



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Edén Cortez for the degree of Master of Science in College Student Services Administration presented on April 16, 2013

Title: The Transfer Process of Latina/o Students from Community College to the University: What are their Experiences?

Abstract approved:

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This qualitative study explores the experiences of Latina/o transfer students from a two-year to a four-year institution. Six Latina/o transfer student from the Pacific Northwest participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The researcher utilized Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, Validation Theory, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology to bring forth the narratives of the participants to the study. From the collected narratives, five prevalent themes emerged, they are: a) self-doubts of education attainment, b) challenge and support in the transfer process, c) validation of educational path, d) sense of belonging, and e) perceptions affecting degree attainment. Each theme contributed in several forms to the transfer experiences of the participants before, during, and after. This study contributes to the literature available by focusing on Latina/o transfer students' narratives to understand their experiences navigating the transfer process. In addition, the researcher highlights contributing factors to a successful transfer process and recommends several supportive initiatives for student affairs professionals from two-year and four-year institutions to utilize on their campuses.

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The Transfer Process of Latina/o Students from Community College to the University:  
What are their Experiences?

by  
Edén Cortez

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Edén Cortez, Author

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DEDICATION

For Sara Aurelia López

# THE TRANSFER PROCESS OF LATINA/O STUDENTS

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

The Latino population in the United States is significantly increasing, 16 percent of the current U.S population (U.S Census Bureau, 2011). It has become one of the largest and fast growing ethnic groups in the nation (Valverde, 2008; Yosso, 2006). According to Suarez (2003), the Latino population is predicted to grow 44 percent between 1995 and 2025. Nevertheless, the increased growth of Latinos in the U.S has not yielded high college enrollment rates since there is low degree attainment in comparison to their counterparts, White students (Fry, 2002; Valverde, 2008).

The national enrollment data of undergraduate students indicates that Latinas/os are often over-enrolled at two-year institutions and under-enrolled at four-year institutions (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), the total Hispanic college enrollment (two-year and four-year institutions public and private) for fall 2000 was 9.5 percent. In fall 2000 the total enrollment for Hispanics at two-year institution was 14.2 percent in comparison to 6.6 percent at four-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). Ten year later, the total Hispanic college enrollment for fall 2010 was 13.0 percent (NCES, 2011). NCES (2011) also indicated that in fall 2010 Hispanic made up a total of 18.0 percent of the student enrollment at two-year institutions as well as a 10.2 percent of the total student enrollment at four-year institutions. From fall 2000 to fall 2010, there was an increase of 3.5 percent of Latinas/os entering college. Between fall 2000 and fall 2010, the Latino enrollment grew 3.8 percent at two-year institutions and 3.6 percent at four-year institutions. In terms of the enrollment gap between two-year and four-year

institutions, in fall 2000 there was a 7.6 percent enrollment gap and in fall 2010 there was a 7.8 enrollment gap.

In 2010, the Pew Hispanic Center (2010) released a statistical report highlighted that the Latino youth represented 31.1 percent of the traditional college-age population of eighteen to twenty-four years old. College age Latino enrollments vary by institution type from two-year to four-year institutions, with most of them enrolling at two-year institutions (Valverde, 2008). The enrollment percentage gap among two-year and four-year institutions illustrates Latina/o college students enroll at two-year institutions at a higher rate than four-year institutions, making their initial entry to higher education through the doors of two-year institutions (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Valverde, 2008).

According to Hagedorn and Lester (2006), it is hard to pin point accurate national transfer rates for community college students due to various factors that affect the definition of transfer student. Regardless of this, there has been enough evidence of the challenges transfer students face, especially Latina/o transfer students (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Fry, 2002; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Melguizo, 2009; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). In a study conducted by Fry (2002), he points out that nearly half of the Latina/o students who enter community college never complete a bachelor's degree. Because of the studies done on Latino transfer students, it is safe to assume that their transfer rates to four-year institutions are low (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006).

Furthermore, Zarate and Burciaga (2010) add that the Latina/o transfer rates to four-year institutions are low regardless of the increase enrollment of this student population in higher education. The low transfer rates of Latinos limit their access to universities affecting their possibilities of degree attainment (Zarate and Burciaga (2010). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the transfer rates in order to gain an insight into the experiences of Latinas/os students in pursue of baccalaureate degrees (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

The increase of Latinos in the U.S is significantly impacting the enrollment rates in post-secondary education. As illustrated by NCSE (2011), Latina/o enrollment at four-year institutions is low when compare to two-year institutions. With the increase of the Latino population, higher education will need to be prepared to meet their needs. Therefore, it is important to further examine the enrollment gaps as well as the low transfer rates of Latinos in higher education.

### **Research Question**

Based on the national trends and literature review, the researcher focused on Latina/o college students who transfer from a community college to a university. The questions that guided the researcher are: a) what are the experiences Latina/o students have during the transfer process from community college to university? b) How did their experience(s) affect their transfer process? c) What support systems were crucial for successfully transferring and persisting at the university?

Specific emphasis was placed on Latina/o community college students who transfer to a predominant White, large, public university in the Pacific Northwest. Also,

the researcher placed a high value on the experiences, personal and institutional, this particular student population had before, during, and after the transfer process. This was necessary in order to understand the lived experiences of Latinas/os in higher education.

By examining this particular student population, the researcher understood the lived experiences Latinos experienced in the navigation of the transfer pipeline. The understanding of such experiences provided a better insight on the factors affecting the transfer process to four-year institutions. Also, the researcher used the information gained from this study to make recommendations to two-year and four-year institutions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following section contains key definitions of terms used in this thesis as defined by existing literature.

- Hispanic – Term introduced by the US government to designate “a speaker of Spanish (hence Hispanophone, Spanish-speaking), and, in the US context, anyone of Latin America or Spanish heritage” as Hispanic (Allatson, 2007, p. 121).
- Latino – “The broad panethnic identity term that includes the Chicano/a and Puerto Rican historical minorities and any citizen or resident with Latin American heritage” (Allatson, 2007, p. 140).

Hispanic and Latino are two terms that Spanish-speaking people often use to describe themselves. For the purpose of this research the term Hispanic will be use when referring to U.S population demographics such as census data as well as college enrollment data. The term Latino will be use in this research to acknowledge the diversity of Latino communities in the U.S.



- Transfer student – Students who attended a full academic year at a community college and met the credit requirement to transfer as sophomores to a university.

For the purpose of this study, this transfer student definition will be use due to the demographics of student participants.

- Community college – “A 2-year government-supported college that offers an associate degree” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- Two-year institution – “A postsecondary institution that offers programs of at least 2 but less than 4 years duration” and offer associates degrees as well as career technical certificates (NCES, n.d.).

Two-year institutions and community colleges are essentially the same and often they are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this research the term two-year institution and community college will be used interchangeably.

- University – “An institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorized to grant academic degrees; specifically: one made up of an undergraduate division which confers bachelor's degrees and a graduate division which comprises a graduate school and professional schools each of which may confer master's degrees and doctorates” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- Four-year institution – “A postsecondary institution that offers programs of at least 4 years duration or one that offers programs at or above the baccalaureate level” (NCES, n.d.).

Four-year institutions and universities are essentially the same and for the purpose of this research four-year institution and university will be used interchangeably.

- Predominantly White Institution – “Is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment” (SAGE Knowledge, n.d.).
- Transfer pipeline – “Represents a system of connecting educational institutions” allowing students to transfer from one institution to another (NCES, n.d; Yosso, 2006, p. 4).

### **Latina/o Trends in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education across the nation are experiencing the growth of minority groups on their campus as Blacks, Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives make up 36.1 percent of the total fall 2010 enrollment (NCES, 2011). Latina/o college students’ enrollment has increased at universities as well as the community colleges (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). In fall 2000 Latino enrollment at four-year institutions was 6.6 percent and 14.2 percent at two-year institutions (NCES, 2010). When comparing these percentages to fall 2010 college enrollment, the Latino enrollment at four-year institutions was 10.2 percent and 18.0 percent at two-year institutions (NCES, 2011). Although Latina/o college enrollment is gradually increasing, many of them enter community colleges at a higher rate leaving a disproportional enrollment gap of between community colleges and universities (Fry, 2002).

Furthermore, community colleges have become an initial stepping-stone to higher education and baccalaureate degree attainment for Latina/o students (Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). According to Martinez and Fernández (2004), Suarez (2003), and Zarate and Burciaga (2010), the majority of Latina/o students enrolls at community colleges with the intent to transfer to a university and obtained a bachelors degree. For this reason, community colleges have become an important component in the education of Latina/o students (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

However, there are many factors contributing to the landscape of Latinas/os in higher education, pre-college experiences being one of them. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the transition of Latinas/os high school graduates to college, their high drop out rates, and legal status (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Fry (2002) points out that Latina/o high school graduates pursue higher education at community colleges at a higher rate than universities in comparison to their White peers. Also, Zarate and Burciaga (2010) comment on the “alarming high school drop-out rates among Latinos” (p. 25) creating disparity gaps in college enrollment. Another factor in Latina/o education is the significant number of undocumented students graduating from high school and entrance to higher education through community college (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This particular student population is underserved and less likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Contreras, 2009). All of these factors explicitly contribute to the Latina/o landscape in higher education (Gandara, 2010; Martinez & Fernández, 2004).

As the Latino population increase in the U.S, institutions of higher education are starting to experience this growth, especially community colleges. Institutions of higher education need to address the low transfer rates in order to provide equitable educational access for students. Without doing this, there is a potential negative effect on access to college and degree attainment (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

### **Latina/o Education at Community Colleges**

The community colleges enroll approximately half of the nation's undergraduate students each academic year, and half of all first-year college students (Laanan, 2001; Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Also, community colleges have significantly greater minority student enrollment than any other institution in higher education (Handel, 2011; Lee, 2001). In comparison to universities, community colleges are attracting more students of color since they are more accessible and convenient to students' life situations (Lee, 2001; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

The primary ethnic group entering community colleges at high rates is the Latino population (Suarez, 2003). Because of the initial pursue of degree attainment, Latinas/os initiate their educational path at community colleges (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003). Latina/o students attend community colleges across the nation for the purpose of transferring to a university and obtaining a baccalaureate degree (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Research indicates that even though Latinas/os enroll in higher numbers in community colleges, they are still underrepresented at universities (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). One clear

component of this is the Latino enrollment gap between two-year and four-year institutions as well as the transfer rates of Latina/o students from community colleges to universities (Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Although, there are no accurate national transfer rates of Latinos, there is sufficient evidence that highlights the challenges they face during the transfer process making it difficult for Latina/o transfer students to pursue a bachelor's degree (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Fry, 2002; Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Melguizo, 2009; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004)

Community colleges play an important role in the education of Latina/o students because many enter the transfer pipeline through these institutions. The transfer process from community colleges is complex and not beneficial for Latina/o students (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). There are several internal and external factors contributing to the transfer process of Latinas/os; therefore it is important to analyze them (Laanan, 2007).

### **Factors Affecting the Transfer process**

Community colleges and universities offer a transfer pipeline that allows students to transition to a university in order to obtain their bachelor degree. Ornelas and Solórzano (2004) comment that it is in the community college setting and through the transfer process that Latina/o students experience institutional challenges as well as rely on cultural characteristic to navigate the transfer process. Also, Bensimo and Dowd (2009) recognize that the transfer pipeline established by institutions of higher education benefit traditional students, White middle and upper class, who have had institutional knowledge on how to navigate the transfer process. This places Latina/o transfer students

at a disadvantage before, during, and after transferring (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009). There are several factors that impact the transfer process from two-year to four-year institutions; this section offers an understanding of such factors.

**Institutional challenges.** At the institutional level, Latina/o student encountered several challenges: lack of guidance and direction throughout the transfer process, unclear transfer course requirements, invalidation from institutional agents, financial burden, and limited exposure to support programs (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003). These institutional challenges are present at community colleges and universities making it difficult for Latinas/os to successfully navigate both institutional systems in order to transfer successfully.

**Cultural characteristics.** The cultural characteristics of Latina/o students contribute to their decision to transfer-out from their community college (Suarez, 2003). Students' culture posits the challenge to leave their family and community behind in order to attend college, making the transfer process emotionally challenging (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988; Suarez, 2003). Nevertheless, Latina/os students recognize the necessity to continue with their education and the benefits it provides for them, their families, and their communities (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Leaving their family to transfer to a large university environment forces students to assimilate to a dominant culture, creating a lost "sense of belonging" (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009). Because of this, students seek a Latino community within their institution in order to feel connected and a sense of belonging (Rendón, 1994). These cultural characteristics are salient to the Latina/o transfer students experience before, during, and after the

transfer process.

As indicated in this section, there are several institutional challenges students' faces as well as cultural characteristics that affect their transfer process. These factors need to be carefully examined to understand the transfer pipeline placed by higher education institutions and the impact it has on Latina/o education.

### **Methodology**

The researcher examined Latina/o college students' experiences from a community college to a large, predominantly White, four-year institution using qualitative methodology. The qualitative method used in this study was one-on-one interviews (Appendix A). This method was chosen because it provides a broad perspective, establishes rapport with participants, allows for open-ended questions and follow-up questions, and provides an opportunity to develop "in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 203; McCawley, 2009). Also, the researcher used this method because it provided the participants with the opportunity to share their personal and institutional experiences (lived experiences) as an approach to validate their inner-knowledge and for the researcher to understand the participants' experiences and engage in further research inquiry (Yosso, 2006).

The researcher chose a large, predominantly White, public four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest to conduct the study. The Pacific Northwest is a region in the United States comprise of two states, Washington and Oregon. Between these two states there are a total of 18 public four-year universities and five out of the 18 are considered large institutions (student enrollment over 20,000)(Oregon University System [OUS],

n.d.; Washington Student Achievement Council [WSAC], n.d.). The student population in these institutions is predominately White and they represent over 50 percent of the total student population (OUS, n.d.; WSAC, n.d.). Due to the student demographic, all public four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest are predominately White institutions, with small percentages of minority students. For these reasons the researcher focused on student participants enrolled in a large, predominately White, public four-year universities.

The recruitment methods used in this research are: email, and in-person announcement in student organizations and ethnic studies classes. The researcher sent invitational emails through campus support programs list-serves as well as through instructors who taught sociology, math, and ethnic study courses. He also posted invitational letters in student organizations bulletin boards.

The participant population was composed of six students, 3 females and 3 males, which identify as Latina/o and currently enrolled at a large, predominantly White, four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest. All participants completed a minimal of one academic year at a community college as well as one academic year at the university prior to their participation. These requirements were necessary because a full academic year at the community college and at the university can offer participants with extended experiences before, during, and after the transfer process; therefore providing a more comprehensive data.

The data collected through interviews was transcribed into Microsoft Word document for coding and interpretation. The researcher analyzed the coded data using a



branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), as a framework of reference. CRT analyzes the inequalities that exist in society, law practice, and education in regard to race and ethnicity (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

In the education field, CRT is a “theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). LatCrit “examines the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect people of color generally and Latinas/os specifically” (as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p 144) and it is “grounded in the particulars of their social reality and experiences (Yosso, 2006, p. 6). By using LatCrit, the researcher will be able to scrutinize “the layers of racialized subordination that comprise Chicana/o, Latina/o experiences” (Yosso, 2006, p. 7) within higher educational. There are five tenets in CRT that are applicable to education, but the researcher only used two tenets: the challenge to dominant ideology, and the centrality of experiential knowledge in order to analyze participants’ narratives (Yosso, 2006). The use of CRT and LaCrit in this study assisted the researcher with a critical analysis the experiences participants encountered as Latina/o students navigating the transfer pipeline. Particularly, LatCrit was used to shift the views of the “dominant ideology which supports deficit notion” about Latina/o college students “while assuming ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 144) in education.

In addition, validation theory (Rendón, 2002) was also used to understand how institutional agents validate or invalidate Latina/o students in their academic and personal

endeavors during the transfer process. Rendón (2002) states that “validation theory poses that college faculty, counselors, and administrative staff take a proactive role in reaching out to students to affirm them as being capable of doing academic work and to support them in their academic endeavors and social adjustment (p. 645). For this purpose, validation theory was used as a theoretical framework.

The outcome of using CRT and LatCrit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Yosso, 2006) and Validation Theory (Rendón, 2002) was beneficial in validating the stories of Latina/o students in order to evaluate the factors that affected the transfer process. Both theories provided the researcher with a critical framework to understand and give meaning to the findings.

### **Researcher’s Personal Interest and Background**

As the researcher, it is important to disclose my experiences and personal interest in this study. I identify as a Latino male from Mexican heritage and a graduate student at a four-year public university in the Pacific Northwest. My experiences in secondary and postsecondary education play a significant role in my life. After graduating from high school, I transitioned to a community college, and after a year of developmental education and college level courses, I transferred to a predominantly White, large, four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest. During my transfer process, I had minimal assistance from advisors and counselors as well as minimal encouragement from faculty and administration from my institution.

From 2008 to 2011, I worked at as an academic advisor at a community college with high Latina/o enrollment. My advisor role was to assist students with degree

attainment and the transfer process to their university of choice. Many of the Latina/o students I worked with had limited awareness of the academic transfer requirements and lacked the encouragement and validation from their institution to continue beyond a two-year degree. This experience exposed to issues Latina/o students faced throughout the transfer process; nevertheless, I still needed to gain more knowledge on issues affecting them beyond community college.

Furthermore, based on my personal experiences and professional career, I used Chicana feminist epistemology to place my personal and institutional experiences as a guiding source of knowledge during the research. Bernal (1998) defines Chicana feminist epistemology as a methodology that:

Goes beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods, and lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of knowledge. [Chicana epistemology is] grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas... as a legitimate body of knowledge. Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas – about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized. It questions objectivity, a universal foundation of knowledge, and the western dichotomies of mind versus body... (pp. 555-560).

Also, Bernal (1998) draws on cultural intuition as a form of legitimate knowledge that assists the research with framing “the research questions in ways that give voice to” Latina/o students and makes meaning of the collected data (p. 559). Cultural intuition is the experiences that one has as it relates to their culture in order to navigate dominant spaces and counteract dominant ideologies (Bernal, 1998).

Based on Chicana feminist epistemology and cultural intuition framework, my experiences as a past transfer student and current student affair professional provide me with experiential knowledge on the research being done. My cultural background and

multidimensional life and professional experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge that can help me listen and understand the experiences of Latina/o students during the interviews, as well as draw conclusions from the collected data.

### **Limitation of Study**

There are five limitations in this research: a) small sample size, b) no representation of an ethnically diverse Latino population, c) coordination of the interviews, d) interview structure and environment, e) transfer rates, and f) Latina/o identity development. All of these limitations affected the research.

The sample size for this particular student population is relatively small compared to the actual Latina/o transfer student numbers. Also, the literature available focused on Latina/o transfer students from Mexican and Mexican-American descent in the areas of California, Texas, and Arizona. The researcher was unable to locate research done on Latina/o transfer students from the Pacific Northwest region. Another limitation in this research was the limited representation of diverse Latinos due to a high numbers of Mexican and Mexican-American students in the recruiting university.

In addition, coordinating interviews with the participants was challenging and caused some setback in the collection and coding of the data. Also, the interview structure and environment proved to be a challenge for students to share additional personal and educational experience. Another factor that was challenging for the researcher was locating accurate Latina/o transfer rates. There were several transfer rates established by multiple institutions several geographical locations were Latina/o representation is significant. This proved to be difficult in providing a consistent Latina/o transfer rate.

## Summary

The educational landscape of Latinas/os in the U.S has changed drastically as greater numbers enter community colleges. They enter with the goal to transfer to a four-year institution for degree attainment, but, unfortunately, many do not reach this goal (Alexander et al., 2007; Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988; Suarez, 2003; Yosso, 2006; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The transfer rates among Latina/o transfer students are considered to be low when compared to White students, creating an educational gap for Latinas/os in higher education (Fry, 2002; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This national trend indicates that the transfer pipeline Latina/o students navigate through is not well supported and has limited their access to four-year institutions across the nation (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The increased enrollment of Latina/o student in community colleges has not impacted the low rates of degree attainment (Suarez, 2003). Latinas/os are still experiencing challenges with access to to four-year universities regardless of their increased numbers in higher education (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

The research done on this topic has indicated that the enrollment gap and low transfer rates is a phenomenon that needs further investigation (Alexander et al., 2007; Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This is one of the reasons why the researcher focused on the Latina/o transfer experiences from community college to university.

Furthermore, the method use in this research was qualitative. This allowed the

researcher to conduct one-on-one interviews to understand the phenomenon being researched. The use of CRT and LatCrit (Yosso, 2006), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Bernal, 2002), Cultural Intuition (Bernal, 1998), and Validation Theory (Rendón, 1994), was used to understand students' lived experiences, and place meaning to collected data.

Overall, the research conducted can assist professionals in higher education to understand the Latina/o transfer experience and to acknowledge the needs and concerns of this student population. This is crucial to address in order to create an inclusive and equitable transfer pipeline for Latina/o students as well as a successful environment at two-year and four-year institutions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter the researcher examined the available scholarly articles, books, and other educational sources that provide information on Latina/o higher education in the U.S. The literature review in this chapter is composed of three parts: (a) national trends of Latinas/os in higher education, (b) Latina/o education in community colleges, and (c) factors affecting the transfer process. These three parts addresses the state of Latinos in postsecondary education and specifically focus on Latina/o community college transfer students.

The minority population in the U.S. has increased as well as their enrollment rates in higher education (Lee, 2001). According to Laden (2005), “between 1990 and 2000, the U.S. population increased by 13 percent while the White population *declined* from 76 to 69 percent of the total population” (p. 5). As the White population declined, minority groups increased to a third of the nations population (Laden, 2004). With the rise of minority groups in the U.S, higher education has been experiencing a racially and ethnically growth in their student body (Laden, 2004; Lee, 2001).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) indicates that minority group enrollment, Blacks, Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives, in undergraduate institutions represent a 36.1 percent of the total fall 2010 enrollment population. The second major growth in the minority group for fall 2010 enrollment comes from Latinas/os, 13.0 percent enrollment rate (NCES, 2011). This growth indicates that Latino students are entering higher education at considerable rate.

Although Latina/o students contribute significantly to the high percentage of

minority enrollment at two-year and four-year institutions, they are leading the way in enrollment at two-year institutions, but falling behind at four-year institutions. According to the NCES (2011), the total Latino/a enrollment at the community colleges for fall 2010 was 18.0 percent. When compared to fall 2000, Latinos only made up a total of 14.2 percent of the enrollment population. Also, Latino enrollment at universities for fall 2010 was 10.2 percent compared to 6.6 percent in fall 2000 (NCES, 2011). The enrollment gap between community colleges and universities is significant. Research done by Bensimo and Dowd (2009), Fry (2002), Martinez and Fernández (2004), Pérez and Ceja (2010), Rendón, Justiz, and Resta (1988), Suarez (2003), and Zarate and Burciaga (2010) indicates that the transfer rates of Latina/o students from community colleges to universities is low, therefore creating a disproportional enrollment gap in higher education.

### **National Trends of Latinas/os in Higher Education**

This section will be examined in three parts: (a) secondary education trends, (b) community college impact on transfer students, and c) disparities in post-secondary education. These three sections are important parts to understand the Latina/o national trend in higher education.

**Secondary education trends.** The Latino population is the second rapidly growing minority group in the United States since the 1970's (Suarez, 2003). Their "growth is expected to continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; demographers predict that between 1995 and 2025, 44% of the growth in the nation's population will occur among Latinos (32 millions Latinos out of a projected total of 72 million persons)" (Suarez, 2003, p. 96).



In view these numbers, it is assume that Latinos will have an increase representation in secondary and postsecondary education.

In order to understand the national trends of Latinas/os in higher education, it is important to acknowledge the trends in secondary education and their connection to higher education. According to Gándara (2010) and Zarate and Burciaga (2010), it is important to correlate secondary with postsecondary education as an early stage of college eligibility. It is in their pre-college years that Latina/o students experience disproportional education in comparison to other racial groups; therefore, “resulting in fewer opportunities to prepare for college” (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010, p. 26). For example, high schools with a high percentage of Latina/o students might not have equal access to the advance placement courses often accessible in predominately White high schools. This can create educational inequalities for Latinas/os students affecting their transition to college.

In addition, high school Latina/o students face several challenges that affect their transition to higher education such as drop out rates and legal status (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). According to Zarate and Burciaga (2010), approximately half of the educated Latinas/os in the nation complete high school. This fact is alarming because it indicates that the number of Latina/o high school drop out is increasing (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Of the high school graduates, a high number transition to higher education (Fry, 2002). “The nation’s 11.7 million Latino high school graduates attend college at a higher rate. More than 10 percent - nearly 1.2 million Latino high school graduates - pursue undergraduate education at community colleges and four-year

colleges” (Fry, 2002, p. 4). Among traditional Latina/o high school student graduates,

Frey (2002) comments:

Among 18- to 24- year-olds, 44 percent of Hispanic undergraduates attend a two-year school, as opposed to about 30 percent of both white and black undergraduates. The heavy reliance on two-year schools is not just characteristic of Latino students when they are of traditional college age. Latino college students over the age of 24-years old are more likely than their peers of any other racial/ethnic group to be enrolled at two-year institutions. As Latinos get older, an ever greater share attend two-year schools. More than 55 percent of Latino undergraduates over the age of 35 years old attend two-year colleges (p. 6).

*Undocumented students.* An additional factor that contributes to the national trends of Latinas/os in higher education is the increasing number of undocumented students graduating from high school (Contreras, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This particular student population faces legal and financial barriers preventing them from achieving their dreams of baccalaureate degree attainment (Contreras, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). There are no exact numbers representing the growth of undocumented students in higher education; nevertheless, it is assumed those who graduate continue on to post-secondary institutions such as community colleges (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Once they have navigated the complex college admission process, they are still faced with financial barriers forcing them to self-finance their education, which in many cases prevents them from transferring (Contreras, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This is a common barrier for undocumented students (Contreras, 2009; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

**Community college impact on transfer students.** In addition, the enrollment of Latinas/os students in higher education is significantly in community colleges and it was

been viewed as a national trend across the U.S (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). According to Zarate & Burciaga (2010), 50 percent to 80 percent of Latinas/os enrolled at two-year institutions with the intent to transfer to four-year university to obtain their bachelors degree. Zarate and Burciaga (2010) attribute the high Latina/o enrollment at two-year institutions, as a national trend and that Latinas/os who enroll in these institutions, on average, take longer to obtain a college degree.

Community colleges play a significant role in the education of Latina/o students. These institutions are consider to be accessible for many, but for Latinas/os they are consider the pathway to baccalaureate degree attainment because of their open door policies, flexible class schedules, and low tuition rates (Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Although, Latinas/os enrolled at two-year institutions plan to transfer, many fall short from their goal (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Zarate and Burciaga (2010) explain that there are “multiple factors [that] contribute to poor retention and transfer rates for Latino community college students. For example, the increasing cost of attending four-year institutions has slowed access for many students” (p. 26). Also, students face several challenges when they navigate the complex transfer pipeline that requires attention regarding credit requirements, knowledge of enrollment information, and support from an academic adviser at the institution they are transferring. These challenges place Latina/o students at a disadvantage.

**Disparities in post-secondary education.** In addition, there are disparities in Latino higher education across the nation, and it is more apparent in states with high Latino populations such as California (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The US Census (2008)

indicates that the Latino population in the State of California is 36.6 percent of the entire state population. California also has one of the largest university and community college systems in the nation with “112 community colleges, 23 California State Universities (CSU) and 10 Universities of California (UC)” (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010, p. 25). The admission requirement for each institution varies from open enrollment to test base requirements and “as the eligibility requirements become more selective, Latino participation narrows” (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010, p. 25). Eligibility requirement at two-institutions compare to four-year institutions can be attributed to the disproportionate enrollment rates of Latina/o students.

Overall, this section provided an insight of the current educational trends for Latina/o students from secondary to postsecondary education as well as addressed the disparities in Latino education, transfer rates, college attainment, and financial and legal barriers. The overview of Latinos in higher education provided an illustration of the salient issues Latinas/os face in the early stage of their educational path; leading to educational disparities in higher education, especially for those enrolled at two-year institutions.

### **Latina/o Education in Community Colleges**

This section of the literature review will be examined in three parts: (a) brief history of community colleges, (b) Latina/o enrollment in community colleges, and (c) contributing factors of high enrollment of Latinas/os at community colleges. All three parts are important components for understanding Latina/o education in community colleges.

**History of community colleges.** Since their beginning in the early twentieth century, the American community colleges served a unique function in higher education (Cohen, 1998). The early American community colleges were developed for the purpose of providing general education and training for the new industrial workforce in the country, as pointed out by Cohen (1998). They were also more accessible than the universities and were grounded in community wealth, attracting a more diverse population, yet there were limited locations and low enrollments (Cohen, 1998). Subsequently, the community colleges were viewed by society as “the drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education” (Cohen, 1998, p. 1). According to Cohen (1998), the demands placed on schools to solve societal problems such as racial integration contributed to the growth of community colleges. The nation’s “courts and legislatures have insisted that schools mitigate discrimination by merging students across ethnic lines in their various programs” (Cohen, 1998, p. 2) and the community colleges became destined to provide equitable access for ethnic minorities.

**Latina/o enrollment in community college.** Currently, community colleges represent nearly 50 percent of all higher education institutions (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Their current student population consist of “42 percent first in their family to attend college, 46 percent are receiving financial aid and 45 percent are from an underrepresented ethnic minority group” (Handel, 2011, p. 9), providing a more diverse student population and contributing significantly to higher education (Handel, 2011). Community colleges have a significant enrollment of minority students compare to

universities since minority high school graduate students have a higher transition rate to community colleges than universities (Handel, 2011; Martinez & Fernández, 2004).

Within the minority groups, “Latino students are far more likely to be enrolled in two-year colleges than students from any other racial or ethnic group” (Martinez & Fernández, 2004, p. 51). NCES (2011) illustrates the total fall 2010 enrollment rates of Latina/o to be at 18.0 percent compare to 15.6 percent for Blacks, 6.0 percent for Asian Pacific Islanders, and 1.1 percent for American Indian/Alaskan Native. With high percentage rate of Latinas/os enrolled at community colleges, these institutions play a significant role in their education, especially for those seeking to transfer (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003). Martinez and Fernández (2004) state that “knowing that institutional needs and priorities vary depending on a number of internal and external variables... [and that the] most salient issues that affect Latino students attending community colleges as well as community colleges’ ability to facilitate Latino student success” (p. 51) is a growing concern in higher education.

#### **Factors contributing to high enrollment of Latinas/os at community colleges.**

Latina/o college enrollment is significant at two-year institutions because they often view these institutions as a transfer path to baccalaureate degree attainment (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Latinas/os view their position at community colleges as an opportunity to gain social and cultural capital in order to gain “social and economic mobility in the United States” (Martinez & Fernández, 2004, p. 52). Also, research has shown that “Latino students overwhelmingly state at least a bachelor’s degree as their intended goal” (Martinez & Fernández, 2004, p. 52) when asks

about their reasons for enrolling at two-year institutions. The reality is that most transfer students do not reach their goal and this creates low transfer rates (Hagedorn & Lester, 2006; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

According to Martinez and Fernández (2004), there are several factors contributing to the low transfer rates that range from social economical status, attrition, lack of persistence, academic levels, attainment of career technical degrees, and institutional policies. When examining the expectations of Latina/o students and community colleges:

Latino students attend community colleges as a gateway to senior institutions, expecting to complete transferable courses and receive the guidance and mentoring necessary to successfully navigate postsecondary institutions. Community college policy, on the other hand, primarily provides resources and support services for students interested in vocational programs, shortchanging the type of curriculum and student services needed to successfully transfer to senior institutions (Martinez & Fernández, 2004, p. 53).

The above statement points to one of the reason why community colleges need to examine their policies to better support Latina/o transfer students. These facts can be seen from a point of view that Latinas/os have high achieving education expectations, but they lack support, guidance, and/or encouragement at their two-year institution.

Suarez (2003) comments that two-year institutions need to commit to the transfer function and have stronger collaborations with four-year institutions providing a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. Following institutional commitment, Martinez and Fernández (2004) add that two-year institutions need to cultivate student-faculty interactions to start dismantling institutional barriers. The disadvantages that Latina/o face needs to be understood by faculty in order to positively shape the educational

experiences of this student population (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003).

Martinez and Fernández (2004) comment:

These external relationships addressed only part of the puzzle; essential to Latino transfer success was also a sense of shared responsibility among students, faculty, and administrators, although Suarez suggests [in her findings] that faculty participation was minimal and was being showcased rather than faculty being full partners intimately involved in the planning and implementation of the transfer process (p. 55).

Therefore, it is necessary for faculty from two-year institutions to become involved in the education process of Latina/o students for validation of educational goals, but also it is crucial for staff and faculty to share cultural congruence with the students (Suarez, 2003). Students need to have a faculty of color as a role model to feel validated and supported by someone who can relate to them (Nuñez, 2009).

This section illustrates the importance of two-year institutions as a primary pathway for Latina/o educational dreams and aspirations. The findings place two-year institutions at the center of Latino higher education by illustrating the enrollment trends, addressing the transfer rates, and factors that affect Latinas/os in the transfer process.

### **Factors Affecting the Transfer Process**

This section covers the factors contributing to the transfer process of Latina/o community college students. There are two parts examined in this section: a) institutional challenges and b) cultural characteristics, both parts are equally as important in order to understand the experiences of Latinas/os in the transfer pipeline.

The increased enrollment of Latinas/os at two-year institutions suggests that students have equitable access to education, which leads to degree attainment. On the contrary, the increased enrollment rates are not affecting the low-transfer rates and



enrollment gap of Latina/o students in higher education (Suarez, 2003). Their overrepresentation at community colleges does not guarantee high numbers of Latinas/os with bachelor degrees (Suarez, 2003). Also, Bensimo and Dowd (2009) indicate that the transfer pipeline established by institutions of higher education benefit traditional students, White middle and upper class, who have had institutional knowledge on navigating the transfer process. This places Latina/o transfer students at a disadvantage before, during, and after transferring (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009).

In further examination of the factors affecting the transfer process, researchers identify two overarching factors: institutional challenges and cultural characteristics (Contreras, 2009; Laanan, 2007; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). These two factors are present before, during, and after students transfer.

**Institutional challenges.** Institutional challenges are external factors connected to two-year and four-year institutions that affect the transfer process (Laanan, 2007). According to Laanan (2007), one of the external factors that all transfer students experience is the “transfer shock,” which places transfer students at a disadvantage. Laanan (2007) defines the transfer shock as the decrease in academic performance as transfer students’ grade point average drops. Jain, Herrera, Bernal, and Solorzano (2011) research finds Laanan’s (2007) interpretation of transfer shock as evidence that two-year and four-year institutions are not properly addressing the needs of transfer students. For Latina/o students, the transfer shock is not the only disadvantage they experience. The enrollment gap and low transfer rates in itself is an institutional challenge that illustrates the educational disparities of Latina/o students in comparison to White students (Bensimo

& Dowd, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

Another institutional challenge Latinas/os experience is the navigation of the transfer pipeline. For example, the transfer pipeline that many Latinas/os walk through is not well supported (Suarez, 2003). The lack of guidance, direction during the transfer pipeline, faculty resistance to advise students, and low academic expectations contribute to the challenges Latinas/as face at their institutional making it hard to transfer (Rendón and Nora, 1994; Suarez, 2003).

Furthermore, there are other external factors that affect the transfer process for Latinas/os. Ornelas and Solórzano (2004) points out that transfer students face institutional challenges such as limited monitoring of transferable courses and inconsistency of transfer information between academic advisors. Also, community colleges structure tends to direct Latina/os students to vocational and technical degrees, denying them the possibility of a bachelor's degree (Ornelas and Solórzano, 2004). These two factors can significantly delay the transfer process and they are a clear indicate of the minimal academic support provided to Latina/o student.

Financial constraints are another institutional challenge faced by Latina/o transfer students (Alvarez, Perez, & Griffin, 1984). Regardless of their socioeconomic background, concerns with the cost of university tuition exist (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009). They are confronted with financial challenges such as limited or no access to federal and state financial aid, scholarships, and grants (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Pérez & Ceja, 2010). This financial factor can discourage Latinas/os from transferring and obtaining a bachelor's degree (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009, Pérez &

Ceja, 2010).

Ornelas and Solorzano (2004) add to the institutional challenges by addressing the role of the institutions as contributors to the deficit cultural model that affects Latina/o transfer students. Yosso (2006) describes the deficit cultural model as a negative perception of students' cultural characteristics, meaning that Latino culture does not value education; therefore, "shifting the responsibility of educational attainment from the school to the individual and the family" (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004, p. 242).

Institutional agents often use a deficit cultural model to assume that Latina/o students do not have aspirations to transfer and, as a result of this, they fail to acknowledge the role of the institution in supporting Latina/o transfer students (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004).

**Cultural characteristics.** Shifting from institutional challenges, Suarez (2003) examines the importance of Latina/o personal and cultural characteristics as contributors to their college education. Regarding personal factors, Latina/o students use their lived experiences as the driving force for obtaining a bachelor's degree (Suarez, 2003). Their cultural characteristics consist of financial responsibilities to family, family encouragement for degree attainment, and not wanting to leave their family and community behind (Rendón et al., 1988; Suarez, 2003). Nevertheless, Latina/o students recognize the necessity of obtaining a college degree in order to assist their families and communities (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Also, Latina/o students who enter large university environments can experience certain levels of assimilation creating and disconnection, which forces them to seek a community in order to feel connected, validated, and a sense of belonging (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Rendón, 1994). Research by

Fry (2002), Gándara (1999), Rendón (2002, 1994), and Zarate & Burciaga (2010) indicates that Latino culture places a high value on education despite the contrary assumptions and that Latina/o students are aware of the benefits of obtaining a college degree.

Institutional challenges and cultural characteristic are an important factor that contributes to the successes or lack of success for Latina/o transfer students. These two factors affect, positively and negatively, the transfer process and for these reasons there needs to be a further examination of the direct and indirect impact it has on Latina/o transfer students.

### **Conclusion**

The minority student population has been on the rise in institutions of higher education (Laden, 2004). Two-year and four-year institutions are experiencing a population growth of minority students on their campuses (Handel, 2011; NCES, 2010). Among the minority groups, Latinas/os are the second fast growing student population (Alvarez, Perez, & Griffin, 1984). The increase of Latinas/os in higher education is more evident at community colleges since they are most likely to initially enroll at these institutions (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The high enrollment rates of Latinas/os in community college have created an enrollment gap between community colleges and universities, which affect the transfer rates of Latinas/os (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

As stated earlier in this chapter, Latina/o student who enrolled at community

colleges enroll with the goal to transfer to a university; nevertheless, the enrollment gaps states otherwise (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The transfer pipeline that Latinas/os walk through has become a complex system to navigate without guidance and direction from institutional agents (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This creates a level of difficulties for Latinas/os to properly transfer while facing institutional barriers along the way (Alvarez et al., 1984; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Suarez, 2003). Also, the transfer pipeline placed by institutions of higher education has failed to successfully assist Latina/o transfer students reach their educational goals (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Pérez & Ceja, 2010).

Overall, institutions of higher education are now faced with enrollment disparities, low transfer rates, and ineffective practices that affect the Latina/o student population. These factors are salient issues that need to be examine by institutions in order to support and create programs to assist Latina/o transfer students from two-year to four-year institutions (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988). Without the examination of the transfer experience of Latina/o students at two-year and four-year institutions, higher education will continue to create inequitable learning structures that prevent Latinas/os from reaching their academic and personal goals.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this study, I examined the experiences of Latina/o college students whom transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. This chapter covers (a) the research design overview, (b) researcher's background, (c) participants and recruitment method, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) limitation of the study. The primary purpose of this research is to understand the multidimensional experience(s) that Latina/o transfer students have before, during, and after transferring to a four-year institution. The secondary purpose of this study is to understand how the Latina/o experience influenced their transfer process. The third purpose is to identify factors that contributed to the successful transfer process and persistence of Latinas/os at the four-year institutions.

Based on the national trends and literature review, the researcher will focus on Latina/o college students who transfer from a community college to a university. The questions that guide the researcher are: a) what are the experiences Latina/o students have during the transfer process from community college to university? b) How did their experience(s) affect their transfer process? c) What support systems were crucial for successfully transferring and persisting at the university?

#### **Research Design Overview**

A qualitative research method was intentionally designed for this study. The reason I chose this method was because it provided me with the opportunity to explore several influential factors in the transfer process of Latinas/os. Qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to “get at the inner experiences of participants, to

determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12) as well as to build rapport with participants. A qualitative approach is suitable for this study as it provides “a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). Another reason for the use of this method was for the accessibility it provided to established open-ended questions, providing a more fluid answer as well as the option to ask follow-up questions for further clarification.

As the researcher, I decided to use a qualitative method because it placed a central focus on participants lived experiences. This approach was intentional in order to validate participants’ inner-knowledge and for me to understand the participants experiences in higher education and engage in further research inquiry. Qualitative research methodology also allows me to use my knowledge and lived experiences on the subject to place meaning to the data collected.

**Strategy of inquiry.** In developing a strategy of inquiry, I applied a combination of two qualitative strategies, phenomenological research and grounded theory. Each strategy provided a unique inquiry process that brought to light and connect the multiple experiences of Latina/o transfer students.

The first strategy of inquiry that I applied in this study was phenomenological research. Creswell (2009) defined phenomenological research as “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method...”(p. 13). This particular strategy sets aside the

researcher experience in order to place the participants as the central figure, therefore focusing on the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009).

The phenomenological process of inquiry focuses on interacting with a small number of participants through an interview process as well as using the data collected from the interviews to understand the phenomenon being study (Creswell, 2009). I identified this method as appropriate for this study due to the human interaction between the researcher and the participants, allowing the researcher to ask open-ended question designed to investigate the phenomenon.

For the purpose of this study, a section of phenomenological research was use: placing the participants at the center of the study. I used this section to create a naturalistic approach to understand the lived experiences of Latina/o transfer students. Additionally, my lived experiences, ethnic background, and epistemology brings to this study a source of valuable knowledge that guided the facilitation of interviews as well as developed meaning from the data collected.

The second strategy of inquiry that I applied in this study was grounded theory. Creswell (2009) defines grounded theory as “ a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants” (p. 13). This strategy utilizes a process that “involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998)” (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 13).



I used grounded theory in this study because it provided a strategy to center the experiences of the participants during the research. Also, grounded theory facilitates the thematic organization of the data collected during interviews then provides the researcher with an abstract theory based on the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2009).

I combined phenomenological research and grounded theory to fully understand the experiences of the participants. Each strategy of inquiry focused on participants as well as my personal experiences on the area being studied. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that good qualitative researchers “are unafraid to draw on their own experiences when analyzing materials, having rejected more traditional ideas of ‘objectivity’ and dangers of using personal experiences” (p. 13). Therefore, the combination of such strategies reinforced the importance of the share experience among participants and researcher.

**Researcher’s worldview.** In this section, I drew from cultural intuition to legitimize my experience in the subject being study (Bernal 1998). Cultural intuition comes from Chicana feminist epistemology and it is a form of legitimate knowledge that assists the researcher with framing “the research questions in ways that give voice to” Latina/o students and make meaning of the collected data (Bernal 1998, p. 559).

According to Bernal (1998), cultural intuition is:

Similar to Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) ‘theoretical sensitivity’ – a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data.... that “one can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending on one’s previous readings and experience with or relevant to the data’ (p. 41). However, [her] concept of cultural intuition is different from theoretical sensitivity because it extends one’s personal experiences to include collective experiences and community memory, and points to the importance of participants’ engaging in the analysis of data (pp. 563 - 564).

Bernal (1998) elaborates on this by emphasizing that the researcher's unique perspective on the topic being researched is a legitimate source of knowledge that she/he can rely on for guidance during the research process and interpretation of data.

Furthermore, there are four major sources of cultural intuition: (1) one's personal experience (collective experience, community memory, and personal identity), (2) existing literature, (3) professional experience, and (4) analytical research process (Bernal, 1998).

In addition, I used Chicana feminist epistemology to place the Latina/o education experience at the center of the study (Bernal, 1998). This approach raised consciousness of educational inequalities and legitimized Latina/o students' lived experiences in higher education, placing them as the central subject (Bernal, 1998). Bernal (1998) defines Chicana feminist epistemology as an epistemology that:

Goes beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods, and lies instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences and realities are accepted as the foundation of knowledge. [Chicana epistemology is] grounded in the life experiences of Chicanas... as a legitimate body of knowledge" (pp. 555, 558).

Based on Chicana feminist epistemology, I focused on the lived experiences of Latina/o students, facilitating an approach to bring their voices to this research. Because of the inquiry in this research, it was important to draw from participants' experiences to illustrate their transfer experiences and raise consciousness in higher education on issues pertaining to this student population.

Based on my lived and professional experiences and for the purpose of this study, I used the first three sources of cultural intuition to guide my research. My experiences as

a past transfer student and current student affairs professional provided me with experiential knowledge on the phenomenon being studied. My cultural background and lived experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge that I drew from to understand the experiences of Latina/o students as well as interpret the collected data. With the use of Chicana feminist epistemology, I was able to ground my experiences with that of the participants creating a more rich and meaningful interpretation of data.

### **Researcher's Background**

Traditional research methodology would mainly address in this section “researcher’s bias.” Instead, I position my research perspective in terms of Bernal’s (1998) “cultural intuition.” My epistemological perspective grounds this section into two parts: a) bilingual/bicultural reflection titled: *¿Quién Soy Yo?* (Who Am I?) and b) personal and work experience in higher education.

***¿Quién Soy Yo? Who Am I?*** Yo soy el hijo de Sara Aurelia Lopez Herrera y Catarino Cortes Cervantes y hermano de Nereyda Cortes Lopez. We are una familia pequeña. Yo nací en la ciudad de México y crecí entre dos mundos, Mexico City and Medford, Oregon. My high school had más anglosajones que mexicanos. Nadie en la preparatoria me dijo you can go to college. College was not an option.

I graduated from high school y luego me mude a Salem, Oregon. I was scared to start a new chapter in my vida. Comencé el colegio comunitario sin ninguna asesoría, I was afraid! En mis clases no habían Latinas/os, nadie con quien relacionarme. I went to see an academic advisor, ella me dijo “te va tomar tres años para transferirte.” She pointed to a thick binder y me dijo que todo lo que tenia que saber para transferirme

estaba ahí. She never took the time to advise nor guide me.

Me transferí a la universidad después de un año, but it was a hard process y cuando me transferí todavía me sentía perdido y no sabía qué hacer. I felt marginalized porque no encontré el apoyo de consejeros académicos. Por primera vez I felt that higher education was not a welcoming place for Latinas/os. Las clases requerían mucha atención and I couldn't focus because I did not feel welcomed in college. I did not matter nor did I feel a sense of belonging. Me sentí solo and felt the need to encourage myself to pull through.

Mi mamá me apoyo moralmente para que continuara en la universidad. Me gradué y comencé a trabajar como un consejero académico in the same community college from where I transferred from. I helped underrepresented students transfer to a university. Ellos también sufrieron como yo, but I was there to support them.

¿Quién soy yo? ¡Todavía no lo sé! Pero lo que sí sé es que he ayudado a toda clase de estudiantes a cumplir sus metas, transferirse a la universidad y graduarse. Yo comparto mi conocimiento para que todo aquel que este al mí alrededor tenga una esperanza y se enteren que hay personas como yo que están aquí para servir a la comunidad.

**Personal and work experience in higher education.** I pursued this study is because of the experiences I had during my undergraduate transition from a two-year institution to a four-year public university in the Pacific Northwest. I identify as a Latino male from Mexican heritage and a graduate student at a predominantly White, public, four-year university in the Pacific Northwest. My experiences in secondary and

postsecondary education play a significant role in my life. After graduating from high school I transitioned to a community college, and after a year of college developmental courses, I transferred to a large, predominantly White, four-year institution. During my transfer process, I had minimal assistance from advisors and counselors as well as no encouragement from faculty and administration from my transfer institution.

From 2008 to 2011, I worked at as an academic advisor at a community college with high Latina/o enrollment. My role as an advisor was to assist students with degree attainment and the transfer process to their university of choice. Many of the Latina/o students I encountered seemed to have limited knowledge of the academic transfer requirements and lacked the encouragement and validation from their institution. This experience exposed me to some of the issues Latina/o students experienced throughout the transfer process; however, my experience does not encompass a full comprehension of all the issues faced by this population.

### **Participants and Recruitment Method**

The Pacific Northwest (PNW), Washington and Oregon, has a total of 18 public four-year universities with a predominately White student population that makes up over 50 percent of the total student enrollment (OUS, n.d.; WSAC, n.d.). Five out of the 18 institutions in the PNW are considered large, predominately White, four-year universities with a student enrollment ranging from 20,000 to 45,000 (OUS, n.d.; WSAC, n.d.). The institution that the participants attended in the PNW has a student population between 20,000 and 25,000 and approximately 60 percent of the student population is White.

As the researcher, I established the recruitment goal for up to ten Latina/o students who attended a community college and transferred to a predominantly White, public, four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest. This number was established because having a small participant population allowed for a more direct engagement with individuals and a strong focus on their transfer experiences. Six students participated in this study and due to the time constraints of this study; the quantity of participants was adequate to ensure a more in-depth qualitative approach, which provided a personal approach and relationship building among the participants and I.

All six participants were recruited from a predominantly White, public, four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest. Participants needed to identify as Latina/o and attended a community college for a minimum one year before transferring to a university and been at their university for at least one year. This criteria was necessary because of the diverse experience community college provides for Latinas/os transfer students. According to Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, and O'Brien (2007), Ornelas & Solorzano (2004), and Suarez (2003), one of the issues faced by Latinas/os in higher education is walking through the transfer path established by community colleges and universities. This is another reason for selecting participants who transferred from community colleges.

Four-year institutions provide access to Latina/o transfer students, making these institutions a preferred site for recruitment. Latina/o transfer students are also more likely to become reflective of their transfer experience while attending a four-year university because they now can compare their community college experience to their current one.

These are the reasons for recruiting and collecting data from students at a four-year university.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study in August 2012 (Appendix D). After IRB approval, I sent a series of invitational emails introducing my research topic, the reason for the study, and provided my contact information for potential participants (Appendix B). The invitation emails were distributed through Latina/o student organizations, student support services, multicultural service office, and Latina/o fraternities and sororities as well as to professional faculty and staff. These offices, student organizations, and professionals were chosen because of their wide network and connection to the Latina/o student population. Also, the email clarified to the respondents that they must meet the participant criteria to be part of the study.

In addition, I attended student organizations, clubs, and social events to make in-person invitation announcement. This personal recruitment method provided me with exposure to the Latino community at the recruiting university. This facilitated my interaction with potential student participants, allowing students to ask questions about the study.

All interested participants were required to meet four specific criteria: 1) must be at least 18 years of age, 2) must identify as Latina/o, 3) must attended community college for a year (one academic year) prior to transferring to the university, and 4) must be currently enrolled at the university for a year (one academic year) after transferring from a community college (Appendix C). As stated earlier, the reasons why I chose this student population was because of the wealth of experiences they have before, during,

and after the transfer process. I found these criteria to be necessary because of the valuable transfer experiences participants had, which makes them better suited to answer research questions about their transfer process and their Latina/o experiences at the university.

Interested student participants who contact me and met the participant criteria were invited to one-on-one interviews (Appendix A). After the initial contact, I arranged the location of the interviews at a private location to ensure that the participants' identity was kept confidential.

### **Data Collection**

As mention earlier, I interviewed six student participants at a predominately White, public, four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest. All six participants who replied to my invitation letter and met the participant criteria were asked to take part in a semi-structured one-on-one interview. Each participant was asked 15 predetermined open-ended questions (Appendix A) and the interviews lasted approximately one hour. The goal of the open-ended questions was to obtain a detailed perspective of the Latina/o participants transfer experiences from a community college to a university. All the interviews I conducted were digital audio recorded and handwritten notes were taken to highlight key points for follow-up questions.

Prior to the start of each interview, I provided participants with the IRB consent form and asked them to review it as well as to ask questions if they needed. After they reviewed the consent form, I informed each participant that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time before or during the interview process. Also, I



assigned participants with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and to protect their identity.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section I will discuss the process I used to analyze the data gathered during the interview process to answer the research questions. I applied two theoretical approaches, grounded theory (Creswell, 2012) and LatCrit (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) to code the data, create themes and categories, provide meaning of the data, and to analyse the data for education inequalities. Each theory provided me with a data analysis approach and interpretational lens.

The data that I collected from the six participants was analyzed by using a systematic design called grounded theory (Creswell, 2012). The data from the digital audio recordings and field notes collected during the interviews was transcribed then coded by using grounded theory. From the data, key words and phrases were segmented. Piecing the segmented data and grouping them into themes related to the research questions provided me with a general overview of the phenomenon, which led to the general design and organization of the information. By doing this, I understood the participants' answers and was confident in creating meaning of the information provided. After themes were grouped, categories were formed to connect participants' views to the phenomenon being study (Creswell, 2009). This process allowed me to identify and examine the categories in order to explain the phenomenon, which is grounded in the view of the participants (Creswell, 2012).

The use of Latina/o critical race (LaCrit) theory as a framework, allowed me to examine the categories formed from the data collected for educational inequalities. LatCrit “examines the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect people of color generally and Latinas/os specifically” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479) and it is grounded on their social reality and lived experiences of Latinas/os (Yosso, 2006).

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study offers insight into the experiences of Latina/o transfer students, it has several limitations. Some of the possible limitations in this research are: (a) limited sample size population, (b) literature addressing a wider Latino population, and (c) limited diverse Latino group representation in the participant population.

The sample size for this particular student population is relatively small compared to the actual Latina/o transfer student numbers. Additionally, most of the literature available on Latina/o transfers students focused on Mexican and/or Mexican-American students from California, Texas, and Arizona (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Rendón & Valadez, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). I was unable to locate research done on Latina/o transfer students from the Pacific Northwest region. Another possible limitation in this research can be the limited representation of various ethnicities within the Latinos community due to a high numbers of Mexican and Mexican-American students in the recruiting university.

**Summary**

In this qualitative study, I examined the experiences of Latina/o transfer students from a community college to a predominant White, large, public university in the Pacific Northwest. The main purpose of this research was to understand the issues Latinas/os face before, during, and after they transferred to a university. Their experiences are a valid source of data that can create awareness of transfer issues this population face in higher education.

In addition, I used a phenomenological research method to identify the experiences of the participants in relation to the transfer process (Creswell, 2009). This method was important to use because it focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the participants by placing them as the central figure in the study (Creswell, 2009).

I interviewed six student participants during the course of three months. The data collected from the interviews was transcribed then coded using grounded theory (Creswell, 2012). I grouped the themes and categories that emerge from the data in order to make meaning of it. After this, I used LaCrit theory as a framework to examine the themes and categories for educational inequalities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479). This process of data examination allowed me to understand the issues Latina/os face. All six participants provided a wealth of information to this research and provided me with an insight to their transfer experience. The findings of this research will follow in chapter four.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter includes a reintroduction of the research questions, a general overview of the participants as well as a summary of all the participants in this study, and a comprehensive review of the findings based on the data collected. The findings are organized into five theme areas: a) self-doubts of education attainment, b) challenge and support in the transfer process, c) validation of educational path, d) sense of belonging, and e) perceptions affecting degree attainment. All the themes are interwoven and illustrate the multidimensional experiences of Latina/o transfer students. The themes are examined and discussed through the use of narrative data, direct quotes. It is important to note that the researcher has chosen specific participants data to illustrate each theme.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were: a) what are the experiences Latina/o students have during the transfer process from community college to university? b) How did their experience(s) affect their transfer process? c) What support systems were crucial for successfully transferring and persisting at the university?

### **Overview of the Participants**

A total of six students participated in this study. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, they were given pseudonyms. Also, any individually identifiable data that could disclose the students' identity was removed and replaced by generic data placed into brackets in the students' narratives. All student participants attended the same two-year institution and the same four-year institution. For the purpose of this study, the two-year institution is referred by the pseudonym The Community

College (CC) and the four-year institution is referred by the pseudonym The Pacific Northwest University (PNU).

In order to participate in this study, potential participants had to meet the following qualifications: a) must be at least 18 years of age, b) identify as Latina/o, c) attended a community college for at least one academic year before transferring, and d) must be currently enrolled at a university for one academic year after transferring from a community college. Six out of nine interested participants met the qualifications.

The six participants attended a minimum of two academic years at the community college and their current university class standing is junior or senior. Their majors varied from Ethnic Studies to Animal Science. Three of the participants identified as female and three identified as male. Four participants identified as Mexican, one as Latino, and one as Mexican-American. Also, five of them identified as first-generation college student and one as second-generation college student. Five participants came from a migrant background and one came from a blue-collar background. The next section to follow illustrates a more in-depth detail of participants' background.

### **Summary of Participants**

Claudia immigrated to the United States from Mexico during her high school years. English is her second language. She identifies as first-generation college student although one of her parents attended college in Mexico. Claudia also comes from a migrant background. She attended two years of community college before transferring to a university. Currently, she is a university senior majoring in General Science with an option in Pre-Pharmacy. Although Claudia was admitted to a university, she decided to

attend a community college to increase her English proficiency level. Because of her first-generation college background, Claudia found it challenging to navigate the transfer process by herself. She received support from her peers and student support programs along the way.

Rebeca immigrated to the United States from Mexico during her last year in high school. English is her second language. She comes from a migrant and first-generation college student background, although one of her parents attended college in Mexico. Rebeca attended two years of community college before transferring. Also, she is a university senior majoring in Geography with a certificate in Geographic Information Systems. During Rebeca's last year in high school, she was not informed of the universities admission process. This influenced her decided to follow her sister footsteps by attending a community college. During her transfer experience, she relied on her sibling as well as her advisor to navigate the transfer pipeline. Regardless of the support received, she faced several challenges during and after the transferring.

Ana is a first-generation Mexican-American, but identifies as Mexican. She grew up in the Pacific Northwest. She identifies as first-generation college student and with a migrant background. Ana attended a community college for two years and obtained an Associates Degree before transferring. She is a university senior majoring in Animal Science. After graduating from high school, Ana decided to attend a community college because of lack of financial resources. She was intentional in her decision and saw the benefits community college offers in terms of affordability and course selection. Her transfer process to a university was not hard to navigate due to the on-going support she

received from student support programs at her community college. Ana saw her transfer process as positive and experienced minor challenges. Although she received support throughout the transfer pipeline, Ana felt that she faced a few challenges in her new institution.

Gerardo did not identify as an immigrant or as a first-generation Mexican-American. He did identify as Mexican decent. He comes from a migrant and first-generation college student background. Gerardo attended three years of community college and obtained two associates degrees before transferring. Currently, Gerardo is a university senior majoring in Computer Science. Because of his low grades in high school, Gerardo was inclined to attend community college for remedial education. Before and during his transfer process, Gerardo had support from peers and a student services program. In terms of the transfer process, he was supported, but did not have the guidance in making an academic plan to meet the requirements for his major. After transferring, he faced setbacks in his Computer Science major.

Jaime comes from multiracial background, but identifies as Latino. He comes from a migrant background, identifies as first-generation college student and older than average student. Jaime attended two years of community college and obtained an associates degree. He is currently a university junior majoring in Ethnic Studies. After working in construction for several years, Jaime became a displaced worker. This situation influenced him to seek a General Equivalency Degree (GED) at a community college. At the community college, Jaime was part of a student support program that assisted him throughout the transfer process. Although he had support, he still had

difficulties navigating the transfer pipeline. After he transferred, Jaime faced several personal and academic challenges at his new institution.

Sam is a third generation Mexican-American and grew-up in the southwest region of the United States. He comes from a blue-collard background, identifies as second-generation college student and older than average student. His father obtained a bachelors degree in sociology. Sam is a university junior and majoring in Ethnic Studies. After high school, he was incarcerated and never had the opportunity to attend college. A few months before his release, he took the advice of a peer to apply to a community college. After he was released, he attended community college for two year and obtained an associates degree. Sam had minimal support before transferring. He relied on a friend to assist him navigate the transfer process and find support systems at the university. Regardless of the support he had transferring, Sam still faced several challenges at his university.

### **Review of Findings**

A summary of the findings are organized in five theme areas: a) self-doubts in education advancement, b) challenge and support in the transfer process, c) validation of education path, d) sense of belonging, and e) perceptions affecting degree attainment. The five themes are interwoven and illustrate the multidimensional experiences of the participants. Each theme will be examined and discussed by using direct quotes from participants' data. However, only salient examples gathered from the collected data will be use to illustrate the six themes. Latino critical race (LatCrit) will be use as a lens to



examined the students' narratives data and understand their transfer experiences as Latinas/os in higher education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

**Self-doubts in education advancement.** All participants shared insecurities and doubts in transitioning to institutions of higher education. Their pre-college experiences played a role in their academic and personal doubts. They did not see themselves continuing with their education. Claudia, Rebeca, and Gerardo indicated that they had self-doubts in pursuing higher education. They doubted their capabilities whether academic or language, they had doubts on their capabilities to enter a university and successfully finish. For the most part, they did not feel prepared to enter a four-year institution right after high school. Jaime being a displaced worker and Sam a formally incarcerated person, added to their self-doubts in being successful at their community college. Their background played a roll in the college life. On the other hand, Ana was a bit more confident because of her awareness of the type of higher education institutions and familiarity with the admission process. Nevertheless, she faced academic and financial doubts that affected her perception in attending a university, therefore, opted for enrolling at a two-year institution.

For example, Claudia's first language is Spanish and had difficulties in acquiring the English language. She saw this as an area of weakness and felt the need to further develop her English skills. She shared how this affected her decision to attend a four-year institution:

I decided to go to [community college] because I didn't have the English level required for university... I don't feel comfortable going straight to university. I tried. I applied at couple schools and I got admitted, but I decided to not to do that because I didn't feel my English was enough for university level... I wasn't sure

about continuing my education after high school so I decide [community college] because most of my friends from high school went there, so I think I decide to go there to keep my friends.

Claudia's reflection on the reasons for not attending a university reflects her doubts not only in her English capabilities, but her doubts in advancing to post-secondary education. Towards the end of her reflection, she provided a clear illustration on the second reason for seeking community college. Because most of her Latina/o friends decided to enroll at a community college, this option seem reasonable for Claudia. Following her peers seemed like a natural step to take. The fact that her peers were Latinas/os and opting out from entering universities right after high school influenced Claudia's perception of the narrow educational path for Latinas/os.

Rebeca, like Claudia, also experienced self-doubts in her education advancement after high school. She explains:

I attended community college first because my English level wasn't... I wasn't just ready to start taking college classes and I didn't want to spend money to prepare myself at a four-year university... When I graduated from high school I didn't know the application process for a four-year university so I just followed my sister's steps. I went to the community college... I just did what she did because I didn't know I could do things different.

As a native Spanish speaker, Rebeca felt that her English was not sufficient to attend a university. She reflected doubts about her English, but most importantly she spoke to self-doubts on education advancement. Not feeling ready for college classes and not wanting to use her financial resources for language acquisition at the university level, affected her perception of attending a university. Although her concerns are legitimate, not having the support and validation need to attend a university played a role for her decision to attend a community college. Following her sibling's footsteps because no one

mentioned to her that she can actually attend a university and assisted her in this process left Rebeca with only one option.

Gerardo indicated that he had doubts about furthering his education. He did not feel academically ready to move on and did not see himself in higher education. He explains:

I really wasn't thinking in going to college at all when I graduated from high school. I did not have the grades to go into a four-year university... but I was sent to experience the real world. Working without a degree and I didn't really like that experience, so I decided that it was best for me to at least get a two-year degree and get an education.

Gerardo had self-doubts continuing to post-secondary education because of his high school grades. He was not introduced to alternative educational paths to assist him to transition to higher education. His experience working in the fields changed his point of view on obtaining a college degree. Although he decided to enter a community college, he initially saw this as the beginning and the end of his education journey. His doubts in furthering his education were present throughout his community college years.

Sam's experience was different from Claudia, Rebeca, and Gerardo. He did not have the opportunity to transition from high school to college. After he graduated from high school, he was incarcerated and all his opportunities to further his education vanished. Soon after his release, Sam enrolled in a community college. He explains this process:

Before attending a community college I was incarcerated here in the [Pacific Northwest] Penitentiary. A friend of mine asked me what I was going to do when I got out and I wasn't really sure. I didn't have a plan and he asked me why not go to college and I never really thought about it and thought it would be a good idea. I filled out my FAFSA papers... sent it to [the community college] and later got a response saying that I was going to receive financial aid...

Sam reflected on his initial thought about life after being released and never thought about attending college. His experience in the prison industrial complex shaped his perception of what he could and could not achieve. The thought about college was not present in his mind until a peer instilled it in him. Sam further reflects on his high school years and the impact it had on his perception of college:

In high school I was never talked to about college. I never really knew the process about going to college. It was never really brought up to me, so I just really thought that either you had to be really smart and get a scholarship, or it was really really expensive. I didn't have either one, you know. My grades in high school weren't that great, I mean, they were good. I graduated from high school, but I think I wasn't challenge enough to really show my potential of what I can do. So that was it, I just thought about community college.

In examining Sam's experiences he was not encouraged and empowered to continue to post-secondary education. In high school he experienced the inadequacies of the education system by not having the support and developmental encouragement to reach his full potential. Also, institutional agents from his high school did not provided him with guidance and reassurance to attend college. Adding to his self-doubts in academia and identity as a previous incarcerated person of color, he experienced doubts in education advancement. Sam, like Gerardo, also saw community college as the beginning and the end of his education journey.

The self-doubts in the educational advancement for Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, and Sam were salient in determining which institution of higher education they attended. For the most part, English acquisition, academic performance, and lack of knowledge of university admissions process are components present in their secondary experience, which affected their perception of education advancement. These are components from

which self-doubt emerges and they speak to the inadequate education that Latinas/os are experiencing prior to entering college. This has affected Latinas/os perception of what institution of higher education they can attend. Narrowing their options, therefore, they are being routed to community colleges versus universities. These student experiences provide a glimpse to the reasons why Latinas/os enroll in community colleges at a higher rate than universities.

**Challenge and support in the transfer process.** Each participant experienced several challenges during the transfer process. Some faced more challenges than others. Sam, Ana, and Rebeca faced the challenge of navigating the transfer process. When they initially entered the community college they were not aware of that they could transfer. They just knew they needed to start at a community college. On the other hand, Ana knew that she could transfer out of a community college. She was fully aware of this before entering college. Jaime was also aware of the transfer process because he was a participant in a student support program that focused on transferring student to a university. Five out of the six student participants received support from a support program during their community college years. Sam was the only one that navigated community college and the transfer process without any program assistance.

For example, Sam experienced several challenges during his transfer process. Sam comments on his transfer experience:

I didn't know about the transfer, the [transfer degree]. I didn't know about it until later. I didn't have a degree, like a goal. I didn't know what I was actually working towards. I had an idea that maybe I can get into... physical therapy... But no one ever told me that if you want to go to physical therapy you need to take pre-physical therapy, you know. I went out of my way a few times, but... I felt that maybe I was asking too many questions. I didn't want to bother. I didn't want

to keep coming into the office, but I know now that's their job that maybe I should of gone there a bit more. I think that maybe acknowledging or encouraging students to kind of be like "hey man, if you have any questions at all, there is no wrong questions, or don't feel embarrass about asking any questions, ask them. Come by any time." There was really none of that. I didn't get none of that, you know. So I just kind of felt like I just figured things out as I went.

Sam's reflection speaks to the lack of guidance and direction he experienced at his community college. He knew that he needed to accomplish some type of degree. No one mentioned to him the several degree options offered or encouraged him to pursue a bachelor's degree. His interactions with academic advisors rarely provided him with the answers he needed. Sam felt invalidated and disconnected, creating self-doubts about transferring. In his reflection, he questioned the type of advising he received as it impacted his education discernment.

Sam further explains his experience as he plans to transfer:

It wasn't so much the advisors at [the community college]. It was more like a good friend of my, [Alfonso]. I actually talked with him and told him... I had a better idea of what I wanted to do... He gave those words of encouragement. Those doubts that I might have been having you know. Should I do it? Can I do it? [He said] "no, carnal you are going to do it. I'm going to help you bro. I'm going to help you get there. Si se puede!" He sat down with me and open up the [The Pacific Northwest University] web site and... he helped me to actually start filling out the application. [Alfonso] brought me to campus and he was excited to introduce me to the professors at the ethnic studies department, especially [Claudia]. And he goes, she is really cool people and... I would like you to meet her. So I came here and met her and he was right... I met pretty much most of the ethnic study professors. I felt really good about it that made up my mind that this is where I was going to come.

When Sam discerned his educational goal, he received full support from his peers. Sam's friend assisted him throughout the transfer pipeline from the admission process to introducing Sam to a support system at the university. One of the major factors that contributed to the successful transfer of Sam was the validation and encouragement he

received from his friend. To hear positive affirmations and feel accepted and cared for reinforced Sam's decision to transfer.

Ana established a support system at her community college. She initially entered as a participant of a student support program that guided her during her first year in college. In her second year, she transitioned to a program that focused on assisting students with the transfer process to a university. Ana explains her initial awareness of the transfer process:

I don't think so. Just the information that they have given us in the classes I was in a community college [Student Support Program]... they helped me understand the transferring process. My second year at the community college, I was in TRiO so they helped me with the application fee waiver. For applying, I think I did it myself... TRiO gave me more information about colleges and visiting different colleges that connected with your majors... I think I got most of my help from like my advisors at [the community college] and also like admissions. Like calling admission and asking them like what paper work I need. Like if I was missing something. I think my advisors were really helpful. Making sure I finished all my classes on time, well, yeah, making sure I finish all my classes and graduating by the year I wanted to and having my [associate's degree].

Ana, unlike Sam, had the support from two student support programs at her community college. Each program focused on specific support services. In TRiO, the second program she participated in, she was able to learn about the transfer process, visited universities, and had the support of an academic advisor. Ana's reflection highlights the significant impact university campus visits and having a go-to person at the university had on her transfer experience. The support that she received from both institutions played a successful role in her transition to a university. Also, the academic guidance of an advisor kept Ana on track for graduation and successfully transferring. Ana's experience was positive giving her the confidence to move along the transfer pipeline.

Rebeca also had support from a student support program. Through her program, she connected with an advisor that provided her with guidance before transferring.

Rebeca comments on this:

After two years [at the community college], I started finding for myself how to transfer to the [Pacific Northwest University] and asking advisors here (university) and there (community college), I found the way to move here (university)...

She continues her reflection by identifying the advisor who helped her:

This lady used to work for [College Support Program] so because she graduated from [The Pacific Northwest University] it was easier for me to come into [PNU]. She knew about [PNU]... Every time I had a question, I went to her and then she brought me here and I met two of her friends... then with her help and then just me sending emails trying to find the right persons to go... that is how I did it. It was the program and her that supported me through my transfer... then I started to make appointments by myself for the geography department and I met two professors and they helped me.

During her second year at the community college, Rebeca started to become aware of the transfer process by actively seeking support. Although she was part of a student support program during her first year at the community college, Rebeca was not fully exposed to the transfer process. Her self-efficacy drove her to connect with an advisor from her previous program and rely on this person for initial support. Her reflection points out the factors that successfully contributed to her transfer; she was introduced to the university campus and staff. This gave her the confidence to continue to seek support within the university geography department. It is evident, from Rebeca's experiences, that it is important to have support from institution agents from both the community college and the university to create a seamless transfer process.

Sam, Ana, and Rebeca experienced interpersonal as well as program support



during the transfer process. Each one had a support system to rely on and this gave them the confidence and encouragement to transfer. Initially, all of them entered community college without prior knowledge of the transfer process. It was through classes, advisors, peers, and self-efficacy that they became knowledgeable of this. Their reflections illustrate the importance of having a support system comprised of people and programs, but most importantly it speaks to the need of being guided and empowered through the transfer pipeline.

**Validation of educational path.** Throughout the initial college-going process and entrance in community college, each participant had doubts in furthering their education. They seemed to doubt their academic, intellectual, and cultural capabilities. This affected their view of themselves in college and created a sense of disconnection to their academic goals. Nevertheless, all the participants had experiences that validated them as capable individuals who can reach their academic goals, which empowered them to continue in their education path. Rebeca, Claudia, and Jaime shared the experiences they had with their advisors and peers as well as experiences with self-discovery that validated their presence in college. They became more grounded in finding their place in college and continuing in higher education.

Rebeca experienced validation through her interaction with an academic advisor.

This gave her the confidence to move on in her education path. She explains:

I met a lady. She is an academic advisor from bio-research... She has taken me to the university that I want to go for grad school. She got me into a club. She's helping me with my purpose of statement, with scholarships, with applications, like everything... I mean I'm not even from her department. I just happened to meet her and like within 20 minutes, probably, I introduced myself, and she said "sure come to my office and then we can talk..." and then she brought me papers

from different schools... you should apply here, there, over there, and here.

Rebeca continues by describing the role this person played in her life:

In the way she appeared into my life, it's kind of like an angel because it was random like nothing... then now, she takes the time... to the point that she helps me like even say the words that I need to say, the words that I need to write. Yeah she is amazing...

Rebeca experienced a strong support from a random advisor. This unofficial advisor, who was not part of Rebeca's geography department, displayed genuine interest in Rebeca's education. The academic advisor supported and encouraged Rebeca to further her education through academic and personal validation. For Rebeca, it was not just about having some one to rely on it was about having some one who believed in her and acknowledged her as a person. Rebeca defined her advisor's role in her life as her "angel." This is what gave Rebeca a clear view of her place in college and validated her to continue on her education path.

Claudia had a different experience with interpersonal validation. In her initial years at the community college, she learned through educational achievement that she was more than capable to continue with her goals:

I started believing in myself that I can do things. I was capable of doing things... Language was not a barrier any more and then that was the main reason why I continue my education. At the beginning, I was just focused on my associate and certificate and I was like I'm done after this. I started believing in myself and that is why I decided to continue.

This powerful reflection shared by Claudia highlights a critical point in her development. Claudia's self-doubts and barriers started to vanish as she gained momentum through her academic achievements. She experienced personal validation by believing in herself and trusting her capabilities to surpass her original goal of obtaining an associates degree. It is

clear that initially Claudia was confined to the expectations that most Latina/o community college student have, not continuing beyond community college. Claudia overcame this by developing a critical consciousness that freed her to pursue what once was out of her reach.

Jaime, like Claudia, developed a critical consciousness that empowered him to believe in himself. This developed happened during his interaction with his academic advisor:

I specifically remember asking my advisor, you know. Here we are at [Dex University], I'm a [Panther] fan and I would love to go here. She looked at me and said, 'you can go here' and I look at her and said, "What? Really?" She was like, "yeah it's just going to cost you a bit more money, but you can go here, you can go to [Pacific Northwest University], you can go wherever you want to go." And I didn't realize that only because everyone said go to [Filmore] you are [a community college student] go straight to [Filmore]. That was the easy route, you know. I guess I didn't want the easy route. I wanted to do something that I wanted to do so that's why I'm here at [Pacific Northwest University], one of my favorite universities.

Jaime's reflection shows the misconception he had around what university he can attend.

The fact that everyone around him invalidated his academic goal by intentionally suggesting him to transfer to a university that was not up to his standards was disheartening. Jaime, like Claudia, became liberated through the validation of his advisor who told him that he could attend any university he wanted. These words created an awakening, critical consciousness, in Jaime's being that propelled him to not to settle for less. He decided to continue on his education path to the university of his choice.

The reflections of Rebeca, Claudia, and Jaime are powerful narratives that illustrated their decisions to continue beyond a community college or persevered in their major. They either had a central figure that empowered them to continue on or

experiences self-empowerment through academic achievement and trust on their own abilities to become successful. They all developed a critical consciousness. Rebeca, Claudia, and Jaime all became liberated from assumptions, stereotypes, or negative expectations that clouded their self-esteem in higher education. As for the rest of the participants, they too had similar experiences that drove them to continue in their education path.

**Sense of belonging.** An important factor for students' well-being is to be care for and accepted as human beings. It can be safely assumed that in higher education this factor is often absent due to the nature of a dominant culture that fosters individualism, competitiveness and academic merits as a value system placed on students (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón, 2009). Gerardo, Jaime, and Rebeca spoke to the importance of being care for and accepted. For them, this was important in order to continue with the transfer process and feel a sense of belonging at their university.

In the community college as well as in the university, Gerardo had several experiences that made him feel accepted. He explains one of his experiences at the university:

I love it here. Being a transfer student, I get taken into account a little bit more than the general population... Being Latino and a transfer student, when people from community college come to visit, I usually get taken to consideration to join a panel, so I can talk to them about my experience. Mainly because they want to hear people who have gone through the same process they are thinking of going through. That makes me feel valuable.

Gerardo spoke to his experience at the university where, in several occasions, he shared his personal story with other Latina/o students who were initiating the transfer process. Having the opportunity to share his experience as a Latino transfer student gave Gerardo

a sense of belonging and acceptance. He saw that he had valuable experiences and this matter for him and for students that identified with his background. He felt accepted and appreciated, which gave him a sense of self-value. Gerardo also felt a sense of fulfillment by being able to assist Latina/o community college students.

Jaime also experienced a sense of belonging and acceptance. His relationship with his advisor was crucial for him to feel this way. This is what gave him the drive to continue:

Oh yeah, my advisor. She helped me the most. She was always there... I mean she would actually leave the group to go to my appointments at the university... She would walk with me to all my appointments, sit down and ask questions. I felt like she knew more of the question I knew so she knew me better than I knew myself...

As he became more reflective of his experience with his advisors, Jaime adds the following:

I know she always recommended me for things, for speaking, for doing a commercial that I did at [the community college]. I think that she liked my personality and how resourceful I was. She always kept me in mind, you know... I think getting myself out there and trying to be a better student, a better person... just being part of something, I guess. This is what I enjoyed about her helping me out the most. She was always there to say, "this is what is happening and I volunteer you, you want to do it or not." I did and I'm glad she did a lot of this for me because it helped me out with the confidence... She really connected with me. She really showed me that she cared then I go into another class and found more people that care. To me that was the most important that is what gets me going, you know.

Jaime's reflection spoke to the importance he placed on connecting to his advisor. For him, it was not just about academic support it was about having someone who showed genuine interest in him. The presence of Jaime's advisor, who Jaime described as Latina, during his meetings with university advisors reassured him that she was more than an

advisor. She actually cared for his well-being and wanted him to have all the opportunities in order for him to reach his highest potential. This is what kept Jaime motivated. He mattered to someone.

Rebeca, like Jaime, had similar experiences of belonging. She found that being surrounded by Latina/o peers and professionals gave her the drive to continue on with here education. Rebeca comments on this experience:

I was in [college support program] and it was mainly migrant students and mainly Latinos... Kind of makes me feel like yes if they did it I can do it to. I kind of see myself capable of doing the things that they do, because I see that if they had the opportunity that means that I will have it too. Yeah, it makes you feel comfortable having someone that knows your background.

Having the opportunity to be part of a program where the majority of their participants were Latinas/os, provided Rebeca with a sense of belonging, validation, and acceptance. She found a group of peers that were going through similar experiences. This factor was important for Rebeca because she was expose to Latina/o students who were facing challenges, but were successful in navigating college. She felt accepted in a group were everyone was cared for and encouraged to become successful. This is what fueled her internal drive to continue on. Rebeca saw herself capable of succeeding in college.

Gerardo, Jaime, and Rebecas as well as the rest of the participants connected in a personal level with a peer, advisor, or staff. Their relationships with these individuals and/or overall experience with sharing their experience with other students fueled their inner drive to carry on. The sense of belonging they experience was their motivator to persevere despite all the challenges they faced. They seek to become accepted and appreciated. They saw this as necessary to have in their life, necessary to continue on.

**Perceptions affecting degree attainment.** The experiences of the Latina/o participants varied from negative to positive. Participants had a significant experience that motivated or challenged them from transferring. Ana, Rebeca, and Sam shared similarities in their reflections that spoke to the importance of completing an associate's degree and having disadvantages because of stereotypes and personal background.

Before transferring, Ana was motivated by Latina/o professional as well as by obtaining an associates degree. This accomplishment played an important role in Ana's perception of a bachelor's degree attainment. Ana felt this way:

Completing my [Transfer Degree] and knowing that I can actually finish two years [at the community college]. Well two years when by, you know. I can keep doing this. I mean why not... I was really exposed to a lot of Latino staff... Yeah there were a lot of people like [Miguel], who told us stories about his college career and how it was for him as a Hispanic student. I guess we felt connected to him because we were also Hispanics... It made it seemed like a lot smoother, you know, he's been through it and you can really go through that.

The fact that Ana completed an associate's degree empowered her to pursue a bachelor's degree. Also, hearing the challenges that other Latinas/os faced during their college years and how successful they are gave Ana the confidence to continue. These experiences reassured Ana's educational aspirations.

Rebeca had positive experiences as a Latina student; nevertheless, she also had negative ones. For Rebeca, her identity played a role in how people treated her. She comments:

I feel like there are advantages and disadvantages for being Latina. Yeah you have resources like [college support program] that focus in Latino first-year students and [academic counseling programs] that's also for first year students, minorities. The disadvantage is that there is kind of like a way that people see Latinos... I feel like they are just trying like if they already know "oh these people will just drop so lets not just waist our time." This got me really mad. I was like, "oh my

goodness.” It was just the first time that I met her, like she already knew what was going to happen with me. Yeah, I drop that major, but I’m still taking the classes... I didn’t want to see the advisor. I was like I’m not going here.

As a Latina, Rebeca had positive experiences with her involvement in support programs. The programs successfully guided her in community college and in her university; by having these supports she felt a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, her experience with the academic advisors in her program of study was negative. She sensed that her advisor treated her differently based Latino stereotypes. This unfortunate experience drove Rebeca away from pursuing a biology degree and impacted her perception of continuing on in college.

Sam comes from a different background compared to Rebeca and Ana. He is experiencing college through the lens of an older-than-average and low-income student perspective. These salient identities shape his college experience:

My past is very complex; I’m [30 years plus] here in college. My age difference also makes me insecure at times. I look all around and I’m seeing all these young faces. Also, a lot of these people whom many of them have privilege their parents’ pay for their school or their apartment. They drive nice cars and they don’t pay for their apartment, some do but a lot of them don’t. I don’t have that. I work. I come to school. I also have a family, but I rent. I take out loans. These are the factors that I deal with and there are stressful. I think that is an ongoing issue.

Sam’s reflection offers an inside into his world. He is concerned with making it through college with all the disadvantages he has in comparison to the dominant population. He is fully aware of his age and financial status as he interacts and shares spaces with those who come from a privileged background. This causes him on-going insecurities that lead to question his place in college.

Ana, Rebeca, and Sam’s reflections highlight how positive and negative



perceptions, assumptions, and identity validation encourages and discourages them through college. Ana's degree attainment at the community college and exposure to Latino staff validated her education aspirations. She knew that transferring and going to a university was challenging but having someone who already went through the process gave her the inner drive to carry on. Rebeca saw that being Latina and first-generation college student gave her the opportunity to become part of support programs. She also experiences the disadvantages of being Latina in college and having to cope with stereotypes. Sam's age and socioeconomic status on a predominantly white institution places him at a disadvantage. This is causing him to question his place in higher education.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the research done on the transfer experiences of Latina/o students from community college to the university. This chapter also presented a brief examination of the experiences of Latina/o students before, during, and after their transfer process and how they shaped their perception of college as well as the factors that contribute to students' success.

Claudia, Rebeca, Ana, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam had similar as well as vastly different experiences along the transfer pipeline. Their experiences illustrated the challenges many Latinas/os faced, but also provided an inside to the factors that foster their successful transfer process. The following chapter provides an analysis of the findings, the research's conclusion, and a transition model developed for Latina/o transfer students.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

In this concluding chapter, I will continue to build upon an understanding of the experiences of Latina/o transfer students from a community college to a university and the effect these experiences had on their transfer process. Also, I will outline the factors that influenced a successful transfer process and persistence at the university as well as connect theory to practice for understanding the transition of Latinas/os transfer students into higher education. In this chapter, I will provide the following: a) challenging dominant ideology, b) answers to the research questions, and c) discussion of the literature review, d) limitations of the study and recommendation for further research, and e) concluding thoughts.

Because of my interests in exploring the Latina/o transfer experiences from community college to university, I designed a qualitative study to understand the complexity of the transfer process that many Latinas/os navigate. Another interest of mine was to identify factors that contributed to a successful transfer process and perseverance of Latinas/os at four-year institutions. The research questions that guided this study are: a) what are the experiences Latina/o students have during the transfer process from community college to university? b) How did their experience(s) affect their transfer process? c) What support systems were crucial for successfully transferring and persisting at the university?

As mentioned in chapter four, I recruited six student participants for this study. Although this was a small sample size, student participants brought forth their unique experiences and perspectives on the transfer process and outlook on their persistence at

four-year institutions. The students' narratives provided a rich source of data because of the wealth of knowledge and experience each participant brought to the interview. Their voices were present in the form of narratives to counteract deficit beliefs of Latinas/os in higher education (Yosso, 2006). My hope is that, through this study, institutional agents from all levels of higher education become informed about the challenges and successes that Latinas/os face navigating the transfer pipeline in order to support the development of support programs for this population of students.

### **Challenging Dominant Ideology**

In reviewing the participants' experiences along the transfer pipeline, I critically listen to the student narratives and understood that many participants experienced high levels of academic and personal doubts while attending a community college and transferring out. Most of the participants saw themselves as incapable of reaching academic achievement. As I continued to listen to their narratives, they seemed to be confined by the notion of a deficit model that is often applied to students of color by institutional agents in all level of the education system (Yosso, 2006). Yosso (2006) explains the deficit model:

To explain unequal conditions of discriminatory practices, social science researchers most often use deficit models. Deficit models blame Chicana/o students and communities for lacking certain attributes and therefore causing low academic outcomes. Little empirical evidence exists to support deficit models (p. 22).

Several of the student participants shared that in high school they were not academically prepared causing them to question their academic capabilities in college. Because they were not information about college and were not nurtured in a college going environment

in high school, the participants experienced education inequities and disproportionate access to college. For example, they did not have a teacher who holds them to high standards, therefore, creating low educational expectations for them. This can also be seen as discriminatory practices that prevent Latinas/os from having the same educational opportunities as the dominant group. This has a psychological impact on the students' view of themselves in college. They can internalize their negative experiences causing them to question their abilities in academia or disregard their possibilities of attending college. This is where the deficit model is applied on Latina/o students by placing the blame of lack of education achievement on the student and their culture (Yosso, 2006).

I believe that it is safe to assume that the student participants encounter education practitioners who, consciously or subconsciously, applied a deficit model such as cultural deficit during their educational interactions. A cultural deficit model is a model that “assert[s] that Chicana/o families also exhibit problematic internal social structures... [and] also argues that parents fail to assimilate and embrace the educational values of the dominant group, they continue to socialize their children with values that inhibit educational mobility” (Yosso, 2006, p. 23). In the contrary to deficit model, all student participants shared that their families played a major role through their education. Their parents, siblings, and immediate family members encouraged them to continue with their degree attainment past an associate's degree as well as demonstrated high levels of moral and financial support.

Hearing and analyzing all the students' narratives, allowed me to understand how their pre-college experiences influenced their decision to enter a community college and

the impact it had on their personal view of education attainment. Regardless of the adversities they faced and the invalidation they experience in high school, community college, and university, Claudia, Rebeca, Ana, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam persevered with their education and became resilient students. Being resilient does not imply the easily navigation of challenges faced at their university. On the contrary, they continue to experience institutional, academic, and cultural challenges while navigating through a predominantly white, four-year institution.

### **Answers to the Research Questions**

As noted in chapter four, five themes arose from analysis of the data presented through the interviews. These themes include: a) self-doubts of education attainment, b) challenge and support in the transfer process, c) validation of educational path, d) sense of belonging, and e) perceptions affecting degree attainment. Each theme was present throughout the experiences of the six student participants influencing their perception of the transfer pipeline and education attainment. The themes also provided an answer to the research questions. The research questions are: a) what are the experiences Latina/o students have during the transfer process from community college to university? b) How did their experience(s) affect their transfer process? c) What support systems were crucial for successfully transferring and persisting at the university? This section will be outlined in the following order: a) the overall transfer experience, b) outcomes of the transfer process, and c) factors that influence a successful transfer process. Each section addresses the three research questions providing an in-depth view of the experiences of Latina/o transfer students.

**The overall transfer experience.** In analyzing the student narratives, I identified that all the participants experienced the transfer process in three transitional stages, transition in, transition out, and transition in. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) define the transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). An event is when individuals experience a situation that causes them to reassess and assume new roles in life. Also, Goodman et al. (2006) defined the transition as a series of stages: moving in, moving through, and moving out. Individuals learned to cope and transition out of their new event or transition. This means that in these stages individuals cope with their transition, therefore, not having to reassess their situation in relationship to the environment they’re in. Although the Transition Theory depicts the stages of individual in transition, the six student participants in this study did not follow the transition model established by Goodman et al. (2006). In every transition stage, the student participants reassessed their new life roles, assumption, and their perceptions of higher education. They never demonstrated that they fully settled or moved out of the last transition; therefore, proving Goodman et al. (2006) Transition Theory inapplicable to this particular student population. The following section I will explain the transition model that the student participants followed.

***Latina/o transition model.*** The Latina/o Transition Model (see Table 1) depicts the process that the participants experienced before, during, and after they transferred. They learned and developed along the way by experiencing several challenges as well as having the support of multiple people and programs. The student participants developed a critical consciousness, experienced high level of validation and perseverance, and became

resilient. These are the factors that contributed to their transfer process and success in college.

Table 1

*The Transfer Experience of Latinas/os in Transition*

<b>Transition In</b> Creating consciousness	<b>Transition Out</b> Validation & Perseverance	<b>Transition In</b> Resilience
Minimal awareness of education pipeline	Persistence to degree attainment beyond Associate degree	Juggling (coping) with new life roles
Minimal support or program intervention	Support system continues, others stay behind, and new support systems are formed	Building community
Low self-efficacy	Advisor, faculty, staff, and peer support	Validation versus Invalidation
Challenges understanding the transfer process	Individual assistance in the transfer process	Increase self-efficacy

During the first stage, transition in, student participants enter community college with minimal to no awareness of the education pipeline. They often see themselves as only obtaining an associate’s degree and/or a technical certificate because of the self-doubts they have in their academic abilities in achieving success. They experience low levels of self-efficacy. Also, they enter community college because, at the moment, it was the right step to make since most of their Latina/o peers were already there. They saw community college as their only option to enter higher education. As they initially become exposed to Latina/o peers, faculty, and staff they gradually become aware of the possibilities of going beyond community college. They start to become aware of the

challenges they face and the possibilities of overcoming them. At this stage, student participants are becoming consciously aware of their possibilities to continue in higher education. They are no longer confined to the belief that they are not capable of academic achievement. This stage is also known as the creating consciousness.

To better illustrate the transition in stage, I will use Rebeca and Claudia narratives to highlight this stage. Rebeca comments on her initial experience before entering community college:

I attended community college first because my English level wasn't... I wasn't just ready to start taking college classes... When I graduated from high school I didn't know the application process for a four-year university so I just followed my sister's steps.

Claudia also shares her thoughts in entering community college:

I decided to go to [community college] because I didn't have the English level required for university. I wasn't sure about continuing my education after high school so I decide [community college] because most of my friends from high school went there so I think I decide to go there to keep my friends.

Rebeca and Claudia's experiences as well as that of the rest of the participant illustrate their initial transition to community college. Their pre-college experience affected their initial experience in college. Most of them saw themselves as incapable of succeeding because of the lack of support or learning setback. As they navigated their new environment, the participants heighten their consciousness of attaining success in college by interacting with supportive staff and support programs. These interactions fueled their drive to initiate their transfer process to a four-year institution.

The second stage, transition out, student participants experienced multiple validations through peers, faculty, staff, and support programs. They now have a support



system in place or have developed new ones. They also received support during the transfer process from people on or off campus as well as encouragement and reassures of educational goals. Also, the students start to overcome some of the challenges they faced by successfully completing two academic years at the community college and obtaining a degree. Students have become interpersonally validated and/or validated through personal academic success and degree attainment. These achievements gave them the drive to continue on. This stage is also known as the validation and perseverance.

To better illustrate the transition out stage, Sam and Ana speak to their validation experience during the transfer process. Sam shared the support and validation he received:

[Alfonso] brought me to campus and he was excited to introduce me to the professor at the ethnic studies department, especially [Claudia]. So I came [to the Pacific Northwest University] and met her. I met pretty much most of the ethnic study professors... It was a great feeling. I don't think that it would have been the same if [Alfonso] had not pushed me. I was eventually going to come to college the only difference was that I was going to come alone.

Ana shared her validation experience with interactions with Latina/o staff and degree attainment. She comments:

I was really exposed to a lot of Latino staff [in] the [College Support Program]. Yeah there were a lot of people like [Miguel], who told us stories about his college career and how it was for him as a Hispanic student. I guess we felt connected to him because we were also Hispanics. So you know, it made it seem like a lot smoother, you know. He's been through it and you can really go through that.

She continues to add by saying:

Completing my [Transfer Degree] and knowing that I can actually finish two years [at the community college]. Well two years when by, you know. I can keep doing this. I mean, why not?

Sam and Ana's experience during the transition out stage was rewarding and self-assuring. They experience high levels of validation through interactions with peers, Latina/o staff, or accomplishing an Associate's degree. All of the participants also shared similar experiences that fueled their persistence to continue on their education path. They successfully transferred to their institution of choice.

The third stage, transition in, students participants have endured the transfer process and now face new life roles at the university such as going from being a college student to a "non-traditional college student" and the assumptions that comes with it. Based on their previous community college experiences, the student participants seek a Latino community that is supportive of them in their new institution. Also, as they enter the university, most of them have minimal contact with academic advisors and struggle with defining their role on campus. At this point, they have become more comfortable with self-efficacy, but they still experience challenges in this area. The participants past experience at the community college yield a developed level of resiliency that helped them to navigate their new institution.

Jaime and Claudia's experiences post-transferring illustrate the major characteristics of the third transition stage, transition in. Jaime comments on the validation he received at his four-year institution:

Mainly my support has been [my mentor]. I mean to [go there] and talk to [Arturo] about a lot of things that was going on in my mind. For [Arturo] to keep pushing me, you know, [Arturo] kind of help me put things into perspective. [He was] part of my biggest support, mentally you know... just being there and keeping me going, just having that connection, you know. To me that is just like everything.

Claudia shared her experience around building resiliency. She comments on this:

I think why I decided to transfer [the Pacific Northwest University] it's [because] I started believing in myself that I can do things. I was capable of doing things... Language was not a barrier anymore and then that was the main reason why I continue my education.

Jaime and Claudia's experience during the transition in stage were a combination of interpersonal validation and overcoming challenges. These two forms of support helped them feel more self-assured in pursuing a bachelor's degree. They have the support needed and they have learned from their community college experience in order to become resilient. These factors were present in all the participants' narratives. They learned to become resilient as they face new challenges at their four-year institution.

Overall, the Latina/o Transition Model depicts the transfer experience of the six student participants. The participants' initial decision to attend community college was affected by their pre-college experiences as well as life circumstances. Each student entered community college with minimal to no awareness of the transfer process. As they became exposed to support programs, peers, and Latina/o staff as well as achieving academic success, they saw community college as a stepping stone to a bachelor's degree. They gradually experience levels of validation, perseverance, and resilience. Despite of the several challenges they faced, the Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam learned to navigate the transfer process and successfully enter a four-year institution.

**Outcomes of the transfer process.** The transfer process was challenging for Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam. They learned that in order to transfer they needed to seek support, whether it was from the student support program they were in or

through peers and individual staff members at their community college and/or transferring institution. The fact that they had to find the support they needed helped them understand how to navigate their institution. This was a challenging task for them. Learning from these experiences empowered them to complete an associate's degree and transfer to a four-year institution.

Because of the challenges and successes they experienced at their community college, Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam were able to navigate their four-year institution by seeking and forming new support systems in order to recreate an environment that foster support and validation. They still experienced new challenges at their transfer institution, but the experiences at their community college equipped them with the resilience necessary to continue on. Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam learned from the challenges and success they had prior to transferring. This is what helped them navigate and become successful after transferring.

**Factors that influence a successful transfer process and persistence at the university.** Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam experienced several challenges throughout the transfer process. For each challenge they faced, they found support systems that fostered a successful environment. As outlined in table 1, there are several important factors that yield a successful transfer process and persistence at the university for Latina/o students. Each successful factor provided the participants with the energy necessary to continue beyond a two-year degree and persists at their four-year institution.

The first factor that contributed to the participants' success is validation. Each participant became validated through words of encouragement, interactions with peers from the same background who were going through, or have gone through the transfer process, and interactions with Latina/o staff. Also, participants experienced self-validation through academic accomplishments such as successfully completing an associate's degree. The validation they experienced during the transfer process gave them the confidence needed to believe in their abilities in order to successfully transfer and navigate their new institution.

The second factor is exposure to student support programs. Most of the participants, with the exception of one, were part of a support program that assisted them during their first and/or second year at the community college. These programs provided Latina/o academic advisors who focused on making sure students had access to academic resources and interpersonal support. The programs initially fostered a learning environment where students can interact with other transfer students from four-year institutions. This interaction proved helpful for participants in this study. The student support programs provided participants with the tools necessary to become successful in the community college and in the university.

The third factor for a successful transfer and navigation of a four-year institution is exposure to interpersonal support systems. All of the student participants shared that they received the most help from peers and/or siblings in each step of the transfer process and transition to their university. They received support in the navigating the transfer process, filling out the admission form, finding support programs at transfer institution,

connecting with staff and faculty at the university, and finding a Latina/o community at their new institution. These factors were influential for participants to feeling a sense of belonging and mattering at their four-year institution.

The last factor that made a great impact on the success of the participants during and after the transfer process was resilience. Due to the numerous challenges participants faced before, during, and after the transfer process, they developed a high level of resiliency when faced with new challenges at their transfer institution. The participants were successful in navigating the challenges of becoming a transfer student. They experienced minimal support from academic advisors and found it difficult to navigate their courses because of the lack of Latina/o representation. Nevertheless, they found academic and interpersonal support on campus. Being able to successfully navigate their four-year institution when faced with challenges, gave the participants the resilience needed to continue with their educational journey.

*Support model for Latina/o transfer students.* Based on the factors that successfully contributed to the transfer process of the student participants, a support model arose. The Latina/o Transfer Student Support Model (LTSSM) (see Table 2) depicts the intersectionality of students' validation, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy and empowerment in relation to interpersonal development, building community, perseverance, and on-going support. The support model is divided in two major sections. The first section, which is the top row, illustrates the three major areas students need exposure to in order to feel a sense of acceptance at their institution. The second section,

which is the first column, illustrates the four areas crucial for achieving personal and academic success.

Table 2

*The Latina/o Transfer Student Support Model*

	<b>Validation</b>	<b>Sense of Belonging</b>		<b>Self-Efficacy &amp; Empowerment</b>
<b>Interpersonal</b>	Acknowledging students abilities, experiences, and background	Acknowledgement of lived experiences Positive reinforcement	Exposure to Latino faculty, advisors, staff, and peers	Inspired by the success of others and by personal accomplishments
<b>Building Community</b>	Gained through experiences of acceptance and care in and out of the classroom	Being validated by multiple people; faculty, staff, advisors encouragement, acceptance, and care	Exposure to Latinas/os in major or across disciplines, access to cultural and safe spaces	Gained through establishing several relationships across campus
<b>Perseverance</b>	Exposure to students who successfully transferred	Care for and providing a sense of direction	Exposure to Latino transfer students and professionals	Confidence in academic abilities, aware of inner knowledge, 2-yr degree attainment,
<b>On-Going Support</b>	Assistance in academics, personal, and social	Gained through positive reinforcement and family support	Direct services from support programs at the university and support from peers	Establishing strong support systems at community colleges and universities

The LTSSM works the following way. In order for student participants to feel validated they needed to receive positive acknowledgement from an institutional agents and/or peers. The acknowledgement comes in the form of reassurance of academic capabilities, personal experiences, and acceptance of background. This type of validation is considered interpersonal validation. This is where validation intersects with interpersonal in order for students to have a positive experience in college. Similarly in the intersection of interpersonal and sense of belonging, student participants interacted

with Latina/o peers, staff, and faculty at their institution and these interpersonal interactions led students to finding a sense of belonging on campus. They have someone who they can relate to as well as understand their personal and academic experiences in higher education. Also, the physical presence of Latina/o peers and professionals reassured that there is a place for Latinas/os in higher education. Therefore, students developed a significant level of sense of belonging through interpersonal engagement. Further, the interpersonal section of the model also intersects with self-efficacy and empowerment. In their intersectionality, student participants became empowered by seeing their Latina/o peers successfully transfer to a four-year university and kept a positive outlook despite the challenges faced. Also, once the student participants achieved their own success, completing an academic year and/or receiving an Associate degree, they saw themselves as highly capable of continuing beyond a two-year degree. They experienced a high level of self-efficacy and became empowered by their peers' success and by their own. Their self-efficacy and empowerment came from interpersonal engagement with peers, staff, and faculty.

The LTSSM emerged from the collective experiences of Ana, Claudia, Rebeca, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam. Their experiences, although individually unique, had commonalities that created a collective shared experience. It is within their shared experiences that the LTSSM emerged. This model illustrates the successful factors that the six student participants experienced during, before, and after transferring to a four-year institution. The model is true to the students' experiences.



### **Discussion of the Literature Review**

The student participants in this study showed an exceptional willingness to share with me their experiences before, during, and after the transfer process to The Pacific Northwest University. Claudia, Rebeca, Ana, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam expressed that they were pleased with the opportunity to talk about their experiences since they felt that they needed to share them with someone who would listen. All of them were appreciative on having me as the researcher because they identified with my ethnic background and past transfer student identity. They felt it was necessary to have someone who went through the transfer process and understands their experiences. Also, most of them felt a sense of relief after sharing their experiences. All of them were very reflective and realized they had a lot to shared and offered. This section is divided in two parts: a) anticipated findings and b) unanticipated findings in relation with the literature review

**Anticipated findings.** In addition to the themes presented in chapter four, I was able to connect the individual and collective experiences of the student participants to the literature review. From the collective voice of the participants, I gather that they felt academically underprepared, struggled with language acquisition, and lacked the proper resources and information to make the transition to a four-year institution. Since high school is a crucial stage for college eligibility, their secondary education affected their transition to college (Gándara, 2010; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Zarate and Burciaga (2010) explained that the inequalities that Latinas/os experienced result in fewer educational opportunities to prepare and enter college. This fact correlates to the experiences that most of the student participants had prior to entering community college.

There were multiple factors that affected the transfer process of all the student participants. The negative factors were financial constraints, limited awareness or no awareness of university admission process, unaware of credit requirement for major, and minimal academic advisor support. These factors placed them at an educational disadvantage. Martinez and Fernandez (2004) and Zarate and Burciaga (2010) address that the above negative factors affect Latina/o student to the point of delaying the transfer process and causing them to take longer than expected to obtain a degree. After attending two or three years a community college, the participants found out that they felt short from course requirements for their major. This caused them to take an additional year at their university in order to obtain a bachelor's degree. Nevertheless, they also experienced high levels of support and encouragement from peers, staff, student support programs, admission advisors from the university, and academic advisors. Martinez and Fernandez (2004) also addressed the importance of having positive factors to provide guidance and mentoring for students to successfully navigate the transfer pipeline. These factors were salient throughout the education experience of all the participants.

Further, Suarez (2003) highlights that Latina/o students use their life experiences as the driving force to reach degree attainment in college. This factor was salient among the student participants. They gained confidence in achieving academic success because of their previous experiences in overcoming challenges. All of the participants saw their life and college experience as the major contributors to their perseverance before, during, and after transferring.

**Unanticipated findings.** According to Martinez and Fernández (2004) and Suarez (2003), the majority of Latinas/os enroll in community colleges with the initial intent to transfer to a four-year institution and obtain a bachelor's degree. Although I interviewed a small number of student participants, only one participant consciously enrolled in community college with the initial intent to transfer. Four of them enter with the intended to obtain a two-year degree and only one initially entered without any academic or degree goals in mind. Nevertheless, five of them subconsciously aspired to continue on.

In addition, most of the participants entered community college because they associated this institution with the next step to take after high school and because the majority of their Latina/o peers enrolled there. This was a salient factor for their reasons for attending community college aside from having minimal to no encouragement to attend college and the proper information for college admission. This finding was unexpected because Martinez and Fernández (2004), Suarez (2003), and Zarate and Burciaga (2010) all found that the majority of Latina/o enter community college with the goal to transfer; this being a main reason for choosing community colleges over universities.

Two of the participants did not enter community college after high school. They enrolled later in their life due to life circumstances. Their main reason for entering community college was because they only knew one way to enter higher education. Being a displaced worker and not having a GED forced one of the participants to enter community college. The second one was a past-incarcerated person and the reason he

enter community college was because a peer suggested this to him. These two participants were also older than average students and did not fully relate to the experience of a college age going student. They had similar experiences during the transfer process, but different ones before and after. Their age and background were salient identities for them and this is how they experienced their college life. This finding was not anticipated as both participants brought a different point of view to the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations to this study. The first limitation was the small number of student population that fit the participant criteria. Most of the students who contacted me were first year transfer students with one or two terms at their university. Also, some students were dually enrolled in a community college and in the university. They seemed to have a different perspective of the transfer process. I also had students who were reversed transfer. They first attended a university then transfer to a community college then back to the university. All of these were factors that I did not take under consideration.

The second limitation was the high number of Mexican or of Mexican descent students at the recruiting university. I originally intended to have a more diverse representation of the Latino population, but this proved to be a challenge. Most of the literature review focused on the experiences of Mexican, Mexican-American, and Chicanas/os. Because of this, I wanted to have a more diverse population within the Latino umbrella. Due to the high concentration of Mexican migrant workers in the Pacific

Northwest, it was challenging to recruit participants from different Latino populations. Unfortunately, this was not possible.

The third limitation was coordinating interviews. The busy schedule of the student participants made it challenging to find a time. One participant found it difficult to meet with me during or after school hours due to her demanding class schedule. Unfortunately, she decided to withdraw from the study before the interviews started. Also, there were a couple of interview reschedules that delayed the overall collection of data and interpretation.

The fourth limitation was the interview structure and interview environment. I developed 13 semi-structured interview questions that were intentionally designed to allow participants to share as much of their experiences as they wanted. Although the semi-structure interview allowed room for participant reflection, participants seem to be more relax and willing to share even more in a very informal meeting. They shared additional experiences outside the interview structure. For example, as I walked the participants out of the building they started to share more in-depth experiences that affected their transfer process. This is something I noticed with all the participants. They seem to be more reflective of their experiences post-interviews and willing to share other significant college experiences in a more conversational setting.

The fifth limitation was finding accurate transfer rates for Latinas/os. Because individual institutions of higher education have their own definition of transfer students, it was challenging to locate consistent transfer rates for Latina/o students. Also, research done on Latina/o transfers talked about the low transfer rates, but did not provide a

national transfer rate. Most of the research had specific transfer rates from institutions such as California and Texas.

The last limitation was that some participants had difficulties in reflecting on their experiences from a Latina/o perspective. They found it difficult to use a critical Latina/o lens to analyze their experiences and answer the questions that had to do with their ethnicity. Although, all of the participants identify as Latina/o, not all of them considered their identity as a contributing factors to their transfer experiences. Some felt that being Latina/o had nothing to do with their college experiences. It is possible that the participants who did not see their identity as a contributing factor in their transfer experience have not had the opportunity to develop their Latino identity.

### **Recommendations**

In order for two-year and four-year institutions to better support Latina/o transfer students, assessment and further research is necessary (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2011; Pérez & Ceja, 2010; Suarez, 2003). One of the important factors that contributed to the Latina/o transfer experience was their pre-college experiences as well as exposure to Latina/o peers, staff, and faculty during their initial entrance to community college. Focusing on the experiences of Latina/o transfer students as well as researching their pre-college experience are two areas that require further research to understand how certain stages in the educational pipeline line can potentially affect the transfer process to university. Also, it is important to continue research on understanding the importance of

having Latinas/os faculty, staff, and administrators at community colleges and the impact they have on Latina/o students.

Further research is required to provide information to institution administrators on best practices to support Latina/o transfer students. I recommend the use of a longitudinal study to monitor Latina/o students from secondary to post-secondary education. This can yield valuable information on how to collaborate with high schools to start support the transition to higher education. Early interventions are necessary to provide support systems to successfully transition high school students to their preferred post-secondary institution rather than leaving them with one option or no option at all.

Another area that needs further research is Latina/o adult learners who do not traditionally enter community college after high school. This underserved student population experienced college differently than traditional college Latinas/os. They have different needs that require different approaches for supporting their initial entrance to college, transfer process, and transition to four-year universities.

The last recommendation I will make is to research the experiences of undocumented transfer students. Although, I did not encounter this particular student population in the pool of participants, it is important to acknowledge them as they also impact or become impacted by the complex transfer process. There is a need to research this transfer student population, especially with the recent immigration policies and current Deferral Action for Childhood Arrivals signed by President Obama. Therefore, this population will continue to access community colleges and shape the educational policies and structures of higher education with the years to come.

These four recommendations are crucial to continue to learn about the experiences of the Latina/o transfer students. Because the Latino population is diverse, their experiences in higher education are also diverse. We cannot generalize and assume that the experience of a small sample population encompasses the entire Latina/o college experience. This is why further research is needed to shape the practices of institutional agents and to create institutional policies that adequately support the academic success of Latina/o students.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The experiences of Latina/o transfer students are crucial to understand in order to analyze the inadequacies present in the transfer pipeline. Latina/o students are entering community college at a higher rate than universities and encountering several challenges that delay their transfer and degree attainment (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The over-enrollment of Latina/o students at two-year institutions has gradually created an enrollment gap among Latinas/os at two-year and four-year institutions.

The experiences of Claudia, Rebeca, Ana, Gerardo, Jaime, and Sam, speak to the lack of support and guidance through the transfer process. Because of these reasons, student affairs and academic affairs professionals as well as administrators can learn from the experiences of students in order to remove institutional barriers in order to foster a successful transfer process and inclusive environment. The information presented in this study can be utilize to create collaborative relationships among two-year and four-year institutions to create a transfer program grounded in transfer advising, scholarship



support, student-faculty mentoring, structure peer support, and the development of intervention programs.

Because four-year institutions are mainly focus on the experiences of first-year students and cater to a predominately white student population, Latina/o transfer students enter college with several disadvantages (Laanan, 2007; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Yosso, 2006). This has created many challenges for Latina/o transfer students. Their experience as Latinas/os at a predominately white institution has been negative due to assumptions and stereotypes academic advisors have when assisting Latina/o students such as assuming that transfer students already know how to navigate four-year institutions and Latina/o students are not invested in their education; therefore, creating an unwelcoming environment for Latina/o transfer students. Academic advisors need to go through multicultural trainings to become culturally competent. This can prevent assumptions and wrong assessment of Latina/o students' needs.

My hope is that this study can be used to inform the practices of institutional agents when supporting Latina/o transfer students. The experiences of the participants can serve to develop a well-supported transfer process to assist Latina/o students before, during, and after transferring to a four-year institution.

The student participants provided me with their recommendations for higher education institutions. This is what they said: a) hire Latina/o advisors who are familiar with the transfer process, b) make resources more available to transfer students, c) develop transfer support programs, d) customize academic transfer plans, e) collaboration between community college and university advisor to better assist during the transfer

process, f) more time for one-on-one advising sessions, g) create support programs for past incarcerated students, and h) advisors need time to acknowledge and encourage students at all levels of the transfer process.

Overall, two-year and four-year institutions need to foster an environment of care and inclusivity for Latina/o transfer students. This is important for students to move along the transfer pipeline and reach their goals of degree attainment. It is also extremely important to close the enrollment gap between community college and university Latina/o students by properly supporting and encouraging students to continue with their degree attainment beyond a community college. The narratives in this study depict the experiences of Latina/o students who successfully transferred to a four-year university despite the struggles they faced navigating the transfer process.

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Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

**Interview Questions**

1. Can you please introduce yourself?
2. How do you identify?
3. Why did you decide to attend a community college?
4. Before transferring, did you know how to transfer to the university?
5. What support did you receive during your transfer process to the university?
6. Was there someone who helped you during the transfer process?
7. As a Latina/o student, were there any unique experiences during your transfer process?
8. Was there any situation(s) at the university that affected your perception in obtaining a bachelor degree?
9. Did you receive support after transferring to the university?
10. Did your family play a role during your transfer process?
11. Were you exposed to Latino staff, faculty, and administrators at your community college during your transfer process? What impact, if any, did these individuals have on your experience?
12. What was one of the significant factors that contributed to your transfer?
13. What are your experiences at the university as a Latino/a transfer students?
14. What are your opinions about the general experiences you had during the transfer process?
15. What suggestions would you like to make to the community college and/or the university regarding the transfer process you experienced?

## Appendix B: Invitational Email

Title: The Transfer Process of Latina/o Students from Community College to the University: What are their Experiences?

Principal Investigator: Mamta Accapadi

Dear Student:

My name is Eden Cortez and I am a graduate student in the College of Education. This academic year, I plan to study the experiences of transfer students who self identify as Latina/o and have transfer from a community college to Oregon State University. The results of this study will be used to write a Master of Science thesis in partial completion of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in College Student Services Administration at Oregon State University. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The study would ask that you participate in an individual one-on-one audio taped interview during Fall 2012 term.

Qualifications to participate in this study are:

1. Must be at least 18 years of age.
2. Must identify as Latina/o.
3. Must attended community college for a year (one academic year) prior to transferring to Oregon State University.
4. Must be currently enrolled at Oregon State University for a year (one academic year) after transferring from a community college.

If you meet the qualifications for participating in this study, and wish to do so, please email me at [eden.cortez@oregonstate.edu](mailto:eden.cortez@oregonstate.edu) or contact me via text or phone at 541-337-5269. I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Eden Cortez  
September Scholars GTA  
September Scholars Bridge Program  
Oregon State University

## Appendix C: Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title:** The Transfer Process of Latina/o Students from Community College to the University: What are their Experiences?

**Principal Investigator:** Mamta Accapadi

**Student Researcher:** Eden Cortez

**Co-Investigator(s):** None

**Sponsor:** None

**Version Date:** None

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**1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?**

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that will help you decide whether to participate in this study or not. Make sure to read this form carefully and thoughtfully. If you have questions please ask the study team member(s) for further clarification.

**2. WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this study will be to examine the experience of Latina/o college students who transfer from a community college to a university. The research is intended for a Master Degree Thesis and the student researcher plans to use findings from this study for future publications, presentations, or conferences. Also, the researchers will use the findings to help understand the low transfer rates of Latina/o college transfer students.

Up to 10 students may be invited to take part in this study.

**3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being invited to take part in this study because you meet the following requirements:

- You are over 18 years of age
- Self-identify as Latina/o
- Identify as transfer student
- Currently enrolled at Oregon State University and have at least one academic year at this institution after transferring.
- Attended a community college for at least a year before transferring to OSU

**4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

Your participation in this study and the information gathered from this will be used as a basis for a Masters Thesis in College Student Services Administration.

The activities include in this study are one-on-one interviews. As the participant, the student researcher will interview you.

**Study duration:** The one-on-one interview process will be through fall term and each interview will take no longer than one hour. Also, if the interview sessions take longer than one hour, you will be given the option to continue or end the interview.

**Recordings and photographs:** This study requires that you be audiotaped. This process is mandatory; do not enroll if you do not want to be recorded.

**Storage and Future use of data or samples:** Your information gathered from this study will be stored in a password protected digital file, only accessible to the principal investigator and student researcher. Any notes taken during the study will also be kept in a locked storage file. The researcher will keep your information for three years before it is disposed.

**Sample language for data:** Because it is not possible for us to know what studies may be part of our future work, we ask that you give permission for us to use your personal information without being contacted about each future study. Future use of your information will be limited to studies about experiences of Latina/o transfer students. If you agree now to future use of your personal information, but decide in the future that you would like to have your personal information removed from research database, please contact Mamta Accapadi at mamta.accapadi@oregonstate.edu.

\_\_\_\_\_ You may store my interview answers for use in future studies.  
*Initials*

\_\_\_\_\_ You may not store my interview answers for use in future studies.  
*Initials*

**Future contact:** We may contact you in the future for another similar study. You may ask us to stop contacting you at any time.

**Study Results:** You will receive the completed study once it has been compiled and converted to a Masters Thesis.

## **5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?**

There may be some discomfort in discussing and disclosing personal struggles related to the transfer process. Since you are a student at Oregon State University there is a risk that you can be identify based on your interview responses. To minimize this risk,

you will be given a pseudonym that will be use during the study. Also, the researcher will provide you with information for necessary support services including Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or Intercultural Student Services (ISS).

## **6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

There are no personal benefits associated with this study aside from sharing your personal experience to assist in the study. This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study has foreseeable benefits in understanding and knowledge. The hope is to understand the experiences that Latina/o students have during and after the transfer process so that higher education administrators can better assess and improve access for Latina/o transfer students.

## **7. WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

## **8. WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

To help ensure confidentiality, we will give all participants pseudonyms. Each participant will have the same pseudonym through the entire research to ensure the participants' confidentiality. All materials, including voice recorded interviews and notes, will be kept in a secure location, locked and only available to the researchers. Also, digital information will be secured via a password that is only accessible to the principle investigator and student researcher. The researchers for the purpose of completing a Master Thesis will use the answers given during the interview. The Master thesis will be accessible to the public through Oregon State University library.

## **9. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers

will not use any of your information and will dispose of any notes/recordings that are connected to your participation.

### **10. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Mamta Accapadi  
Email: mamta.accapadi@oregonstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

### **12. WHAT DOES MY SIGNATURE ON THIS CONSENT FORM MEAN?**

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

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(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

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(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent)

(Date)



## Appendix D: IRB Protocol

**RESEARCH PROTOCOL***07/20/2012*

1. Protocol Title: The Transfer Process of Latina/o Students from Community College to the University: What are their Experiences?

**PERSONNEL**

2. Principal Investigator: Mamta Accapadi
3. Student Researcher(s) Eden Cortez
4. Co-investigator(s): None
5. Study Staff: None
6. Investigator Qualifications: Mamta Accapadi has a PhD in Education Administrations and has experience conducting research on human subjects in higher education. She is a graduate faculty member in the College of Education, Adult Education and Higher Education Leadership (AHE) Department and is advisor to the student researcher as well as the Dean of Student Life.
7. Student Training and Oversight: The student researcher and principal investigator have discussed the several aspects of the IRB as well as the research process. The student researcher and the principal investigator have completely reviewed the IRB requirements and planned the research accordingly. The principal investigator will be available through the entire academic year and will meet with the student researcher regularly, especially during important points of the research process. Also, the principal investigator will be available for any questions that may surface throughout the research process.

**8. FUNDING**

Sources of Support for this project (unfunded, pending, or awarded)

This project is unfunded.

**DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH**

9. Description of Research: This study will explore the experience of Latina/o college students who transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution in order to understand the low transfer rate that hindering their possibilities to obtain baccalaureate degrees (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The methodology proposed for this study includes one-on-one interviews with currently enrolled self-identified Latina/o students at Oregon State University who have gone through the transfer process. The information obtained from the interviews can foster a better understanding of the transfer experience of Latina/o students to improve the transfer process for this population.

Background Justification: Institutions of higher education across the nation are experiencing the growth of minority groups on their campus as Blacks, Latinos, Asian Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives make up 34.3 percent of the total fall 2009 enrollment (NCES, 2010). Latina/o college students' enrollment has increased at universities as well as the community colleges (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). In fall 2009, Latino enrollment at community colleges was 17.4 percent compare to 9.6 percent at universities (NCES, 2010). Although Latina/o college enrollment is gradually increasing, many of them enter community colleges at a higher rate leaving a disproportional enrollment gap between community colleges and universities. (Fry, 2002).

Furthermore, community colleges have become an initial stepping-stone to higher education and baccalaureate degree attainment for Latina/o students (Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). According to Martinez and Fernández (2004), Suarez (2003), and Zarate and Burciaga (2010), the majority of Latina/o students enrolls at community colleges with the intent to transfer to a university and obtained a bachelors degree. For this reason, community colleges have become an important component in the education of Latina/o students (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

However, there are many factors contributing to the landscape of Latinas/os in higher education; therefore it is important to acknowledge the transition of Latinas/os high school graduates to college, their high drop out rates, and legal status (Fry, 2002; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Fry (2002) points out that Latina/o high school graduates pursue higher education at community colleges at a higher rate then universities in comparison to their White peers. Also, Zarate and Burciaga (2010) comment on the "alarming high school drop-out rates among Latinos" (p. 25) creating disparity gaps in college enrollment. Another factor in Latina/o education is the increase number of undocumented students graduating from high school and enrolling at community colleges as their only entrance to higher education (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). This particular student population is underserved and less likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Contreras, 2009). All of these factors explicitly contribute to the Latina/o landscape in higher education (Gandara, 2010; Martinez & Fernández, 2004).

As the Latino population in the U.S increases, institutions of higher education will be affected by this growth, especially community colleges. Institutions of higher education need to address the low transfer rates in order to provide equitable educational access for students. Without doing this, there is a potential negative effect affecting degree attainment and access (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

The community colleges enroll approximately half of the nation's undergraduate students each academic year, and half of all first-year college students (Laanan, 2001; Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Also, community colleges have significantly greater minority student enrollment than any other institution of higher education (Handel,

2011; Lee, 2001). In comparison to universities, community colleges are attracting more students of color since they are more accessible and convenient to students' life situations (Lee, 2001; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

The primary ethnic group entering community colleges at high rates is the Latino population (Suarez, 2003). Community colleges have become the initial pathway for Latinas/os in higher education as they pursue degree attainment (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003). Latina/o students attend community colleges across the nation for the purpose of transferring to a university and obtaining a baccalaureate degree (Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Research indicates that even though Latinas/os enroll in higher numbers in community colleges, they are still underrepresented at universities (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O'Brien, 2007; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). One clear component of this is the low transfer rate of Latina/o students from community colleges to universities (Suarez, 2003; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). On average, the Latina/o transfer rate to universities is 12.4 percent, but when compare to White students, 23.4 percent, their transfer rates are still low (Cohen & Brawer, 1987).

Community colleges play an important role in the education of Latina/o students because many enter the transfer pipeline through these institutions. The transfer process from community colleges is complex and not beneficial for Latina/o students (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). There are several internal and external factors contributing to the low transfer rates of Latinas/os; therefore it is important to analyze the low transfer trend (Laanan, 2007).

Community colleges and universities offer a transfer pipeline that allows students to transition to a university in order to obtain their bachelor degree. It is in college and through the transfer process that Latina/o students experience institutional challenges and cultural characteristics that contribute to their transfer process to their university of choice (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Bensimo and Dowd (2009) recognizes that the transfer pipeline established by these institutions benefit traditional students, White middle and upper class, who may have institutional knowledge on how to navigate the transfer process. This places Latina/o transfer students at a disadvantage before, during, and after the transfer process (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009). There are several factors that impact the transfer process from two-year to four-year institutions; this section offers an understanding of the factors.

At the institutional level, Latina/o student encountered several challenges: lack of guidance and direction throughout the transfer process, unclear transfer course requirements, invalidation from institutional agents, financial burden, and limited support programs (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Suarez, 2003). These institutional challenges are present at community colleges and universities making it difficult for Latinas/os to successfully navigate both

institutional systems in order to transfer.

The cultural characteristics of Latina/o students also contribute to their decision to transfer out from their community college (Suarez, 2003). Students' culture posits the challenge to leave their family and community behind in order to attend college, making the transfer process emotionally challenging (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988; Suarez, 2003). Leaving their family to transfer to a large university environment forces students to assimilate to a dominant culture, creating a lost "sense of belonging" for students (Bensimo & Dowd, 2009). Similarly, the expectation or necessity to "contribute to the family welfare" (Fry, 2002, p. 5), for some Latinas/os, has become a factor in their education attainment. These cultural characteristics are salient concerns that Latina/o students experience through college and during their transfer process.

Institutions of higher education are now faced with alarming enrollment gaps, enrollment disparities, and low transfer rates, affecting their Latina/o student population. These factors are salient issues that need to be examined by institutions in order to support and create programs to assist Latina/o transfer students from two-year to four-year institutions (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón et al., 1988).

10. External Research or Recruitment Site(s) No external research; All research/interviews will be conducted at Oregon State University

- a) Name or description of each research site: N/A
- b) Name and role of appropriate authority from each site providing a letter of support or permission (when applicable): N/A
- c) Name of each recruitment site: N/A
- d) If recruitment method involves more than an advertisement (newspaper classified, flier, listserv email), name and role of appropriate authority from each site providing a letter of support: N/A
- e) Attach or include ad copy or correspondence to be used for recruitment: Attached

11. Subject Population

- Students must be at least 18 years of age.
- Students must be transfer students that self-identify as Latina/o.
  - This study is restricted to students who self identify as Latina/o transfer students because we are specifically exploring the experiences of Latina/o students who navigated the transfer process from a two-year to a four-year

institution.

- Students must be currently enrolled at Oregon State University and have at least one academic year at this institution.
- Students must have attended a two-year institution for one academic year prior to transferring to Oregon State University.
- Up to ten students will be enrolling in this study.
- Chronological sequence of events involving human participants:
- Due to the small population size and the specific ethnicity of my population, I will first connect with student affairs and administrative professionals at Oregon State University who serve Latina/o student in order to request the distribution of my recruitment material through their listserv with the assistance of the administrator(s). Also, I will identify student organizations, cultural centers, clubs, and associations that serve Latina/o students in order to use their listserv to send the invitation letters. In addition, I will make a general meeting announcement at various co-curricular student organization meetings to invite participants for prescreening. Both the invitation letter and meeting announcements will explain the purpose of my study to the potential participants.
- I will provide participants with my personal Oregon State email address in any recruitment material in order for participants to send a message denoting their interest in in this study. To protect the privacy of participants, I will not create or use personal email accounts or place any data files associated with this study on public computers. All the information for this study will be store by the principal investigator and student researcher on their computers. Both computers have private passwords to login and all files related to this study will have private passwords.
- After participants have replied to the email provided for this study, I will email those who have expressed interest a consent form. This will allow the participants to review the eligibility requirements before they agree to enroll in the study. All consent forms will be administered via email and collected consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet.

## 12. Consent Process

- Standard written informed consent forms will be used as documentation that subjects gave informed consent.
- Consent will be obtained after the initial contact email has been received from participants indicating that they are interested in participating in the study. The consent form will be in written format and obtained in person in a private setting.

- Consent forms will be sent via email after participants have indicated interest and meet the eligibility requirements. I will inform the participants to read the consent form thoroughly and ask them if they have any questions or concerns. Also, I will address this once we meet in person to make sure they understood everything and give them the option to decline their participation. They will be informed that during the interview process I will audio record them as well as take notes and that their information will be stored in a password protected file by pseudonyms and that their personal identification information will be stored separately in a file and in a different location. They will also be informed that they have the option to not to answer all the questions as well as to opt out from the study at any given time.
- Non-English speaking subjects will not be enrolled.
- Adult subjects who lack capacity to consent will not be enrolled.

### 13. Assent Process

- Only participants above the age of 18 will be participating in this study.

14. Eligibility Screening: The eligibility screening will take place after informed consent has been obtained. Data that will be collected during pre-screening is first name, last name, age, email address, ethnic identification, and yes or no answers to two questions:

- 1) Are you a currently enrolled at Oregon State University and have completed at least one academic year at this institution?
- 2) Have you attended at least one year at a two-year institution (community college) prior to transferring to OSU?

In case the participants do not qualify, all the information obtained (paper and electronic forms) will be immediately deleted. The paper forms will be disposed appropriately through shredding and confidential disposal containers obtained through OSU. The electronic forms will be deleted permanently from the principal investigator and the student researcher's computer.

Prior to the screening questions, I will explain to the participants the purpose of the study as well as the methods of interview. Also, they will be informed that they will be audio recorded and hand-written notes will be taken during the interviews. They will also be informed that the interview will last between 45 minutes and one hour.

### 15. Methods and Procedures

Method

The researcher will examine Latina/o college students' experiences from a community college to a large, predominantly White, four-year institution using qualitative methodology, phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). This qualitative method will be used during this research in order to have one-on-one interviews with participants. This method was chosen because it provides a broad perspective, establishes rapport with participants, allows for the researcher to write questions related to the experiences of individuals, and provides an opportunity to develop "in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 203; McCawley, 2009). Also, the researcher will use this method because it provides the participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences as an approach to validate their inner-knowledge and for the researcher to understand the participants and engage in further research inquiry (Rendón, 1995; Yosso, 2006).

This study is restricted to students who self identify as Latina/o transfer students because we are specifically exploring the experiences of Latina/o students who navigated the transfer process from a two-year to a four-year institution. The data collected from this study will be the lived experiences (thoughts, feelings, and ideas) of self-identified Latina/o transfer students.

### Procedures

Once participants have been declared eligible, a phenomenological method will be used to perform interviews and collect the qualitative data. Each individual interview will take a maximum of one hour. The interviews will be semi-structured and will be conducted in a private one-on-one setting. The researcher will verbally ask a question and the participant will respond to it and if they need further clarification the researcher will ask follow-up questions. All participants will be informed that confidentiality will be present throughout the interviews and study. There will be no personal information linking their identity with their responses.

The interview will have fifteen predetermined open-ended questions.

The participants have the option to skip or not answer all the questions in the interview. Related follow-up questions may be asked during the interview depending on a participant's answer to each of the questions. Audio recordings will be taken during the interviews and it is required to ensure accuracy of statements and answers.

### Analysis

To conceptualize the patterns or themes from the data collected from the interviews, I will use a phenomenological analysis as well as a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), as a frame of reference.

16. Compensation: No compensation will be given to participants in this study.
17. Cost: There is no cost incurred for the participants.
18. Drugs or Biologics: No drugs or biologics will be use in this project.
19. Dietary Supplements: The project does not require dietary supplements.
20. Medical Devices: No medical devices will be use in this project.
21. Radiation: No radiation will be use in this project.
22. Biological Samples: None
23. Anonymity or Confidentiality
  - The data collected from the interviews will be store in the principal investigator and student researcher computers. Both computers have login password and only the principal investigator and student researcher have access. Also, the data will be store in a file that is password protected.
  - The first and last name as well as the email addresses of interview participants will be stored separately from the records of the interview sessions. The audio recordings and text documents collected from the interview will be kept in a password-protected file, accessible only to the researchers. Numbers will be use to code file names (ie: 001, 002, 003, etc.). Participants' identifiable information will be kept in a separate electronic document with a coded filename. Additionally, both the file with the participants' identifiable information and the audio recordings will be files that are password protected. They will be used only for the purposes of this study and will be erased by June 25, 2013.
  - No personal identifiers will be used within any portion of published research or written publication. We will remove identifiers and use a pseudonym that does not closely represent the name of the individual on the audio recording and notes from the interview.
  - Since the one-on-one interviews will be audio recorded, only the primary investigator and student researcher will have access to these records. They will be used only for purposes of this study and will be erased through the permanent deletion of the files in the computers by June 25, 2013.
  - The student researcher in a private room using headphones will transcribe the audio recordings. During the transcription, the researcher will use participants' pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The student researcher will use his laptop to transcribe the audio files to Word document files. The transcribed files will be password protected. Only the principle investigator and student research will have access to the password.
  - The researchers will not place a copy of the consent form or identifiable information in any of the subjects' records.
24. Risks



- There may be some discomfort in discussing and disclosing personal struggles related to the transfer process. Since you are a student at Oregon State University there is a risk that you can be identify based on your interview responses. To minimize this risk, you will be given a pseudonym that will be use during the study. Also, the researcher will provide you with information for necessary support services including Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or Intercultural Student Services (ISS).
- Interviews are limited to one hour and participants have the option to withdraw from the study at any time.
- The researcher is using email to communicate with participants in this study. There is a risk with security and confidentiality of information sent by email that cannot be guaranteed. Information sent by email can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or contain viruses. To minimize these risks, the researchers will not open any email accounts, or data files on any public computers. Only private password-protected computers and/or OSU computers with authenticated password logins will be used to access any materials related to this study.
- The research is collecting participants' identifiable information consisting of first and last name and email address. Since this information is being collected, a potential for breach of confidentiality exists, therefore there is a risk that the information can accidentally be disclose. To minimize these risks, the researchers will not open any email accounts, or data files on any public computers. The researcher will only access private password-protected computers and/or OSU computers with authenticated password logins when accessing materials related to this study.

#### 25. Benefits:

- This study is not designed to benefit participants directly. This study has foreseeable benefits in understanding and knowledge. The hope is to understand the experiences that Latina/o students have during and after the transfer process so that higher education administrators can better assess and improve access for Latina/o transfer students.

#### 26. Assessment of Risk:Benefit ratio:

- The foreseeable probability of harm or injury (physical, psychological, social, or economic) occurring as a result of participation in a research study is minimal. The risks are minimal for participants because they are also able to opt out at any time in the study. The time that is involved in the interview portion of the study is also restricted to one hour maximum. Furthermore, to reduce psychological harm, a constructivist approach will be taken in this research meaning that multiple truths may exist in the world and students will not be judged negatively based on their

responses. The individual stories of students are important for this work.

- This study has foreseeable benefits in understanding and knowledge around the Latina/o transfer experience and will be contributed to published literature. The benefits outweigh the risks within this study.