


AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Roberto Gutierrez for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education
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Abstract approved

Redacted for privacy

 Joanne B. Engel

The purpose of this qualitative study was to research the experience of six Hispanic students who were interviewed in depth regarding their persistence in school and success at a community college. The students reported on their educational experiences prior to college and how that related to attendance at the college; their perspectives on the educational process in general; and the process of negotiating, learning, and coping with the cultural differences they found in mainstream society and in the community college campus learning environment. Five themes were constructed from the data collected:

Pre college preparatory activities

- * Mobility
- * Struggles they experienced while attending college
- * Strategies they employed to stay in college
- * Retention strategies the students suggest for future students

This pattern of results was contrasted with the retention literature and found to be basically parallel with previous findings. Students who felt connected to the community college through extra-curricular activities reported feeling more satisfied with their educational experience and eager to continue the educational process. The participants often cited that accountability to a role model or mentor was an important way for future students to be successful. Finally, the students non-mobility and home stability proved to be a tool for college retention.

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A Qualitative Study of Successful Hispanic Transfer Students at a Community College

by
Roberto Gutierrez

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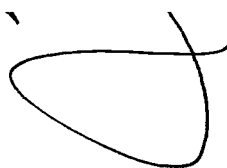
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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Roberto Gutierrez, Author



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The author wishes to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Doctors: Jesus Carreon, Cheryl Falk, Betty Duvall, Jodi Engel, and Jon Hendricks, for taking time out of their busy schedules to support me in this academic and worthwhile process. Special and heartfelt thanks to my Major Professor, Dr. Joanne (Jodi) B. Engel for her advice, guidance, support, and constant reminders not to give up. Thanks Jodi.

The participants deserve my thanks, as well, for contributing their time, patience, and unique expertise in providing the foundation of information on which to complete this study.

Finally, the patience, love, and encouragement the author received from his wife, during the entire educational process was invaluable and made completion of the research possible. Thanks for believing in me babe.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, friend, and spiritual role model, Roberto Gutierrez Sr, who passed away on October 1, 2002, from an automobile accident.

Dad you were always so proud of me. You always supported me in all my academic endeavors. I miss your smile, strong hugs, and how you positively approached life. Most of all I miss your unconditional love. Words cannot convey how sorry I am that you won't be at my commencement.

I miss you Dad . . .

"LA COLCHA"

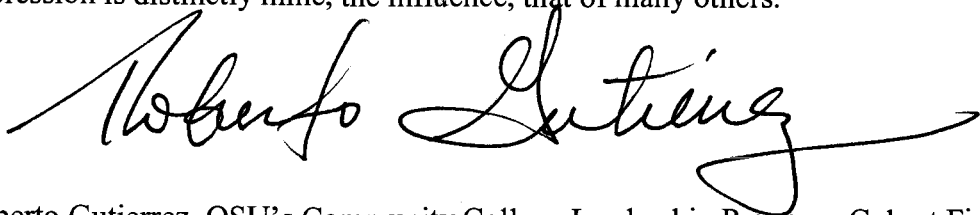
The quilt

In the family room of my home hangs my grandmother's quilt. With this quilt I have my family's story embroidered around it. The delicate stitches bind me together with my parents, brother, and sisters, uncles and aunts into a complex pattern of love and creativity. I can wrap my self in its comfort and history, knowing that what was passed on to me will be passed onto my son or daughter. Grandmothers' quilt hangs in the family room to inspire me-to connect me.

Studying grandmothers' quilt, I discover the fibers that weave me together with her-a fabric of connections-some random, some determined. My fingers trace the stitches; my eyes wander and caress the faded colors, the wrinkled design, and the time-worn frayed edges. And my mind lingers in memories of long ago.

As a child, during summer breaks my parents used to take me to my grandparent's farm in old Mexico. There I used to see my grandmother get together with many of her friends and work on quilts. They stitched fabrics rich in detail and took time to personalize each of their sections. Frequently I would join my grandfather, tilling the ground on the tractor, or in the old truck rounding up lost cattle. However, I found much more satisfaction and stimulus observing my grandmother quilt. I would sit down in a corner and watch my grandmother and her friends and listen to their stories. For my grandmother, quilting was a way to connect to people, to touch others, and in a way, to make up for something my grandfather could not or would not give her. Her legacy of connecting with others transcends time and still touches me today.

Oregon State's Community College Leadership Program cohort process reminds me of the connectedness of my grandmother's quilting. Individual threads; the classes, the cohort, the faculty, the leadership, the settings, and the learning became pieces of the whole cloth. Differentiated but integrated, the single strands woven together became colorful, vibrant, complex and created a unique pattern. Less a blueprint than a creative process, by being part of the cohort, I felt like I was weaving the quilt; designing the pattern from the threads of knowledge, the many color choices, the selection and focus of the learning, the embellishments, the interplay of individuals, the infinite variation of putting it together. The experience was traditional, ritualistic, yet new. The resulting expression is distinctly mine, the influence, that of many others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Roberto Gutierrez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Roberto Gutierrez, OSU's Community College Leadership Program, Cohort Five.

A Qualitative Study of Successful Hispanic Students at a Community College.

Background and Setting

The Hispanic population of the United States is currently increasing at a rate higher than either the Caucasian or the African-American population. Continued immigration from Latin America and the higher than average rate of natural increase among Hispanics in the United States virtually ensure the continuation of this trend for the foreseeable future. This means that Hispanics will make up an increasing percentage of community college students for some time to come.

The education of this growing population has become an issue of national concern. The Hispanic educational pipeline has been described as “narrow, leaking, and needing repair” (Fields 1988). The reasons are clear from a study of the subject published by the National Council of La Raza (De la Rosa and Maw 1990). The findings include (1) Hispanics are the most undereducated segment of the population; (2) Hispanics represent a growing segment of the school-age population; (3) Hispanic students face serious difficulties; (4) achievement test scores of Hispanics and African Americans remain lower than those of Caucasians, and in some cases the gap is widening; (5) Hispanic eighth graders have lower education expectations than African Americans or Caucasians; (6) Hispanics are unlikely to have Hispanic teachers who can serve as mentors; (7) Hispanics continue to be at risk of academic failure and dropping out; (8) Hispanics continue to have the highest drop out rate of any

group; (9) Hispanics continue to have the lowest high school completion rates of any group, and the gap between Hispanics and both African Americans and Caucasians is continuing to grow; (10) Hispanic enrollment in higher education is low, and Hispanic students tend to enroll in schools not offering advanced degrees; (11) compared to African Americans and Caucasians, Hispanics rely more heavily on student loans and less on grants to finance postsecondary education; and (12) Hispanic illiteracy rates are much higher than those of African Americans or Caucasians.

Higher Education Enrollment Trends

Carter and Wilson collaborated to produce the report "*Minorities in Higher Education: Tenth Annual Status Report, 1992*", which stated that the Hispanic share of participation (enrollment and degrees) is still far less than the Hispanic share of the general population. Indeed, evidence suggests that the proportion of all Hispanic youth attending college has declined. The total number of Hispanic college-aged youth (those aged 18 to 24 years) increased by 35.2 percent between 1980 and 1990 (Garcia & Montgomery, 1991). Nonetheless, the enrollment of this cohort in higher education declined to 16.2 percent in 1990, down from its 1975 high of 20.4 percent (Snyder & Hoffman, 1992, Table 173; cf. Carter & Wilson, 1992). The trend among all Whites in this cohort is quite different—an increase to 36.8 percent in 1990 from 27.4 percent in 1975.

Statement of the Problem

Education remains essential for all Americans to compete effectively in the economic arena, and if Hispanics are succeeding in degree completion at a lesser rate than members from the mainstream culture, then individuals from this minority group are at an automatic economic disadvantage. Low retention rates for Hispanic students who attend community colleges clearly demonstrate a need to discover how successful Hispanic students experience the cultural shift to the mainstream campus culture. By examining students' transitional experience to the community college system, patterns may be discerned which can provide information to community colleges concerning how those institutions can better accommodate Hispanic students, thereby increasing retention rates.

Community College Systems

Community colleges were developed during a time of considerable change. In the late 1800s, American society experienced the rapid industrialization of the United States and the mechanization of its agriculture, both leading to increasing demands for trained men and women (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 3). There was also an increased emphasis on literacy for the general population. Research universities had emerged, but the goals for these institutions were intellectual and scholarly, and were not designed to meet the need for a general and pragmatic education leading toward specific employment. University

presidents of the time “encouraged the creation of junior colleges” (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 4).

William Rainey Harper established the first junior college at Joliet, Illinois, in 1901 through the University of Chicago. Harper and his colleagues hoped the junior college, with a focus on skill development, would free up the universities to engage in research and advanced studies as well as to offer post-secondary education to more people.

At the second annual meeting of the American Association of Junior colleges (AAJC) in 1922, the junior college was defined as “an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade” (Bogue 1950, p. 29). However, just three years later, the definition was amplified:

The junior college is an institution offering two years of strictly collegiate grade. This curriculum may include those courses usually offered in the first two years of the four-year colleges; in which case these courses must be identical, in scope and thoroughness, with corresponding course of the standard four-year college. The junior college may, and is likely to, develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located. It is understood that in this case, also the work offered shall be on a level appropriate for high school graduates (Bogue 1950, xviii).

The years from 1900 to 1930 were a period of creating foundations for later growth in independent community educational institutions. The junior college concept was replicated throughout the United States in response to the public need for “education that was pragmatic, affordable, and in proximity to

the people” (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 3). These first generation junior colleges still resembled high schools in many ways. Often, the facilities were shared with local high schools, many of the courses were remedial in nature, and high school teachers, using high school teaching methods taught many of the courses. Funding was granted through the public school system so the state school boards “had a great deal of control over junior college mission, teacher certification, and curriculum” (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 6). There was very little done to support the students through student services, placement, and local employer relations (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 8).

During the next 20 years community college development slowed, as did the entire economy during the Great Depression. However, enrollments in the 259 established institutions continued to increase, particularly in California, Texas, and Michigan. The California legislation of 1907 (Vaughn & Associates, 1983, p. 4) had resulted in enrollments doubling from 1930 to 1940 and by 1936 the state had forty-two junior colleges. General economics and the focus on supporting the war limited the expansion of all higher education, but after the war, the nationwide economic boom and returning veterans fueled the rapid growth of the higher education system. Fewer students took advantage of the two-year vocational and paraprofessional programs being offered.

When the war years ended, American economic demands showed an increased dependency on technology and a decrease in the number of jobs requiring unskilled labor. The GI Bill, passed in 1944, provided funds for

returning veterans to enroll in higher education. The time again was ripe for the further development of community colleges, and President Truman provided this impetus. In 1947 President Truman's Commission on Higher Education incorporated in its findings and recommendations a concept of community college mission that was expansive and included elements that had been sounded by junior college leadership.

The potential effects of the community college in keeping intellectual curiosity alive in out-of-school citizens, of stimulating their zest for learning, of improving the quality of their lives as individuals and citizens, are limited only by the vision, the energy, and ingenuity of the college staff and by the size of the college budget. But the people will take care of the budget if the staff provides them with vital and worthwhile educational services (President's Commission 1947, vol. 1).

For an institution to achieve these ends, the commission postulated five characteristics:

First, the community college must make frequent surveys of its community so that it can adapt its program to the educational needs of its full time students.

Second, since the program is expected to serve a cross-section of the youth population, it is essential that consideration be given not only to apprentice training but also to cooperative procedures to provide for older students alternative periods of attendance at college and remunerative work.

Third, the community college must prepare its students to live a rich and satisfying life, part of which involves earning a living. To this end the total educational effort, general and vocational, of any student must be a well-integrated single program, not two programs.

Fourth, the community college must also meet the needs of its students who will go on to a more extended general education or to specialized and professional study at some other college or university.

Fifth, the community college must be the center for the administration of a comprehensive adult education program (President's Commission 1947, vol. 3).

Thus the name "community college" was given national recognition and a mission description that made educational needs of community the primary reference point.

The federal legislative action concerning community colleges brought a parallel focus in state legislation, which created community college districts separate from the kindergarten through twelfth grade system. The 20 years following the Truman Commission's leadership saw the greatest increase in number and variety of community college institutions. Funding was generally stable for this period; institutions were well supported by federal aid, financial aid packages for students, and raises in tuition and fees (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 26).

Community college student profiles began to approach the general population demographics. Disadvantaged and mature students were attracted to the smaller classes and pragmatic approach, as were people of color, the disabled, veterans, and part-time students. All these groups attended institutions of higher education in smaller numbers, proportionally, than the general population. Campuses were crowded;

support services were developed to care for these new populations of non-traditional college students.

By the mid 1970s almost any aspiring student who could meet the financial aid requirements was able to attend a community college within driving distance of his or her home. "The leap from one-half million to two million students was unparalleled, as was the spread of (community) colleges across the country" (Tillery & Deegan, 1988, p. 12).

While obviously a great deal of energy and monetary resources were expended upon the construction of physical plants creating political structures and ties, developing curriculum and programs, and reaching out to new populations. It became increasingly clear to community college scholars observing these developments that the community college's broad mission to serve all who were admitted having attained a General Education Degree (GED) or high school diplomas was critically flawed. Unfortunately, little attention was paid to student retention, resulting in high numbers of students not completing programs or transferring to four-year institutions. Since that time, community colleges have expanded the student services component of the campus, developing specialized counselors who work with targeted student groups, financial aid, student club, student club activities, and general support services aimed at retention of students.

Cultural Settings

Hispanic Cultural Background

Understanding the cultural history of Hispanics and the characteristics of the culture is essential to any serious examination of Hispanic community college students.

The word Hispanic is a politically assigned term that refers to the larger Latin population. Under the umbrella of Hispanics in the United States, one identifies several groups: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central Americans, South Americans, and Spaniards (Arredondo, 1994, p 8). There are other terms that represent subgroups of the generic broad term Hispanic, "Chicano or Chicana" refers to a person born in the United States who is of Mexican descent, which is the same as "Mexican American." The term Chicano can also have political implications and pertains to the Chicano movement. Another term used in various publications is Latino or Latina, which refers to people of Hispanic descent from the Latin American countries. The most used term, Hispanic, refers to people born in the United States but who are of Spanish descent. A term less used and sometimes confusing is "Spanish" which refers to people born in Spain who share a lot of commonalties with Europeans. Another term used fairly often because of geographical proximity and numbers in the United States is "Mexican" which refers to people from Mexico. Mexicans do not see

themselves as South Americans or Central Americans, and, in some ways, they see themselves sharing many North American commonalities.

The North American Trade Agreement is seen as a recent example.

NAFTA included Canada, United States and Mexico in the agreement.

The second Generation of Mexicans in the United States would constitute the term "Mexican American." This term implies the integration of two cultures including parents, grandparents, and children born in the United States. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term Hispanic to refer to people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, or South American descent.

Hispanic Educational Settings

Educational disadvantages for Hispanics appear to start early and in the home (Tumbaugh & Secada, 1999). Three to five year old Hispanic children are less likely than non-Hispanics to be read to at home or taught letters, words, or numbers. They are also less likely to be enrolled in early childhood programs. Another factor is the low education levels of many Hispanic immigrants. Differences can be traced to the gap in household income and parents' education. Consequently, the parents need all the family members to work instead of pursuing a higher education. The parents feel that putting food on the table and feeding the family is more important than going to school. A

second problem for Hispanic women may be a generational issue. The mothers and grandmothers are saying, "Stay home. Cook. Have babies" (McNamara, 2001, p 2).

Community College Setting

John Doe Community College is located in the state of Washington, is part of a large state educational system which includes 34 community colleges. The first community college in the state to receive a charter was Centralia Community College in 1925, John Doe Community College, which received its charter in 1967, is a relative newcomer (Washington Community College Study, 2001). The College served 8,842 students during the fall of 2001. The reported percentage ethnic breakdown for that quarter was African Americans 4.0 %; Asian Americans 2.0%; Native Americans 1.0%; Hispanic 5% and Anglo 88%. The ethnic data was self-reported upon admission to the college and may not be totally accurate because a small number of students (less than 2%) who attended fall quarter of 2001, chose not identify themselves as belonging to a specific ethnic group.

John Doe Community College is an average campus by Washington State standards. The 159-acre campus includes 6 major buildings. The campus offers 42 professional/technical programs and a comprehensive liberal arts transfer degree to students.

The College's open-door admission policy reflects most community college systems. A prospective student needs to provide a high school transcript or General Education Degree (GED), complete the local placement instrument or provide ACT/SAT scores, and fill out an application form to be eligible for admission. Some programs have math, science, or basic skills prerequisites which must be met prior to program entry. During the admissions process, students may consult with counselors and a multicultural specialist for advice and guidance, as well as with admissions personnel. After enrolling, a variety of support services are available for students: counseling; disabled student services center; tutoring; a multicultural student center; and a full a full range of student activities revolving around the student government process. Students can choose from several clubs emphasizing different interests related to their programs. Club activities are available for students, but how students come in contact with them is very individual. Information is available in a class schedule which is published quarterly, a quarterly activity calendar and through the college's web page. There are also mailings to specifically targeted groups of students as an additional means to get information to students. Students also develop informal networks of information sharing throughout the campus. The Student Union Building provides a gathering place for many groups of students to eat, socialize, study, organize themselves, and simply to visit.

Hispanic students arrive at John Doe Community College from throughout the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Recruitment for Hispanic students is not extensive; they are not targeted as a separate group within the efforts made for all people of color. However, services are set up to support Hispanic students once they arrive, including activities through the Student Services Center. Tutoring, small computer lab, mentorship program, and the support of a Multicultural Hispanic Counselor who provides career and personal educational guidance. There is a concerted effort to contact students through informal networks and mailings, once they have enrolled in an effort to encourage them to join the activities conducted by the Intercultural Student Organization and the Latino Student Organization.

Classroom settings are fairly traditional for a mainstream, public institution. Professional/Technical programs include lecture time, but most of the curriculum revolves around hands-on learning, such as tearing down and rebuilding computers. Most professional/technical programs are offered in a block time frame from 7:30 AM to 2:30 PM daily and include academic related courses, such as "Technical Writing" and "Job Communication Skills." Liberal arts courses, for the most part, are taught in the lecture mode or through an inter-disciplinary approach using small group seminars and group activities rather than a straight lecture format.

The campus administrative structure is similar to most community colleges around the nation. The college is governed by a President and two top administrators, the Vice President of Learning and the Vice President for Student Services. The Student Services area includes counseling, testing, admissions, registration, records, financial aid, and student activities. Instruction involves all classroom activities and support services including the library and computer laboratories.

Method of Investigation

The qualitative method was chosen to conduct the research regarding the questions listed in the next section. A structured interview was conducted with six Hispanic students. The six students earned at least a 3.0 grade point average for a minimum of five quarters with a stated program goal. They were selected randomly from an available subject pool. The interview data was transcribed and analyzed, using the constant comparative technique. Patterns were identified and labeled by the researcher. These results are summarized in Chapter Four.

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions of Hispanic students as to why they persisted and did not fail in college?

Research Questions

Questions for the subjects were formulated around the following questions and were utilized in this study on how Hispanic Students

describe the cultural shifts between their experience in public schools and their experiences with Community College in both the processes involved in admission and in successful subsequent attendance in college.

1. How do Hispanic Students perceive they are affected as a result of experiencing a rapid change in geographical, educational, and/or social environments?
2. How do Hispanic Students who persisted beyond 5 quarters perceive the community college experience?
3. What adaptive techniques are developed by Hispanic Students to enable them to survive in the new educational and cultural setting, the community college?
4. Are there characteristics of the community college which Hispanic Students identify as facilitating the retention of Hispanic Students?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions clarify terms that are used in this study:

Hispanic:

People of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, or South American descent.

White:

This term is used to designate or to refer to persons of Northern-European descent. It also includes membership in the largest group within American society.

Grade Point Average (GPA):

The mean of a student's course grades based on the following scale of points: A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, and F or W = 0.

Satisfactory Completion:

This term describes a student who, for the purposes of this study, has completed five or more consecutive quarters with the same program goal and has achieved at least a 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale.

At Risk Students:

A term used to describe a diverse group of students, which could include recent high school graduates, dropouts, illiterate adults, immigrants, students with limited English abilities, or returning adults, and who may have weak self-concepts, uncertain or unrealistic goals, poor academic backgrounds and/or economic and family problems.

Retention:

A purposeful strategy and plan that involves academic and social support in order to prevent students from terminating their education.

Limitations

This qualitative research is narrowly focused upon one setting and upon a few participants. For this reason, the conclusions drawn from this limited population are not intended to be generalized to a larger population. The data collected is intended to be rich in depth and provide extensive information regarding the cultural transition from the point of view of each of the six students who participated. This is an exploratory study upon which further research can be conducted and more questions generated.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One presents the background and setting, statement of the problem, method of investigation, central research question, definition of terms and limitations. Chapter Two includes a presentation of the literature researched by the author and Chapter Three outlines the research methodology in detail. Chapter Four presents the case studies and offers a discussion of the seven themes, which will be identified through analysis of the data. Chapter five summarizes hypotheses derived from the data, and includes recommendations for further research in the retention of Hispanic students.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This study will be investigating the experience of six Hispanic community college students who persisted and were academically successful at an Eastern Washington Community College. The goal is to identify factors that made this group successful in the community college system.

The literature review and discussion begins with an overview of retention trends in community colleges then moves to specific retention trends for Hispanics in higher education. Learning styles are then detailed. Next, cultural differences are presented. Finally, examples and sources of strategies found in the literature review concludes the chapter.

Retention Trends in Community Colleges

Retention and enrollment trends are inexorably linked with population and societal needs for education. The 1950s and 1960s were years of growth and expansion; the 1970s and 1980s were years of retrenchment and institutional mortality due to the diminishing numbers of traditional students available to enter college. The 1990s and beyond have been years of expansion mostly because of the baby boom echo. Additionally, the community college has risen to the occasion by serving the rapid rise in immigrants. Some with little or no formal education or language skills, others with extensive education

and few language skills, and yet a third group, English language skills but little formal education (Baker, A George. 1994, p 13).

There are basically three ways to maintain enrollments: increase the proportion of the traditional pool to enter college, pursue non-traditional student populations, and retain current students at a higher rate than in previous years (Porter, 1990).

Retention of students has been a focus and concern for community college management personnel due, in part, to research showing that community college students in general do not persist as at high a rate as their four-year counterparts. The retention research literature suggests patterns and trends among community college students, which contribute to the understanding of community college student behavior as a whole. Students who enter a two-year school are less likely to attain a four-year degree than those students who begin at a four-year school (Astin, 1997; Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1991, Tinto, 1993).

Academic under preparedness is a factor in lower persistence for students. Students who are deficient in basic skills are more likely to drop out or to be academically dismissed. It is estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of all entering freshman need help in writing and reading skills (Tinto, 1993).

Those students who receive financial assistance in the form of grants or tuition waivers tend to persist longer (Astin, 1997; Porter, 1990; Tinto, 1993).

However, Astin found that students who depended upon loans to complete their schooling tended to drop out earlier (1997). Campus environments and how a

student interacts with people and organizations on campus also can affect the retention rate. Increased persistence is noted when students seek out contact with faculty members (Jusitz, 1994; Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1991; Tinto, 1993), and when students have a clear understanding of their own educational needs and the insitutional characteristics to create a good initial match of student to institution (Astin, 1997; Jusitz, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Vincent Tinto's social integration model described in Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition, provides research regarding the retention of community college students. Basically, this model refers to the importance of an appropriate match between the student and the institution. Each institution of higher education has a particular climate and culture developed over the years of the college's existence. The size of the institution, where the college draws its clientele, admissions policies, compliance with accreditation standards, and attitudes and personal policies of the leaders in the institution all have an affect on each incoming student. Conversely, the student brings previous educational experiences (both positive and negative), membership in a socioeconomic group, parental attitude toward and possibly previous attendance in higher education, varying degrees of personal support, certain talents and gifts, personal attitudes toward studying, learning styles and preferences, varying levels of the existence of goals set for the higher education experience, and varying levels of commitment to this experience. Tinto explores this relationship between the student and the institutions, tracing paths semester by

semester, from degree to degree, and examining stops made on the way to degree completion, and he makes suggestions to institutions of higher education as to what can be done to increase student retention.

Tinto uses specific terms in reference to the student migration through higher education. He describes the action of students who leave higher education for longer than a term, excluding the summer session, and who return to higher education at the same institution as “stopping out” (Tinto, 1987, p. 9). Those students who change institutions of higher education are referred to as “institutional transfers” (Tinto, 1987, p. 9). He explains that the term “student departure” is more appropriate than “dropout” because students have differing needs and intents upon entering higher education, and students may have completed their personal goals without attaining a degree or certificate. Tinto traced the retention of cohort groups attending community colleges and universities and found “two year colleges as a group exhibited considerably higher rates of institutional departure than do four-year institutions, colleges, and universities” (p. 31). Tinto explains his findings of student migration, in part, by tracing a typical group of 100 college entrants. Out of these 100 students, 33 enter a two-year college. Of these 33, nine students will stay in school, while 24 leave. Two students out of the 24 departures will eventually return to college, resulting in a total of 11 students out of the original 33 completing a two-year degree and four completing a four-year degree without first finishing the Associate of Arts two-year degree. Out of the 67 four-year

college entrants, 41 students will complete a four-year degree and three will transfer to a community college to complete a two-year degree (Tinto, 1987, p.

20). Tinto offers some reasons for this discrepancy:

Part of that difference can be traced to the attributes of the individuals who attend those different types of institutions. On the average, two-year colleges attract students who are, of their own accord, less likely to complete a degree program than are students in the four-year sector. The former students tend to come from less well-to-do families, be somewhat less able, hold less lofty educational and occupational goals, and be generally less committed to the pursuit of educational degrees than are the latter students. Furthermore, they tend to have had less successful high school careers and therefore tend to be academically less well prepared than are four-year college entrants (p. 31).

In this study Tinto noted that students of color, particularly Hispanics and Blacks, left institutions of higher education at a higher rate (64.6% and 54.5% respectively) than other groups. Underprepared students “were more than twice as likely to depart as were individuals of highest ability (71.6% compared to 33.8%)” (Tinto, 1987, p. 26).

Tinto proposes that students leave higher education because they are not sufficiently integrated into the academic and social systems of the institution.

He does not argue that total integration is necessary for persistence, rather that “some degree of social and intellectual integration must exist as a condition for continued persistence” (Tinto, 1987, p. 119). Strategies, then, that bind the student to the institution and lead to integration should produce persistence. For example, students who participate in club activities or student government tend to identify with the institution to a greater degree and tend to persist longer than students who do not engage in any activities offered by the institution, outside of academic endeavors.

Tinto’s social integration model has been replicated in other studies. For example, Pacarella, Smart and Ethington (1986) tracked 825 students enrolled in 85 different two-year colleges. The study took almost ten years and supported the predictive validity of Tinto’s model and the importance of the two basic concepts of academic and social integration for the retention of two-year college students. In 1989 Halpin used Tinto’s model to discover if it would have predictive validity when applied to the analysis of student persistence and withdrawal for freshmen at a community college. The population for the study consisted of first-time enrollees in academic programs. A questionnaire similar to the one used by Tinto was administered to freshmen in an introduction English class. Results from this survey indicated that Tinto’s model is valid and useful for this population group. Thus reinforcing Tinto’s observation that “the more central one’s membership is to the mainstream of institutional life the more likely, other things being equal, is one to persist” (Tinto, 1987, p. 123).

On campuses where the student of color is not a part of the mainstream campus culture, it is more likely that the student will be marginal to the campus activities, less likely to be involved, and, therefore, less likely to persist. Integration and involvement in campus life as well as academics increases students' persistence (Astin, 1997; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Porter, 1990; Pascarella, 1991).

Students who are academically underprepared face an additional barrier to success in the higher education system. "It has been estimated that the incidence of academic unpreparedness has grown to the point where between 30 and 40 percent of entering freshmen are to some degree deficient in college level reading and writing skills" (Tinto, 1987, p. 52). Those students who are educated primarily in the public school arena are, additionally, at a higher risk academically than those who have attended private educational institutions. Students from "disadvantaged and/or minority origins are much more likely to be found in public schools. As a result, they will also be more likely to experience academic difficulty (Tinto, 1987, p. 52). Additionally, Students of color tend to depend on financial aid (Shouping & St John, 2001). Their study revealed the growing importance of aid for Hispanics. In 1990-1991, no form of aid package was significantly associated with persistence. In 1993-1994, aid recipients of all types except loans only persisted better compared to non-aid recipients. In 1996-1997, the receipt of all types of aid packages was significant and positively associated with persistence. The significance and the increased

sizes of delta-p for each type of financial aid package indicated that the effects for financial aid on student persistence increased across these three years for Hispanic students. Year in college was also significant. Juniors in 1990-1991, sophomores and seniors in 1993-1994, and sophomores, juniors, and seniors in 1996-1997 were more likely to persist than freshmen in each respective year.

Students from various ethnic backgrounds enrolled in community colleges in ever-increasing numbers throughout the 1970s, and this trend continues through the present time. However, access to the community college system was then and continues to be no guarantee of success in terms of transfer to a four-year school or attaining a two-year degree (Astin, 1997; Tinto, 1993). The community college system, while affording educational opportunity to some who otherwise would not have attempted higher education, also offered an educational choice for which some students “settled” rather than chose.

Some observers of the community college system in the late 1960s and early 1970s noted that, from their point of view, community colleges may perform a “cooling out” function. This was described by Burton R. Clark (who coined the term), Jerome Karbel, and Fred L. Pincus. “Cooling out” refers to the process of offering an alternative to the four-year school system for students who are judged as lacking the cultural capital to participate fully in higher education. Karabel was critical of “community college educators who refused to recognize the actual role they play in higher education” (Pincus, 1983, P. 15).

Community colleges may thus channel their students to a more limited status in the work force with less flexibility and mobility simply due to the nature of training students in specific professional or technical skills. On the other hand, community colleges, because of their open-door policies and wide accessibility, often offer the only opportunity for many students to attend higher education, regardless of their ethnic origin or educational aspirations.

Community colleges play a role in the education of all Americans. The opportunities the thousands of community colleges offer across the country has resulted in a better educated and more skillful workforce than if the university system were the only option for students. These benefits far outweigh the criticism that community colleges may play a role in perpetuating the limited choices for those who are disadvantaged from various groups in our society.

Access to higher education for minority group members was increased through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited discrimination for reasons of color, race, religion, or national origin. The Higher Education Act, passed in 1965, created government grants for those who could not afford higher education. There was an increase in access to higher education for all people who did not previously attend college due to lack of finances. There was a rise during this time in the numbers of non-traditional students attending all institutions of higher education, but particularly in the community colleges (Timeline," 1988).

Students from all segments of American society experience challenges to degree completion. These challenges include an appropriate institutional match, securing the financial resources to sustain their educational process, and the myriad of details involved in successful degree completion: proper selecting of major and classes that qualify, negotiating the social arena of the campus, making the connections necessary to feel a part of campus life, and finding support from others who are closest to the student. The Hispanic student experiences all of the secondary socialization process described above, but the initial gap between the socialization of a student raised in the dominant society and a Hispanic student raised in a traditional setting is great. There are numerous adjustments and a great deal more effort required to learn for the Hispanic student as compared to the mainstream student. An examination of the retention of Hispanic students in higher education is important to understanding the transitional process Hispanic students experience.

Retention Trends for Hispanic Students

Access to higher education is a concern for Hispanics and other minority groups. A primary requirement to be admitted to higher education is to show adequate preparation through attaining a high school diploma or earning a General Education Degree. In order for colleges to admit an increasing number of students from minority groups, secondary institutions must also work to retain these students, thus increasing the pool of potential applicants. Unfortunately, the educational achievement of Hispanics has not kept pace with

their increasing share of the population and the labor force. According to the 1990 United States Census, high school completion for Hispanics aged 22-24 was only 64 percent, compared with 91 percent for Whites and 84 percent for Blacks, respectively (Sorensen, Brewer, Carroll & Bryton, 1995). Although this figure for all Hispanics partly reflects the entry into the United States of young adult immigrants with low levels of education, the high school completion rate of native-born Hispanics (78 percent) still remains significantly lower than for other groups.

Low high school graduation rates have obvious repercussions for Hispanic higher education. Hispanics are among the most severely underrepresented groups in higher education. Using data from the National Center for Education statistics' High School and Beyond database, Pelavin and Kane (1990) report that over 58 percent of White students attend some college within four years of high school graduation, compared with 45 percent of Hispanics and 47 percent of Blacks. Moreover, Hispanic degree attainment is much lower than that of whites, with only 12 percent of Hispanic 22-year olds earning bachelor's degrees. This rate is four-fifths of the rate for Blacks and less than half of the rate for Whites.

According to Taylor and Olswang (1997) self-isolation from the general student population and college life is recognized as one of the main factors that contributes to Minority student attrition. Because of this, mentoring relationships have often been a popular method of reducing isolation. One

commonly used approach is that of “forced” mentoring, where faculty and personnel actively pursue students who otherwise are reluctant to seek support and guidance (Redmond, 1990). Academic mentoring is customarily used when remediation services are crucial to a Hispanic student’s academic success. The idea that mentors should be of a minority background is also deemed as important in maintaining such relationships (Gardener, Keller, & Piotrowski, 1996). These mentoring relationships are important, because they may encourage students to participate in campus activities and groups that allow them to become more incorporated in the campus environment. Other student minority retention strategies include programs that focus on personal characteristics that may influence decisions to remain at a university or college. Certain programs have been created to boost self-esteem and/or provide more positive images of their ethnic identities (Brown, 1994). Additionally, retention strategies for Hispanic students have focused on populations other than these students themselves. University-wide approaches often target the entire student and faculty populations by offering workshops and classes to educate them on cultural diversity and sensitivity (Grieger & D’Onofrio, 1996).

Vazquez and Garcia-Vazquez (1998) suggest retention rates for Hispanic students can be tied to and are based on Hispanic students’ attitudes toward themselves and their community college experiences. They further suggest that retention of Hispanic students is strongly related to interactions with the faculty and the student’s self-image. Shouping & St John (2001)

examined the effects that financial aid packages had on the persistence of Hispanic students. Their findings indicated that "aid is a much more substantial influence on persistence by Hispanics than by Whites." This supports the argument that student aid plays an important role in equalizing opportunity. Another method that institutions use to retain Hispanic students is by using Learning Communities.

Denver Community Colleges' La Familia Scholars Program has been cited as a pioneer in the use of "learning communities," (Hebel, 1999) which community colleges across the country are exploring as a way of helping Hispanic students succeed academically. These programs, which aim to offer a supportive environment, include classes that cross-traditional subject boundaries, peer mentors, career guidance, and other services. Hebel points out that La Familia specifically helps first-generation low-income students. Denver officials say the program has increased this groups retention and graduation rates. About 80 percent of the students in the program return to college after the first year, compared with 62 percent for all first-generation students at the college. College officials point out that the key is the one-on-one attention provided by La Familia is the ingredient. The program also relies heavily on tutoring. The college's faculty members have developed a passion for working with students who need remedial help. The faculty receives administrative support to use classroom release time to tutor students one-on-one in remedial reading, writing, and in mathematics laboratories, which all students in remedial

classes must attend at least one hour per week. Hebel concludes by stating that many colleges are starting to implement an "early alert" system that refers students who show signs of having problems to someone who can intervene immediately.

Learning Styles Research

An expanding body of research affirms that teaching students with interventions that are congruent with the students' learning-style preferences result in their increased academic achievement and more positive attitudes toward learning.

Investigations (Yong & Ewing, 1992; Dunn & Dunn, 1993) on the learning styles of Hispanics have compared various ethnic groups of students using a measure that identifies 21 elements of learning style grouped into five categories:

Environmental learning style

These elements include sound, temperature, design, and light.

Emotional learning style

These elements include responsibility, structure, persistence, and motivation.

Sociological learning style

Elements are concerned with the social patterns in which one learns.

Physiological learning style

Elements relate to time of day, food and drink intake, perception, and mobility.

Psychological learning style

Elements relate to global versus analytical processing. The construct of field dependence/independence is a component of this learning style. Field dependent individuals are more group-oriented and cooperative and less competitive than field independent individuals.

Based on the research examined above by Yong & Ewing (1992) and Dunn & Dunn (1993), educators should expect a majority of Hispanic students to prefer: (1) a cool environment; (2) conformity; (3) peer-oriented learning; (4) kinesthetic instructional resources; (5) a high degree of structure; (6) late morning and afternoon peak energy levels; (7) variety as opposed to routines; and (8) a field-dependent cognitive style.

Hispanic Cultural Values and Differences

Hispanics are united by customs, language, religion, and values. There is, however, an extensive diversity of traits among Hispanics. One characteristic that is of paramount importance in most Hispanic cultures is family commitment. The family value system involves loyalty, a strong support system, a belief that a son or daughter's behavior reflects on the honor of the family, a hierarchical order among siblings, and a duty to care for family members. This strong sense of other-directedness conflicts with the United States' mainstream emphasis on individualism (Vasquez, 1990). The Hispanic culture's emphasis on cooperation in the attainment of goals can result in

Hispanic students' discomfort with this nation's conventional classroom competition.

Hispanics are more inclined than Anglos to adopt their parents' commitment to religious and political beliefs, occupational preferences, and lifestyle (Black & DeBlassie, 1991). Spirituality, the dignity of each individual, and respect for authority figures are valued throughout Hispanic culture.

For immigrant Hispanic students, identity formation and individuation can be especially challenging and problematic. This is because their cultural values include strong family loyalty and allegiance, values that are in conflict with the behavioral styles of mainstream U.S. students who strive for self-expression and individuality.

Stereotyped sex roles tend to exist among many Hispanics: the male is perceived as dominant and strong, whereas the female is perceived as nurturing and self-sacrificing. Note, however, that in Hispanic cultures the term "machismo", used by many Anglos to refer to male chauvinism, refers to a concept of chivalry that encompasses gallantry, courtesy, charity, and courage (Baron, A. 1991). Hispanic males display more and earlier independence than the Anglo males of the general U.S. population. However, researchers Black & DeBlassie (1991), have found that Hispanic students often exhibit lower levels of self-esteem than their Anglo counterparts.

Further research shows that many Hispanic students do not see the relevance of the class material to their lives. In Kaczmarczyk's (2001) study

she carefully taught Hispanic students the curriculum and followed up along culturally relevant themes. Despite enthusiastic classroom participation, students did not complete assigned homework and other out of class work necessary to progress. Initially baffling, when viewed in cultural context the reasoning became clear: in most Hispanic cultures, education ranks last, behind family and then work. One's future depends heavily upon maintaining familial bonds. Therefore, it takes far more than an enjoyable classroom experience for students to put aside pressing familial obligations in order to do homework. This is in direct contrast to the United States culture where work has an extremely high value and family generally far less.

Conclusion of Literature Review

American society is not positively serving the educational needs of its Hispanic population. Historical data shows that there are not enough Hispanics entering college for college retention programs-working alone-to close the Hispanic education gap. Retention strategies must be combined with programs that increase the percentage of students who complete high school, are prepared for college, and who enroll in four-year institutions or community colleges.

Community college systems offer an alternative to four-year schools and are attended by Hispanic students in greater numbers than are four-year institutions. Although, Hispanic students attend community colleges in greater numbers, the retention rate is second to the lowest of any ethnic group (the

Native American student having the lowest retention rate). The lower retention rate has been noted in the literature, but remains largely unexamined in research. Very few studies focus upon Hispanic student success in the community college system and, as a result little is known about why Hispanic students choose to stay in community colleges. Because more Hispanic students choose to attend community colleges than to attend four-year institutions, it was most appropriate to learn from Hispanic students themselves on what retention strategies are best suited for this population and increase their chances for program completion and transfer to four-year schools.

By examining how Hispanic students negotiate the cultural gulf between family life and campus life, and by learning from these students how they perceive their experiences as students as related to their intended educational goals and their actual educational experiences, a gap in the retention literature may begin to be addressed

Chapter Three

Research Design

Introduction

Hispanic student retention in higher education is problematic. Studies cited and discussed in chapter two show that Hispanic students enter higher education at a lower rate than White students and complete fewer degrees. Pascarella (1986), Tinto (1987 & 1993), Astin (1997), and others have conducted numerous qualitative studies retention studies, compiling data on completion rates, testing various factors involved in a student staying or leaving college, explaining the “stop-out” phenomena, and identifying various variables or features of those students who do complete higher education as separate from those who do not complete degrees in higher education. While these are interesting and helpful in the identification of overall retention trends and in providing guidance toward identifying potential areas of focus for this research, few studies directly address what special population students need from institutions of higher education to complete degrees.

Cultural identity, family support, and adequate financial resources were most often cited as factors for Hispanic success in higher education. Research focuses upon what the students bring with them to the institution in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, grade point averages, and SAT scores rather than what the institutions might do to accommodate or facilitate the impact of changes for the student. A few studies, however, did address retention of

students in terms of the institution making changes to increase retention (Astin, 1986; Tinto, 1987; Carter & Wilson 1990; Rendon, 1995). The movement of students through the higher education system was effectively tracked through the use of the available data base information and through surveys which contained responses on paper at the beginning of their higher education career and at various points thereafter (Tinto, 1987; Carter & Wilson, 1990; Porter, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1997).

Methodology

Because of the importance of cultural issues I felt the most appropriate design was a qualitative exploratory approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This approach was chosen in order to explore the cultural shift students experience during the transition from a traditional Hispanic family home life to the Community College system. The structured interview process allowed the focus upon individual experiences and the identification of patterns of behaviors or responses noted while gathering the data and exploring the research questions which frame this study (Seidman, 1991).

Site

This research was conducted at a community college in the Pacific Northwest, which served both urban and rural students. Data were gathered through the college's centralized computing system. Interviews were conducted on campus and in various downtown café locations. In order to set the

participants at ease, I asked them to designate the interview site, so I may meet and interview them in the least threatening environment possible.

Participants

Six Hispanic students were randomly selected from the community college database based on Spanish surnames and persistence for more than 5 quarters in the same program, as well as achieving at least a 3.0 grade point average.

Techniques

Qualitative research can include a wide variety of data gathering techniques. Archival information was available in the database recorded in the Student Management System at the community college. Descriptive information was acquired through the system. This included: age, address, date of birth, grade point average (program, cumulative, transfer-level, and quarterly), number of quarters enrolled, total credits and courses attempted, total credits earned, stated program goal, and the student intent codes. Then several interviews were conducted with each of the six participants.

Researcher as Instrument

This study primarily used interviewing and observation as data gathering techniques. The researcher became an integral part of this process and could possibly influence the outcome of the data through body language and the tone of the question posed to the participant. I tried to avoid this situation but it is simply a part of this data gathering process. For this study, I used interviewing

as method of gathering data from the participants. The interviews consisted of structured questions with follow-up questions as needed and were completely transcribed. Even though each interview began and concluded within the framework of the structured questions and topics, I was alert for openings to solicit new data by giving the participant freedom to introduce materials that I did not anticipate. Erickson suggests that researchers employing interviewing processes begin "in the most comprehensive fashion possible". Later in the research process one moves in successive stages to more restricted "techniques which the researcher will identify as themes merge from the constant comparison of data during collection" (Erickson, 1986, p. 143). The informal interviews were personal face-to-face contacts and telephone follow-up calls.

Because the data was filtered through the researcher, I became an instrument in the study. Mehan and Wood state "one reality cannot investigate another without running it through its own knowledge and reasoning system" (1975, p. 70). It is thus essential to explore the researcher's biases and views in the context of the research because of this filtering phenomenon, which impacts the interpretation of all data gathered.

The biases I have, as a researcher, are rooted in my cultural upbringing and value system. I am a Hispanic male and my parents were migrant farm workers. Our family moved an average of every two years and we lived in various places in the United States. Consequently, the mobility took its toll and I dropped out of high school. I became part of the statistics that show Hispanics

have a high academic failure. I worked side by side with my parents in the fields trying to help them economically. Throughout this time I was surrounded by people from different Hispanic backgrounds and was part of a group that was socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Through personal life circumstances I am acutely aware of the many challenges and obstacles Hispanic families are faced with. Nonetheless, I did not allow the societal stigma of being poor and not formally educated dictate my choices. Later I visited the local community college and earned a General Equivalency Diploma. Subsequently I attained the Associate of Arts, Bachelor of Arts and Master of Education degrees.

I believe this atmosphere of economic and cultural diversity has been a valuable learning experience for me, and resulted in an attitude of flexibility and a life philosophy that embellishes family and a calling of service to those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

I acknowledge that I tend to believe that Hispanic students have numerous challenges when entering the community college system. Some of these are: lack of cultural sensitivity by some college employees; limited access to knowledge about the community college system; and the lack of an aggressive, organized retention strategy for Hispanic students once they enroll. Knowing I would, consciously or subconsciously, be "looking for" responses along these lines, I carefully checked the quality of my interview questions and,

with feedback from my Major Professor, eliminated those which may have been “leading” in nature.

The participants in this study grew up in a culture very similar to my own upbringing and environment. It is probable that this similarity between the participants and myself resulted in an increase of meaning during the interview process or identification. Since I was aware of this likelihood, I was alert to possible miscues on my part which resulted in answers which were expected, a response from the participant with a systematic answer, or an answer that indicated that the interviewee wanted to please the researcher. Anytime I suspected that this occurred, I stopped and asked for clarification from the participant until I felt the participant understood the exchange as completely as was possible. Nonetheless, I felt that the researcher being part of the Hispanic culture helped the Hispanic participants feel at ease and allowed them to share more meaningful and personal information. For instance, sometimes the subjects felt like answering my questions in Spanish, which I obliged by continuing the rest of the interview in their native language. I believe this process resulted in successful and meaningful interviewing sessions.

Procedure

After approval from the University Human Subjects Review Board, permission was secured from a regional community college for the collection of the descriptive data and to contact their students as participants in the study. A formal letter describing the purpose and design of the study was sent to the

President of the college prior to data collection and an affirmative reply was received.

I then contacted each participant in person or by phone. When each participant contacted expressed interest and a willingness to participate in the study, I followed up the verbal confirmation with a plan of anticipated interview times for the participant and gave the personal information needed for him or her to contact me for questions or rescheduling the interview. Before the interview started the participants were made aware of the interview process, confidentiality issues, and that participation in the study was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at anytime. Additionally, the students were fully advised of who had access to the tapes and transcriptions needed to aid me in the analytical process. None of the participants objected to the processes described and all signed the informed consent form.

Data Collection

Archival information was gathered on each participant through the database at the community college. After all releases were obtained from the participants, information from the database was printed for analysis and record compilation.

The interviewing process made up the largest part of the data gathered. All the interviews were tape recorded and fully transcribed. I completed two interviews with each participant. The first interview was a time to get acquainted, go over the informed consent document, and start the interview

questions. I covered the same topical ground with each participant; each interview lasted approximately two hours. The second interview was to check the accuracy of the transcription from our previous meeting and for any follow up questions they may have after our first interview. I closed the interview session by giving each participant a copy of their transcription and a personalized thank you-card.

The interviews were structured and conducted using the methods described by Seidman (1997). Seidman provided guidance for me regarding participant selection, legalities to consider while interviewing participants, specific interviewing techniques, and data management.

During the research process, I kept two journals: one to record transcripts (dates, times, content) of taped sessions and the other, a personal process journal, in which I recorded my sense of progress, ideas about patterns, and working hypotheses as they emerged. This second journal contained dated entries made immediately after each interview.

Confidentiality was a key issue in maintaining this particular data. The files, computer disks, and related journals were kept in a locked file cabinet at home. The transcribed materials saved as files on my laptop computer hard disk were accessible only through a password system.

Accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data are concerns for the qualitative researcher. Reliability of the data is described as “. . . a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study,

rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 36). This can be assessed through various methods. I constantly examined my understanding of answers given as well as the participant’s comprehension of the questions through clarification during the interview conversation. Each participant was asked the same set of questions during the structured interview. During the follow up interview, each participant had the opportunity to add information to the themes as they emerged and were interpreted and identified by me. I was alert throughout the interviewing times to points of confusion regarding the meaning of events, phrases, and questions. These were communicated to me through answers which seemed “out of context” or “surprising” to me, and by nonverbal behavior (silences, shrugging of shoulders, grimaces) exhibited by the participant.

Validity, the essential truthfulness, of a study is reliant upon the methods of data gathering and the honesty of the participants and willingness for them to share what the researcher is asking of them. I believe by asking six people the same questions and by creating a good rapport with each one of them, I produced a reliable and valid study, to the extent that is possible.

To further filter, check and arrange my data, I used triangulation through accessing, analyzing, and gathering data through several avenues: face-to-face interviews, personal journal, participant verification of transcripts, and mainframe data base information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research is “fundamentally the search for patterns” (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986, p. 108). I used the “constant comparative” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 66) method as a means to make sense of the data gathered. This analytic method consists of an initial construction of themes or patterns, which become the “working hypotheses” within a set of data gathered in each interviewing session, followed by comparisons to subsequent data gathered to continually reconstruct and check the working hypotheses. The data gathered in the first interview became a “base point” from which to compare the subsequent data. The next interview and data base information brought in other perspectives, repeated information, and added new pieces of information which changed the flavor, somewhat, of my initial understanding. Employing this method, “the emerging themes guide data collection, but formal analysis and theory development does not occur until after the data collection is near completion” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 66). These themes in the first few interviews became the working hypotheses, which was modified as I compared it to the data subsequently collected. These are presented in chapter four of this study.

I have constructed a notation system to identify information from the transcriptions of the interviews. The participant is identified first, then the line number or numbers from the transcription. For example: “Alfredo 415-512”

indicates the participant was Alfredo, and the data is from the lines 415 through 512.

Ethics

In qualitative research, participants assume a much larger role and responsibility than those involved in gathering statistics about a participant, as is the case for the quantitative researcher. Because of this increased importance, it was imperative to establish an excellent rapport with each participant from the very first meeting. As a researcher, I had to establish reciprocity with each participant and to achieve, as far as possible, an equitability concerning status between myself and the participant. How the participants were solicited, how the interview questions were framed, and how the participant was treated all affect the quality and quantity of data gathered.

I conveyed the attitude of the participant as a teacher. I explained that I am a teacher and learner who wishes to expand my knowledge of the Hispanic students transitional process from the family home life culture to the culture of a community college. I explained that I had chosen each person because he or she had first-hand knowledge of this process. I treated them with respect, being prompt in attendance of agreed-upon meeting times and respectful of their time by scheduling the interviews at their convenience both in time and location. I returned information to them in a timely, professional manner.

Since I am a community college administrator, it was necessary for me to down-play my working role while I conducted the research, as status differences

can affect the interviewer-interviewee relationship. When asked, I informed the participants about my job and responsibilities, but did not use my title while I conducted the research. I framed the questions in a non-threatening manner, employing an open and friendly demeanor. I met the students in places of their choosing: the campus cafeteria or downtown cafes. I believe this further reduced the impact of the status differential. During the interview, I wore informal clothes as far as was possible, carrying only a notebook and my tape recorder.

I offered anonymity to the interviewees throughout the research document by using a different name of their choosing. I explained the hoped-for benefits to other Hispanic students who will be coming into the community college system. Hopefully this positive outcome will partially compensate them for their time and for sharing their unique stories about their own transitions.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

This chapter includes an introduction to each of the participants included in the study. Information on each person includes educational background, present occupational and educational status, and a brief biographical sketch. The participants range in age from 23 to 44 and have attended the Community College for at least five quarters. Seven themes, or patterns, emerged during the comparative analysis of the data: (1) pre-college preparatory activities, (2) mobility, (3) involvement with alcohol or drugs, (4) issues regarding bi-culturalism, (5) struggles they experienced while attending college, (6) strategies they employed to stay in college, (7) retention strategies the participants suggested for future students.

Description of Participants

Blanca

Blanca is a 20-year-old female who attended the Community College for seven quarters, earning an Associate of Arts degree in the spring quarter of 2001. She is tall, fair skinned, slender framed, wears her hair long and has an aura of self-confidence. She is soft spoken and is very articulate. She carefully considered each of my questions and gave organized and insightful responses. She is the second oldest out of five children. Her parents are migrant farm-workers and during summer breaks Blanca helps her parents out in the fields.

She was born in Mexico and moved to the United States when she was four years old. Currently, she is the only child in her family to have attended college. While at the community college her cumulative grade point average was 3.77. In high school and college she was involved in sports and clubs. She has transferred to Washington State University and is working on a psychology degree. Eventually she wants to be a counselor and later a family therapist.

Myra

Myra is a 20-year-old female who is currently attending the Community College. She was born in Mexico and came to the United States at the age of nine. Myra is the oldest of four and comes out of a single parent family structure. She is dark skinned, has long curly black hair, and is small in stature with an athletic build. She is in her fifth quarter and wants to earn an Associate of Arts degree. Her cumulative grade point average is 3.65. She received a sports scholarship from the college and spends most of her free time competing in college athletics or exercising at the college gym. She wants to go to Washington State University, major in pre-med, and eventually get into the field of medicine. She is the first of her siblings to attend college; however, her father attended the University of Mexico. He majored in pre-med and wanted to be a physician. He is currently enrolled in Wenatchee Valley Community College's nursing program. I noticed Myra as being extremely goal oriented and highly motivated to finish her college education. She thinks highly of her father and I perceived that he has been very influential in her life.

Hector

Hector is a 28-year-old male who was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He was 19 years old when he moved to the United States. He is tall and has a slim build, is light skinned, and has short blondish hair. He is the first in his family to attend college. His cumulative grade point average is 3.1 and his major is in business.

Hector has a strong accent and struggled with his command of the English language. Soon after the interview started he asked me if I spoke his native language. We then switched over to Spanish. Hector is a business owner of a small flower shop located in the downtown area. He discussed the struggles of running a business, learning a new language, getting accustomed to a different culture, and attending school full time. He hopes that his business course work and consequently his degree will assist him in making his business a successful one.

Elena

Elena is a 44-year old widowed female. She is short in stature, petite, has long black hair, and has a fair complexion. She is the single parent of two teenagers that are still living at home. She was born in Peru and moved to the United States at the age of 16. Her cumulative GPA is 3.0 and is in her last quarter at the community college. She has been accepted and will be transferring to a local university next quarter.

She will be the second one in her family to attain a college degree. Her older brother has a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Lima. She wants to get a teaching certificate and eventually teach Spanish at the high school or college level. She feels she can make a big difference as a school teacher. The financial aspect of getting through school has been difficult for Elena. The only income she receives is social security and a small pension from her deceased husband's retirement. She does not seem bothered and says that getting an education is worth the financial hardship.

Omar

Omar is a 23-year-old male with a medium build and stature. He has short black hair and has a medium to light complexion. He is friendly and engaging and greets people with a nice smile and warms to conversations easily. Omar was born in Mexico and is the first one in his family to attend college. Omar's parents are migrant farm workers. His cumulative GPA is 3.63 and is majoring in business. He eventually wants to work for a large fortune 500 corporation.

Omar mentioned several times how appreciative he was to his parents for the sacrifice they made so he could attend college. He spoke of other Hispanic parents taking their kids out of school so they could help the family in the fields. Eventually most of those kids dropped out of school. His college continuance has not been easy. He has to work full time in the evening and attend classes during the day. His parents cannot support him financially, but

more importantly, they supported him by not taking him out of school and valuing education.

Cuauttemoc

Cuauttemoc is a 24-year-old male with a medium build. He has a dark complexion and long black hair down to his back. He is a first generation Mexican American. He carried himself in a professional manner, purposeful, and gave insightful answers to my questions. He preferred to conduct the interview in Spanish. His cumulative GPA is 3.9 and is the first in his family to attend college. He is majoring in social sciences and wants to get into education. His long-term goal is to receive a Ph.D. in international relations with an area of expertise in Latin American issues. He says he plans to have a mixture of politics and economics. Cuattemoc's appearance and demeanor was stunning and very unconventional.

Cuattemoc's high school experience has been anomalous. Because of gang related issues he was transferred to an alternative high school. He blames some of his problems on the high school curriculum, which he called not challenging academically nor intellectually stimulating. He thought the curriculum was designed for mediocre results, thus not helping the students move on to higher education.

Introduction of Themes

Although the following themes are presented distinctly and discussed separately, they are at the same time interconnected and interwoven. They are

presented in a linear format beginning with pre-college experiences. If it were possible in a written format, these themes would be represented by an upward spiral, representing educational gains with all previous experiences affecting the subsequent experiences in higher education. I chose to pick the particular point in time on that upward spiral of educational experiences in order to learn from the participants what their perceptions of the bi-cultural negotiation from Hispanic family life to the community college campus has been and how that relates to their choices to continue attending institutions of higher education.

Pre-College Preparatory Activities

Entering the community college did not happen as an isolated event in each participant's life. Many small events and personal decisions, stepping forward, sideways, and backward, were taken in the journey toward higher education. Each educational experience shaped the student's perception of the process of learning and what it means to "do education", beginning with early grade school. These perceptions constructed each participant's view of the traditional educational process in regards to the priority placed upon the school setting for education and responses to authority figures, and is, subtly for some and more overtly for others, linked to perceptions of their own intelligence, ability, and capability gained through the various means of feedback the school setting offers. The sum of these experiences contributed to these participants' decisions to enter the community college system.

The secondary socialization process in grade school for some participants was a bigger change from the home environment than for others.

Blanca reported:

It seems like I always knew I needed to continue my education. I have worked in the fields since I was seven. Long hours, back breaking work, and very little pay. Heaven forbid that any body gets hurt or has an injury . . . then you are laid out for a while with huge medical bills and no income. This happened to my uncle back home. I have experienced the hardships of this kind of life. I had no choice but to get an education (Blanca 1:20-25).

Myra describes her early grade and middle school years as constantly being scared that she was going to be deported:

I came to the U.S. when I was 7 years old. I was born in Mexico and my father brought me here illegally. I remember my father telling me in second grade what to do in case the migra (border patrol) came in looking for me. Consequently every time an official came in the classroom I thought they were coming for me. It seemed I could not relax like the rest of the kids (Myra 1:210-214).

Grade school was pleasant for Omar:

My grade school years were enjoyable. I believe they were successful for me because of my family and the great teachers that I had. I just wished my parents could have attended more school functions. But they

were busy working in the fields and were tired when they got home (1:7-11). I had always thought about college even while I was in elementary school. As I started getting older I begun to see the reality of it (Omar 1:23-25).

The middle and high school years brought a greater awareness of racial differences. For example Blanca noticed racism while in high school:

Once we were in P.E and we were choosing sides for a basketball game. When the teacher said ok all the white kids over here and the beaners over there. I was so angry. He later told us that we better not say anything because we would be branded as troublemakers and be expelled. I wanted to go see the principal but the others were afraid and would not go with me. They said the principal would not do anything anyway. So I chose not to go (Blanca 1:51-56).

Myra noticed peer isolation in high school:

I noticed that some Latino kids did not want to be involved in sports. They would say we are Mexican and we are not going to make it. They are not going to pick us because they just want the White kids. I noticed that most of them did not try out for any sports. They would isolate themselves. They want the White kids on one side and the Mexican kids on the other . . . they don't want to mix. So if any of the Mexican kids wanted to try out for sports they would call you wanna be White. So when I tried out in sports they would say to me that I really wanted to be

White and did not want to hang out with them. I would tell them we all need to get along and not isolate ourselves (Myra 1:33-42).

Myra's experiences with high school teachers did little to reinforce positive views of herself or the educational systems credibility:

Since I was in track I would run around town and I dreaded it sometimes . . . at times high school kids and even adults would shout for me to run back to Mexico. Sometimes they would say derogatory remarks like greaser or beaner. A few times teachers would hear the kids say these things at me and they would pretend they did not hear. This hurt me a lot but I would not let it get to me . . . sometimes it is hard to overlook these things. Sometimes I do feel like quitting and going back. Maybe go back to Mexico. At least I would feel free there. (Myra 1:67-71; 136-139).

Omar reported that he was treated differently at his high school when it came to consider going to college:

Many times I had teachers that thought just because I was Latino I would not make it in college . . . I remember there was a teacher or an administrator I don't remember but she would come into the classroom and hand out scholarship applications to students. Later on I noticed she would just be giving out the applications to the White students. Then one day I asked her why don't I get one of those? Do you think I am not good enough to qualify for a scholarship? Her answer was oh I did not

know that you wanted to go to college. She did not ask before, she made a judgement. Probably based on my skin color. After that she did give me applications. I filled them out and received quite a few scholarships (Omar 1:52-54; 56-63).

Most of the participants did see themselves as someday going to college. Goals they set for themselves during their high school years included finishing high school and then going to college. Myra reported:

All through high school I knew I wanted to go to college but I did not know how, or where to begin, or who to talk to . . . I felt lost. So right before I graduated my dad helped me apply at the community college . . . I worked that whole summer so I could afford the tuition for fall quarter (Myra 1:83-87; 89-91).

Blanca reported that all through high school she often thought about college:

When I was in high school I always knew I wanted to continue my education and move on to college . . . I knew this was the only way out of poverty for me (Blanca 1:17-19; 113-115).

Additionally Omar always felt his parents were supportive of him going to college and did what they could to assist him:

During my four years of High School I was very successful and was involved in extra curricular activities and was preparing my self to go to college. I believe I was successful because of my family . . . I believe my family values education (Omar 1:9-10; 13-14).

Cuauttemoc seemed to be bored in high school. Additionally, he had a mentor that supported him going to college:

My high school education was not difficult for me. The curriculum . . . it was not challenging, no promotion no growth. At that time I know I wanted to go to college . . . it must be better than this I thought . . . later I was in constant contact with my mentor and motivator. She kept talking to me about going to college. Finally I saved enough money to support myself for a while so I could go (Cuauttemoc 1:15-16; 18-20; 1:24-26).

Elena did not have plans on going to college after high school, however she did plan to attend in the future:

When I came to live in the United States I could not speak the language so I went to night school and I was an ESL student. That was in June. Then come December I got enrolled in high school because of my age. While in high school I continued my ESL. Most of the year was spent learning the language and how to communicate. I also attended regular classes. Math, science and all the requirements in order to graduate. I graduated, but did not have the understanding of college or the thought of continuing on at that time in my life. Nonetheless, I knew I would someday go to college and here I am. I only wish it could have been a little sooner (Elena 1:15-23).

All the participants mentioned that they did not receive support from their high school to attend college. None of them mentioned a teacher or a

guidance counselor taking an interest and assisting them to apply for scholarships, financial aid, or explaining the reason why college is important. Some of them even talked about teachers discouraging them from going to college. For example, Blanca stated:

Once or twice a quarter a counselor would come into class and hand out college information to students. After several quarters I noticed he was just handing them out to White kids. Leaving out the Hispanic kids. Later I went to his office and asked him why, he said that he did not recommend college for me. I was so mad. Later on I would go into the counseling office area and get the college information myself (Blanca 1:68-72).

Elena stated:

I did not have the proper guidance as far as why one needs to go to college or that this will help me to get a better job or improve my standard of living. Neither the teachers nor the counselors ever discussed this with me (Elena 1:24-26).

All the participants mentioned this pre-entry phase as being important to them. They all reached a point when setting the goal to attend higher education seemed the right move for them. They all had positive things to say about the community college admission process, especially, the counseling office and the multicultural center. Another commonality most of these participants shared was their strong sense of family support.

Mobility

While listening to the participants' stories, I was struck by the stability of their early school years. Hector, Helena, Blanca, and Omar had very stable home lives while they were in elementary and grade school. Myra moved twice. The only exception is Cuauttemoc. He moved several times and has had somewhat of an unstable living environment:

I have moved through out my life. For example I moved eleven times before high school and have attended 6 high schools. I have lived with my mother, aunts, uncles, and my grandmother. My grandmother provided the best environment for me . . . she encouraged me and supported me and said I was bound to do great things . . . as of now my whole family is separated my mother is in Texas, my biological father has never really been in the picture, so he is irrelevant, my younger sister in Portland; my older sister is in Sunnyside. So we are not really a close family at this point (Cuauttemoc 1:89-102).

Omar discussed how stable his family was in Puerto Rico:

When I lived in Puerto Rico I lived with my mother and father and both of my grandparents. Additionally two sets of aunts and uncles lived down the block. Plus a bunch of cousins. I could not get away with anything. If I talked back to the local storeowner or was disrespectful my parents would know by that evening (Hector 1:67-72).

Elena shared some of the same beliefs:

I was born in the same house that my mother still occupies. I know all the neighbors and shopkeepers. When I go back they still remember me. We sit down and visit. Additionally, my aunts and uncles lived two blocks down the street. It is such a great feeling when I go back and visit my mother's house and go in my old room and sleep in my old bed.

There are so many pleasant memories in my hometown (Elena 1:49-54).

Blanca, Myra, and Omar had similar comments about the stability of their early years.

Another not so surprising item was they all have been very stable since enrolling at the community college. Omar, Blanca, Myra, Cuautemoc, and Elena have not moved at all. The only exception is Hector:

I have moved 7 or 8 times since enrolling at the community college. Did not move when I lived in Puerto Rico. I was much more stable there (Hector 1:64-69).

Omar, Blanca, and Myra sometimes travel back and forth on most weekends to visit family. Myra:

I go home on most weekends. My family needs me. I have four sisters and I am the oldest and the role model for them. It is important for them to see me. Many times I take my college books with me so they can see them and in turn ask me questions about the particular class (Myra 1:101-105).

Blanca:

I travel most weekends to see my family it is only a two hour drive and it is worth it. . . sometimes I need to be there because during tight months I give them some of my money I earn at my part time job. My father is too proud to ask so I go home to observe and know when things are tight. The money belongs to all of us (Blanca 1: 92-96).

Omar:

I go home most weekends, that is where my family is. I would go home to get rested to connect with my family again. To get away and get spiritualized and strengthened. . .see every body that looks like me again. See people that I could relate to (Omar 1:93-96).

This return to a primary socialization experience served as a reservoir of strength for Omar when he returned to campus in the mainstream society.

All of the participants have entered college in a fairly traditional way. All of them attend traditional classes that start in the early morning that go into early afternoon. Blanca, Myra, and Omar transferred right out of high school to the community college. Cuautemoc worked after he graduated from high school for about 8 months then he decided to go to the community college. Hector waited about 4 years before he decided to go to college. Blanca, Myra, Hector and Cuautemoc work part time while in school. Elena has approached the educational process a little bit different. She decided to have a family first

then go to college. For her the transition has been unconventional and she has struggled at times:

It has been so long since I been in school that some subjects I have found to be very hard. Sometimes I have gotten overwhelmed by the science subjects like biology or geology . . . I get frustrated and feel like I need more help. Many times I want to quit. Sometimes wish I had started this process while I was younger. Seems like the younger students don't put in the time studying like I do . . .they seem to have an easier time learning than me (Elena 1:54-60).

Involvement with Alcohol or Drugs

While listening to the participants stories I was not surprised when I learned that none of them consume alcohol on a regular basis. Omar, Blanca, Myra, and Elena do not drink at all. Cuauttemoc and Hector drink occasionally. Myra:

No I don't drink. I took a sip several years ago. I never really had an inclination. Maybe it was my dad that he never said no. He explained the consequences of alcohol and what it does to the body and what it may do to people's lives. He said you are the ones that are going to suffer the consequences if you drink. He gave us a choice. I don't want to drink (Mayra 1:83-88).

Cuauttemoc:

I drink occasionally. During my first year of college I did get into the party scene and started drinking on a regular basis. It is so easy to get into. Soon I realized that my grades were dropping. I made a change and only drink occasionally (Cuauttemoc 1:151-154).

None of the participants admitted to doing drugs. I quizzed them a few times about smoking marijuana. Nonetheless, they stuck to their stories that they did not smoke pot.

Myra:

No I have never smoked pot. I've smelled it once in the high school bathroom. That is the closest I've been to drugs (Mayra 1:188-190).

Hector:

There are so many issues in college that it is hard to survive and make it with a clear mind let alone high on pot (Hector 1:81-83).

None of the participants have struggles with alcohol or drug issues, whether it was a personal struggle or close family members whose drinking affected them. There seemed to be a pattern of no alcohol or drugs in their personal or family lives.

Issues Regarding Bi-Culturalism

This theme refers to the concept of a person operating in two cultures and the strategies they employed in order to prevail in the mainstream culture. The participants described incidents of cultural conflict, reflected in and

expressed by confrontations and by feelings of uneasiness and feelings distinctly different in some settings. The participants described an ensuing social dissonance, explained how they recognized it, anticipated certain reactions in selected situations, and delineated how they coped with this constant barrage of differences in perceptions and reactions. They noted that these encounters were, generally, an assault on their self-esteem. Negative attitudes were reported to have been communicated in a variety of ways from a glance, which triggered a feeling, or perception of potential conflict to overt comments, seemingly designed to create conflict.

Hector explains his frustrations:

This issue has been tough and frustrating for me. There are different values and morals. People here are so cold. They are not friendly; they live their lives, keep to themselves, and don't want to get involved. For example, in Puerto Rico I know every body in my neighborhood we all care for one another and invest in one another's lives. Not the same here, I don't know my neighbors at all. When I do try to get to know them they look at me suspiciously . . . every body keeps to themselves . . . I have my business; customers come in and leave some times without saying a word. In Latin America they would come in visit and get to know you . . . I cope by trying to connect to the local Latin community. But there are not enough of us. So I go back to Puerto Rico often . . . I've also experienced racism. Three different times students at the

college have criticized the financial aid process in front of me. Saying that just because I am Hispanic I will probably get a lot more money than they will. Once the comment was done in front of the financial aid officer and he pretended not to hear. These comments get me so angry that I want to confront these people. But it will only get me in trouble and in turn affect my education. So I walk away (Hector 1:40-51; 1:18-24).

Cuauttemoc has had a difficult time coping with the non-diversity of the area:

This has been very difficult for me . . . I find this issue very troublesome . . . racism in this area is so covert. I would rather have somebody tell me a racist remark to my face. So I know whom I am dealing with. But here you get looks and smirks. I may be wrong but I associate that with a lack of knowledge of who I am. People here are so stereotypical to the point of racism . . . My response has been to form a close relationship with Hispanic friends. They have been very supportive . . . we are a tight group . . . within the last year I have met acquaintances throughout the country through our Latin club MECHA. I gone to places like Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. It is depressing when I come back here. There is no atmosphere that supports diversity in this area. You can tell the difference as soon as I get of the plane. It takes me a few days to transition back to the non-diverse life here . . . as soon as I

get my degree I am leaving and not coming back to this place.

(Cuauttemoc 1:24-26; 59-67).

One of the ways Omar coped was by going back home:

This has been one of the hardest things for me . . . later I met several Latino students at the community college. However, at the most there must have been only ten in the whole college. I found myself getting increasingly isolated. During the week I would go to classes then my apartment, I would spend very little time on campus . . . there came a time when I had to go home and reconnect with people who look like me (Omar 1:44-51).

One way Blanca and Myra coped with this issue was getting involved with the college Latin club. Ultimately Blanca became the club president and Myra succeeded her.

Most of the participants mentioned their sense of isolation, not seeing people who are like them in educational settings, as well as other places in the area.

Elena describes her experience when she took a class led by a Hispanic instructor:

My major coping mechanism is my family. I retreat to my home and my children. Maybe it is me but I have a hard time connecting with the college students. My age may be a factor . . . we don't have a lot in common. Also my Hispanic culture may reduce our commonalties . . . recently I took Latin American history, to my astonishment, the teacher

was Hispanic he was from Uruguay. This was the first time since I've been in college that I got to learn from a non-Anglo instructor. We bonded right away . . . both of us being Hispanic and South Americans. It was so nice; we communicated in our own language. He shared how long he had been here. We shared similar experiences. It was nice to have a teacher who I could relate to. There is always a longing to be among your own people who understand you. I have not had a minority instructor since (Elena 1:94-104).

An assumption I held as a researcher prior to gathering the data was that because the college system was developed by the mainstream culture and presumably exposed their value system and learning styles, Hispanic students who came from a different culture and have different learning styles would find the college inhospitable. I assumed that these differences would be great and would pose a cultural barrier to Hispanic students. I was concerned that the Hispanic students would experience a fairly profound cultural shock as they went through secondary socialization on the college campus. However, the participants reported that while moving away from their families to new surroundings, community, and city was a fairly dramatic transition, beginning college did not have the impact on the participants that I imagined. It seems that while they were experiencing their primary socialization in their very early years and at home during their grade school and high school years, the secondary socialization into the mainstream culture was occurring almost

simultaneously. By the time the participants were of college age, the cultural characteristics of the mainstream culture were essentially learned through experiences in their community and the public school system. Cuauttemoc reported:

Personally I had a very positive experience at the community college. The first class was a block class that integrated speech and culturally diverse issues. Consequently, I had a chance to speak my mind and share my feelings about various issues that were important to me. The instructors were very supportive they recognized my quest for knowledge . . . the class atmosphere made me feel comfortable . . . the instructors went out of their way to get to know me as an individual and student. For example, sometimes a faculty member would meet me for coffee at the cafeteria. There we would discuss class issues and they would ask me about my personal experiences. I felt like we were learning from each other . . . the different approach at the community college level certainly worked for me (Cuauttemoc 1:30-51).

All the participants made positive comments about the community college's Hispanic counselor. Most of them attributed their successes to this particular counselor as being the most important to their prosperity and forward progression at the college. Omar states:

If it was not for the multi-cultural counselor I am not sure I would have made it . . . he was there to introduce me to other students especially the

Hispanic students. He even had me and other Hispanic students that were new to the college over to his house for dinner. Can you believe it? Later on he helped me apply for financial aid and scholarships . . . he mediated an issue with an instructor that gave me a lower grade then I thought I deserved . . . I will be eternally grateful to this men (Omar 1:30-36).

While making the transition from the Hispanic family culture to the community college was not without barriers or challenges, as described later in this chapter, it was reported to be no more of a challenge than working in a new job in which they were the only person of color.

Struggles Participants Experienced while Attending College

All of the participants have continued with their education, overcoming problematic events by devising strategies which have enabled them to stay in school. However, they all have related experiences which caused them personal emotional pain, presented strong challenges, or were very difficult to overcome. Some of these experiences caused some of the students to be more motivated and determined to prove themselves successful in the system. This set of responses, which constitutes a pattern or theme, are connected in that these are events or circumstances which may have resulted in a student discontinuing higher education if a strong support system, both internal and external, were not present.

The participants expressed their perceptions about how they fit into the culture of the campus environment. Elena worried about being older, language barriers, and being a student of color before she entered school:

The issue with being an older student was a struggle for me. Numerous times I felt out of place. Sometimes we have study groups and I would attend but I did not connect with the students and left. It seemed that they were not serious and stick to the task at hand . . . making friends at the college has been difficult for me. Sometimes I get lonely. The language barrier has been an issue. Some words I never heard of or used before and it takes me time to get used to them. Also I sometimes I feel I am treated differently because I am Hispanic . . . there was one time when an instructor gave me a lower grade than I thought I deserved. The issue with this was that my student partner which happened to be White and I were allowed to work on this project together and we did exactly the same project and lo and behold she received a higher grade than I for the same project . . .oh well, some things I just have to overcome (Elena 1:183-197).

After gaining Myra's confidence and trust she told me about her biggest issue:

The biggest obstacle is that sometimes I am really scared that I am going to be asked to leave . . . I was not born in this country and do not have a green card. I am over 18, which means that if I am caught I will be deported with out my family and alone to a country that I hardly know.

Sometimes when a stranger walks in to the classroom I get a chill and think are they coming for me. It is hard to live like this . . . last year I had to reject a scholarship from a prestigious university that wanted me to run for them. They required a social security number in order to finalize the scholarship and admissions process. They did not understand why I changed my mind. Later their athletics director called me and also tried to talk me into it . . . even offering more scholarship money. It was hard to say no without giving a reason (Myra 215-225).

Most of the participants struggled with acceptance when they first enrolled at the college. This was another issue for Myra:

When I first came to the college I tried to get to know people but it is hard to do sometimes because you get the cold shoulder . . . you have to approach them and they can rebuff you. I guess that is for every new student, but I think it is mostly for minorities . . . everybody's giggling . . . saying "well, we're going to go over this after class," you hear them buzzing, and you try to walk over there and they do not say anything to you . . . maybe it was the way I was dressed but they didn't ever invite me to have coffee with them or any other function. Sometimes we all would be walking to the student union building together and I'd sit by myself and I'd see them at another table, and . . . I was just sitting by myself . . . things are a lot better now, but at the beginning it was hard (1:230-241).

Omar also discussed the issue of acceptance and stereotyping:

Sometimes people were rude and not friendly. But that was at the beginning. For example, one faculty member did not want to believe my GPA. I told him just because I am Latino does not mean I am going to have bad grades. There are people out there that have good grades and I am one of those . . . please get to know me first. Later about half way through the quarter he apologized (Omar 1:87-92).

All the participants struggled with the financial aspect of attending college.

However most of these students also had the added burden of working, going to school, and sometimes even supporting their families back home. Blanca:

Financial issues have been hard for me. It is hard working and going to school. The tuition and books are so expensive. I have an 8-hour job as a waitress and at the same time I am enrolled as a full time student. And like I said earlier I also occasionally send money home. I have a difficult time studying because I feel so tired sometimes. I need to keep going because I really cannot financially depend on anybody . . .you know that if the rent is not paid you will be kicked out of the apartment (Blanca 1:102-108).

All the participants mentioned the lack of diversity in the college and more particularly in the community as a struggle.

Strategies the Participants Employed to Stay in College

The participants reported using and creating strategies that helped them stay in school. I am not sure that all of the participants would describe or list the strategies as I have identified them, sifted them out as discreet patterns, because some of the strategies seem to be such an ingrained part of their overall behaviors, who they are and how they live their lives in general. However, I believe they would recognize the value they placed on the following strategies to stay in school. The most frequently reported strategy was setting attainable educational goals and making school a high priority. Others the participants discussed were a strong desire to get educated, study skills, maintaining a positive attitude toward schooling, finding a support mechanism, and cultural involvement. Cuauttemoc:

I dedicate myself to my studies everything else is secondary . . . I would like to spend more time with my family but . . . My theory is that the reason many of us Latinos drop out of high school and college is because external pressures. I told this to a friend of mine that was struggling because her family was putting financial pressure on her. I said listen if your father moved from the deepest poverty areas of Mexico and left his parents behind so he could have a better life for his family. I am sure you can forget about your family back home so you can someday give your own family a better life through education. I like to put things in that kind of perspective. We need to be a little selfish in the short term

that way we can finish our education and then help our families any way we can. We need to think about ourselves for a while . . . I view this issue as a major inhibitor to retaining our numbers in higher education. We have to accept the fact that we need to be selfish to an extent and we need to convey this to our families that they need to support us. This is difficult because Latinos are so family oriented. This is our blessing and in some way it is our curse (Cuautemoc 1:134-149).

Others like Blanca get motivated from a strong desire to get educated and in turn help their families and community back home:

I have a strong desire to get an education to help my family back home. I have seen so much injustice done to them. My uncle last year was involved in a farm accident and he could not work any more because of a broken back. He did not have medical insurance so he bills were astronomical. To top it off the farmer refused to help him at all. He said the accident was my uncle's fault. Today my uncle cannot work and his wife has been forced to work to support him. What has happened to him is not right. I want them to know their rights. I have seen many farmers pay below the minimum wage to illegal farm workers and not give them any sanitary facilities in the field. If they complain he just calls the border patrol and they get picked up . . . last year one farmer had his field crop dusted while the farm workers were working in that field. They were sprayed with the chemicals. It is unbelievable that farm

workers are treated sub-human . . . it is things like this that motivate me and give me the energy to finish school (Blanca 1:74-86).

Blanca, Myra, Omar, Cuauttemoc, and Hector mentioned involvement in the Hispanic club as a support mechanism. Blanca:

When I first moved to this area I was surprised with the lack of diversity. Thanks goodness for the Latino Club. There I met John and five other Hispanic students and we did things together. I felt like there was a little bit of home at the college . . . they basically showed me the ropes . . . what classes to take and at what time, popular instructors to take classes from, and the racist places in town to avoid (Blanca 1: 45-50).

Strategies the Participants Suggested for Future Students

All the participants seemed eager to share ideas with me when I asked each of them what advice they would give to their children, nieces, nephews, or friends who were considering college attendance. Their many hints and considerations fell roughly into three main themes: preplanning for college and strategies for success in the first few quarters; specific classroom and campus survival strategies; and connecting with people who can help. These suggestions grew both from their own successful retention strategies and from less successful experiences which taught them stronger survival tactics. The strategies reflect a thoughtfulness regarding cultural differences, taking into account how the Hispanic students were raised (primary socialization) versus

what students will need to do differently (secondary socialization) to be successful in the mainstream culture classroom.

As part of the preplanning for attending college, Hector suggested that:

A tour of the college would have been nice . . . to know where the buildings were . . . I knew where the gym was because I attended a friends graduation . . . I went from there and asked where the next class was from another student (Hector 1:84-88).

Elena made the following suggestions:

Prepare ahead of time what is going to be covered in the class. Then review the notes afterwards. Connect with other students in the class. Use a fellow class member to study with at least twice a week and develop a system to study together. Use the different memorization techniques . . . make a commitment and reward yourself when a goal is reached. And finally find someone you can be accountable to (Elena 1:198-205).

Blanca was concerned that future students need to be sure to consider preplanning financially before entering school and being careful about money flow once school begins:

Before they go . . . into the quarter . . . they should try and start thinking about what their expenses are going to be . . . if they need a phone . . . see how much food they think they are going to need . . . and then see how their financial situation is after that. More than likely they are

going to need to preset their financial situation. Or else if they don't, they going to end up just going along, till . . . they are out of money (Blanca 1:119-124).

In a similar vein, Myra suggested checking ahead for housing and an even longer time head for day care needs as some facilities have waiting lists.

Omar felt that students needed to have an overall picture of the campus, both the geography and the culture of the campus. Blanca thought the "orientation . . . is really important . . . People don't want to go, but that's where you start making your connections" (Blanca 1:127-129). "They need to talk with other students, I know it is hard, but this is so important (Blanca 1:133-135). Blanca went on to elaborate that by talking to fellow students, new students can better assess what classes and instructors might be a good fit for them, and may be a way to get to know others on the campus for support while they are in school.

For the students who are through the initial phase of acclimation to college life, the participants had a wide range of suggestions. For example, Cuautemoc cautions the student to keep their goals, wants, and needs clear while scheduling course work because:

The counselor may be filling classes, maybe not looking at the student from the standpoint of what . . . their long-term goals are and what they want to be. Because the student may have goals, but unless they're asked, they might not necessarily ever tell anybody . . . as you know,

some first time Hispanic students can be very traditional and feel they are questioning authority if they question the counselor . . . it's just like when they are getting into trouble or need tutoring . . . they may fail waiting around for somebody to reach out to them. A reason why they may not ask questions is that they may not be able to admit they are different because of cultural reasons. They may be trying to be invisible and get by. (Cuauteemoc 1:185-195).

Suggestions aimed at changes for the institution in terms of personnel and awareness of cultural differences were brought up. Cuauteemoc suggested faculty take more interest in the students:

If we could have more professors that would show an interest in the students . . . be their advisor, show them what classes are needed, meet with them for coffee or lunch, be their mentor. Be transparent with them share your struggles and some of the things you have gone through . . . little things like that can go a long way. Things like this and genuine mentorship is crucial for the Hispanic student to make it in college . . . it has worked for me (Cuauteemoc 1:160-175).

He further suggested:

In many campuses, especially in California they have Chicano or Latino education programs. These programs are oriented towards educating the Hispanic community. I think these programs are important because of the support base they provide the student. Many of us have different

levels of awareness of our culture and these help to connect the us to the campus and our culture. However, Some of these programs have an image problem. Some students are not attracted to them because they view the program as being separate or separatist. I believe they need to include other programs and students and have an open atmosphere within the campus (Cuautemoc 1:177-184).

Blanca suggested more Hispanic faculty be hired to serve as a role models and mentors:

To this day I have not had a Hispanic faculty as my instructor . . . actually I have not had anybody of color as an instructor. This college needs to hire Hispanic instructors . . . It is difficult to connect and find role models that really understand and relate to you (Blanca 1:143-148).

Specific classroom strategies that the student could employ were also suggested.

Hector thought, "any new student ought to take study skills" (Hector 1:90-92).

Blanca found that a good tactic for her was to start on the next quarter's work early:

Call the instructor before the class starts . . . and ask to see the syllabus, or what's the first assignment and get a jump on it . . . if you are able to get your book before class, start reading (Blanca 1:137-140).

All of the participants strongly and repeatedly suggested that all students, new and continuing, make connections with people on the campus. Omar suggested:

Find somebody to talk to . . . start with counseling, it's their job. Start there, and if you don't feel in sync with that person, you'll know right of the bat . . . then don't waste your time. Ask them if they know somebody you could talk to . . . then they can refer you . . . find a teacher you can hit it off with . . . you have to take that initial step (Omar 1:104-108).

Omar also noted the value of having a good support staff who can "direct them if they have a question or if they need help or something" (Omar 1:110-112).

Myra noted that it is very important to:

Try to find someone that you know is going to help you in those tough times . . . like when you are say "Ahh, I just want to quit" . . . you need someone that you know who will bring you out of that and realize that you can make it. You need to find someone like that. And sometime it isn't the people that are closest to you (Myra 1:241-245).

The participants recognized that preplanning strategies, survival tactics, and connecting with others was not enough if the student was not committed to his or her education. They recognized that personal strength and a strong positive attitude with commitment to the educational goals are necessary for a successful experience. Hector wanted new students, especially the younger ones, to realize that:

You're not a kid any more, and this is something that's going to be with you for the rest of your life, and making an effort to make a living, this

is what this does, it helps you make a living . . . don't take it for granted, and just try your best and study. You can probably earn a better job, start seeing opportunities for better jobs (Hector 1:95-105).

The suggestions by the participants show a willingness to accommodate the mainstream culture of the school. They also showed a frustration with a lack of diversity at the campus especially in the faculty ranks.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

One problem facing higher education is that of retention of students of color, particularly Hispanic students. The research reported in this study is an attempt to help fill the gap in research on the retention of Hispanic students. Learning about how Hispanic students perceive the community college learning environment may help educators become more sensitive to this population of students.

Overview of Study

The research in this study centered around six Hispanic students who attended a Community College in the Pacific Northwest and persisted in college for at least five quarters, earning a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better. In this study, I focused on the transitional process from Hispanic home life, including traditions, learning styles, and values to the community college campus which espouses essentially mainstream societal traditions, teaching and learning styles, and values. I completed this study using a qualitative, exploratory research approach. I conducted interviews to collect data, which were tape recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using the constant comparative technique. During the analytic process, I identified seven themes or categories of responses which were: pre-college preparatory activities, mobility, involvement with alcohol or drugs, issues regarding bi-culturalism,

struggles they experienced while attending college, strategies they employed to stay in college, and retention strategies the participants suggested for future students.

Conclusions

Themes in Relative Terms: Interrelatedness of Impact

The themes identified through the data analysis are inescapably interrelated. In order to understand how the students negotiated cultural differences when going through a secondary socialization process at the college level, one must put college entry in the context of their prior experiences and their perceptions of the mainstream culture of which they are a part. The experiences recounted by the participants while they were in attendance in primary and secondary schools on or near their communities were rich with references to the mainstream culture and demonstrated how each had begun making adjustments at a very young age. Some of the participants learned English for the first time in grade school. The only exception was Elena and Hector, who learned English in high school. This for some of them was vivid in their memories and probably represented the first major impact of many secondary socialization processes. Most of them had many chances to interact with people from mainstream society in retail settings, social gatherings, and in educational environments. Each small encounter in his or her experiences prior to college entry resulted in each participant learning "what works" in the mainstream culture. Each participant brought those strategies and

preconceptions of how to interact with members and institutions from mainstream society to the community college.

Understanding the stability of the participants throughout their educational system, as well as geographically, contributed to a better understanding of how they viewed entering the college setting. Most of the participants attended one high school and their families did not move. The majority of the participants were stable among their relations and friends. This stability in school, relations and family might have contributed to acquiring a sense of mental well being, and even though there were barriers in the secondary school system they could expect the stability of the family to be there. None of the participants included "staying in one place while in school" as a recommended strategy for staying in college. Maybe they took this stability for granted and did not consider it a problem.

Alcohol and drug use did not seem to be an issue throughout the participants secondary school years nor while attending the community college. They also did not report this being a problem in their family or home life. However, again, this was not brought up as a strategy for future students to make in college and no specific strategies were suggested by any participant regarding drugs and alcohol.

The participants described many incidents of conflict or at least recognition of differences between the Hispanic culture and mainstream culture. When an encounter is uncomfortable or provokes a strong emotional reaction,

and involves people from differing cultural backgrounds, one possible reason for the occurrence is a violation of one or both parties' cultural values. An event like this can help to define both when it is possible to stop and pay attention in order to increase understanding between the cultures, and, upon examination of the event, to create strategies together to bridge the cultural gap.

The bi-cultural experiences the participants described were fairly evenly distributed throughout their elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational settings and in non-school settings. The participants reported them to be more frequent in their early encounters with the college experience, i.e. in the first two quarters. This was most likely because, after the participants had gained some experience on campus, each had, consciously or unconsciously, developed strategies to cope with the cultural differences, ranging from exiting from the circumstance to direct confrontation and negotiation of values. Most of the participants reported they were helped by a multicultural counselor who advocated for them in conflicts with faculty members. The most frequently reported bi-cultural experience, both positive and negative, was that between the participant and a faculty member. Faculty members were the most often cited as being a positive support person in a participant's educational life and were instrumental in helping the student stay with a program of study.

All the participants mentioned being involved in their cultural traditions. Both Blanca and Elena had Quinceaneras as young adults and later were president of the college's Latin club. Cuauttemoc is involved with Hispanic and

Latin issues at a national level and Hector, Elena, Omar mentioned frequent trips back home to reconnect with their Hispanic roots. Cultural traditions and characteristics are quite firmly rooted, being a part of each of the participants' primary socialization, but these ties were not linked to retention in college by the participants in any way.

The last three themes are actually sub-sets of the same concept. These themes described different perspectives of student retention or persistence in college: experiences which were interpreted as hurdles to continued attendance, experiences which were helpful and supportive of continued attendance, and finally strategies the participants recommend for future students to stay in college. The last theme may or may not reflect what the participants actually did for their own persistence; rather it was a result of a reflection of their own experiences. This reconstruction of the college process resulted in the participants identifying ways they, themselves, might have had a more positive experience, and collectively outlines a body of survival tactics for the Hispanic student attending this community college.

Relation to Retention Research

Basic research in retention and student persistence provides another lens through which the themes and the participant responses can be examined. In general, the student responses in this study parallel and support the general observations and results of the quantitative studies conducted by Astin (1986), Pascarella (1986), Tinto (1987), and others cited. Financial assistance was

listed as a factor affecting persistence; in particular, those students who took out loans were noted by Astin as the most likely not to persist. All the participants talked about financial problems and all had at one time or another depended upon Federal and State grants. None of them reported using loans.

Pascarella, Smart and Ethington (1986) noted that when students seek out contact with faculty members, they tend to stay in school. The participants all described contact with campus staff and faculty as a key to their survival in school and recommended that future students identify someone to talk to on campus as a primary means to stay in school. When students in the study matched their educational goals with the higher education institution's characteristics the results were greater persistence in attendance and program completion (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1997). The retention strategies these participants described as leading to success included examples of goal setting and an examination of the community college programs. Several stated that they had attended the community college to complete a specific program and attending this community college was part of their goal of attaining a higher education degree.

Tinto, in his social integration model of student retention, proposed that students tend to persist when they feel more involved in college life, such as clubs and other extracurricular activities (1993). All six students in this study have been involved in school clubs, participate in other extracurricular activities on campus, and use the sporting facilities, such as the weight room. Further,

they describe the involvement as a way to meet people and to become connected to the campus; the students themselves realize this is a survival tool.

Astin's study, completed in 1982, traced minority student retention from high school through college. The four factors Astin cited as being influential in predicting success or persistence for Hispanic students were (1) high school grades, (2) class ranking, (3) a sense of having developed good study habits, and (4) enrollment in a college-preparatory program (1982). All of the participants met three out of the four factors. Factor three, class-ranking data was not available to me to determine the group placement. Astin also noted that a high self-concept regarding academic ability was a factor in persistence (1982). From my observation and their accounts all of the participants had a good degree of high confidence. According to their own accounts, Elena and Hector started with less self confidence but they slowly gained confidence through experience and expressed an awareness of academic ability demonstrated by their grade point averages.

Astin also noted that students from rural areas tend not to persist as long as students from urban areas (1982). This retention trend was not reflective of this study. Five out of the six participants came from rural areas. Elena is the only one out of an urban environment. However, since this study included only students who did persist, it was not a factor.

In Rendon and Nora's study (1988) of retention of Hispanic students enrolled in community colleges throughout Texas, Arizona, and California, five

factors emerged as being important for retention of Hispanic community college students. (1) Adequate support systems; (2) encouragement, guidance, and counseling; (3) ethnic minority organizations and cultural service centers; (4) high levels of involvement in college life; and (5) favorable relationships with faculty members. The responses from the participants in my study mentioned all of Rendon and Nora's factors as being important to their success. A factor that I observed in these participants that was not mentioned in Rendon and Nora's study was motivation and strong perseverance to succeed.

Grossett's study (1997) explored personality traits, economic factors, and institutional experiences Hispanic students at a community college perceived as affecting their progress towards graduation. Aspects of personality such as confidence, discipline, and perseverance, as well as encouragement of faculty and other students, greatly influenced degree completion. Grossett's factors were supported all through this study, especially perseverance. That strong sense of determination and perseverance were traits leading to persistence in the community college.

Berger and Luckmann's theories regarding primary and secondary socialization (1967) were reinforced throughout the study. These concepts provided a grounding and a basis from which to sift through the responses which dealt with cultural conflict in particular. Primary socialization for the participants involved their value formation and some learned behaviors, which are culturally different from the mainstream culture. Some of these primary

socialization characteristics came to light specifically when the participants described conflict situations involving members of the mainstream culture. In the process of that conflict, whether it was resolved or not, the student experience a secondary socialization: each of them learned something from each experience and their reconstruction of and interpretation of those experiences shaped their subsequent responses. That process is at the core of secondary socialization: re-learning and restructuring how one behaves and reacts in response to societal stimuli.

Visual learning was reported to be a primary learning style by Collier (1988) and Phillips (1970) and was described by Myra and Elena, in particular, as a learning mode they employed. Informal learning (Hall, 1973) was described by Blanca, Hector, Omar, and Cuauttemoc concerning primary socialization, especially related to cultural events, such as dancing and cultural celebrations. The participants reported that they were the most comfortable with classes, which used hands-on learning or informal, connected methods of teaching, such as interdisciplinary studies.

Thus, the results of this research support and reinforce the previous retention studies described in the literature review which were conducted on community college students in general and for Hispanic students particularly.

Implications of the Study

Although the participants reported experiencing challenges while entering and attending the community college, the cultural transition process

through secondary socialization did not seem to be a major shift in their lives. The participants reported that, as compared to other life transitions of a similar nature, entering the community college was an adjustment along a gradually widening breadth of experiences in their lives, rather than a totally new experience which was an overwhelming secondary socialization experience. As a part of the secondary socialization process, the participants appeared to be learning, creating, and sharing strategies designed to cope with differing expectations and cultural values in order to make sense of the college setting from the Hispanic student perspective. It appeared that each person brought a broad range of experiences from interacting with the mainstream society through primary and secondary school settings. These experiences may have served as a rehearsal for college entry, enabling the student to more easily adapt to the community college culture than, perhaps, an international student who would not have had the exposure to American mainstream culture at all.

Even so, it appeared that the main hurdles the participants needed to leap had to do with the community's lack of cultural diversity and financial concerns. They made up for the area lack of diversity by joining the college's Latin club and by frequently making the two or three-hour trip back home. All the participants cited problems in the financial area at one time or another. One of the biggest budget strains was that some of the participants financially supported their family's back home.

Academic and emotional support was sought and received from various sources, but faculty members provided the most valuable link to college life. Although some of the most negative incidents described occurred with faculty, the faculty was commended for providing needed and welcomed personal support for the participants. Several faculty members were described in glowing terms and credited for helping to keep the students in school because of the connection they had made.

Talking with these students, I became sensitized to the lack of role models, not only in the classrooms as teachers or on campus as counselors or staff people, but also in the curriculum itself. Increasing the number of Hispanics employed at all levels of the community college staff would provide role models for Hispanic students. Rarely do the textbooks or faculty-developed sources use Hispanics as resource authorities. The curriculum needs to be revised to include more diverse experts and to include different ways of thinking and learning. Teaching delivery methods should be diversified to include more group work and collaborative learning. Outcome measures should include credit for group learning as well as individual measurement.

The community college staff may find the results of this study helpful when attempting to identify areas to be strengthened in student services and instruction in regards to the delivery of a high-quality educational experience, including appropriate strategies to increase the retention of Hispanic students. Providing clear and accurate information may give students the encouragement

needed to overcome the initial barrier of considering higher education as an option in their lives.

Further Research Recommended

Based on the conclusions derived from the results of this study, the following potential areas for research are recommended:

1. This study focused upon six Hispanic students from this particular community college, but there are other community colleges in the region with whom this study could be replicated to further test the conclusions from this study.
2. Hispanic students who grow up in the urban setting may have a different perspective on what it was like to negotiate the cultural differences upon entering the college arena. A similarly structured study could find shed light on this population's reactions.
3. As a related area, the part role models play in persistence of Hispanic students of color on a college campus could be examined.
4. As further research based on this study, one could contrast and compare persisters with non-persisters using two different groups of Hispanic students.

The results of this study also suggest further examination using a similar methodology to examine other minority or ethnic groups in our society and how they negotiate the passage from their points of origin through the higher education community. Retention studies conducted in the past have relied on

quantitative measures and comparisons between and among various identified behaviors and test scores or grade point averages. Tinto pointed out that the qualitative method “allows us to avoid the thorny and sometimes threatening question of our own actions as faculty and staffs shape students’ dropping out” (Evangelauf, 1990, p. A18). This study may encourage other researchers to employ qualitative methods to learn more about retention issues concerning students of color in higher education.

Retention of all students is a key issue for community colleges. Given that the retention rate for Hispanic students is considerably less than that of White students, it is imperative that community college faculty, administrators, and staff become aware of the sensitive issues surrounding Hispanic students’ educational experience. In order to accomplish this objective the following must be met.

First, there is a misconception in most community colleges and universities that retention is primarily the responsibility of student services staffs, whose work puts them in direct contact with students outside the classroom. As a faculty member recently told me: “Our job is to teach, not to retain students who shouldn’t be in our classrooms in the first place. Let the people in student services worry about student retention. That’s their job.” That is regrettable, because faculty members’ involvement is critical to the success of retention programs. It is incomprehensible for instructional faculty to act as though their interactions with students inside and outside the classroom

are somehow unrelated to students' decisions to stay or leave. The research in this regard could not be clearer. It shows, that most consistent finding has been that positive interaction with faculty members has a direct bearing on whether students persist to earn a degree. The simple yet frequently overlooked truth is that instructional faculty members, not student services staff, are the primary educational agents of an institution. It is on their efforts that effective retention programs ultimately hinge. Regardless of how well the student services office does its part; the success of retention programs will always be limited when the instructional faculty is not equally involved.

Second, staff development in community colleges which focuses on Hispanic culture and learning style will help Hispanic students to more easily integrate into the community college culture. In addition to giving students more tools with which to negotiate the system, changes within the community college system must be made. This will enable Hispanic students to profit from a quality educational experience; moreover the campus community will become enriched by learning about Hispanic culture.

Finally, unless the president of the college or university is genuinely committed to diversity, campus or system-wide minority enhancement efforts will be limited, uncoordinated, under funded, and ancillary, rather than central to the institution's agenda and priorities. She/he must be prepared to engage in a long-term effort to increase the representation of minorities on the faculty, to

improve the recruitment and graduation rate of minority students, and to hire and promote minority staff to the highest ranks.

I believe the 35th president of the United States summarized my dissertation well when he said:

“All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talents”

John F. Kennedy.

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