

# Support for Success: An Exploration of the Support Networks of Latino Students in the College Assistance Migrant Program

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## Abstract

*Research on Latino college students finds high attrition and low completion rates at the four-year level. This study explores the support networks of Latino students in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) during their first year in college. Surveys and interviews were used to determine which individuals the students went to for support on academic matters, educational and occupational plans, personal matters, and information on job opportunities. The main goal of this study is to learn about the individuals that form the students' support networks and the resources that emerge from the ties to those individuals for each type of support. The students were able to gain valuable resources through these ties, which helped them persist in college and navigate the school system. Findings indicate that CAMP staff and family are important sources of emotional and informational support for the students and are helpful in their adjustment and persistence in college.*

## Introduction

Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the United States. Latinos are projected to make up about 25 percent of the population by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). In some states, such as California, Latinos will make up over 50 percent of the population by 2050 (State of California 2007). Despite their growing number, Latinos remain one of the least educated ethnic groups in the U.S. This is creating problems and it will exacerbate them if this trend continues. Latinos will not be able to compete for occupations that require educational credentials beyond high school, thus hindering their role in the economy and the social conditions of the Latino population. This will not only affect Latinos, but all of society because this will create economic hardship for all of the population, such as a decrease in per capita income (Gandara and Contreras 2009).

The educational attainment of Latinos has seen some improvement, but there are still many problems. One of these is the high attrition rates that exist at all levels of education for many Latino groups. Even though the dropout rate has declined from 1980 to 2007 for many racial/ethnic groups, the dropout rate was higher for Latinos than for Whites and Blacks every year (Planty et al. 2009).

Two other big concerns are the low college enrollment and completion rates for Latinos. In 2007, the percentage of Latinos ages 18 to 24 enrolled in a college or university was 27. The enrollment rate for Non-Hispanic Whites was 43 percent, and for non-Hispanic Blacks it was 33 percent (U.S. Department of Education 2008). The number of Latinos completing a college degree is much bleaker. In 2005, about 11 percent of 25 to 29 year-old Latinos had completed a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education 2005). In comparison, 17 percent of Blacks and 33 percent of Whites had completed a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education 2005).

The retention of Latinos in higher education has been widely researched and several factors are considered important for their success and persistence in school. One important factor is social support. Research has shown that social support from family, friends, faculty, and college staff can help students adjust to college and help prevent them from dropping out. Social support can make a big difference in the students' decisions to remain in school and help them succeed academically.

Emotional and informational support is crucial for Latino students who are trying to navigate the educational system. Latino students often don't possess the necessary social or cultural capital to succeed in school. This pushes them to rely on a variety of supportive individuals outside the family structure to provide the resources

and information necessary to succeed academically and persist in college. These individuals are vital for the retention of Latinos in postsecondary institutions. Students can gain access to supportive individuals through college assistance programs intended to assist minority students get a postsecondary degree. One such program is the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), which is a federally funded scholarship program that assists migrant or seasonal farmworkers and their children during their first year in college.

This study explores the social support networks of Latino students in CAMP. The primary focus of this study is to learn about the individuals who make up the students' support networks and the resources they provided to the students that helped the students adjust and persist in college. For this study, a social support network was defined as the group of people the students had the confidence of going to and that they can count on for help and resources. The term "resource" can mean many things, including material resources, but for this study it is used primarily to refer to the information, assistance, guidance, and emotional support the students need to be successful students in college. The students were asked to indicate the individuals they would go to for four types of support: academic matters, educational and occupational planning, personal matters, and job opportunities. Their ties to the individuals in their support networks revealed who was or could be providing resources to them and to some extent the assistance they received.

This study is situated in social network and social capital theory. Social network theory is used to study the social structure by examining the different ties linking people in society and how, through these ties, people can gain access to resources and opportunities. It is mainly used to study how ties to individuals with higher statuses, prestige, and wealth can provide people with access to better job opportunities and resources. To refer to these networks, Wellman (1983) uses the phrase "the social distribution of possibilities," which he describes "as the unequal availability of resources such as information, wealth, and influence as well as the structures through which people may have access to these resources" (P. 163). People gain access to resources by having relationships with individuals that have some degree of control over resources.

Bourdieu defines "social capital" as the actual and potential resources that result from membership in a group. He indicates that access to social capital is affected by networks: "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (Bourdieu 1986:249). He also provides the framework to understand how the use and access to resources is affected by race, class, and ethnicity. Individuals who come from ethnic minority groups and lower social classes are disadvantaged because they generally lack the ties that lead to highly valued resources in society, and have not been accumulating the resources upper-class individuals have been enjoying over time through their ties to higher status individuals. The theories indicate that the ties between individuals do not guarantee resources, but point to the potential resources that could emerge from such relationships.

This study sets out to learn about the individuals that form the students' support networks and the resources that emerge from the ties to those individuals for each type of support. Through these ties, the students were able to gain valuable resources that helped them navigate the school system and persist in college. Since CAMP students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the social capital they have becomes crucial in their pursuit of a college degree. They rely on supportive individuals for resources that they would not have gotten from their families. In several of his works, Stanton-Salazar (1997; 2001; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995) discusses the development of relationships between racial minority children and institutional agents. He defined "institutional agents" as the individuals that have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities (1997). He admits that institutional agents can reproduce racial, class, and gender inequalities, but they can also help ethnic minority individuals overcome social structural barriers and help them achieve school success and social mobility (1997).

## **Social Support**

Social support can be one of the most important factors for Latino students when it comes to persisting in school. Social support in general can be instrumental for students in various ways, such as lowering stress and helping in the adjustment to college. Higher levels of social support have been linked to less distress for Latina college students of Mexican descent (Castillo and Hill 2004). For Latino students, social support has been found to be related to college adjustment (Jamara, Belgrave, and Zea 1996).

The possession of social support is important, but where the social support is coming from is just as critical. Social support from various sources is very important for minority students in order to succeed academically in college. Students' inclination to mobilize support through the creation of new networks, and the maintenance of and reliance upon old networks of support may help student do better academically (Saunders and Serna 2004). Support

from faculty and staff is crucial for the retention of Latino college students (Hernandez 2000). Faculty/staff mentorship helps decrease academic non-persistence decisions among Latino undergraduate students (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales 2005).

Friends and peers are also instrumental for Latino students in academic persistence and retention (Gloria et al. 2005; Hernandez 2000). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) found peers and friends to be a good source of support and helpful in college adjustment for Latino students. In fact, peers may be a more important factor in school performance patterns for working-class and migrant students than peers for students from more advantaged and privileged positions (Gibson, Gandara, and Koyama 2004). Nonminority peers can be crucial for disadvantaged students. Peers that are non-ethnic minorities and have higher socioeconomic status can be important sources of support and can push ethnic students to take more challenging classes, which will help them make the college transition (Gandara 1995).

Family support and encouragement are especially important in academic persistence for Latino students. Even though parents and siblings may have low educational attainment, having family members that are supportive of the student's educational aspirations is crucial for academic success and decisions to persist in school. Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) found that social support was the strongest predictor for non-persistence decisions in college. They also found students with educational encouragement and social support from family had a decrease in academic non-persistence decisions. Encouragement and support from family, especially from mothers, are important factors that positively affect the retention of Latino students (Gandara 1995; Hernandez 2000). Family also played an important role for Latino students in deciding to attend college and in their transition and adjustment in college (Hurtado et al. 1996). Older siblings with college experience were an important source of support because they provided resources and knowledge about college and the college application process that parents were not able to provide to Latina students (Ceja 2006; Gonzalez, Stoner, and Jovel 2003).

## **Migrant Students**

The majority of students that participate in CAMP are migrant students from Latino backgrounds. Migrant students are reported to have the lowest school completion rates of any other population group in public schools (Garza, Reyes, and Trueba 2004). This is due to constant moving, economic hardships, limited English proficiency, and differences in cultural values between the school system and that of Latino children that affect the school performance of migrant students.

The interruptions caused by seasonal migration create educational challenges for migrant children. This has led to the creation of state and federal programs to help migrant students overcome some of the educational challenges they face due to their migrant status. In 1966, the Migrant Education Program, part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was established to help migrant students (Kuenzi 2002). Programs intended to aid migrant students are essential for their educational advancement and eventual social mobility. Programs such as CAMP can help students not only obtain the necessary information and knowledge, but also provide them personal and academic support (Reyes 2007).

In order for migrant students to advance in the educational system, they must gain the needed knowledge and resources to navigate it. This can be done through participation in programs for migrant students and/or from supportive individuals. Families of migrant students are not able to provide the necessary information regarding college, but they are important in helping them decide to attend college (McHatton, Zalaquett, and Cranson-Gingras 2006). Migrant students have indicated that a support system is necessary to learn about school opportunities and develop a desire to pursue college and teachers and school staff can provide this support (McHatton et al. 2006). Reyes (2009) found that significant interactions with educators can give "a sense of agency, knowledge, and/or empowerment to the students" (P. 115). This can motivate them to perform better academically.

## **College Assistance Migrant Program**

College assistance programs have been implemented successfully to recruit and retain minority students in higher education (Abrego 2008; Aguirre and Martinez 1993). The programs are necessary and have been instrumental in helping Latino students adjust to the new environment and the rigors of college life (Hurtado and Kamimura 2003). Programs such as CAMP have been successful in helping students adjust to college. CAMP is a federally-funded program that assists migrant or seasonal farm workers and their children during their first year of postsecondary studies. During the first year in college, CAMP provides financial assistance and supportive services, such as counseling, mentoring, and tutoring. Federal spending affects the number of CAMP programs at colleges

and universities every year. In 2008, there were 38 CAMP programs nationally, serving over 2,000 students (U.S. Department of Education 2008). The program has been quite successful in accomplishing two of its goals set in 2004 by the General Performance and Results Act (GPRA): successful completion of the first academic year in college and continuing in a postsecondary institution. From 2004 to 2007, the percentage of CAMP participants that completed the first academic year at a postsecondary institution in good standing ranged from 75 percent to 91 percent (U.S. Department of Education 2008). For those same years, the percentage of CAMP participants that after completing their first year in college went on to their second year ranged from 91 percent to 96 percent (U.S. Department of Education 2008). The program's retention rate of students into the second year is impressive, considering the national average retention rates of first-time college freshmen into the second year of college for 2004 to 2007 has been 75.7 percent (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2007). Overall, CAMP has been found to have a positive effect on educational attainment and academic success (Willison and Jang 2009).

This study highlights the CAMP program at a large public institution in the Intermountain West. The program, which has been operating at this institution for 25 years, admits about 40 students every year. The program has adapted to meet the needs of the student population it serves. Every year before the school year begins, the program hosts an orientation, where both the parents and students are encouraged to attend to familiarize them with how the program works, the services they provide, and financial aid. After the orientation, the incoming students and CAMP personnel go on a retreat to get both the students and staff acquainted with one another and begin establishing the relationships between the students that will be crucial for their adjustment to college. CAMP offers a class for all the students to take both semesters they are in the program. During the class the students learn about scholarship opportunities, school resources, community leaders, and how to construct resumes and cover letters. The course alternates between class instruction and study sessions where the students are given time to work on their homework and have tutors available to assist them. There is a computer lab for the students where they can go to between classes and do homework. Students meet regularly with assigned CAMP counselors. CAMP staff members are available daily for the students who need advising or assistance of any kind.

## **Data and Methods**

### **Survey**

The survey portion was conducted in a class CAMP designed for the students in the program. Questionnaires were available in English and Spanish and were distributed to all the students in the class two weeks before the end of their second semester in the program. All students completed the questionnaire in English. The questionnaire consisted of demographic and social support questions.

The demographic portion consisted of questions that addressed age, gender, race/ethnicity, generational status, language use, grade point average, future educational plans, and familial education. For the social support portion, the students were asked to select an individual to whom they would go in seeking four types of support: (1) help or advice on academic decisions (choosing classes, tutoring, etc); (2) guidance and information on educational and occupational plans; (3) help or advice on personal nonacademic matters (experiencing personal, economic, or family problems); and (4) information about current job opportunities (Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995; Stanton-Salazar 2001).

All participants in this study were in the CAMP program. Twenty-six out of 40 students in the program completed the survey. Of these, 23 meet the study criteria of first-year CAMP students of Latino/a heritage. For this study Latino/a heritage was determined as those participants who self-identified as Latinos or had one parent or both parents born in a Latin American country.

The sample consisted of 14 males and 9 females. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 36 years, with an average age of 19.65 years ( $SD = 3.688$ ). All participants were of Mexican descent. The majority of participants were born in the United States ( $n = 17$ ) and the rest in Mexico ( $n = 5$ ). Over half of respondents ( $n = 14$ ) were living in residence halls. Three respondents reported living with parents or had other living arrangements ( $n = 5$ ). The students' self-reported GPAs ranged from 2.70 to 4.00 ( $M = 3.427$ ,  $SD = .402$ ). The majority of the respondents ( $n = 22$ ) reported that they were very sure they would enroll for classes at a college or university for the following semester. Most of the respondents ( $n = 19$ ) indicated they were very sure they were going to graduate from college. Two of the respondents indicated that they would probably graduate and two did not know.

Nineteen of the respondent's mothers were born in Mexico, while two were born in the U.S (two students did not respond). All of the respondent's fathers had been born in Mexico. Nearly all of the respondents ( $n = 22$ )

reported the first language spoken at home to be Spanish. Twenty of them reported Spanish to be the language usually spoken at home. There was low educational attainment reported among both mothers and fathers. For the mothers, 16 did not finish high school, four graduated high school or received a GED, one went on to college, but did not graduate, and one graduated from college. Among the fathers, 20 did not finish high school, one graduated from high school or received a GED, and one completed some college. Over half of the respondents (16 out of 23) had at least one sibling who was either attending or had attended college.

## Interview

All interviews were conducted in English. An incentive was provided to the students to participate in the interviews. The focus of the interviews was on the individuals the students went to for each source of support. For each type of support, the students were asked to identify the individuals they had confidence in approaching for support, to give an example of how the individual helped them, how often they sought out this person, how recently they had done so, and whether they considered the help or advice given useful or helpful.

Five out of the 23 students that completed the survey participated in the interview portion of this study. The interview was designed to give a more in-depth look into the individuals that provide support for students in CAMP.

All five students, *Ruben, Laura, Angela, Martina, and Samuel*<sup>1</sup> were born in the United States and were second-generation immigrants. Ruben, 18, is a Marketing major with a 3.6 GPA. He currently has an older sister attending college. Laura, 19, has a 4.0 GPA and is majoring in Bilingual Education. She has three younger siblings and is the first in her family to attend college. Angela, who is 19, is majoring in Elementary Education and has a 3.7 GPA. She has an older brother attending a community college in a different state. Martina, 19, is Nursing major with a GPA of 3.7. She has two younger siblings and one older sibling attending college. Samuel, 18, is majoring in Art and has a 3.8 GPA. He has a younger sister and is the first male in his family to graduate from high school and attend college.

## Findings

### Survey

Participants were asked to identify an individual they would go to for each type of support. The majority of respondents indicated one person they would go to, but there were three or four that indicated several persons for each type of support. The respondents that indicated using more than one person for a specific type of support will be discussed at the end of each support section.

*Academic decisions.* Over half of the students (n = 11) listed CAMP staff as a source of support for help or advice on academic decisions (choosing classes, tutoring, etc.). The other students reported non-CAMP counselors, friends, and family as sources of support. Three students listed more than one source of support, however, all three included CAMP staff as one source of support and two included friends. Other sources included family and professor/instructor.

*Educational and occupational plans.* Most common source of support for guidance on educational and occupational planning was CAMP staff (n = 11). The second most common source was non-CAMP counselors, followed by family. Three students reported more than one source of support. The following were sources of support listed by these students: family members (n = 2), CAMP staff (n = 2), professor/instructor (n = 2), friend (n = 1), and non-CAMP counselors (n = 1).

*Personal matters.* For advice on personal non-academic matters (personal, economic, or family problems), the most common sources of support listed by students were family (n= 9), friends (n = 6), CAMP staff (n = 3), and

<sup>1</sup> All names for student and staff members used in this study are pseudonyms to help protect the identity of the participants.

other (n = 1). Four students reported several sources of support. Three listed family members and friends and two listed CAMP staff. Other sources were professor/instructors, non-camp counselors, and other.

*Job opportunities.* The majority of the students (n = 15) reported CAMP staff as a source of support for information about job opportunities. Other sources of support included family, friends, and other. There were four students that listed more than one source of support including family (n = 3), friends (n = 3), CAMP staff (n = 3), and non-CAMP counselors.

Table 1: Survey findings

<u>Type of Support</u>	<b>Source of Support</b>				
	<u>CAMP Staff</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Friends</u>	<u>Counselors</u>	<u>Other</u>
Academic Matters	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)	0 (0%)
Educational and Occupational Plans	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	0 (0%)
Personal Matters	3 (16%)	9 (47%)	6 (32%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)
Job Opportunities	15 (79%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)

Statistical tests were not run because of the small sample size. There weren't any obvious differences in the individuals the students went to for support on any of the variables examined (gender, age, birth place, housing, and GPA). The majority of the students would go to CAMP staff for help on academic decisions, educational and occupational plans, and job opportunities. Most of the students who did not have any siblings with college experience reported going to non-CAMP counselor for academic decisions and educational and occupational plans. In contrast, most of the students that had siblings with college experience reported going to CAMP staff.

## Interview

*Academic decisions.* Support on academic matters is important for first-year students in college. The students are unfamiliar with the academic process and unaware of the resources available to them on campus (for example, tutoring). It is important to learn who the students are relying upon for this crucial information. The students were asked to indicate whom they would have the confidence of going to if they needed advice on academic matters. CAMP staff was listed as a source of support by all five students. Samuel found the CAMP counselors to be particularly helpful in academic matters:

This is my first year and for all of that stuff, because nobody in my family is ever been in college, I would ask the counselors. [I would ask] the CAMP counselors mostly because they seem to know the kind of position I'm in and my unfamiliarity [with college]. I wouldn't feel stupid to ask them a question that might be, you know, really clear to other people. So mostly, I talk[ed] to them my first semester and [then] I kind of went on my own. [The first semester] I didn't really have a major or anything. This semester though, now that I have more of a focus of what I want to be doing, I sought out the teachers that taught the subjects I liked, and I asked them, where do I need

to be and things like that. [I] balanced it with CAMP's advice and tried to find what would be the best decision [for me], but for the most part it was CAMP.

Samuel, like most first-generation college students, expressed unfamiliarity and uncertainty when it came to academic matters at the university level. He was not afraid to ask for help and was aware of the resources and support CAMP offers through its staff. Samuel was also conscious that the program was designed to help students with his background adjust to college and to succeed academically in their first year at a postsecondary institution. This aided in his decision to seek out the CAMP counselors.

The other students, like Samuel, said they would go to the main CAMP counselors for help on academic matters. Each student is assigned to one of the two counselors, but there were three students that would go to both counselors for help. Students also listed other CAMP staff as sources of support, particularly for help on homework in areas such as math or English.

The students reported going to the CAMP counselors mostly for advice and guidance regarding class selection. They expressed unfamiliarity with the classes offered at the university. Angela expressed anxiety when it came to choosing classes and attending college in general. Here she tells how her CAMP counselor provided support for her:

When I first met Cristina [a CAMP counselor], she was really willing to help [me].... [She said] we can just work [things] out, ... just come and see me. I remember because I did not know how the whole college thing worked and I [was] overwhelmed. What the heck is going on? What are these classes with these numbers mean? It was good to have them there, definitely. I'm glad I was able to do CAMP my first year because I would have been way lost with not knowing anyone that's from here.

Angela also mentioned her older brother, who is attending a community college, as a source of support for academic matters. She described her brother as her role model and their relationship as close, even though there was a five-year age difference between them and they were attending different colleges in different states. Angela said that her brother helped her through college and provided guidance in areas with which she was unfamiliar and had no previous experience.

When asked how often they went to their source of support, the male students reported going to the individuals on a bi-weekly basis. The female students reported going to them at least once a week, if not more.

All students reported going to a CAMP counselor or other staff members for support on academic matters. Students described having a lack of knowledge in dealing with academic matters, such as knowing which classes are available, how to register, and which classes they need to take for their major. With the help and advice the students received from CAMP staff, the students became familiar and more knowledgeable in the process of choosing classes and other matters. This aided in the students' adjustment and persistence in college by providing crucial information that will be used by the students in subsequent years in college. This prepares the students to make these kinds of decisions on their own without so much assistance from others. Becoming familiar with some academic processes at the university may help increase the students' comfort and decrease their feeling of alienation that was a result of the lack of knowledge in those processes. This would also help students adapt to college and could increase the students' decision to persist in college.

*Educational and occupational plans.* CAMP staff and counselors played an integral part in providing guidance and information on educational and occupational planning to the students. Teresa, the follow up and career coordinator, was the person that most of the students would go to for support in this area. She is the instructor for the CAMP University Success class, required for students in the program. During this class, the students learn about career planning and the resources available on campus. There are also guest speakers invited to the classes.

Students cited the homework she assigned the class as really helpful for educational and occupational planning. Martina found the cover letter and resume done for class to be useful for jobs and applying to scholarships. Another assignment that was valuable to the students was planning out classes for the next four semesters. Angela found this assignment to be helpful in keeping her on track with the classes that she needed to be taking and avoiding the unnecessary classes that would have delayed her graduation. She also mentioned that this assignment and CAMP staff encouraged her to seek support outside the CAMP program. She sought assistance from a counselor from the center that offers academic counseling on campus. Angela listed Teresa and this counselor as sources of support planning out her classes.

Samuel listed Cristina, his CAMP counselor, as one of the persons he sought for support on educational and occupational planning. He is an Art major and plans to transfer into a university in Chicago to study film next school year. Samuel indicated that she was helpful and supportive of his plans to go to school in Chicago:

I know that she would like it if I would stay because I'm a good student. I have a pretty high GPA and I think I represent the program fairly well. And it would be, you know in her professional best interest to try to keep me [here at the university], as [an] example of what the CAMP program can do.... When I told her that I'd like to go to Chicago and study film, she was just like okay, let's do it. She helped me get set up with everything, get in touch with the counselors [and] the staff there, kept me on a deadline of when to get my stuff turned in and get everything done, my FAFSA and everything. I think that's like a good example because it's just her stepping outside of, you know, what she ideally should want with being a counselor ... and more just looking at my best interest[s]. Like if you want to do this and you're willing to put the work in, then I'll help you the best I can.

Students had a difficult time telling me how often they went to the CAMP staff for support in this area. Since they had class twice a week and often did their homework in a computer lab designated for CAMP students, they saw the staff almost every day. Laura, who listed Teresa as a source of support, had this trouble when asked how often she went to Teresa:

[It] seems like I go to Teresa a lot because I'm in the lab a lot, so I see her all the time.... That's a tricky question because like I said I see her all the time, so it feels like I go [to] her every day. I don't know exactly how often.

CAMP staff was a major source of support for educational and occupational planning. The class the students took from the CAMP staff was beneficial to them. The assignments given for the class were valuable to the students and the students recognized this. Planning out classes and constructing a resume were considered helpful in looking at the future and in making the connections between what they are doing now and how it affects their educational and occupational goals. An understanding of how what they are doing now is linked to the future is crucial to the students because it gives them something to look forward to. This could help them remain in school by giving direction to the students' educational aspirations and reassuring them that they are on the right path.

*Personal matters.* Students were asked to name a person they went to for help or advice on personal non-academic matters, for example if they were experiencing personal, economic, or family problems. This area of support is important for academic persistence because non-academic matters are often the push factor for students when they decide to leave school. Students reported going to both family members and CAMP staff.

Martina and Ruben reported going to family members for personal matters and preferred to keep personal matters within the family. Ruben went to his sister for support:

There's been times when I've needed like [a] little bit of economic support and she's been able to support me on that, especially in the first semester when I was running scarce on money before I found a job. When I have troubles, over here I could just talk to her and let it out. You know just knowing it's going to stay in that trust, that circle of trust.

His sister has been a source of support for Ruben, but he does not go to her as frequently as he would like because she is attending a technical college in a different part of the state. He does, however, keep in touch with her over the telephone and she had recently visited him.

Students also reported going to CAMP staff. Angela listed Gabriela, a CAMP counselor, as a person who provided help and advice on personal matters. Angela was the first one in her family to "officially" move out of the house. Her older brother attended college close to the family home, about 50 miles away. However, she decided to go to a university that is over 550 miles away from her parents' home. Angela had a hard time adjusting to college and being away from her family, but she recalled how Gabriela was able to help her during that difficult time:

It was probably the beginning of the first semester for me and I was still like, I hate [it] here, I hate it, take me back.... I went to Gabriela and I was, like, I miss my family, I can't handle this, take



me back. She's just telling me it's going to be good *mija*, you know, ... calming me down. I was definitely crying ... and I didn't have a cell phone at the time ... so for a whole month I was borrowing people's cell phones, and be like mom, hi. I'm like not trying to cry because if I start crying, she's going to start crying you know. I'm, like, this is not going to work. So I definitely went to Gabriela about that and so she definitely saw me cry. I was lonely, but I mean now she's even told me, you know, like you make friends, you adjust to the college life and everything .... She's, like, I've seen this before, you know, you like freak out the first month or two weeks, but you'll make it, you get used to it. So I'm like, okay, I will survive. You know I'm gonna make it, so it was nice to do that and just to calm down. Talk it out, you know, not freak out.

Laura, Martina, and Samuel reported going to Maria, the Associate Director of the CAMP program for financial matters. They went to her when they had trouble with FAFSA, getting financial aid, or needed money. Samuel went to her when he ran out of money on his student ID card, which works like a debit card around campus:

[She is] the person that handles the money for the program and she's nice. She's really helpful. She's surprisingly reasonable, like there [were] a couple instances where I just needed some money ... and she told me that CAMP was thinking about taking care of the last dorm payment. I was like, oh well, if she did that, I could have the money that I would be spending on my dorm payment and buy all this food with it. She'll really work with the students and go out of her way to get grants and things. [She's] another person that's just really passionate of what they do. I usually gravitate towards people like that because I feel like they actually do take what they're doing seriously. So Maria would be, would be the person I go to talk to about like personal, financial struggles or stuff like that.

Students that were experiencing financial problems related to school went to Maria for support. Laura and Samuel reported going to Maria, but not with much frequency. Martina had been going to her throughout the year because she had been having trouble getting financial aid:

I've been working with her all year as I said because I was trying to get Pell [Grants]. That was based on my parents' income and so I don't know. There's an issue with it so I had to wait for this year's taxes, which was a real hassle. She helped me through all of that. I think in total it was a hundred and five pages long of just tax information and stuff I had to turn in into financial aid.

Students also reported going to CAMP counselors, but Maria was usually the person that provided assistance in difficult cases like Martina's. Students were aware of Maria's expertise on financial matters, and when students were experiencing difficulties receiving financial aid or other school finance problems they usually went to Maria or were referred to her by the staff.

Family and CAMP staff were important sources of support for the students in personal matters. The resources they provided came in the form of consolation, money, and information. A great deal of trust and comfort would be needed between the student and the persons they went to for personal matters. This shows that some of the students formed close personal relationships with the CAMP staff.

*Job opportunities.* CAMP staff was a big source of support in providing information on employment opportunities to the students. Teresa, the follow up and career coordinator, was the person most of the students would go to for information on employment. Teresa often sends e-mails to current and former CAMP students about internships and job opportunities. Laura found the e-mails to be beneficial even though she already has a job:

She's given me a few e-mails and she's also given me, like, hard copies, when I'm there of, like, applications and qualifications you need to have for certain jobs and stuff... She knows I have a job. She knows my major and anything that sounds like it would tie in somehow, she would just give it to me, even though she knows I have a job. It's good because then I am learning about these opportunities.

Angela was not interested in working her first year in college, but she also found the e-mails and different activities for CAMP class useful:

I should have done work-study maybe this semester or last semester, but ... I didn't want to work because I'm still trying to get used to everything. I don't want to be stressed with like having a job.... But, Teresa [would] definitely be for that [providing information on job opportunities] and when we had ... a career fair thing at the SUB, that was also pretty cool, get[ting] to know little businesses here.... I really don't know [the area] still and I've lived here since like August.... So it was nice to get the exposure, I guess for careers or just like part-time [jobs and] summer job internships. So I think that was good.

The students had confidence in going to Teresa because she was the CAMP class instructor and she regularly was in the computer lab for CAMP students. Students found the e-mails and her presence in the computer lab convenient. The students usually go to the lab in between classes. Martina, who commutes to school every day, is often in the computer lab and found it advantageous to have Teresa there:

[I go to Teresa] mostly just because I see her on campus. I don't really have time to go seek employment on my own, like off-campus because I spent so much time here.... I don't want to be running around when I have to come back to class here in an hour.... It's easier for me to just go to the CAMP office and talk [to] Teresa.

Students reported going to CAMP staff for information on job opportunities. The students may not have needed the information, but they found it useful for future reference. Learning about job opportunities and employers around campus helped the students see the different employment opportunities available to them after their first year in college. Most of them will not be receiving as much financial aid as they did the first year, therefore learning about employment opportunities will help them see that there are other ways to pay for school.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings from both the survey and interviews reveal that for support on academic matters, educational and occupational planning, and information about job opportunities, the majority of students went to CAMP staff. Family was also mentioned, but less frequently. Students that sought support from family for academic matters usually went to older siblings that had attended or were attending college. For personal matters, most of the students reported going to their family for support, but CAMP staff was also listed as a source of support.

Family was important in the support networks of students. Older siblings that were attending college or had previously attended college were critical for the students because they provided encouragement, information, guidance, and were a source of support. They are able to help the students persist in school by validating the students' fears, doubts, and experiences. Parents were probably not mentioned because they lacked knowledge and experience with the educational system. The students' reliance on support from older siblings with college experience on academic matters is significant because it demonstrates how individuals with experience in and familiarity with in higher education are necessary critical in their support networks once they are in college. Since they come from families with low educational levels, the family support available to them is severely limited to those few that have some education beyond high school. This also limits the resources the students are able to obtain from their family. Therefore, most of the students' family members are not able to help or guide them once they are in college.

CAMP staff members were also crucial in the students' social support network. It was expected for CAMP staff to be an important source of support in matters related to academics, but not for personal matters. This demonstrates that CAMP staff went beyond their role as educators and formed close personal relationships with many of the students. These relationships facilitated the transmission of expectations, norms, and resources to the students, which were crucial for college adjustment and academic persistence. This also may be helping CAMP staff to accomplish the program's goals: successful completion of the first year in college and continuing their college education. The close relationships between the students and CAMP staff could be a possible explanation as to why the CAMP program is so successful.

This study contains important limitations. First, the results should not be generalized to all Latino postsecondary students or even all CAMP students. Second, the small sample size did not make it possible to see any differences (such as gender, future educational plans, and acculturation levels) in the individuals they went to for support.

The students' support networks indicate that the students had to go outside their family and to individuals with experience in higher education. Ties to these supportive individuals gave students the resources necessary to

navigate through the school system. Most of the students reported going to CAMP staff. CAMP staff would be considered what Ricardo Stanton-Salazar called “institutional agents.” Students in the CAMP program who formed relationships with CAMP staff were gaining resources and support necessary to persist in college. These relationships were crucial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, like the participants in the CAMP program.

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