sense of representation on campus. The participants discussed feeling as if it would have been easier to connect with their advisors if they would have been relatable. Aside from forming a connection, if staff members are from similar backgrounds as the students, students may recognize that individuals from similar backgrounds as themselves are able to find professional success. The participants noted that they did not have role models whose lives they would like to model; ensuring representation and staff diversity would provide them that chance.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study contained two main delimitations and two main limitations. The delimitations were decisions I made to limit and to control the study. The limitations could not be controlled and may potentially weaken the study.

Delimitations

There were two main delimitations in my study. The first delimitation was that I only selected participants who had spent at least two years in college. I did so because I wanted to ensure I had students who had succeeded in the college environment and I also wanted to make sure that they could access the different supports before I interviewed them. I did not anticipate that some participants would have difficulty recalling the transition from high school to college. I also did not expect that they may have a more challenging time remembering detailed

information about supports received during their first two years, such as orientation. I could still obtain quality information from each participant, but I did not initially consider the timeline and how one's memories may be more limited.

The other delimitation in my study was the places I found my participants. To find my participants, I initially contacted presidents of different Hispanic-serving clubs and organizations. I also contacted professors and staff members at the universities to help me distribute my information. As a result of who I contacted, my participants ended up being high-performing leadership types. My participants were the types of students who excelled in AP and honors courses in high school. I also used snowball sampling to find additional participants, which meant that my participants steered me to the same specific population of high-performing students. My study may have been altered by the fact that my participants were mostly all high-performing students.

Limitations

There were two main limitations to my study, the first being the global pandemic that is occurring. The pandemic altered my research in two ways. First, it did not allow me to meet the participants in person for our interviews. For in-person human contact, there is something to be said, resulting in a more personal human connection, resulting in the participant opening up more and being comfortable sharing more about their experiences. In-person interviews may have led to establishing a rapport easier versus establishing a connection through an online platform such as Zoom.

The pandemic also altered my research because the participants had not been attending classes on-campus, living on-campus, or participating in on-campus activities in about half a year. The participants could not utilize all the support systems that being on-campus may have

provided them. The participants had been separated from their most significant supports their organizations provided, such as tutoring, workshops, or socials. The pandemic forced everything to transition online, which may have taken away from their college experience and the available supports, ultimately altering the perspectives that they shared with me.

The second limitation of my study was my bias as a researcher. As I previously discussed, my research was initially inspired by my two best friends, Hispanic first-generation students. Although I tried to limit how my bias impacts my research, I did have the initial perspective that this population of students was not receiving an equitable education based on my best friends' experiences. I utilized bracketing throughout my study to ensure that my biases did not affect or alter the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States. All my participants had participated in AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses during high school, which may cause their preparation for college rigor. Recommendations for future research may include Hispanic first-generation students who did not partake in any honors classes or advanced-level classes while in high school. This research could determine if this population of students may require alternate support programs based on their academic preparation level before entering the college environment.

Future research may also focus on Hispanic first-generation students who do not partake in clubs and organizations in college. Most of my participants were heavily involved in big organizations, such as the Academic Program, the Descendant's Program, the Service Program, and the TRIO Success Program. These organizations provided many of the supports that the

participants deemed valuable. However, what supports do students have that cannot participate in these clubs or organizations due to work schedules, commuting, or necessary family time?

Future research should focus on how underserved populations, such as Hispanic first-generation students, can succeed in college if they cannot participate in clubs and organizations and cannot reap the benefits of the supports that those groups provide?

Lastly, future research should dive deeper into students' experiences from underserved populations who attend a college that incorporates a valuable orientation process. Most of my participants did not feel that the orientation was overly useful. They also felt frustrated with the way their schools did not consider how to include their families in a realistic way. Future research should find colleges that provide a thoughtfully planned, quality orientation process and determine if successful orientations resulted in an easier transition.

Summary

My goal was to understand how Hispanic first-generation students perceived the support programs that the colleges were providing. A lack of research focused on the student perspective, and I wanted to close that gap. I used self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) as my theoretical framework. I also created a central question and three sub-questions to interpret my data around. My central research question was: How valuable do Hispanic first-generation students perceive university-provided support programs to be? My first sub-question asked: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation college students perceive as the most helpful during each of their years in college? Sub-question two stated: Which support systems do Hispanic first-generation students view as unhelpful, and why? Sub-question three asked: What barriers do Hispanic first-generation students experience that might cause them to leave college without a four-year degree?

Seven themes emerged as I analyzed my data: academic support, identity & empowerment, success coaching, emotional & psychosocial supports, retention & commencement hurdles, accessibility, and extrinsic motivation to succeed. These seven themes answered my research questions and helped me to understand the crucial implications of the study. Colleges should consider designing future support programs and revise current support programs to ensure that they are focused on helping the students feel autonomous, competent, and a sense of relatedness with others to achieve a sense of self-motivation. Colleges should also consider the specific needs of the students while developing their orientation program so that the program is impactful and may aid the students' in their transition into college. Future research recommendations include studying Hispanic first-generation students who struggled academically in high school, identifying college support for students who do not join organizations, and understanding how students are affected when colleges conduct an impactful orientation process. This study lays the groundwork for future studies, but additional research is necessary.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION REQUEST

Dear _____:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The title of my research project is Hispanic First-Generation College Student Perceptions of University Support Programs and the purpose of my research is to understand the Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States.

I am writing to request that my recruitment information be distributed to the members of your organization.

Participants will be asked to contact me if they meet the criteria for participants and are interested in participating. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. Participants will begin by filling out the consent form, then they will answer journal prompts through a Google Doc link, followed by one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and member checking.

For education research, school permission should be on approved letterhead with the appropriate signature(s): Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to _____. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Katelynn Wheeler
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Katelynn Wheeler:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled [Title of Research Proposal], I have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

[The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.]

[The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.]

[I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.]

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The purpose of my research is to understand the Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be Hispanic/Latino, a first-generation student, a full-time student, taking in-person classes (unless the pandemic has made your university transition into an online model), between the ages of 18-24, and must have completed at least two full years of college. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a list of journal prompts that will be distributed via Google Docs, participate in a one-on-one interview, participate in a small focus group, and participate in member checking. It should take approximately six hours spread across a four-week period to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please contact me at _____ for more information.

A consent document will be given to you via email after you contact me to discuss the research. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me via email at your earliest convenience. The consent form must be received prior to the start of data collection.

Sincerely,

Katelynn Wheeler
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Hispanic First-Generation College Student Perceptions of University Support Programs

Principal Investigator: Katelynn Wheeler, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be Hispanic/Latino, a first-generation student, a full-time student, taking in-person classes (unless the pandemic has made your university transition into an online model), between the ages of 18-24, and must have completed at least two full years of college. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the Hispanic first-generation student perspectives on provided support programs at universities across the United States.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete the journal prompts that will be sent to you via a Google Docs link (this should take between 30 minutes to an hour)
2. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher (this interview should take between one to two hours and will be audio recorded)
3. Participate in a focus group with a maximum of seven other participants who qualified for the study from your university (this focus group should take between one to two hours and it will be audio recorded)
4. Participate in member checking (member checking should take between thirty minutes to an hour)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential to improve future support programs designed for Hispanic first-generation college students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only

the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer that will be kept in a safe and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

- Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

• Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

- The researcher conducting this study is Katelynn Wheeler. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Vacchi.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

- If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

- By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: JOURNAL PROMPTS

1. Growing up, how did you feel about school and your level of academic achievement?

Please explain.

2. What were the greatest factors that made you decide to go to college?
3. Upon entering college, what were your feelings about being considered a first-generation student and what was the cause of those specific emotions?
4. What factors have contributed to your perseverance in college, and why are these specific factors so important?
5. How do you think being a first-generation student has affected your college experience thus far?
6. What advice would you give to other Hispanic First-generation students as they begin their college journey?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you please introduce yourself to me, anything you think is essential, as well as your educational background up to today?
2. What made you want to go to college?
3. Why did you choose this specific university?
4. How did your family feel about your decision to go to college, and why did they think this way?
5. Describe how your college experience has met, or not met, your expectations.
6. What do you feel has been the most challenging aspect of being at a university? Please explain.
7. How do you think your college coursework compares to the coursework at your high school?
8. Describe the extent to which any of your new friends have helped to guide you in your journey to a college degree.
9. If you have had access to a counselor or advisor, how have they assisted you with your transition?
10. How do you think your college experience compares to the experience of your peers?
11. How has (or hasn't) your college supported you in this transition?
12. How has your college supported you in your transition into college life?
13. Can you think of any additional supports that your college could provide that would be helpful to you?
14. How would those other supports assist you in adjusting to college life?
15. What role do you think your self-efficacy has played in your success thus far?

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Briefly introduce yourself to the other members of the group as if you have not met them before.
2. What is the decision-making process you went through that led you to the decision to attend college and to attending your specific university?
3. What role did your family play in your education, beginning from your elementary years up through your time at university?
4. What challenges do you think you face regarding your education that you identify as “unique challenges”?
5. What support systems have the university put into place that has assisted you with your unique challenges, and why have those specific supports been so useful?
6. Can you describe additional supports that could be put in place to assist you better that have not been offered to you thus far?
7. What do Hispanic first-year students need to know before starting college?

APPENDIX H: THEMES & RELATED CODES

Themes & Related Codes

| Themes | Related Codes |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Academic Support</i> | Organizational requirements, staff, summer-bridge programming |
| 2. <i>Identity & Empowerment</i> | Culture, diversity and representation, designated spaces |
| 3. <i>Success Coaching</i> | Workshops, professional development, autonomy training |
| 4. <i>Emotional & Psychosocial Supports</i> | Friends, home away from home, feelings of belonging, guidance, and reassurance |
| 5. <i>Retention & Commencement Hurdles</i> | Microaggressions and institutional racism, loss of support from first to second year, working, imposter syndrome, family expectations, consideration of population |
| 6. <i>Accessibility</i> | Financial support, DACA status, early interventions |
| 7. <i>Extrinsic Motivation to Succeed</i> | Financial stability, family and upward mobility, purpose |