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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

COLLEGE ACCESS: A CASE STUDY OF LATINO CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS AND
THEIR K-16 PATHWAYS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

Victoria Faynblut

December, 2016

Anthony Collatos, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Victoria Faynblut

Under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my husband and my family for their encouragement, inspiration, and love. Specifically, I dedicate this work to my father who devoted his life to ensuring that his daughters pursued their dreams and whose belief in me enabled me to believe in myself.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the benefits of a college education and the resources allocated to college preparedness programs, Latino minorities, at 12.7% of college students, continue to be overwhelmingly underrepresented in institutions of higher education (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The graduation gap between lower and higher income students as well as minority students is due in part to lack of academic preparation, underfunding and staffing, and affordability of resources and support (Tinto, 2008). There is a need to increase students attending universities. Individuals with an advanced degree are more likely to enjoy a higher standard of living, donate time and or money to various organizations, and live healthier lifestyles. Moreover, graduates are also less likely to live in poverty, have children at a young age, and partake in illegal activities (Contreras, 2011).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify how sociocultural factors, peer affiliation, adult mentorship, and institutional barriers, affected the K-16 pathways of Latino individuals graduating from a STEM-based 6th-12th grade charter school. Results of this study show that home factors such as English language acquisition, level of education, and adult time spent with their children played a significant role in academic achievement. School-based factors, including: course offerings, strong mentorship, and choice of friends also significantly impacted student success and matriculation to college.

Results of this study will inform high school leadership teams on how to target and reshape their academic and college preparedness programs to better fit the needs of their Latino students. By addressing specific sociocultural characteristics as well as institutional deficiencies, we hope to increase the percentage of Latino students entering in and persisting through college.

Chapter I: Introduction

Background

Latinos are the most rapidly growing ethnic group in the United States, yet they have the lowest levels of educational attainment (Gandara, 2013). In 2010, the population of Latinos living in the United States was 50.5 million people, rendering it 16% of America's total population, the largest minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). One in five children or adolescents in the U.S. are of Hispanic origin (Pino, Martinez-Ramos, & Smith, 2012). Amidst an ever-increasing population, Latinos are intensifying their impact on America's work and educational forces, yet only 40% have completed high school and 12% are college graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

In today's society, obtaining an advanced degree directly correlates with increased professional and personal opportunities. Individuals with a bachelor's degree earn more income over their lifetime and have a higher standard of living than their non-degreed peers (Gandara, 2013). However, access to a postsecondary education is not readily attainable by all segments of the U.S. population. Minority students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and first-generation American students are the least likely to be prepared for, enroll, and persist past their first year in a university (Garcia, 2010).

Like their African American counterparts prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), many Latinos were denied fair and proper educations due to segregation and disenfranchisement (Contreras & Valverde, 1994). In the 50 years since the *Brown* case, the United States has made a concerted effort to provide minority groups an equal and quality education. While African Americans were the primary beneficiaries of this effort through Title I legislation, Latinos have also benefited from increased spending and a focus on underprivileged minority groups. In 1968,

the Johnson administration furthered the nation's goal of addressing language proficiency and attainment by authorizing Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Act: the Bilingual Education Act (Contreras & Valverde, 1994). These programs have been designed to produce two outcomes: (a) "aid non-or limited English-proficient (LEP) students to learn English and to thus move into English-speaking classrooms" (p.473) and blend with general education students and (b) help LEP students retain their native language in order to become bilingual.

However, even with federal legislation and increased monetary support, Latinos' high school graduation rates and matriculation to 4-year higher education institutions continue to lag behind those of other minority groups and Caucasian Americans (Romo & Salas, 2003). Fewer than 43% of Hispanic high school students are eligible to enroll in 4-year institutions (Saunders & Serna, 2004). Of the students who are able to graduate from high school, only 40% will enroll in higher education immediately after high school and only 10% will continue on to graduate. The disconnect between Latinos' academic achievement, size of population, and disproportionate under-representation in higher education can be attributed to a variety of factors including lack of parental involvement, not understanding the university system and its requirements, school barriers, racial perceptions, and Latinos' high part-time and community college enrollment (Conchas, 2001, 2006; Conchas & Goyette, 2001; Fry, 2002; MacDonald, 2004).

In an effort to improve this situation, many high schools have developed intervention programs. Programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) aim to better support minority students in gaining access to higher-level institutions and remediating credit/skill deficiencies (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009). Many of these programs, however, often involve

courses that are designed to merely remediate and/or counter the effects of poor schooling, lack of community resources, and tracking, rather than focusing on college preparation.

The charter school movement evolved as an effort to counter consistently failing schools; to create a marketplace within the school system where parents could choose where their children could attend school (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). In particular, charter schools developed to implement innovative teaching strategies in an environment free of some of the bureaucracy found in larger school districts (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.). As lack of access to a quality education and preparedness to college continues to be a pervasive issue, a growing number of educational leaders has begun to develop theme-based charter schools and alternative approaches to educating students.

Problem Statement

Despite the benefits of a college education and the resources allocated to college preparedness programs, Latino students continue to be underrepresented in 4-year universities, making up, on average, a disproportionate 12.7% of college going students (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The graduation gap between students from low-and higher income families, as well as the gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts, is due in part to lack of academic preparation, underfunding and staffing in urban K-12 public schools, and affordability of academic resources and support (Tinto, 2008). Individuals who have completed a university program, have a higher standard of living, donate time and/or money to various organizations, and live healthier lifestyles; moreover, they are less likely to live in poverty, have children at a young age, and partake in illegal activities (Contreras, 2011). Thus, there is a need to increase the percentages as Latinos with advanced degrees in order to sustain this growing population to be prepared for, enroll, and matriculate from institutions of higher education.

Although Title I and Title VII legislation has aimed to better support low-income and diverse populations, the problem of low educational attainment still persists. A growing number of theme-based charter schools have emerged in an attempt to increase college access for minority students. Therefore, the opportunity exists to study how sociocultural factors, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers have affected the K-16 pathways of Latino students graduating from one STEM-based charter school in a large, metropolitan school district.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship, and peer affiliation, structural/institutional barriers, have affected the K-16 matriculation and college access of Latino individuals who graduated from a STEM-based, 6th-12th grade charter school.

Importance of Study

Results from this study will contribute to research literature by focusing on what factors participants perceived to best support their college aspirations. Although it may be true that structural and environmental barriers can inhibit learning, it is important to study what services students and staff members found to be most helpful so that more high school educators can replicate them and better assist their students to enter and complete higher education. This study may help teachers and administrators decide which academic/social supports to include in their interventions/academic programs and in finding what academic supports participants found to be the most beneficial in helping them persist into and through college. Moreover, results of this study can help students and families seek out resources that will support them in matriculating to university.

Grounded in a cultural-ecological theory, this study will add to the body of knowledge on Latino access to higher education and college readiness programs for minority or at-risk youth. By highlighting what academic supports or other factors successful college-going, Latino students believe have helped them the most; this study will seek out solutions to the roadblocks facing many minority students in their college going endeavors. In particular, how a charter school may, or may not help Latino high school students navigate toward higher education.

Operational Definitions

Perceptions of Effectiveness of Academic/Social Supports – Students’ perceptions regarding the activities and services that support the school's primary missions of instruction, research, and public services (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2000).

Adult Mentorship– Mentorship is the process by which an individual has a dramatic impact on a student’s orientation towards school and helps the student develop mechanisms for coping with academic demands and develop awareness of the educational resources available to him/her (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Peer Affiliation– Peer relationships compose a fundamental portion of the social support system for adolescent youths and embody the potential to nurture academic achievement and social and emotional development (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005).

Sociocultural Factors– The culture and role of the family, legal status, parental education level and language proficiency, and socioeconomic status (SES) are all sociocultural factors that affect Latino education and jointly compose sociocultural factors.

Structural/Institutional Barriers – Schools factors such as lower expectations, tracking, grade retention, and lack of cultural awareness can also contribute to this growing problem

(Adam, 2003). A racially stratified society and school system can attribute to the low performance of Hispanic youths

Key Terms

Latino – “A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (NCES, 2000, p. N/A). The terms Hispanic and Latino will be used interchangeably in this study.

Preparedness – “Students would be considered prepared for college entrance if they have met UC/CSU requirements by taking A-G coursework and have earned a minimum 2.0 grade point average” (University of California, n.d., p. 3). These students would have mastered basic skills.

A-G requirements – “The minimum requirements that students must meet in order to be eligible for acceptance into a University of California or a California State University. Students must complete the following coursework with a grade of C or better: (a) 2 years of history/social science, (b) 4 years of college preparatory English, (c) 3 years of college preparatory mathematics, (d) 2 years of laboratory science, (e) 2 years of a language other than English, (f) 1 year of a visual or performing art, and (g) 1 year of a college preparatory elective from the A-E categories previously listed” (University of California, n.d., p. N/A).

4-year institution– “An institution legally authorized to offer at least a 4-year program of college-level studies wholly or principally creditable toward a bachelor’s degree” (NCES, n.d., para. 3). The researcher will be using the terms *college*, *university*, *postsecondary institution*, and *4-year institution* interchangeably in this research.

Completion status– For the purpose of this study, completion status will be defined as students who have completed at least 2 years of coursework at a university (60-66 units worth of education).

Institution of higher education –An institution of higher education (IHE):Admits as students who have a certificate of graduation from a high school, or the recognized equivalent of such a certificate; provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor’s degree or provides not less than a 2-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree, or awards a degree that is acceptable for admission to a graduate or professional degree program (Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute, n.d., para. 2

Community college – Community college is the most common type of two-year college. These colleges offer many types of educational programs, including those that lead to associate degrees and certificates. Certificates and some types of associate degrees focus on career readiness. Other types of associate degrees are good preparation for study at a four-year college where graduates can earn a bachelor’s degree (The College Board, n.d., para. 1).

College readiness – Students are college ready when they have the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation (Conley, 2007).

Multiple measures include:

- (a) Completion of A-G requirements
- (b) Success in college-prep or college level courses (AP or honors)
- (c) Advanced academic skills, such as reasoning, problem solving, analysis, and writing abilities; e.g., as demonstrated by successful performance on the SAT
- (d) College planning skills, as demonstrated by an understanding of college

And career options and the college admissions and financing process (Conley, 2007).

STEM themed charter school– A charter school with a special focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Theoretical Framework

A cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance was applied to this study (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). As explained subsequently, this theory incorporates societal and school factors, as well as the cultural characteristics of the minority group. Culture is examined through the lens of a race/ethnic group and how the minority group sees the world. When discussing ecology, one refers to the *setting* or *environment* of the people. This theory has two major components, which Ogbu and Simons (1998) designated as the *system* and *community forces*. The system consists of the educational policies, pedagogy, and school credentials and its treatment of certain minority groups. The way the minority group responds to their treatment and their affiliation with their cultural group is referred to as the community force.

According to cultural-ecological theory, the overall treatment of minorities in society is reflected in their treatment in education. Educational experiences can be separated into three varieties:

1. Educational policies and practices towards minorities such as school segregation, underfunding, and understaffing;
2. Educational experiences such as how minorities are treated by teachers, grouping/tracking, and level of expectations; and
3. Lack of awards traditionally given to minorities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

These three structural barriers are important determinants in minority students' achievement and retention rates. However, these barriers are not the exclusive cause of low performance;

otherwise, all minority students would have low achievement and retention rates since all face discrimination. Cultural and language differences also seem to have some impact on education. Although lack of language acquisition can clearly hamper school performance, Ogbu and Simons (1998) suggested that the major difference in the success factor of some minority students over others lies in community forces.

Community forces are divided into four categories:

1. A separation between the school's White community and the students' home.
2. The value of schooling; does an education really help a person in getting ahead?
3. The relationships created in the school-degree of trust in teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.
4. The beliefs about whether or not school is harmful to cultural identity.

Each of these community forces plays a role in stifling school performance and contributing to the continued lower matriculation rates of minority students (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Although no single factor can explain racial disparities in educational attainment, some links have been established among educational attainment and social forces, school segregation, and home environment (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, this study focused on discerning which factors students found most beneficial to their high school experience, and understanding the social and environmental variables that Ogbu found to negatively impact the schooling of minority populations. Ultimately, this study aims to inform schools on how to be more culturally sensitive to the needs of their Latino population and how to prepare Latino students to access, enroll, and matriculate through higher education.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. How have sociocultural factors affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme-based charter school?
2. How have adult mentorship and peer affiliation affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme based charter school?
3. In what ways have structural/institutional barriers affected the matriculation and college access of Latino graduates of a theme based charter school?

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that its focus was on the Latino population and therefore the findings may not be generalized to all charter school and/or college going students. Students were also first generation high school graduates and completed their full high school education from the same charter school. Furthermore, as the researcher limited the sample size to six individuals, findings may not be reflective of the experiences of the general population of Latino students. Additionally, as only five staff members have remained at the subject school since the year 2011, interviews from this small sample may not be reflective of experiences of all staff members from the year 2011.

Delimitations

This research study was further limited to first-generation Latino students attending one particular theme-based charter school in Los Angeles County. The participants were selected based on their availability and the researcher's ability to locate and contact former students who graduated from the subject schooling the year 2011. Information garnered from interviews may not be generalizable to all students graduating from the charter school system, but are a case study of these students in particular. The researcher gathered data based on student and staff

interviews; therefore, findings are limited to their recollections, truthfulness, and selectivity in sharing information.

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants would be honest and that they would share information accurately to the best of their recollections. To increase this likelihood, participants were assured that their confidentiality would be preserved by using pseudonyms and that they would be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I includes a brief introduction to the historical context of minority inaccessibility to higher education. It continues with the researcher's goal of adding to the literature by informing educators and policymakers of what factors successful Latinos found to be most helpful in their educational endeavors and what barriers continue to exist for this population of students. Chapter II presents a review of literature that consists of themes related to institutional barriers, socio-cultural characteristics, affiliation/mentorship, and personal motivation in ablation postsecondary education. Chapter III describes the qualitative research design as it related to a case study design. Chapter IV presents the study's findings and analysis of data collected. Chapter V provides an analysis of the data, as well as conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

This study investigated which factors may help high schools and universities improve their programs to meet the needs of the increasing Latino student population in California. For organizational purposes, this chapter will be divided into three major themes: sociocultural characteristics, institutional/structural barriers, and adult mentorship and peer affiliation.

The literature review and this study are supported conceptually through the lens of Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority academic performance, as well as current and historical research as it relates to Latinos at all levels of education (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). This chapter has a particular focus on high school preparedness as well as the transition to the university system.

What Is the Latino Educational Achievement Gap?

The ethnic composition of the United States is increasingly changing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), as of 2010, Hispanics make up the largest minority group at 16% of the population. Los Angeles is second only to Mexico City with the largest Latino population in the world (Schofield & Hanna, 2002). While their presence is clearly seen in this demographic shift, Latinos' presence in higher education is disproportionately low compared to their representation in American society (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011).

The United States school system is failing to retain Hispanic students at every level of the education continuum (Hernandez, 2006; Schofield & Hanna, 2002). National studies of American education find that an academic gap between Caucasians and Latinos emerges as early as kindergarten and continues to grow systematically through graduate school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Of the Latinos who begin elementary school, 54% dropout before they receive a high school diploma (Burciaga, Pérez Huber, & Solórzano, 2010). Because an educated

working class promotes a stronger economy, increased tax revenues, decreased cost of social welfare programs, and increased participation in civic duties (Hernandez, 2006), this high dropout rate is a cause of concern as Latinos potentially make up large segment of America's future workforce.

Latino students lag behind all major ethnic groups in graduation rates, enrollment in higher learning institutions, and degree obtainment. Of Hispanic high school students, only 62.9% become graduating seniors, whereas Caucasian Americans graduate at a rate of 87.6%. Additionally, only 13.9% of Latinos in the U.S. obtain a bachelor's degree as compared to 30.3% of White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Factors such as poverty, cultural characteristics, institutional barriers, and lack of motivation and social support have all been cited as major contributors to the low number of Latinos in higher-level educational institutions (Tierney & Jun, 2001).

The History of Latinos and Education

The academic underachievement of Latino students in the American educational system is a pervasive, persistent problem that troubles educators and researchers alike. As the percentage of Latino students continues to increase, the need exists to address and close the achievement gap between Latino students and their Caucasian and Asian counterparts (Mindnich, 2007).

Latino impact on America's population. The Latino population in the United States is steadily expanding. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), in 2008, there were 46 million Latinos living in the U.S., making it the nation's largest minority group. By 2030, children of Hispanic origin will constitute the majority of elementary and secondary students, and by 2050,

they will make up almost 30% of America's population (Pino et al., 2012). In addition, between the years 2000 and 2025, one out of five new members of America's workforce will be Latino.

The size of America's foreign-born population has important implications for education as well as individuals' income. The National Center for Educational Research (NCES, 2007) suggests that foreign-born children and children of immigrant parents tend to have higher rates of poverty and may not perform as well as their U.S.-born peers on academic achievement tests. The poverty rate continues to be high for this minority, at approximately 22-26% of total Latino population (DeNavas Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The median wealth of White households is 18 times greater than that of Hispanic households (Kocher, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). Especially since educational status is a critical determinant of future wealth, it is important to note that only 60% of Latinos have completed high school and only 12% are college graduates as of 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). These figures foreshadow bleak outcomes in the global economy. Many Hispanic Americans will live at or below the poverty line, toiling in the lowest levels of an incredibly stratified U.S. economy (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). As economic health continues to fluctuate, schooling remains one of the strongest indicators of future well-being.

Latinos in California. California's Legislative Analyst's Office (1998) stated that California is the world's seventh largest economy. To this end, if this prosperity is to continue, California must be able to produce a highly educated and innovative workforce (Mindnich, 2007). However, as California's labor market is increasing its demand for educated workers, population and educational trends suggest a mismatch between level of skills the population has and the level of skill necessary for the job market. Given that one-third of Californians are from

Latino origins, addressing educational deficiencies is a priority for California if it wants to maintain its economic prosperity (Verdugo, 2006).

In 2005, the dropout rate of Hispanic high school students in California was higher than that among Blacks, Whites, and Asian/Pacific Islanders (Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). Additionally, Latinos have lower test scores, lower rates of enrollment in academically advanced classes, lower graduation rates, and lower matriculation rates to university than all other populations (Heaton, 2013). Failure in school exponentially increases in urban school districts. In California's largest school district, Los Angeles Unified, less than 76% of Hispanic students graduate from high school (LAUSD, 2014). This statistic suggests that Latino students have been historically clustered in low-income urban areas that have few resources to address learning barriers and improve their educational outcomes.

A history of an unequal education. The American educational system was founded on the notion of preparing a workforce to better the economy, assimilating immigrants to the American language and culture, and educating citizenry that could participate in the democratic process (MacDonald, n.d.). As a nation made up of immigrants, many newcomers have been able to successfully integrate and acquire the full benefits of an American education. This ideal, however, sharply contrasts with the educational experiences of many Latino youths since the founding of this country.

Latino peoples are descendants of an amalgamation of Europeans, indigenous Americans, and Africans brought to the U.S. as slaves during the colonial period (MacDonald, n.d.). Educational segregation and disenfranchisement of the Latino population began with the presence of European Spaniards in the 16th century and took the form of mission schools, where natives were required to learn the Spanish language and adopt Catholicism, the Spanish religion.

However, as the indigenous population became more educated and resistant to colonization, education became increasingly viewed as negative and was soon limited by the Spanish crown (Bortoluci & Jansen, 2013).

Ironically, with Mexican independence came fewer educational opportunities for Natives. As missions were closed down and the government was prey to political and financial instability, there were no resources to form a concrete and reliable public school system (MacDonald, n.d.). As the Mexican Era gave way to American Imperialism in the Southwest territory during the 1800s, the U.S. government had the false impression that education was not valued by the Hispanic American population living in the states and therefore did not include them in the public school reform movement of the 1800s (Molina, 2011; Verdugo, 2006).

Throughout the late 19th century and early 20th centuries, America experienced dramatic economic, political, and social shifts (Tevis, 2008). The Civil War, World War I, and the Great Depression triggered xenophobic measures against immigrants and their inclusion in public institutions. Although Mexico was exempt from strict quotas limiting immigration into the U.S., Mexican-Americans were restricted from the usage of public facilities such as restaurants, swimming pools, and Whites-only schools (MacDonald, n.d.).

Unlike the legally segregated schools of the South, Mexican American children of the Southwest were placed in *Mexican* classrooms because of what teachers and administrators called language deficiencies, even though many of the children were native English speakers (MacDonald, n.d., p. 310). Additionally, use of IQ tests led to increased isolation, as many Hispanic children were assessed as special education students (Tevis, 2008). Because this *de facto* segregation was done outside the legal realm, it became even harder for litigators to identify and abolish (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; MacDonald, n.d.).

The first major victory for Mexican-American students came as a result of the *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District* Supreme Court Case (1946; Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Tevis, 2008; Verdugo, 2006). The Superintendent of the Westminster School District of California stated that Mexican Americans were segregated because of language deficiencies and lack of personal hygiene (Tevis, 2008). The court ruled that, while the state of California required separate schools for *Negro, Mongolian, and Indian* children, under the Equal Protection clause of the 14th amendment, Hispanic children were designated as White and therefore had rights to equal, desegregated schooling (MacDonald, n.d., p. 316).

The Bracero program. From the early 1900s to the 1960s, the population of Mexicans in America more than doubled every decade as agriculture expanded throughout the Southwestern region of the United States (Molina, 2011). The demand for migrant workers was conveniently met with a huge influx of refugees from the Mexican Revolution who were seeking employment.

Through a series of negotiations between Mexico and the United States, the Bracero Program was employed between 1942 and 1964 to combat the labor shortage produced by World War II and the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans on the west coast (Parrini, 2007). Approximately 4.5 million guest laborers were imported with the vast majority working in California, Arizona, and Texas (Mize, 2006). The Bracero program altered the economic development and trajectories of both the United States and Mexico. According to Reichert and Massey (1982), while migrant workers were able to send money home, which resulted in increased income for some communities, this benefit was temporary and may have actually perpetuated the idea that economic development could only be gained from abroad. This idea

has led over one million migrant farm workers to travel yearly from state to state, harvesting America's agricultural goods (Green, 2010).

Children of seasonal farm workers are among the most educationally underprivileged children in the United States (Green, 2010). The lifestyle associated with migratory farm work imposes great obstacles to educational development. Children of workers who must frequently move with their families often receive disjointed schooling coupled with limited English proficiency and must suffer through social and cultural isolation. To combat the negative consequences associated with migrant schooling, universal education was extended to all children, including those who reside in the States, legally or illegally. In the 1982 case *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court found that undocumented school-age children may claim all of the benefits associated with the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution and, therefore, have rights to a free and public education. However, migrant workers continue to be subject to "malnutrition, health problems, educational deprivation, and poverty" (p. 55). In the United States, they seem to endure some of the harshest housing and labor conditions in the country.

The Chicano and Boricua movements for civil rights. The traditionalist climate of the 1950s quickly gave way to anti-Vietnam war protests, urban riots, and racial, gender, and ethnic protests of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Spurred by the African-American civil rights movement, Mexican and Puerto Rican Americans, identified as Chicanos and Boricuanos, started their own equal rights movement (MacDonald, n.d.; Verdugo, 2006).

In response to student walkouts and community protests, President Johnson and the U.S. Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968. This legislation recognized the needs of limited English-Speaking students and made educational services available to English language learners (Contreras & Valverde, 1994)

Federal legislation: The impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* on Latino students.

In the late 1960s, post *Brown v. Board of Education*, school officials were able to once again circumnavigate desegregation rulings by classifying Latino students as *White* for integration purposes (Contreras & Valverde, 1994). By pairing African American students and Latino American students, but still excluding Whites, these two minority groups were still exposed to inferior, poorly funded, and unequal educational facilities. The average White student typically attended a school that was almost four-fifths White. Only 14% of Caucasian students were in schools where three or more races made up 10% or more of the student population (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2002).

Bilingual Education Act of 1968. However, in the four decades after the Civil Rights movement and the *Brown* case, American legislators have made a concerted effort to improve the educational experiences for both African Americans and Latino students. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was the first piece of legislation that directly addressed the needs of students with limited English. Among the proposals of this bill were to design programs to teach Spanish-speaking students in their own language, teach English as a second language, and support an appreciation of their native culture and language (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988).

Since then, the act has undergone several reauthorizations whereby the legislation has been broadened to include not only limited English-speaking students but also limited English-proficient (LEP) students (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). However, one of the greatest barriers to implementing this act appropriately was the fact that school participation was on a voluntary basis and could therefore be largely ignored. In the 1974 reauthorization, school districts were now required to have special programs for limited English speaking ability (LESA) students. The main goal of this new plan was to create English as a second language (ESL) program that

would teach students necessary skills and language proficiency so they could eventually be mainstreamed into the general education classroom. However, Latinos continue to be the most segregated minority group, with two-thirds of students attending schools with a majority of other Latino students (Orfield et al., 2002). This isolation prohibits students from interacting easily with native English speakers, and, therefore, making it harder for them to acquire the English language.

A focus on equitable education for Latino students has also been an area of concern well into the 21st century. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into effect Executive Order 12900, establishing the *President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans* within the Department of Education. This commission's purpose was to develop, monitor, and coordinate efforts towards the academic achievement of America's Hispanic youths (Exec. Order No. 12900, 1994). George W. Bush furthered this aim by implementing Executive Order 13230, whereby the commission's focus was to research and implement effective practices at the local, state, and federal levels to close the achievement gap and attain the goals set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB; Exec. Order No. 13230, 2001).

Hispanic students were now encouraged to participate in federal educational programs and agencies were designed to help parents prepare their children for schooling and encourage them to go to college (Exec. Order No. 13230, 2001). Yet, with the implementation of all of these measures to improve the educational attainment of Latino youths, they still remain the most poorly educated minority in America.

The Dream Act. Increasing levels of immigration and the complexities of legal status have created new problems in academic attainment as a greater number of Hispanic students are now moving through the American educational system (Gonzales, 2010). Nearly 5.5 million

children in the United States live in undocumented households, and approximately 2 million are undocumented students (Kim, 2013). Although much contemporary scholarship finds intergenerational gains made by immigrant children, the growth in the unauthorized Latino population brings concerns to their status as students. Undocumented students are particularly vulnerable in that they must not only overcome the challenges of the typical immigrant student, but also face legal and financial constraints as they navigate through high school and transition to postsecondary schooling (Gonzales, 2010).

Current immigration policies base undocumented students' residency on their parents' legal status. Therefore, if parents are unauthorized residents of the United States, children do not have a legal pathway of obtaining legal residency, even though, in many cases, children have lived almost their whole lives in the U.S. (Kim, 2013). As a result, undocumented students tend to cope with a variety of psychosocial educational problems. Beyond the struggle of simply managing their precarious residential status, undocumented students must choose from a much narrower range of postsecondary college choices with a dramatic decrease in both financial aid and workforce options (Gonzales, 2010).

To alleviate some of these problems, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (commonly referred to as the DREAM Act) was introduced to effectively repeal Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which discouraged states from offering in-state tuition to undocumented student residents (Palacios, 2010). Presently, the DREAM Act proposes that undocumented students obtain legal status through a two-stage process (Kim, 2013). Firstly, students would be incorporated as conditional legal permanent residents (LPRs) if they entered the United States at age 16 or younger and have at least 5 years of consecutive residency, have a high school diploma or the equivalent, and or

have gained admission to an institution of higher learning and have no criminal background (Aguirre & Simmers, 2011; Palacios, 2010). The second stage to obtain full LPR status involves maintaining a good moral character and meeting one of the following criteria: (a) acquisition of a degree from a 2-year or vocational college, (b) completion of 2 years in a bachelor's degree program, and (c) serving in the U.S. armed forces for at least 2 years. The DREAM Act offers unauthorized minors the possibility of education and citizenship. Concurrently, the U.S. social services infrastructure would benefit from an increased pool of college-educated workers whose income power can contribute to the nation's overall economic health (Aguirre & Simmers, 2011).

California Assembly Bill 540. Each year, nearly 65,000 undocumented children graduate from high school, many at the top of their classes, but cannot attend college, work, or join the military because of their precarious legal status (American Immigration Council, 2011). These students are often barred from continuing their education and excluded from the legal workforce. For this reason, "it is estimated that only between 5 and 10 percent of undocumented high-school graduates go to college" (American Immigration Council, 2011, p.#).

In an effort to better support California's undocumented population, in 2001 Governor Gray Davis signed the California Assembly Bill 540, or AB 540, allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition if they attended high school for 3 or more years or have a GED, are enrolled in an accredited public institution of higher education, and have filled out an application to gain legal residency (California Assembly Bill 540, 2001). Additionally, qualified undocumented students would be able to receive state-based financial aid such as the Cal-Grant and various fee waivers offered by the state of California. However, as the political climate turns more conservative, state officials are in fear that the federal government will override in-state

tuition laws that are applicable to undocumented students (Miranda, 2011). As the number of states that adopt educational laws that are antagonistic towards undocumented individual's increases, states that allow in-state tuition have remained divided.

The Charter Movement Aims to Improve Latino Education

Charter schools have emerged as a possible solution to the bureaucratic controls governing American public schools and the greater demand by the community to have more control and input in school organization (Huerta, 2009). Born in the early 1990s the leaders of the charter movement envisioned a school system where parents, teachers, and administrators would create new and more efficient schools that better met the needs of students. In just over 2 decades, more than 5,600 charter schools operate in 39 states. Charter schools are publicly financed, tuition-free, public schools that operate independently from traditional school districts (Knaak & Knaak, 2013).

As problems in education persist, charter schools have been viewed widely as a means of revitalizing education by offering teachers, parents, and students the opportunity to abandon oppressive district bureaucracy in favor of "small-scale, innovative schools responsive to the needs of specific communities of learners" (Bancroft, 2008, p. 248). The main objective of NCLB's Charter Schools Program was to replace policy-based governance in favor of performance-based accountability, thus stimulating the commitment and creativity of teachers and the school community.

Seeing that desegregation of public schools was not going to solve the problem of the learning gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts, parents sought a marketplace of education options for their children ranging from "intra-district transfers, [to] magnet school programs, to increasingly popular charter schools" (Jacobs, 2011, p. 460).

Similar to marketplace economics, the charter movement creates more options for parents; therefore, all schools are incentivized to increase their academic performance in order to retain their student populations.

The shift to charter schools has been especially pronounced in the Latino community. Rauch (2001) states that “Latinos have emerged as a driving force in the charter movement.” He goes further to note that Latinos have described their schools as poor with 60% favoring charter schools. STEM based charters have also emerged to target minority youth in an effort to decrease the interest and achievement gap as well as to involve this untapped talent in STEM fields. The President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology noted that “the underrepresentation of minorities and women in STEM denies science and engineering the rich diversity of perspectives and inspiration that drive those fields” (Robelen, 2011, p.1).

However, research by Bancroft (2008) shows that while charter school founders and educators hoped that specialized programs and environments would create educational opportunities and advance minority populations, the socioeconomic factors that affect mainstream public schools also affect charter schools. In charter schools serving low-income areas, high expectations of educators were tempered by the reality of socioeconomic stressors on their target populations in conjunction with the schools’ limited resources. Although larger public school facilities can take advantage of economies of scale, small charter schools located in urban areas must also take into consideration rental of facilities, as well as expenses such as insurance, meal programs, and smaller budgets.

Nevertheless, in the 2012-13 academic school year, California enrolled the greatest number of charter school students of any state (NCES, 2015). In the same year, the “percentage of students attending high poverty schools- schools in which more than 75% qualify for free or

reduced lunch,” (NCES, 2015, p.1) was higher for charter schools, at 36%, than for traditional public schools, at 23%. Charter schools have also experienced a great shift in its demographic population from 1999 to 2013. Hispanic students have increased from 20% to 29% while the Caucasian population has decreased from 42% to 35% (NCES, 2015).

The Latino Education Gap Persists

The failure of over four decades of progress and legislation suggests that what legislators have been doing to support Hispanic minorities in successfully navigating elementary, secondary, and higher education has not been working (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). The fact remains that Latinos are more likely to come from poorer neighborhoods that lack access to doctors, healthy nutrition options, early education, and other resources that could improve educational outcomes. U.S. public schools continue to be highly segregated by class and race and, therefore, perpetuate low educational attainment by having fewer resources, less qualified teachers, and less rigorous coursework (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Furthermore, Latinos are more likely to come from homes where parents have limited English and a low level of education, which limits their ability to support their children academically (Lucas, 2001). In the United States, Latino children still attend hyper-segregated schools in large urban cities where they are barred from access to peers who are more familiar with mainstream culture, expectations, and are in contact with college-going mentors.

Gandara and Contreras (2009) suggested that although schools may not be able to combat factors like poor healthcare and segregated neighborhoods, they could employ a rich curriculum, improve teacher quality, and dedicate resources to improve Latino education. One key to successfully bridging the attainment gap is to understand that intervention efforts are on a

continuum and by creating effective supports throughout students' educational careers; they will be more likely to graduate from high school and be prepared for college.

How Can We Improve the Educational Pathways of Latinos?

During the 21st century, Latinos have become the largest minority group in the United States. Although the percent of Latinos enrolling in college has increased from 11% in 2006 to 16.5% in 2011, their college enrollment rates remain lowest when compared to Anglo and African Americans (Fry & Lopez, 2012; McCallister, Evans, & Illich, 2010). In order to increase the number of eligible college-going Hispanic students, the cultural and economic factors underlying their low academic achievement must be identified.

In reviewing the literature, four main themes emerged as having a direct impact on Latino students' ability to successfully graduate high school, matriculate to a 4-year university, and persist past their first year. The Hispanic culture and role of the family, legal status, parental education level and language proficiency, and SES are all sociocultural factors that affect Latino education. Additional themes such as peer affiliation and adult mentorship and structural/institutional barriers have also been found to affect student achievement.

Hispanic culture and role of the family. The Latino culture embodies a belief system that promotes family support, close relationships, and interdependence among family members (Devos, Blanco, Munoz, Dunn, & Ulloa, 2008). Hispanic families—in comparison to European/American families—place a much higher value on family obligations and support, a value commonly referred to as *familism*. From the familial perspective, there is a strong commitment to family relationships and obligations that supersede personal aspirations. Although Hispanic parents believe that a good education is the key to a better future, they tend to

believe that the school is responsible for educating children, whereas manners and values are taught in the home (McCallister et al., 2010).

The college environment in the United States, however, is influenced by a more individualistic approach. Institutions of higher education largely reflect Anglo-American culture (Devos et al., 2008). Here, characteristics such as independence, self-reliance, and personal accomplishments displace collective interests and cultural perspectives. This emphasis comes at a great detriment to Latino college students who must navigate between their two worlds by prioritizing family obligations but still focusing on schoolwork and immersing themselves in the new college culture.

The value of familism is especially relevant to Latina youths. Evidence suggests that Latinas generally conform to gender stereotypes and may take on the role of caretakers for younger siblings or elderly relatives (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund [NWLC & MALDEF], 2009). Although strong family ties can motivate and support students, pressures to fulfill roles of both student and family member can cause overwhelming stress and be detrimental to academic performance. Family responsibilities also hinder school engagement, as well as involvement in after school sports and extracurricular activities that can strengthen one's sense of commitment to school and broaden Latina students' support network.

In 2014, Latina adolescent females ages 15-19 had the highest rate of pregnancy of any major racial or ethnic group (38 births per 1,000 adolescent females) (U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, 2016). There are many reasons for the heightened incidence of teen pregnancy in this population, but central among them was inaccessibility to medically accurate prevention

information and few discussions with family members concerning pregnancy and contraceptives (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009).

Legal status. Although the Latino student population is increasingly U.S.-born or possesses citizenship, an estimated three million parents of U.S.-born children are undocumented (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009). Children whose parents reside illegally in the U.S. or who themselves are undocumented face emotional, financial, and legal stressors as well as barriers to higher education.

Undocumented students first received the right to a free public education in the 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Plyler v. Doe*. Here, the court ruled that all children, regardless of their citizenship, have the right to an education, as they cannot achieve any sense of individual equality without it (Perez, Espinoza, Cortes, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). The court further noted that children should not be held responsible and forfeit their education because of their parents' decision to move to the U.S. illegally.

Currently, however, equal access to federal or state based financial aid for undocumented students ends at high school graduation. Upon completion of secondary school, thousands of college-eligible Latino students are unable to continue with their education due to their legal status, limited financial aid, and federal laws that prohibit some schools from extending all rights and privileges to undocumented students (Perez et al., 2010). These students face considerable obstacles in their academic trajectories because they cannot qualify for certain financial aid options and are unable to secure employment.

Students with undocumented status are more likely than authorized citizens, to feel “shame, trepidation, anger, despair, marginalization, and uncertainty” (Perez et al., 2010, p. 37). Those who persist in college despite these burdens are more likely to encounter stress and other

challenges because of the realities of tuition costs. Furthermore, students do not know that when they are finished with college, they may still not be able to find a position in their field.

Parental language barriers and/or low levels of formal education. Another roadblock to education is lack of language proficiency for parents. One in 10 American families speak Spanish as their primary language (Hernandez, 2006). In LAUSD, California's largest school district, "33% of the district's k-12" population are English learners, of that, Spanish speakers comprise 94%" (LAUSD Language Census Report, 2009). In addition, many Hispanic parents were not educated in this country or did not achieve high levels of education in their native countries. Because of this impediment, many immigrant and first-generation parents struggle to help their children with schoolwork and are inhibited from being involved in their child's school because they lack the cultural and social capital to navigate the U.S. school system successfully (Hernandez, 2006; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009).

Hernandez (2006) argued that parents' educational attainment level can be a determining factor in their children's educational attainment. Given that 51% of Latino mothers themselves have not finished high school, the educational outcome for Latino children is once again hampered. College-educated parents are more likely to enroll their children in early education programs, read and spend more time with their children, and live in higher income areas where they can avoid resource deficient schools. Lucas (2001) notes that, while socioeconomically *disadvantaged* families promote education, they often have no way of effectively guiding their children through their education like so many socioeconomically *advantaged* families.

Economic factors. Poverty or low SES poses a great challenge to a child's ability to be successful in school (NCES, 2010). Growing up in poverty can lead to lower rates of school completion because damage to physical health affects memory and can cause chronic

psychological stress. In the United States, almost 30% of the children living in poverty come from Hispanic households (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009).

Many low-SES children experience great insecurities during their early childhood due to the social and emotional challenges caused by poverty (Jensen, 2009). In order for a child to perform optimally, he/she must be raised in an environment conducive to healthy learning and exploration. However, adverse factors such as inadequate healthcare, young motherhood, and depression all lead to decreased sensitivity and attention to the child, which is likely to later influence his/her academic performance.

In many poverty-stricken households, caregivers are typically overworked and overstressed and must leave their children at home to care for younger siblings. Low SES children spend less time playing outside and participating in extracurricular activities, and usually spend their time staying home and watching television (Jensen, 2009). In addition, because caregivers have a harder time building safe, secure environments and relationships, poor children are at much higher risk for developing teenage depression.

Low SES children are also more likely to suffer from acute and chronic stress (Jensen, 2009). Compared to affluent or middle-income children, poor children are more likely to be “exposed to higher levels of familial violence, disruption, and separation” (Chapter 2). Chronic stress is linked to more than 50% of school absences; it reduces motivation, effort, and cognition, and channels into disruptive behavior at school (Jensen, 2009). Children raised in poverty may exhibit social and emotional deficits that teachers may inaccurately label as lack of respect or manners. Behaviors such as *acting out*, impatience, impulsivity, and inappropriate emotional or physical responses cause irritation and frustration in many teachers, further hindering academic success in Latino children.

Adult mentorship and peer affiliation. Youths' social relationships both at home and at school can predict a wide variety of academic outcomes, such as behavior and educational success (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Academic mentorship is one resource Latino students believe plays a prominent role in supporting their educational attainment and success (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2007). In an academic setting, mentorship is the process by which an individual has a dramatic impact on a student's orientation toward school and helps the student develop mechanisms for coping with academic demands and awareness for the educational resources available to them. Students can be members of multiple peer groups, which may play a critical role in supporting upward mobility and identity development (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Zalaquett and Lopez (2007) stated that "mentorship relationships may be formal or informal in structure" (p. 342). In formal mentoring, typically a third party establishes the relationship between the mentor and the mentee in a structured environment, such as the Boys and Girls Club. Here, the third party has a set of procedures, trainings, guidelines for behavior, and goals in place in order to maximize the effects of the relationship. Informal mentoring involves a less structured process whereby either the mentor or the mentee takes the initiative in fostering a relationship. Although this kind of mentoring relationship can be just as effective, without concrete roles and guidelines, it can vary widely.

Rowley (1999) described the following characteristics of a good mentor: (a) has a strong commitment to the relationship; (b) accepts the mentee; (c) is skilled in providing appropriate support; (d) has strong interpersonal skills; (e) communicates faith and is optimistic about the future; and (f) advocates for education. Many individuals can take on the role of mentor. Parents, siblings, friends, counselors, teachers, and administrators are all possible sources of academic support and encouragement. In a research report by American College Testing (ACT, 2002),

middle/high school Latino students indicated that a relationship with a teacher or administrator in their high school greatly influenced their goal of attending college, particularly if that mentor was of Latino/a descent.

Teacher support/mentorship. Social relationships at school are important to the academic success of students, particularly those from non-dominant ethnic groups (Woolley et al., 2009). In studies by Loukas, Suzuki, and Horton (2006) and Martinez, DeGarmo, and Eddy (2004), Latino adolescents who described themselves as having higher school satisfaction, fewer discriminatory experiences, and a stronger connectedness to staff and peers had higher grade point averages (GPAs) and were less likely to dropout (Woolley et al., 2009).

However, creating strong social relationships is not easy for many Latino students. In Stanton-Salazar's (1997) study of minority youths, he highlighted the developmental challenges Latino youths face in having to participate in multiple and at times conflicting social systems. One's achievement in American society is situated within a highly individualistic atmosphere that focuses on "innate ability, merit, and individual motivational dynamics" (p. 2). Contrary to the *familism* that one might find in a typical Latino household, in American society, the potential to promote one's career or social status is evaluated on the congruence of one's attitudes and beliefs and these American "universal" traits (p. 2). The greater this alignment, the greater the likelihood that teachers will identify the individual as having *talent* and communicate high expectations, moral support, and academic and social encouragement.

Whereas the family takes on the responsibility of engendering the motivational dispositions of their children, school agents (teachers, counselors, and administrators) can enhance these traits or provide children with a second chance of developing them, if they have

not already done so (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Thus, school-based agents have the power to not only provide moral support, but also initiate the development of motivational dynamics.

For at-risk, minority youths, adult mentorship is of particular importance. In their study of resiliency theory, Sanchez, Esparza, and Colón (2008), found that children exposed to poverty and family instability can become healthy and competent adults with the mentorship and support of at least one extra-familial adult. In a 30-year study, Werner and Smith (1989) found that at-risk minority youths who succeeded showed the ability to look for an adult, in addition to their parents, who was able to provide guidance and emotional support. Resilient youths cited educators as mentors who had respect for them, listened to them, provided encouragement, and had high expectations while providing academic support (Herbert, 1996). Research by Woolley et al. (2009) consistently found that relationships between teachers and students were one of the greatest factors in the academic success of Latino youth. Reinforcing the idea that teacher-student relationships have the power to affect school outcomes, Woolley et al. (2009) found that teachers play a critical role in Latino adolescents' self-concept and persistence in school.

Peer affiliation. Relationships with peers can play a pivotal role in school pathways for both majority and minority students (Azmitia & Cooper, 2009). Peer relationships compose a fundamental portion of adolescent youths' social support system and embody the potential to nurture academic achievement and social and emotional development (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Through joint participation in various school activities, peers play a great role in "decisions to stay in school and in developing college and career identities" (Azmitia & Cooper, 2009, p. 46). Therefore, having friends that support a college-going mindset are of great import to Latino students.

For minority youths, however, sociologists and educational anthropologists also posit that peer relationships have the capacity to have a negative impact on students. For Hispanic students from low-SES backgrounds, peers can challenge their friends' achievement and motivation to pursue higher education (Azmitia & Cooper, 2009). According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), schools can recreate the discrimination seen in the larger society; therefore, alienated peers gravitate toward one another and can develop oppositional identities in response to what they see as unjust and unfair educational practices.

Although the notion of oppositional school identities may characterize some students, it does not explain how other minority students were able to navigate the educational system successfully. Brown (as cited in Azmitia & Cooper, 2009) stated that it is the youths themselves who seek out and befriend like-minded peers who reinforce their preexisting attitudes about school. Therefore, affiliation with peers seems to have mixed results in terms of impact on educational attainment.

Structural/institutional barriers. Multiple factors at the secondary school level may relate to Latino students' lack of enrollment and persistence in university. A racially stratified society and school system can contribute to the low performance of Hispanic youths. Conchas (2001) found that low-income minority students often face ill-equipped learning environments, where they have fewer instructional materials, and defiant "peer subcultures, such as youth gangs". Additionally, school factors such as lower expectations, tracking, grade retention, and lack of cultural awareness can also contribute to this growing problem (Adam, 2003). According to a report by the National Council of La Raza, such stereotyping and differential treatment is manifested and reinforced by a school system that lends itself to systematic discriminatory practices (Foxen, 2010).

Increasingly, Latino youths must also face a variety of negative public discourse and an increasingly hostile, anti-immigrant mentality that portrays them as low achievers, teen parents, gang members, and high school dropouts (Foxen, 2010). In light of this broad social context, the ways in which Hispanic youths perceive and engage in social settings or institutions, such as school and work, can play a critical role in how they envision their present and future options. The stigma of inferiority and the detrimental effects of discrimination have taken a great toll on the academic outcomes of these youths. It has lowered self-esteem and motivation, led to disengagement and alienation, and increased disciplinary problems. In addition to these subjective impacts of perceived discrimination, Foxen (2010) also reported that stereotyping by teachers and administrators in regard to intelligence and capabilities can lead to unjustifiable tracking and reduced educational opportunities.

The problem of low enrollment at the university level is greatly affected by lower rates of college readiness. Although enrolling in advanced classes and rigorous coursework is identified as crucial in college preparation, low-SES Latino students are more likely than any other ethnic subgroup to be enrolled in a sub-standard curriculum (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011).

Latina/o students are also less likely to access the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate through high school and into college. *Social capital* in the context of education is referred to as the specific knowledge of individuals who can support and/or strategies that are used, to learn the processes of school completion and college enrollment. Because Latino students lack access to mentors or teachers who can possibly help them through these processes, they often struggle because of lack of knowledge. *Cultural capital* is information related to norms and expectations (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011). Latino students often do not have a family

member, school teacher, or counselor who could communicate expectations of knowledge and behaviors to them that would help them continue with their education.

In a study by Valenzuela (1999), Mexican-descendent students reported that they often felt uncared for by their teachers or other school personnel who seemed like they were trying to make all “children into replicas of Anglo children” (Salinas, 2005, p. 283). Latino students seem to be victims of a public education that does not choose to recognize their language, culture, or goals.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance

This study of Latino students’ academic success and matriculation to higher education utilized the cultural-ecological theory of school performance (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu and Simons (1998) analyzed the school performance of minority groups and conceptualized the factors that affect educational outcomes of a given population. In particular, cultural ecological theory investigates how differences in educational outcomes may be caused by the treatment of minorities in society at large, as well as in school. Additionally, the perceptions of societal factors and how minority students respond to them may also have an effect on academic outcomes (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) posited that cultural and ecological factors have a direct correlation to the educational outcomes of minority students. The cultural component refers to the way people see the world and respond to it, whereas the ecological component refers to the setting or environment. Therefore, this theory has two premises, one part being how minorities are treated by *the system*, their school, and educational policies (Mindnich, 2007). The second set of factors refers to how minorities respond because of their mistreatment; this Ogbu and Simon call *community forces*.

Cultural responses to ecological barriers. To understand how the educational system affects school performance, Ogbu and Simons (1998) examined the White majority treatment of minority groups in society as a whole. The barriers imposed on minority individuals by the White majority include: instrumental discrimination (inequitable employment and wages), relational discrimination (where individuals live and who they socialize with), and symbolic discrimination (belittlement of the minority group's language and culture). To sustain the impact of these forces, minority groups have created *collective solutions* to these problems. In response to instrumental discrimination, minority groups have developed theories on how they can *make it* and survive their economic struggles. In response to relational discrimination, they have become suspicious of White Americans and their institutions. Finally, in order to combat symbolic discrimination, minority groups either take on White *ways* or develop their own counterculture or language.

These societal and structural barriers can have great implications for the school performance of minority groups. Mistreatment of minority groups in schooling takes three forms: (a) educational policies such as segregation and unequal school funding; (b) how students are treated in the classroom (teacher expectations, tracking, teacher-student interactions); and (c) lack of rewards given to students' achievements, including employment and pay (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Community forces. Although institutional barriers greatly impact the achievement of minority students, it is not the only cause of low performance; otherwise, all immigrant/minority students would fail in school (Mindnich, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to explore students' responses to and perceptions of schooling. Ogbu and Simons (1998) proposed four factors that comprise community forces: (a) beliefs about the value and purpose of school in helping one get

ahead, (b) a comparison of a White school versus their school *back home*, (c) relationships and degree of trust with school personnel, and (d) whether schooling will harm their affiliation with their own cultural and language identity.

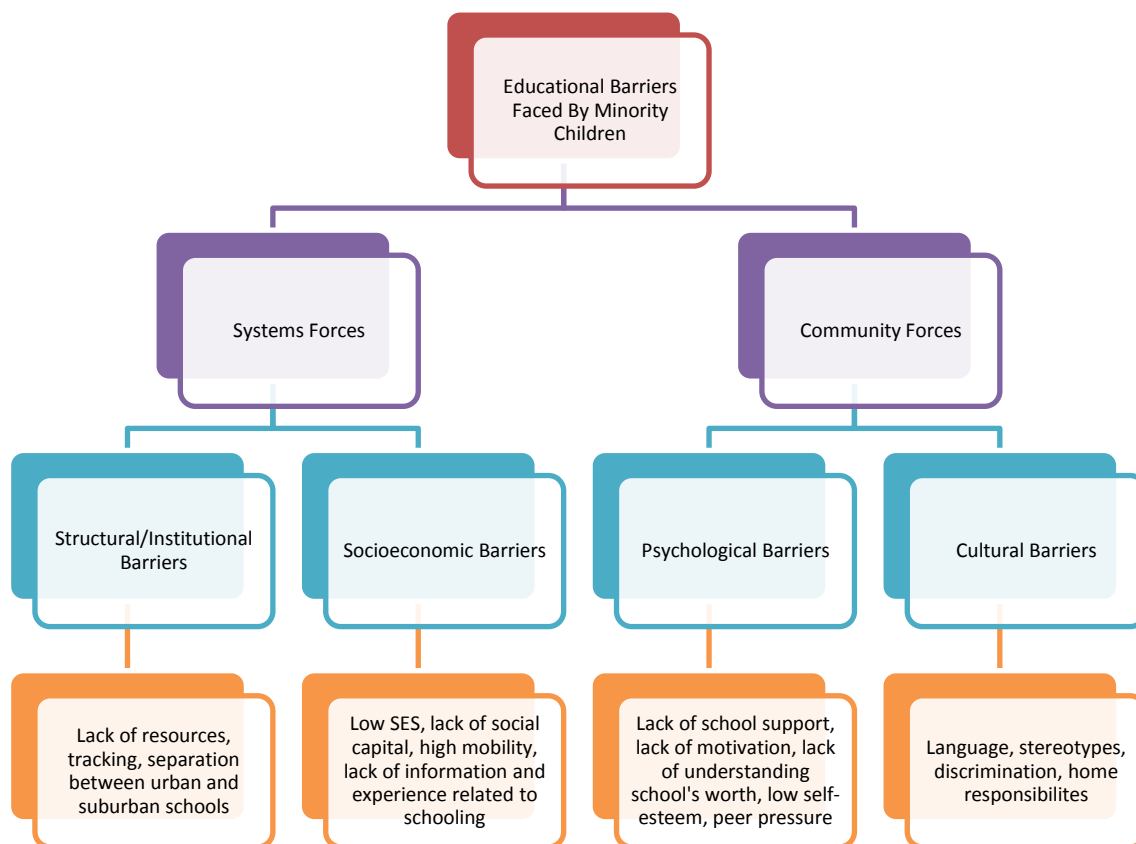


Figure 1. Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory. Adapted from “Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education,” J. U. Ogbu and H. D. Simons, 1998, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 29(2), 155-188. Copyright 1998 by the authors.

Different types of minority status. To gain a greater understanding of minority actions and reactions, Ogbu and Simons (1998) distinguished between the various minority groups and classified them into autonomous, voluntary, and involuntary minorities based on their histories (Mindnich, 2007; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Autonomous minorities are people who vary from the dominant group in more subtle ways based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or language; however, their numbers are so small that they have very little impact on the dominant group, therefore, they are not totally oppressed and their minority status has no bearing on school

achievement (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Samuel, Krugly-Smolka, & Warren, 2001). Examples of autonomous minorities are Jews, the Amish, and Mormons.

Voluntary minorities are those who have moved to the United States by choice (Burdman, 2003). These groups commonly seek a better future in the U.S. and do not see their presence in America as being forced upon them (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Samuel et al., 2001). Although they may initially have some learning difficulties as a result of language and cultural adjustments, voluntary minorities do not typically experience any long lasting detriment to their education. Examples of voluntary minorities are Cubans, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, and some Mexican, Central Americans, and South Americans.

Involuntary minorities are people who have been colonized, enslaved, or conquered (Burdman, 2003; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Therefore, their status as Americans has not been taken on by choice but has been forced upon them. Involuntary minorities, such as African Americans and Native Americans, hold caste-like status, whereby they experience a systemic form of discrimination. Individuals in this category perceive themselves as barred from success in future employment and earnings. As a result, they become disillusioned within American society that hinders them from any form of success and begin to doubt the purpose of furthering their education. Although most Hispanic groups within the United States have immigrated by choice, Ogbu and Simons (1998) place them into the involuntary category as a result of American imperialism and their continued feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement.

Ogbu and Simons (1998) noted that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary minority groups is not based on race specifically but is instead rooted in the beliefs and behaviors the dominant group has about particular races and their relationship to school success or failure.

He further explained that not all members of groups are alike and there are variances in degree of affiliation within a category.

Minorities' adaptations to different cultural understandings of and reactions to U.S. society. Cultural-ecological theory posits that voluntary and involuntary minorities view American society differently and have developed cultural models, understandings or interpretations of the world and guide their actions based on this understanding.

Frame of reference. A frame of reference is the way an individual perceives a situation. Because voluntary and involuntary minorities encounter different situations, they perceive them differently, and therefore, have differing frames of reference, attitudes, and beliefs (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Voluntary minorities see America as the land of opportunity and when comparing it to *back home* see their situations in the U.S. in a more positive light (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). As a result, they are initially more accepting of unequal treatment as they see it as a stepping-stone to their future success. Because of this mentality, children of immigrants also see America as being able to give them more opportunities and are motivated to work hard. For example, in Ogbu and Simons's (1998) study of Chinese Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans in Oakland, California, most students from a voluntary immigrant background stated that in the United States a good education and hard work is more likely to pay off than back home where success was based on one's connections, name, and help from friends and relatives.

In contrast, involuntary minorities see their status as inferior compared to middle class White Americans. Historically, children of color were seen as intellectually and morally inferior to White children (Samuel et al., 2001). Although many of these stereotypes have diminished, this inferiority complex still lingers enough to make certain minority groups resent the fact that

the majority group has more educational and economic opportunities and, therefore, they do not see themselves as having full access to what America has to offer. Many immigrant children, particularly those living in urban areas, face daunting challenges such as high levels of poverty, unemployment, violence, and structural barriers such as segregation in schools and the workforce (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). Because discrimination has been so long-lasting, these individuals see it a permanent fixture in American society (Mindnich, 2007; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Folk theory of “making it”. Although involuntary minorities believe that hard work and education are necessary to become successful in America, they have come to believe that wage and job discrimination are institutionalized and permanent and that no matter how hard they work, they will never be able to combat racism (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Therefore, these individuals do not see doctors and lawyers as role models. Instead, they see nonconventional people such as actors and athletes as role models: people who have been able to *make it* because they have worked twice as hard and broke the *rules*. Like these athletes and actors, involuntary minorities do not want to be incorporated into mainstream America; rather, they choose their own paths and maintain their identities. A major cultural barrier to their education is the idea that if one adopts *White* ways—language, mannerisms, etc.—one would be losing the identity of one’s original culture (Burdman, 2003). Involuntary minorities may see education as steering them towards Americanization, yet they do not feel they can access the wealth of possibilities that White Americans may have (Valenzuela, 1999).

Pedagogical implications. Ogbu and Simons (1998) stated that while it is important for educators to note a student’s group identity, it alone does not determine a student’s success or failure. Educators must, however, take into consideration how group membership affects

students' learning and recognize that trust needs to be built. To maximize student success, educators must create culturally responsive instruction: a curriculum that builds upon students' strengths and interests (Burdman, 2003). Teachers should also have high standards; by expecting students to meet these standards, it sends the message that the teacher does not share racist stereotypes, but instead believes that all students can succeed, regardless of race, nationality, or class. Finally, Ogbu and Simons (1998) recommended parent and community involvement in schooling, to show parents how respected their role is as tutors and mentors to their children

Chapter Summary

Research consistently points to Latino academic underachievement in comparison to every other major ethnic group in the United States. Yet it also posits that Latino youths face some of the most challenging hurdles in terms of culture, institutional barriers, and lack of mentorship, which may contribute to lack of school success.

Latino culture is deep-rooted in its values of community and family. Its belief in interdependence and cooperation has become a cornerstone in the Latino mentality and value system. Yet while many would cite this as a positive characteristic, when translated to the American school system, it can be seen as a great hindrance to Hispanic students. America's educational system prides itself in its principles of independence and rugged individualism. To students who have been taught at an early age to put family before self, this can come as a great blow. Compounded with this ethic, children of Latino descent must also navigate language barriers that preclude them or their parents from ever receiving appropriate supports.

Additionally, unlike many students of other ethnicities, Latina/o students typically come from low-SES backgrounds and many are of precarious legal status. These tenuous circumstances can have profound negative effects on educational attainment and success.

Because of these conditions, the roles of strong mentors and positive peer relationships are of even greater importance. Students who create relationships with teachers, administrators, and other adults who can help them navigate through school and into college have much greater rates of success. Having friends who are also wading through these experiences can create a sense of camaraderie and affiliation, which has been shown to contribute to a positive school outlook. Unfortunately, many Latino students face schools that are underfunded and lack resources. Additionally, they are typically tracked in classes with teachers who hold lower expectations of these students. Consequently, Latino youths affiliate themselves with peers who also feel alienated and unworthy, and therefore, contribute to the stereotype of Latinos as lazy and uneducated gang members.

Chapter III: Methods

This chapter details the methods used to implement a qualitative case study research design to investigate how sociocultural factors, peer affiliation and adult mentorship, and structural/institutional barriers have influenced Latino charter school students' matriculation to and retention within a 4-year university. It details the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative case study research and describes the study's participants, the site, rationale, and methods for data collection and analysis. Additionally, potential ethical concerns, the role of the researcher, and strategies for addressing safety and confidentiality of participants are also discussed.

A more thorough understanding of the experiences of successful Latino college students is necessary to better support students at the secondary level and to assist them in their preparation and matriculation to the university system. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify if and how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers, affected the life and school experiences of Latino students who graduated from the same STEM-based sixth-12th grade, charter school. Furthermore, the researcher sought to examine how these experiences influenced or shaped their post-secondary educational pathways.

More specifically, this study examined the following research questions:

1. How have sociocultural factors affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme based charter school?
2. How have adult mentorship and peer affiliation affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme based charter school?
3. In what ways have structural/institutional barriers affected the matriculation and college access of Latino graduates of a theme based charter school?

Research relating to minority access to college is of great import, as individuals of Hispanic descent will continue to make up large segment of America's workforce. Acquiring an advanced degree affords individuals greater opportunities for employment, productivity, and a more enriched life (Contreras, 2011). However, as stated in Chapter II, the trend in Latino educational attainment continues to show a great gap in academic achievement, size of population, and disproportionately low representation in higher education (MacDonald, 2004). Results of this study could inform charter and theme-based secondary school educators on how to target and reshape their college-preparedness programs to better fit the needs of their Latino student populations.

Research Methods and Rationale

A qualitative approach to research focuses on real-life situations in natural settings (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative studies, researchers examine meanings, perspectives, and understandings with an emphasis on process and a focus on inductive analysis (Hayes, 2008). This research sought to uncover meanings that participants attribute to their behavior, their perspectives on certain issues, and how they interpret situations. Data were gathered in detail through open-ended questions where the researcher played an integral role in the investigative process (Key, 1997).

A qualitative case study involves the exploration of a situation within a "real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). This style of inquiry is essential in order to generate theory, develop research-based policies, improve educational practice, and illuminate social issues still plaguing the U.S. school system (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The investigator explored the case using multiple sources of information to triangulate the data, including semi-structured interviews, documents, reports, and observations.

In comparison to a quantitative study, qualitative research allows for a more complex description and interpretation of a problem, the voices of participants are heard, and the study structure allows for more flexibility (Creswell, 2013). It seeks to find a wider understanding of the entire situation. However, its complexity is in the greater time involved and ambitious data collection and procedures necessary to make meaning out of data. Additionally, its subjectivity leads to difficulties in establishing validity and reliability of the information gathered (Key, 1997).

In reviewing the literature, three main themes emerged as having a marked effect on Latino student matriculation and retention in 4-year universities: (a) sociocultural factors (i.e., legal status, financial health, and cultural characteristics), (b) adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and (c) structural/ institutional barriers at the secondary level. To better understand how these factors influenced Latino students, a qualitative case study was employed to investigate students' experiences in order to provide theme-based charter schools with immediate knowledge and recommendations for improvements.

Case study research methods. The case study method of qualitative investigation involves the in-depth study and investigation of an observable occurrence in its natural setting and context (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). It is a detailed investigation of individuals, institutions, or other social groups. The principal distinction of a case study approach is that the focus is on an individual case rather than the whole population of cases. Although most research is done to see what the common, pervasive issues are, the case study seeks to understand the particulars of that specific case in its complexity (Key, 1997). Key (1997) noted that “a case study focuses on a bounded system” so that the “system can be better understood in its own habitat” (para. 8). McMillan and Schumacher (2001) stated that a case study methodology allows the researcher to

use an open-ended approach to discover patterns and the complexity in anticipated and unanticipated relationships. In focusing on the impact of in-school and out-of-school factors on the K-16 pathways of Latino youths, the researcher used a holistic approach to describe, in depth, the program, the school's historical and organizational context, and its impact on its students.

Because semi-structured interviews were used to highlight the perspectives of graduates of a STEM-based sixth-12th grade charter school, this research was bound by time, setting, and student accessibility. A case study, therefore, was the most appropriate method of inquiry in that it provided the researcher with the opportunity to hear from participants themselves. In this study, the researcher had the opportunity to relate clearly to a human experience and give it a *face* (Hayes, 2008). Case studies facilitate well-informed reflection and discussion on single issues, specific events, and circumstances. Additionally, case studies are often problem-centered, are small scale, and bring attention to the ways certain people confront various problems and situations.

Setting

The setting for this research was Oaks STEM Academy (OSA), a small, independent public charter school that opened its doors in 2002 to serve an urban or working class community in Los Angeles, California.¹ Serving the sixth-12th grades, OSA prides itself in providing its students with a small school environment, focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). OSA's college preparatory curriculum requires that all students fulfill the UC (University of California) A-G course requirements. In addition to the core curriculum, it offers the following courses: Technology Integrated Education, Life Skills, Advanced Mathematics and Science Courses, and an after-school academic intervention program and social enrichment clubs.

¹ All proper nouns are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

When this research was conducted, OSA served 537 students in grades 6-12. Located in an urban area of the San Fernando Valley, the school's demographics consisted of 71% Latinos, 18% Whites, and 8% Asian, 1% African American, and the remaining 2% mixed or other races/ethnicities. OSA is classified as a Title I school, as 82% of its students receive free or reduced lunches. Of note, 20% of OSA students are English language learners and an additional 15% are classified as special education students.

OSA has received prominent distinction for obtaining a gold medal as one of the *Best High Schools* by US News in 2012 and is ranked a top 30 school within California. In addition, it has a similar school ranking of 8 out of 10² with a 100% graduation rate, 98% of graduating students have enrolled in at least one advanced placement class. While the school has failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB for its major subgroups, its high school is still considered an *achieving* school.

Figure 1 and Tables 1-2 reflect OSA's diverse student population for school years 2007-2013. Figure 1 describes the overall demographics of OSA. It includes gender, special populations, socioeconomics, and ethnic backgrounds. These demographics are fairly comparable to what one would expect from the local public school. The only major difference is class size. As shown in Table 1, student enrollment by grade over the course of 6 years has remained steady. For this study, students who graduated in the year 2011 were asked to participate. As shown in Table 2, students of Latino descent make up the largest ethnic group of OSA.

² Disclosing this reference would compromise the subject school's confidentiality. Therefore, it is not included.

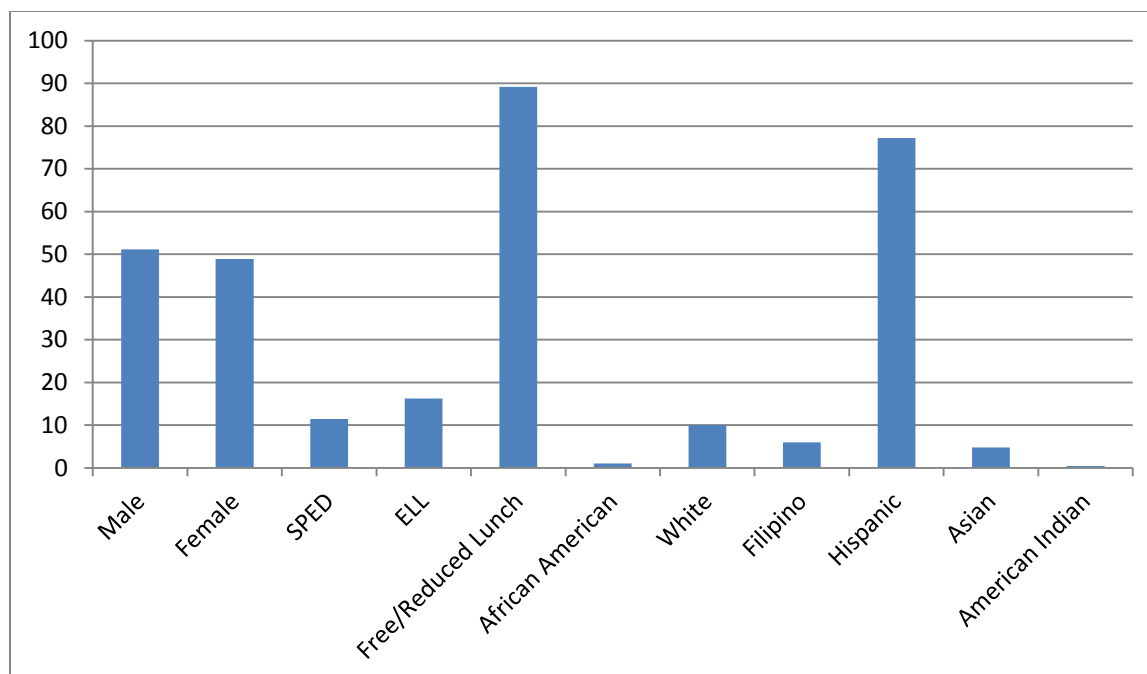


Figure 2. 2012-13 OSA student demographics by percentage.

Table 1

2007-2013 OSA Student Enrollment by Grade

Year	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
2007-08	91	93	73	48	50	24	20
2008-09	92	94	76	50	39	44	23
2009-10	109	93	81	59	52	41	42
2010-11	96	104	88	64	55	44	40
2011-12	106	94	92	69	63	53	39
2012-13	83	87	78	70	61	53	51

Table 2

2007-2013 Enrollment by Ethnicity

Year	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic	African-American	White
2007-08	4	13	13	24	262	9	74
2008-09	2	7	0	32	293	6	78
2009-10	3	11	0	35	323	15	90
2010-11	4	13	0	29	351	12	82
2011-12	5	23	0	26	384	5	73
2012-13	2	23	0	29	373	5	47

OSA is located in an urban area of a working class community in the greater metropolitan area of Los Angeles County. The city's demographics show variance in population, with a Latino population of 48.5%, African American 9.6%, Asian 11.3%, and the rest a mixture of White and other ethnic groups. Foreign-born persons account for 39.1% of the population, with a language other than English spoken in 60.2% of households. Of the city's inhabitants, 74.2% have graduated from high school and 30.8% hold a college diploma (US Census, 2010).

The school's surrounding community consists mainly of low-middle income, working class families living primarily in apartments and single-family homes. Although the city's history dates back to agricultural field workers, it now mainly hosts day laborers and service occupations. The city's median household income is \$49,745, almost \$12,000 less than the average income across California, with 21.2% of its population living below the poverty level (US Census, 2010).

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

This study focused specifically on all 25 Latino graduates of OSA in the 2010-11 academic year. Each 2010-11 OSA Latino graduate was invited to participate in this study. There were 39 graduates in the year 2011, 25 of whom are of Hispanic origin. The researcher initially sent out a questionnaire (see Appendix A) to all interested participants in order to obtain the following baseline information:

- Immigration status
- Gender
- Educational Status

Additionally, students must have been of Latino descent, completed high school in the year 2011 and obtained a diploma, graduated from OSA, and attended OSA for their entire high school careers.

Three teachers and one administrator present during the 2011 graduating year and still employed by OSA asked to participate in the study. All four employees started with OSA within the first 5 years of its opening; therefore, they have the greatest knowledge of both the evolution of the school programs and the student population. None of the employees are Latino, however, all but one have grown up in the San Fernando Valley and have a good understanding of the demographics with which they work.

The researcher obtained the names of students from OSA's database file and contacted them via email and/or phone call (see Appendix B). The recruitment letter was read over the phone or sent via email and detailed the purpose of the study and the participants' role. Once contact was made, participants had 5 days to contact the researcher and agree to participate, via phone or email. After 7 days, students who did not reply to the recruitment email or respond to the phone call were contacted once more by the researcher. If there was still no response, they did not participate in the study. When graduates and the researcher made initial contact the researcher answered any questions the participant may have had and mailed a self-addressed stamped envelope containing the Consent to Participate form (see Appendix C). Once all consent forms were collected, the researcher invited students from each of the aforementioned categories to participate in the study. Table 3 shows the profile of all students included in the study. All three teachers and school personnel, shown in table 4, still working at the school site were asked to participate in the study in order to strengthen validity and reliability.

Table 3

Student Participants' Profiles

Name	Gender	Current college/career	Parent educational attainment level	End of High School GPA	Immigration status
Izabella	F	Everest College	Some HS	2.1	Born in America
Omar	M	Unemployed	Some HS	2.4	Born in Mexico/ American Citizen
Brian	M	Arts University	HS Graduate	2.7	Born in America
Gen	F	CSUN	HS Graduate	3.2	Born in America
Liliana	F	UC Santa Barbara	College Graduate	3.9	Born in America
Jacqueline	F	UC Berkeley	Some HS	4.2	AB 540

Table 4

Teacher and School Personnel Profiles

Name	Gender	Years working at OSA	Position
Mrs Jennifer Hauseman	Female	12	Administrator
Ms. Sara Firth	Female	10	Teacher
Ms. Anna Artemyan	Female	8	Teacher
Ms. Nancy Aslan	Female	10	Teacher

Student Profiles

Izabella. Izabella is a first generation Salvadorian-American raised in a single parent, mother-led household with one younger brother who also attends OSA. She described her childhood as very tumultuous as she often had conflicts with her mother, resulting in her periodically living with other relatives and/or boyfriends at the time. She stated that her mother worked long hours and often focused more on her brother, who had learning difficulties and an IEP, rather than her. Because of pressure at home, Izabella often acted out at school and had to repeat the sixth grade due to low academic performance. After several years attending OSA and

with the mentorship of the Dean of Students, Izabella felt that she was finally on what she called “the right track.” She became the Dean of Students’ TA and helped mentor younger students. She’s stated that she has used her own experiences as an example to kids who have had it “rough” and don’t believe they can overcome the obstacles in their path. Izabella is currently attending Everest College and plans on becoming a dental hygienist.

Omar. Omar is of Mexican descent and was also raised in a single parent household. Omar has battled significant learning disabilities as well as bouts of depression that led to his hospitalization and eventual placement on antidepressants. Both his personal and academic troubles made it difficult for Omar to feel confident and successful in school. However, he felt that the emotional support of his mother and the academic support of his resource teacher really helped him prevail over these difficulties so that he could graduate on time with his classmates. Since graduating high school, Omar has found it challenging to find his way as he no longer has the support and structure OSA was able to give him. He is currently unemployed and has no plans to continue his education. He is currently seeking out employment at either OSA or another of its affiliated schools.

Brian. Brian is first generation American of Mexican descent and lives with both parents as well as a younger sister. Brian has been described by both teachers and peers as very “charismatic” and a “go-getter”. Although he states that academics were never his strength, he was always able to charm his way into passing his classes. Brian invested most of his energies into extracurricular activities such as student government, photography, and cinema. Although OSA did not have many programs aligned to his specific interests, Brian was able to create his own avenues through which he could express his creativity by helping to plan dances,

assemblies, and videos for the school. Upon graduating from OSA, Brian went on to Arts University and was hired part time by OSA to be their events coordinator.

Gen. Gen is also first generation American of Mexican descent who lives with both parents and a younger sister. Although she is very close to her parents, particularly her father, Gen has endured episodes of familial alcoholism and gang violence in her childhood. Due to this, she developed what she called a “tough exterior,” making it hard at times to relate to female peers. However, this did not prevent her from making friends and doing well in school. Though not an exceptional student, Gen was hard working and did not want to be left behind her academically minded peers. She made it a point to take many of the rigorous courses her friends were also taking but admits that she often needed to come to tutoring to obtain additional support in order to maintain her grades. She is currently attending Cal State University at Northridge and has an undeclared major.

Liliana. Liliana is of Salvadorian descent and is the youngest of four children. In comparison to her peers, Liliana would be described as high SES wealthy and accustomed to luxuries that many of her friends rarely experienced. Religion too was a strong force in Liliana’s upbringing. She often went to church or retreats to donate time and services to help the less fortunate. Liliana also participated in planning school-wide events such as prom, fundraisers, and other such activities. She was part of cheerleading and was the Secretary in Student Government. A hard worker, Liliana always did well in school and was able to successfully navigate her education to obtain entrance to UC Santa Barbara and plans on becoming a lawyer.

Jacqueline. Jacqueline is of Mexican descent and is an AB 540 student. She lives with both parents and a younger sister, and is currently attending UC Berkeley with the intention of becoming a nurse. Raised in a working class family, Jacqueline did not initially imagine that she

would be able to achieve entrance to one of the most prestigious universities in the nation. However, the mentorship of one of her teachers as well as the support of a tight knit circle of friends allowed her to discover her abilities. Jacqueline was the President of Student Government, participated in cheerleading, and tutored in her spare time. Modeling her favorite teacher, Jacqueline went into nursing in the hope of helping people. She was considered one of the most popular and accomplished girls in school and was greatly looked up to by the younger students. While she does not believe her undocumented status played a major role in her life, she does believe that it made her more driven to work harder and achieve what other students often take for granted.

Adult Profiles

Mrs. Hausman was hired by OSA as Dean of Students and eventually took on the greater role of working with students with disabilities as well as greater behavioral needs. In her role, Mrs. Hausman has always taken a student and family centered approach. She often finds herself as a mediator between families and school personnel navigating the politics of running a charter school while maintaining the best interest of the student.

Ms. Firth is an eighth and 12th grade English teacher who began her teaching career at OSA. As a veteran teacher, Mrs. Firth has developed a strong rapport with her students and often plays the role of mentor and guidance counselor; particularly to the students she has seen through middle and high school. Her status as veteran teacher has also led the school to depend on her to mentor new teachers and help plan school events, a role she has reluctantly adopted but for which she feels a strong responsibility.

Mrs. Artemyan also teaches the eighth grade and has worked for OSA for 8 years. While she also gets along well with students, she is known for maintaining a strict classroom

environment and following school policies closely. As the department chair, Mrs. Artemyan takes her role of teacher leader very seriously and takes pride in sharing best practices as well as evaluating her peers.

Miss Aslan. Nancy has worked for OSA for 10 years as an upper-level math teacher and started her career working abroad. She has taught multiple grades throughout her career and has had great success in raising student test scores. While not a teacher to whom most students are initially drawn, Ms. Aslan has developed a strong relationship with a select few who have been with her since middle school all the way through AP Calculus.

Methods of Data Collection

The researcher used two qualitative research methods and three sources of data including (a) student interviews, (b) teacher/administrator interviews, and (c) artifact collection. The primary source of data was participant interviews to capture the experiences of both students and school personnel. To provide historic and documented information, artifacts such as grades and transcripts were used to triangulate data and provide multiple sources of information to validate findings.

Participant interviews. Interview data were collected and recorded using the interview notes template and a digital recorder (see Appendix D). These notes included a written record of interview responses as well as the researcher's interpretations and impressions. Data were then organized and transferred to an interview matrix (see Appendix E), which the researcher used to analyze and sort through emerging themes.

Both the student and school personnel interview protocols captured the perceptions and experiences of students and teachers/administrators present during OSA's 2010-11 school year. The goal of the researcher was to capture their beliefs about the effects of sociocultural factors,

adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and structural barriers may have affected the matriculation and college access of Latino students. Butin (2010) stated that every question “should be deliberate and explicitly linked to answering your research question” (p.92). Therefore, all interview questions pertained to adult mentorship and peer affiliation, sociocultural factors, and structural/institutional barriers at the secondary school level.

Two interviews were held with each participant: the first to respond to interview protocol questions, and the second after the researcher had gone over artifacts and has established follow-up questions. Each interview lasted from 45-60 minutes at the participant’s location of choice. The researcher began the interview by reading aloud the script (see Appendices F & G) that stated the purpose of the research and informed participants that they could decline to answer any of the interview questions. Participants were also told that the interview would be recorded digitally for the researcher’s use alone. Interviews were semi-structured, open-ended, and transcribed for coding and categorization.

Collection of artifacts. The purpose of collecting various artifacts was to help the researcher identify and interpret data more objectively and to provide a variety of opinions and viewpoints (Stake, 2010). For the purpose of this study, artifacts included grades, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and student work provided by the research participants to gain a better understanding of their academic preparedness and abilities.

Participants were also asked to bring pictures, yearbooks, letters, and notes that they still had attesting to their school relationships and experiences. By going over these memorabilia, students spoke to specific occurrences during their high school experience.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrumentation included interview protocols and tables used to code and decipher artifacts. Interviews were semi-structured, using questions prepared by the researcher (see Appendices F & G). These questions were open-ended and based upon the themes revealed in the literature review. The purpose of the questions was to identify and thematically categorize student perceptions of the sociocultural factors, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and the structural barriers that may have impacted their post-secondary pathways. Teacher and administrator interviews were held to better understand the academic and social supports used by students.

Data Management

Only the researcher and the transcriber had access to interview recordings. Confidentiality was maintained, though anonymity could not be assured since audio recordings contained personally identifiable information (i.e., recognizable voices and perhaps mention of other identifiers).

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher made every effort to minimize risk by using pseudonyms for students, schools, cities, and any other names in reports of this study. The researcher kept a list of pseudonyms electronically in a password-secured folder. All hard copies of materials, surveys, and documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Only the researcher and transcriber knew the identity of the involved participants.

There were few risks to the research participants; however, none of these were more than minimal. Some subjects may have become emotional when discussing their pasts and may have been sensitive to discussing possibly emotional situations about challenges, barriers, and family dynamics. If at any point a participant wanted to take a break, postpone, or stop the interview,

the researcher obliged. In addition, a participant was able to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any point. The benefits of this study will include revealing what students perceived to have been the most useful high school supports in helping them get into college and strengthening their skills in persisting through at least 2 years. Results can greatly help local high schools in improving their college readiness programs to meet the needs of their Latino populations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included several components: (a) organization of data, (b) coding data, (c) generation of themes and patterns, (d) testing for emerging themes, and (e) identification of alternate explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Data obtained from interviews were transferred to the matrix (see Appendix E) for analysis. Three forms of data analysis were developed: (a) personal interviews with former students, (b) interviews with teachers/administrators, and (c) artifact assessment. The use of these three forms of data helped to triangulate the findings (Creswell, 2013). This contributed to an inductive format of reasoning in that interpretations were made through the interview protocol, artifacts were used to back up these impressions or elucidated new themes or phenomena, and then conclusions were constructed.

The data analysis phase required the conscious use of fairness and objectivity. One way of regulating bias was to search for disconfirming evidence by exploring all possible sources of information, including contrary evidence that would support the developing themes. Another method was researcher reflexivity: a self-disclosure technique that allowed the researcher to acknowledge inherent assumptions, beliefs, and bias that may affect the findings (Creswell, 2013). I described my experiences with this research and my affiliation with OSA in the subsequent Positionality section.

Interview data came from the questions that were generated in the interview protocol (Appendices F & G). Participant interviews addressed how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship, peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers may have affected the in-school and out of school experiences of Latino minority students, and how these factors affected their post-secondary pathways. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed professionally in a Microsoft Word document. For the purposes of this study, coding was used to enable the researcher to simplify and concentrate the data based on topics or themes (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Two forms of analysis will follow:

1. Data transcribed from interviews were first color coded according to the following themes: cultural characteristics (red), institutional barriers (yellow), peer affiliation (green), and adult mentorship (blue). Responses were then transferred to the Interview Matrix (see Appendix E) where the researcher analyzed data and sorted through responses for topics, issues, and experiences that were the most salient to interviewees. Next, the researcher looked for possible sub-categories and perceived causes. The researcher also coded for themes or factors that had not been identified previously in the literature review but may have still affected the K-16 pathways of the subjects.
2. The researcher's interpretations of the interviews were then transferred from the Interview Notes Template (see Appendix D) to the Interview Matrix (see Appendix E). Notes were made for each of the questions and organized by category. The researcher constructed interpretations of participants' perceptions of the effect of each of the categories and coded them using the following indicators: SPP (Strong positive

perception), PP (positive perception), NP (negative perception), and SNP (strong negative perception).

The use of these instruments allowed the researcher to assemble themes, identify students' perceptions, and develop emerging understandings.

Human Subject Considerations

The researcher has completed the Social and Behavioral Research for Human Subjects Consideration course through CITI (see Appendix H). The researcher obtained permission from the high school's central office to use their database to access student email addresses and telephone numbers. Permission for this study was gained through Pepperdine's Graduate and Professional Schools IRB process (see Appendix I). In order to protect subjects from potential risk associated with participation in this study, the researcher provided an adult consent form for alumni (see Appendix F), assuring all members that only the transcriptionist and researcher would have access to raw data collected.

All subjects were assured that interviews and other artifacts would be confidential and that they would have the opportunity to terminate their involvement in the study at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality was maintained, though complete anonymity could not be assured due to the nature of this study and the small sample size. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher made every effort to minimize risk by using pseudonyms for students, schools, cities, and any other names in reports of this study.

Participation in this study was voluntary and participants had the option of declining to answer questions during the interview. Participants were further informed that the responses given were for the sole purpose of the study and that no personally identifying information would be reported. There was no remuneration for students for their participation. The

transcriptionist also agreed to confidentiality and was not allowed to reveal information garnered from the transcription process.

Positionality

My history with OSA began 7 years ago as a relatively new teacher, like so many others, hoping to make a difference in the lives of her high school students. As a first generation American myself, I knew that obtaining a good education was one of the pathways to gain economic independence, self-esteem, and better career choices. For these reasons, I wanted my students to take advantage of the resources and opportunities necessary to access and matriculate to a 4-year university—individualized attention, diverse clubs and competitions, advanced placement classes, and a plethora of other opportunities seldom available to Latino public high school students.

Like so many immigrants traveling to America, my family came to this country 30 years ago from the Ukraine seeking the American Dream—one of greater opportunities and a lifestyle we had no hope of attaining back in our homeland. For this reason, obtaining a high quality education and a successful career were of the greatest importance for my parents when raising me. However, in working with students in their junior and senior years of high school, I saw that, while they too had this dream, they seemed unable to access the resources necessary to realize it. For this reason, I wanted to focus on what factors students believed supported or hindered their post-secondary endeavors.

Summary

This qualitative case study triangulated three forms of data including student interviews, teacher/school personnel interviews, and artifact analysis. Interviews with graduates captured student perceptions of how sociocultural factors, peer affiliation and adult mentorship, and

institutional barriers may have impacted their K-16 pathways. Interviews with teachers and staff yielded their perspectives on student motivation and school infrastructure. Finally, artifact analysis validated interview findings and gave additional perspectives on student outcomes.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the findings gathered from data involving OSA students and school personnel during the 2010- 2011 school year. The purpose of this study was to find to what extent sociocultural factors, peer affiliation, adult mentorship, and structural/institutional barriers have influenced Latino STEM-based charter school students' matriculation to and retention within a 4-year university.

This qualitative study analyzed the responses of both students and educators from the aforementioned charter school to gain a greater scope of the resources and supports OSA offered its students as well as the personal and cultural characteristics that students possessed when establishing their postsecondary pathways. Purposeful sampling was utilized in order to obtain a sample for this study. The sample group consisted of 6 Latina/o students who graduated from the same charter high school in 2011 and incorporated relevant student information such as current educational status, immigration status, and gender.

Findings

The findings presented in this chapter represent to personal interviews conducted with six students, three teachers, and one administrator. The following presentation of findings will answer each research question as well as analyze data according to the process described in the methods chapter. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How have sociocultural factors affected the college access of Latino graduates of the same theme-based charter school?
2. How have adult mentorship and peer affiliation affected the college access of Latino graduates of the same theme-based charter school?

3. In what ways have structural/institutional barriers affected the college access of Latino graduates of the same theme-based charter school?

The findings presented subsequently encapsulate the data compiled from personal interviews of students and school personnel as related to the research questions.

How have sociocultural factors affected the college access of the OSA Latino graduates? As defined in Chapter I, sociocultural characteristics include factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), language proficiency, characteristics of the Hispanic culture, and role of the family. In this study, while multiple sociocultural factors may have played a role in the academic success of OSA students, financial stability, language proficiency, and the home and family structure, seemed to have the greatest impact on the participants of this study. Grounded in Ogbu's ecological theory, unlike poverty status, SES denotes an individual's or family's ability to access commodities such as wealth, power, and social status (McLoyd, 1998). Parental characteristics such as career, educational attainment, power, and lifestyle, are all factors that are associated with one's SES and may contribute to a child's development and academic achievement (Gonzalez, 2013). It follows that a family's SES affects the behaviors and child-rearing practices in the home through mediating variables such as occupational attainments, parental education, and the language and academic vocabulary used to stimulate conversations and activities in the home. Likewise, parental lack of language proficiency also impacts a family's ability to navigate and obtain resources needed to support their children in school.

How did sociocultural factors impact student pathways? According to the study findings, socioeconomic status, English language acquisition, and the home and family structure, seemed to have the greatest impact on the educational attainment of the participants in this study

Socio-economic status. Inequities in wealth distribution and resource allocation have been found to greatly impact the students' academic progress. While economic status was not self-reported by respondents as having a negative impact on social relationships or preventing students from accessing school related resources, a family's finances still seemed to influence the decision making practices of the home and/or the time that parents and students could allocate to schoolwork. In looking at students with GPAs above 3.0, all students lived in dual-parent households; therefore, there seemed to be more oversight related to schooling as well as greater distribution of household responsibilities.

Liliana stated that, "My mom always said that my only job was to be a student, I still had like chores to do, but it wasn't that big a deal." "[I] didn't really have any excuses." "Plus they would freak out if I didn't get good grades." A dual-family income or a stay at home parent allowed the student more time and flexibility to dedicate to schoolwork.

Like Liliana, Jacqueline too stated that her household responsibilities did not prohibit her from focusing on school. Rather, Jacqueline noted that, "the more homework I did, the less my mom made me do around the house." Similar to Ogbu's (1998) Social Ecological Theory, families with a more solid economic foundation have adopted the frame of reference that America is the land of opportunity, given that their occupations give them the time and the financial freedom to allow their children the ability to solely focus on their schooling. Community forces seem to be working in their favor and upholds the belief system that a good education will allow their children to get ahead.

Conversely, several students living in single-parent or single-income homes did mention that the additional responsibilities placed on them and/or their local community may have hindered the time they had to dedicate to their schooling. Although students did not concretely

link educational attainment to their family structure, single-parent households or single income status impacted their time available for academics. For Izabella, who lived with her mother and brother; “Yeah, I was always watching my brother and taking care of stuff at home. My mom doesn’t have time.” She described her ability to do homework with these additional demands as difficult and she would do it “sometimes....the stuff that I could do fast or so that I wouldn’t get into trouble [for not doing].” Similarly, Omar elaborated on how the neighborhood in which he lived made it difficult for him and his friends to stay out of trouble and be motivated to do well in school, “There are always people around. Nobody cares. We just do our own thing.” He described his behavior further, “I dunno, stupid stuff like drugs. It’s hard, you know, when it’s like everywhere.” Omar explained how his friends impacted his motivation or aspirations, “Yeah, they don’t care. Sometimes it’s a hassle with everyone on your back and stuff. It’s just easier to forget about it sometimes.” Omar went on to share that these negative experiences greatly impacted his schooling, particularly as he entered into high school and peer pressure by neighborhood friends discouraged him from doing well in school.

Socioeconomic factors, however, were not clearly self-reported as playing a major role in students’ school experiences. Several students described themselves as “not having much money,” but indicated that their classmates were in similar economic standing; therefore, they did not feel a great sense of competition with their peers. Jacqueline stated, “We didn’t have a lot of money but my parents still made it happen. I could go to prom or buy the senior sweater, or whatever. I just had to be careful and I couldn’t ask them for, like, everything!” Low/middle SES was seemingly accepted as commonplace in the school community but did not make students feel that they were deprived of anything they wanted.

Language. In interviews with students, a language barrier between families and school personnel emerged as an obstacle to parent participation in school activities. Izabella noted that her mom often felt intimidated and “uncomfortable” to “ask questions” of the teachers regarding academic performance. Brian also addressed language as one of the main reasons his parents “couldn’t help [him] with school [work].” Brian stated that, “If we were in Mexico, my parents would know what to do, like, how to help with homework. But here, they don’t know this stuff.” The language barrier seemed to have strongly impacted parental ability to help their children with schoolwork. While all students stated that one of the major reasons they stayed in school was because it was important for their parents that they graduate high school, they also shared that their parents often did not have the skill set or resources to help with homework or they simply did not have the time to do so.

Students did, however, feel that their parents tried to navigate their schooling to the best of their abilities. In an attempt to bridge the two worlds of an Americanized, independent educational system with the Latino culture known for its collective family oriented nature, parents often created their own communities within the boundaries of the school. Although student’s parents did not frequently participate in traditional school activities (e.g. meeting one-on-one with teachers or administrators), parents regularly met with fellow parents, bilingual teachers/administrators, and office staff within the school so that they could obtain the information they needed. It is important to note that none of the OSA teachers/Administrators were bilingual in Spanish, shared a Latino heritage, or lived in the local community. Omar stated that his mom tended to communicate more with “administrators, school secretaries, or the other mothers at the school.” He attributed this to discomfort in speaking with the teachers. She knew that she could communicate easily with the “other parents or the front office,” and if there

was a bigger issue and she needed to speak to an administrator, a translator was more easily available, however, she couldn't "just walk into the classroom and talk to the teacher."

Role of the parents. Parental difficulty in understanding and accessing their child's school environment may have also made it more difficult to reinforce the habits needed for successful schooling at home. Omar shared that while graduation from high school was a major goal for families, parents often "just expected" their children to pass their classes and complete their homework without direct supervision. Although no student claimed socioeconomic factors as playing a major role in his/her schooling, some did say that because their parents had to work, they shouldered more responsibilities at home. Several students indicated that their parents did not designate a specific space or time to check on children's homework. Brian stated, "When I said I didn't have homework, my parents just like believed me." Parents may have asked if homework was complete or how school was going, but did not verify their children's responses unless told to the contrary by the school.

The type and frequency of parent involvement shifted over the years. Parental involvement in school activities was often reserved for fundraisers such as bake sales, chocolate sales, and restaurant nights. Students reported that parents attended school functions and initiated contact with teachers more often when they were younger but that communication tapered off as they entered into later middle school and high school and educational issues became more complex. Unlike middle school, students shared their parents no longer came in for parent-teacher conferences unless the teacher directly asked that they do so due to a behavioral or academic issue.

For the students who lived in dual-parent households and who obtained a GPA of 3.0 or above, all three stated that while parents did not often go to their school to participate in school

functions; good grades and homework were of great import to their families. Parents often asked about grades, difficulty of classes, and had the expectation that students would be studying once they got home from school. Gen reported, “My parents didn’t really check what my homework was, but they did check to make sure I was doing it. They would nag me if I was like on the computer or phone for a long time.” An added benefit for Liliana was that her older siblings had already graduated from high school and navigated through community college or university, so they had someone who mentored them throughout their high school years.

How do teachers perceive socio-cultural factors impacting student pathways? Both teachers and administrators interviewed for this study reported lack of parental involvement as a major roadblock to student success. Common themes in responses by school personnel were language barriers, families more focused on behavior than academics, and the teacher’s perception that parents felt it was the school’s responsibility to address academic issues rather than their own, as school personnel had a greater understanding of the American educational system and its requirements.

Socio-economic status. According to school personnel, SES did in fact play a major role in student success. In an effort to curb the effects of poverty, OSA provides its students with two meals a day as well as after-school snacks. Teachers go to great lengths to provide school materials, field trips, social events, at little to no cost to families. However, according to teachers, low SES can take its toll on student achievement as parents often require their child to help support the family in the form of chores and sibling care. Ms. Aslan stated:

As a math teacher, homework practice is necessary to student achievement, but I know that sometimes it is really hard for these kids to be able to get it done. They help with their brothers and sisters, and they help around the house. They do a lot to help their family and my math homework is just not their priority.

She explained further, “I also know that their parents can’t help them. It’s frustrating because I see their potential but there is only so much I can do in a class period.” She went on further to share how schools and families needed to work better together to reinforce what children have learned in school, at the home.

When asked about how socioeconomic factors may play a role in student achievement, Mrs. Firth stated:

My kids don’t really have anyone who is an example for them, in the school sense. They aren’t growing up in great neighborhoods; they don’t usually have someone in the house who has graduated high school, much less college, so motivating them to do well in school is a monumental task. A lot of the time they have the attitude like- why should I care about this? - And I have to think up an answer that they can relate to.

While all teachers believed that parents showed a great concern for their child’s academic success, both Ms. Aslan and Mrs. Firth shared the hurdles families and schools had to face when trying to overcome the challenges of poverty and the difficulties that families faced on a daily basis.

Language. All four adult participants described the many ways OSA tried to reach out to parents including an active Parent Task Force, weekly newsletter, phone messages, fliers, and parent-teacher conferences. Translation services had been provided in almost all forms of school-to-home communication; however, teachers believed that parents found these methods overly general and were more inclined to address concerns with the office staff as needed. Mrs. F stated:

They never came to me. I would always hear about an issue from the secretary or the Principal but never from the parent themselves. I would be happy to have someone translate if that was the issue but I think they would rather just tell the Principal.

Both teachers and administrators stated that parents who were more adept at speaking English communicated more often with teachers regarding academic issues. The teachers also stated that

they themselves tended to contact these parents or email them more often as they knew follow-up would be easier without the assistance of a translator. According to Mrs. Artemyan:

Home visits are a really big thing at our school, but our admin doesn't get how awkward it is to sit in a room with people you can't communicate with. Sometimes it's just easier making the call to someone you know is going to understand.

Therefore, it seems that this socio-cultural language barrier has created a structural/institutional barrier, as parents and students do not get equal benefit from teacher-parent interactions.

Expectations of the family. Both teachers and administrators also commented on the fact that when parents initiated communication with the school, it often revolved around behavioral rather than academic issues. OSA's Dean of Academics and Dean of Students often call parents to notify them of students' lack of progress or behavioral incidents. Mrs. Firth stated that parents tended to "address behavior much faster than grades" because it was something they were "more comfortable with and knew more about." Although both behavior and academics were of great import to families, Mrs. Firth noted that parents were more adept at dealing with behavioral concerns.

It was a common theme in all school personnel interviews that parents cared about their children's safety and success in school—this "was why they sent their kids to a charter school" as stated by Ms. Aslan—but they had a much harder time supporting their children academically and reserved that responsibility for the teachers. Mrs. Artemyan explained that "Parents take initiative by sending their kids to a school they know will give them individualized attention and help, but after that, it is the school's responsibility to do all the teaching." She went on to say that OSA's parental engagement could be strengthened by including training for parents on how to academically support their children.

The administrator and teachers interviewed stated that, although there may be many home-school factors affecting student success, communication between OSA and families was still much better than what they believed families would find at a district school. Teachers believed that parents really cared about how their children did in school, and they felt that parents knew that sentiment was reciprocal. In relation to Ogbu's socio-ecological theory, teachers are said to be making the comparison between the district school as the "one back home" and the charter school as the "white suburb" school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Teachers perceive that students at OSA are receiving many benefits that students in traditional district schools are not receiving.

The research literature describes the charter school movement as an effort to help schools overcome the community forces that are affecting its student population. The effects of poverty, language barriers, and the additional stressors of single-parent, single-income households, all play a role in students' ability to be successful in school. While the attention given to students and families in the small school environment, the caring nature of stakeholders, and the ability to provide students with resources, have all helped students become more successful at OSA; the data indicates that there is still a greater need to continue building up relationships between the school and families. To combat what Ogbu and Simons (1998) describe as a lack of trust and understanding between the minority group and American institutions, teachers and students felt that the school needed to do more to support families in accessing school based resources. In turn, school needs to provide professional development and training to assist teachers in their outreach to families.

How did adult mentorship and peers influence OSA students? Positive peer and adult relationships have been linked to more successful schooling, healthy decision making, and

support in realizing one's potential. This study examined if, and how, Latino students at OSA benefitted from positive social relationships with both adults and peers.

Mentorship is critical. OSA teachers and students often built very strong relationships that students described as “friendships.” In comparison to their expectations of tradition public schools, students believed that their charter school teachers were more caring and accessible. When asked to describe some of the characteristics that stood out to them, Brian stated that his favorite teacher was always there to give him “advice, her attention, and time.” He felt that he knew he could always come to her during breakfast and lunch and that she would “even reply to emails at like midnight” if he had questions about an assignment. Similarly, Izabella said that her favorite teacher never acted “annoyed” when she didn't understand a concept. Izabella added: “They are more than just teachers, sometimes they are like parents. I can never tell my mom the things I told Ms. O. She never made me feel dumb. She always gave me advice and stuff. She kept it real.” Both students stated that these connections were not made with every teacher, but that more often than not, they could find at least one person on campus who acted as a mentor to them.

Mentors supported students' academically regardless of where students selected to attend. Omar said that while he did not go to college, he felt that he probably “wouldn't have made it through high school” had it not been for his resource teacher. As a special education student, Omar often struggled in classes but knew that he could get extra help when he needed it. He stated that, at times, he would rather be at school than at home, noting, “My mom was always working and busy and stuff. I didn't want to bother her with my issues. At school, my teacher would come up to me. I didn't even need to always ask.”

He said that his resource teacher went over his grades and missing assignments with him on a regular basis. He could go to her room to use the computer or go to her directly when he did not understand a concept.

In preparing for college, students believed that their adult school mentor was imperative in their academic preparedness. While Liliana and Gen had siblings who had already navigated through college, their adult mentors assisted them by touching base regularly regarding their academic progress, helping them pick majors, taking interest in what classes they took and giving them advice when students ran into roadblocks. Jacqueline described her mentor as an “inspiration”:

I don't know if I would be where I am today without Ms. F. She was always there for me whenever I needed her. Because we go to the same school for middle and high, she was able to see my highs and lows and help me along the way. I really looked up to her and wanted to be as good at my future job as she was at hers.

OSA was able to give both students and teachers the opportunity to form close bonds. As a small, 6th-12th grade span school, students and mentors were able to build lasting relationships that transcended middle school, high school, and into college.

Peer affiliation. In describing the role of their peer groups, students stated that they had a wide range of friends with “good” grades and “bad” and some who went to a 4-year university while others chose to work or go to a community college. Omar stated:

It's a lot of pressure. I know I need a high school diploma for a lot of jobs but I don't really know what kind of job I want. I thought I was going to be a soccer player for the longest time. I'm trying to see if OSA will hire me for after school.

Like many of his friends, Omar knew that he wanted to graduate high school but had not yet decided what he wanted to do in the future.

While OSA was labeled a STEM school, many students did not seem to pursue STEM careers. For the students who fell into the GPA category of 2.0-2.99, only Izabella pursued a

STEM based career as a dental assistant. When asked why more students did not consider STEM field occupations, Brian stated that, “[he] was not good at math” and that his friends, “probably aren’t either.” Brian went on to share that many of the STEM activities that the school sponsored were geared towards the “smart kids” and that he and his friends did not participate.

The three students with GPA’s in the 2.0-2.99 range, did not participate in many academic extracurricular activities and did not have many friends who did as well. Izabella explained, “I didn’t really have time and those kids aren’t really like me. We’re not like friends and stuff. “Brian, who worked on the school newsletter, often took pictures and helped organize assemblies; however, he attributed this to his close relationship with the administrator in charge of these activities, rather than his peers. Brian shared, “There aren’t really clubs for what I like to do but I made it work. Ms. O let me plan stuff for assemblies and other stuff.” While peer interactions were not a draw for Brian’s participation in school activities, he still found an outlet to his talents with the support of his mentor.

Peer relationships seemed to play a much more significant role in the college expectations of the higher achieving students. Participants in this category appeared to socialize in a cohort of similarly accomplished students. As class sizes diminished in the later school years, student peer groups solidified around related interests and mutual classes. Jacqueline stated:

Yeah in some ways it wasn’t great that we were with the same group of people for pretty much like all of school, but in some ways it was good. We all knew each other. We all took the same classes and could help each other when we didn’t get something...Some people like Gen tried to leave at one point and go to a bigger school but then she came back. We grow up together and it would be weird if we left to go somewhere else.”

Although they all pursued different majors/careers, students in this category took at least a few AP and honors classes and participated in extracurricular activities such as yearbook, student government, cheerleading, and various sports teams.

Each student in this category attributed some amount of his/her accomplishments to having friends that motivated him/her to work harder and take a more rigorous course load. Liliana stated that she at times took classes that were more challenging so as not to appear less intelligent than her friends: “Sometimes you just want to be lazy but you can’t be because then your friends will get better grades than you, and I can’t just let that happen.” Moreover, students strongly agreed that having friends apply to the same colleges allowed them to use each other as resources for school information and financial aid.

How did school personnel perceive adult mentorship and peers influencing students? All school personnel interviewed felt that teachers and administrators took a great interest and role in student success. As a charter school, the small school community often lent itself to closer bonds between teacher and student. Both teachers and the administrator stated that they all “really cared” about student success and went to great lengths to ensure that students did well. According to Mrs. A, “Sometimes we spent more time with our students than with our own children. Between tutoring, Saturday school, field trips, and all the other activities, these kids know we are there for them.” [don’t end with a quote]

Because OSA is a span school that educated students in grades 6-12, teachers saw kids “grow up” and felt they were part of that process. Mrs. Aslan stated that she taught the same students in seventh grade as well as in the 12th grade. She described these students as “her kids” and was thoroughly “invested” in the academic rigor of their classes, grades and performance, and what colleges they went to. Mrs. Aslan explained, “That’s what we are working for, so the

students know that we are there for them, and that we care about their future.” She went further to state that the relationships between students and teachers at OSA were mutually rewarding, as teachers too benefitted from the strong bonds with their students.

She also commented that as the mentor to students vying for the Congressional Medal of Excellence, she tracked students for several years, tutored them one-on-one, and invited them to her home for dinner and celebrations.

Teachers and administrators felt that, unlike traditional public schools, where students can get lost in classes of 40+ students, no student was lost at OSA. Mrs. Firth stated:

There is a reason parents send their kids here but there is also a reason we continue to work here. We are a family. The kids, the teachers, admin, even parents. It’s not like that at the schools I went to.

Though not all children formed close bonds to their teachers, all school personnel stated that OSA paid a great deal of attention to individual students.

Peers influencing peers. School personnel found that, typically, students who were college going spent time with like-minded peers. As a charter school, class choices are very limited, so students in honors and AP classes tended to spend the majority of the day together as they shared many of the same classes. Mrs. Artemyan:

“We don’t have tracking but the kids end up getting tracked. Those that have good grades take honors and AP classes and because we don’t have many groups in each grade, it’s obvious who the stronger group is.”

While OSA does not officially track students, grade groups are typically comprised of 2-3 groups of students who are able to choose from general education college preparatory classes or Advanced Placement classes. As such, advanced students and general education students are easily identifiable.

Students in more rigorous classes often formed study groups, participated in many of the same extracurricular activities together, and often had friendly competitions over who had the best grades. Mrs. Artemyan:

It ends up being a click. The kids are with each other all day in the same classes, so it is natural that they form a bond with one another. That doesn't mean that they aren't friends with other kids, but they were more compatible with the kids in their classes.

In contrast, students not in these classes were often grouped together based on ability, often stigmatizing them and making them feel less successful than their peers. While Mrs. Artemyan said that the school tried making more heterogeneous classes on many occasions, it was almost impossible to create functional schedules. She stated that struggling students often “found each other” and would “hang out” together, “which made it more difficult to stay focused and on task in class.”

How have structural/institutional barriers affected the matriculation and college access of OSA Latino graduates? OSA's mission is to provide students with a college-preparatory STEAM based education. All courses are UC/CSU transferable to give students the best opportunity to be admitted to their college of choice. However, participants with GPA's between 2.0-2.99 found that many of their classes, while college preparatory, did not train them for the trades or technical careers they intended to pursue after graduation.

Career/technical training. In describing his postsecondary pathway, Omar noted, “I knew I didn't really want to go to college, but I didn't really know what else to do either. It seemed like OSA was always pushing college...college...I wish they helped me find other options.”

Brian too felt that OSA limited his ability to explore his talents. He shared that many of the extracurricular activities such as Robotics and Student Government didn't appeal to him and

that he had to seek out opportunities in his areas of interest outside of school. However, while class choices and extracurricular activities might have been limited, students found that they had a greater amount of freedom to start their own clubs and mold existing activities into what they wanted them to be. According to Brian:

We didn't have a lot of choices but the school always let me do the things I liked. So I wanted to make movies and they let me do videos for assemblies, commercials for announcements and upcoming events. They never really said no to anything.

He shared that while there may have not been formalized training for specific trades, there were still outlets for motivated students.

Several participants said that they had the opportunity to move to their assigned public school but chose to remain at OSA because they felt that it provided a stronger academic program, free tutoring, offered more personalized attention from teachers and administrators, and was safer. Izabella noted that she would have been more likely to get into "trouble" at the district school but never had the opportunity to at OSA where teachers and administrators "knew about everything."

Students with GPA's above 3.0 had a much more positive outlook on their school experiences and did not list as many institutional barriers to their education as the other students. Students greatly appreciated the school's ability to provide them with rigorous college preparatory courses that were transferrable to the Universities of California. Students stated that they were able to take the majority of AP courses in which they were interested as well as a few electives. Although they agreed that the school was lacking in its ability to cater to everyone's interests, they felt it was the students' responsibility of to obtain volunteer work or jobs in their field of interest. Jacqueline stated, "No school is able to give out all the classes we want, it's up to us to figure it out."

What stood out to these students were the small class sizes and the one-on-one attention of the teachers and administrators. Liliana stated that “I had to pass. Ms. F wouldn’t let me not pass.” She went on to share that she might not have passed all of her AP classes had it not been for the small class sizes and her teachers who would often reply to emails late into the evening, meet students after school and during lunch as needed, and often take a special interest in students’ success.

Jacqueline attributed much of her success to the resources that the school made available to her.

They never made me feel different. It was actually the opposite. They made extra sure that my parents could afford to send me to the best school. They did the same with my sister. I don’t think another school would care so much.

An AB 540 student, she took note of the fact that the school went to great lengths to make sure she had access to people who would support her in finding financial aid so she could go to a top performing university.

School personnel. While one of the benefits of a charter school is that it operates with more freedom and individualized attention than traditional public schools, it also has some inherent drawbacks, as described by teachers and administrators. Unlike district schools, charters promise to provide more services with less funding. Teachers often purchase their own supplies, fundraise for field trips, have inferior facilities, and have fewer resources with which to teach a more often than not high needs population. Mrs. Firth:

If there is tutoring, we provide it. If there are clubs, we provide it. If there are fundraisers, we run them. It’s one of the things that brings us closer, but also the thing that is the hardest to maintain.

Mrs. Firth stated that, unlike what she believed to exist at district schools, charter school teachers had a much greater workload and were at higher risk for burnout. She shared that is was the

students and the faculty that she had made connections with, that made her continue doing her work.

Teachers found that the students they serve in this community come to them with varying levels of foundational math and reading and often need remediation. To continue its tradition of being a high performing school, OSA must then overcompensate for the lack of foundational skills by providing free tutoring every day after school and most Saturdays, as well as at-home tutoring, home visits, and remedial classes.

Although funding for resources may be a drawback to a charter school education, OSA personnel found its school to be wealthy in providing its students with a caring, individualized environment of teachers, administrators, and students who went the *extra mile* to ensure the success of each child. Teachers felt that the small charter school, while not providing an excess of class choices and sporting programs, did give students every opportunity to do well, including having all classes be college transferable and meeting A-G requirements, giving students abundant access to college and academic counseling, walking them through the college application and financial aid processes, and offering credit remediation, tutoring, and specialized competitions and programs. Teachers stated that these advantages compensated for the limitations that the school may face.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Latino students are shown to have lower rates of matriculation and persistence in universities compared to all other major ethnic groups. In order to provide greater academic and social support to this population of students, it is essential that secondary schools seek out which in school and out of school factors have best assisted high school graduates to access higher education. . In this study, sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers have been found as having a great effect on the K-16 pathways of Latino students graduating from a STEM based charter school.

This chapter is divided into four sections: (a) an analysis of which factors students perceived to have most affected their high school experience and post-secondary choices, (b) recommendations for other charter schools to improve academic and social supports for its Latino students, (c) implications of this study, and (d) identification of areas of future investigation.

Overview

A competitive global economy and American workforce has made it essential that high school graduates continue their education and receive an advanced degree. With one in five American children being of Hispanic origin, Latinos are greatly intensifying their potential impact on the American economy, yet only a minority of this population persists through a 4-year university (Pino et al., 2012). As these numbers continue to grow, it is essential that the U.S. educational system investigates which factors they could build upon support Latino students towards successful entry and completion of a four year degree.

Charter schools have been at the forefront in providing targeted supports in smaller settings to mostly minority youth. However, in order to obtain a thorough understanding of what

led to students' success, it is necessary to investigate which factors the students felt affected their postsecondary pathways.

Research Questions

This study examined the factors that Latino graduates from a STEM based charter school believed most affected their high school matriculation and postsecondary pathways. The following research questions served as a framework to examine the efficacy of OSA's academic and social supports as well as the effects of sociocultural characteristics on students' choices post high school graduation:

1. How have sociocultural factors affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme-based charter school?
2. How have adult mentorship and peer affiliation affected the college access of Latino graduates of a theme-based charter school?
3. In what ways have structural/institutional barriers affected the matriculation and college access of Latino graduates of a theme-based charter school?

The data generated from interviews of teachers, administrators, and students produced several findings, some of which are aligned to and support the existing literature in the field of education, while others need continued exploration.

RQ1: How Have Sociocultural Factors Affected the College Access of Latino Graduates of a Theme-Based Charter School?

Sociocultural characteristics such as family size, the presence of both the mother and father in households, financial stability, and language acquisition, have been found to significantly affect a child's development and academic success. Economic hardship in particular negatively impacts the quality of the family structure and the child-parent relationship

as evidenced by interviews with students and teachers in this study. According to Takeuchi, Williams, and Adair (1991), poverty can result in marital conflict, depression, psychological distress, and loss of self-esteem. The higher incidence of single-parent households among minorities is also associated with high-risk factors and stress on children's development, primarily due to the multiple demands and lack of time and energy of the parent in the home (Gonzalez, 2013).

The following themes as related to sociocultural characteristics, emerged as having a direct impact on students' educational attainment.

Parents' levels of education and language acquisition. Parents' level of education and language proficiency greatly impacted the ability of participants to successfully navigate through school. Both school personnel and students felt that the educational attainment and language acquisition of immediate family members had an effect on their child's schooling. Here, according to Ogbu's (1998) cultural-ecological theory, a students' minority status and the institution within which they must work, are in fact acting as a barrier to a quality education. Both the parents' lack of English language acquisition and the school's inability to breach this barrier were detrimental to student achievement. Several participants, such as Omar, felt that their parent's inability to step into a teacher's classroom and express concerns over their child's progress, made it difficult to support and reinforce learning at home. The language barrier between families and the school has developed into an institutional barrier as not all students have access to the benefits of parent-teacher feedback and support.

Both teachers and administrators believed that a language barrier often impeded interactions between teachers and parents. Mrs. Artemyan for instance felt that it was logistically easier to contact English speaking parents as translators were not needed and she

didn't have to make an appointment ahead of time. Teachers felt that parents did not often initiate discourse regarding their children's academic progress because it was difficult to understand one another, and although translation services were made available, it often required pre-scheduling meetings that both parties seemed to find challenging to arrange.

School personnel additionally reported that the educational attainment of parents also affected students' success in school. Both Mrs. Aslan and Ms. Firth noted that because of parents' low level of education or because they were not accustomed to American educational practices, it was very difficult to assist their children with homework or projects. Parents who had little to no formal education seemed unable to support their children academically beyond enforcing their attendance to school-sponsored tutoring. Furthermore, although parents were often contacted regarding academic progress, they had difficulty following through on prearranged action plans.

While the relationships between students and teachers has been found to positively impact students' success (Woolley et al., 2009), many would argue that the need to build relationships with families and to foster parental involvement is even greater. Because OSA has not been able to successfully breach the language barrier, *community forces* (Ogbu and Simons, 1998) such as those that bar minority groups from building relationships with the school are working against families who are trying to create trust and knowledge of the school system in order to better support their children.

Economic factors have ambiguous effects on students' educational attainment.

According to students' reflections, their SES did not have a bearing on their educational attainment. This position is counter to the literature which states that many low SES children experience great social and emotional challenges and insecurities due to poverty, which could

negatively impact their schooling and self-esteem (Jensen, 2009). Both Jacqueline and Gen stated that because they had a similar economic standing as their peers, they did not feel judged by or inferior to their classmates. Additionally, they stated that their parents were able to provide essentials and what they could not provide, the school was able to subsidize. While students did not perceive a direct correlation between SES and academic success, several students did point to ways that low income impacted their home lives. Students like Izabella and Omar stated that they had to care for younger siblings, their parents worked a lot, and they did not have a space in the home dedicated to school work. These factors seemed to impact their ability to complete assignments and study for school exams.

School personnel also saw socioeconomic factors as a major inhibitor to students' academic progress. Parents who had to work long hours or who had single-parent households often relied on their children to do additional chores, look after siblings, and care for themselves when a parent/guardian was not home. Izabella shared that she often "didn't have the time" and inclination to do her homework as she typically had to care for her brother and had household chores to do. Socioeconomic factors also seemed to be an impediment for some parents taking a more active role in the academic culture of the school, as they were often uneducated themselves or did not have the time to participate in school events.

When looking at economic factors through Ogbu's cultural-ecological lens, students at OSA did not seem to have experienced *community forces* working against them as they may have had they had gone to a local or traditional public school. Ogbu (1998) states that minority students will often feel marginalized and subjugated by society because they are unable to obtain the same support and resources as their Caucasian counterparts. Here, the charter school might serve as what Ogbu called, "white" schools. OSA students are able to obtain greater resources,

support, and opportunities than at the public school or the one “back home”. Students who come from various backgrounds and abilities are able to attend OSA and receive individualized attention, tutoring, after school clubs, and adult mentorship and guidance, something that they may not have received at the much larger district school.

However, the presence of these resources and the role of the charter school did not negate the obstacles that low income students of color face daily. OSA may consider after school programs for younger siblings so that their older brothers and sisters had the time and space to study. Additionally, OSA should look to parents for insight on how they can better support families in facilitating academics in the home.

RQ2: How Have Adult Mentorship and Peer Affiliation Affected the Experiences of OSA Latino Graduates?

Adult mentorship positively impacts students’ educational pathways. Both students and teachers reported that the mentorship of non-familial adults helped students navigate school issues more easily. Faculty felt that charter schools often attracted teachers who were more willing to dedicate their time to act as mentors to students and both groups teachers at the much larger, local public school would not be as engaged with the students.

Adult mentors were found to help students both academically and socially. Although parents still played a key role in students’ academic trajectories, because they were not educated in the U.S. and did not have similar educational experiences as their children, a school adult was often found to be very supportive and provide guidance to students. According to Sanchez et al. (2008), a competent adult mentor can provide the guidance and emotional support that at-risk youth need to overcome the poverty and instability they face in their communities.

Here, OSA has addressed Ogbu's belief that minority students do not get the same social supports in school that White American students receive. Families, students, and school personnel have created positive community forces, whereby, students are able to take advantage of positive relationships built with adult mentors who have a high degree of trust and expectations of their students. Both students and teachers stated that mentorship is a great advantage of the small charter school. Jacqueline and Liliana shared that had it not been for the mentorship of teachers and administrators, it would have been much more difficult for them to navigate high school and the college application process. They went on to say that their teachers often had just as much investment in their future as their own families. By working closely with students over the course of many years, teachers and students were able to form close bonds that carried the students through most of their schooling. The guidance of an adult mentor allowed many of these students stay on track academically and allowed them to better navigate the college application process

Through joint participation in various school activities, peers play a great role in "decisions to stay in school and in developing college and career identities" (Azmitia & Cooper, 2009, p. 46). Therefore, having friends that support a college-going mindset are of great import to Latino students. For minority youths, however, sociologists and educational anthropologists also posit that peer relationships have the capacity to have a negative impact on students. For Hispanic students from low-SES backgrounds, peers can challenge their friends' achievement and motivation to pursue higher education (Azmitia & Cooper, 2009).

Like minded peers reinforce educational aspirations . Students befriend likeminded peers who reinforced their educational trajectory. Friend relationships seemed to reinforce the educational pathways that students were already taking. Students often sought out like-minded

peers in an effort to fit in. Those who were more academically inclined found friends to whom they could relate and with whom they could compete. Azmitia & Cooper (2009) stated that peers play a great role in developing one's academic and social identity. However, they also noted that the converse was true for students who struggled to be successful in school. OSA students such as Izabella and Omar were less likely to see education as the main pathway to success and sought out other avenues related to trades or technical training. They also tended to befriend students with the same mindset, making it even more difficult to branch out and develop an academic mindset. In his interview, Omar shared how difficult it was to cope with peer pressure from kids in his neighborhood who participated in illegal activities. He stated that it was often easier to just go along with the crowd.

Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory (1998) identifies minority youth who struggle academically, as having a folk- theory of making it, or the belief that one with exceptional abilities has the same probability of being successful as one with an education. Therefore, students with this mindset do not have the same drive to do well in school. This phenomenon often created homogenous classes that prevented students from interacting with diverse and an academically minded student population.

While several participants found the small school community as a positive factor in their school experiences, the charter school unintentionally tracked students into high performing and low performing classes. Those students who struggled, spent the day with similarly struggling students. They, therefore, were unable to access the same level of adult mentorship, challenging course load, and academic dialogue with peers. Because university bound students had access to these resources, this reinforced what Ogbu (1998) called the *frame of reference* of voluntary minorities. Those who were able to access academic and social supports had the belief that they

could get ahead regardless of their ethnic background. Students who were not as academically successful, or were of the mindset that they were involuntary minorities, sought out other pathways for their futures.

RQ3: How Have Structural/Institutional Barriers Affected the Matriculation and College Access of OSA Latino Graduates?

Charter schools provide some students with individualized attention that may offset some of the environmental and/or societal hardships that plague Latino minority students. One of the greatest benefits of charter schools, as reported by both students and teachers, was the academic quality and individualized support given to students in need. A study by Delaney (2008) found that “small class size and high standards were the most cited reasons for which parents choose” (p. 8) to send their children to charter schools. Students substantiated this claim in describing individualized attention and a curriculum tailored to their needs as a major factor in their choice to attend. Latino students appear to be at the highest risk for high school dropout and low rates of matriculation to 4-year universities. In this study, several students found that the attentiveness of their teachers and a curriculum designed to meet their needs greatly impacted their odds of staying in school.

However, not all students seemed to have access to academically rigorous classes. While there may not have been formalized tracking at OSA, students did fall into a cohort system based on grades and class selection. Students who received high marks typically participated in extracurricular activities, accessed more resources, and developed stronger bonds with adults and peers surrounding academic issues. According to Ogbu’s socio-ecological theory (1998), the institution furthered the idea that involuntary minority groups do in fact face institutional barriers to accessing resources, personnel, and information related to their areas of interest.

Nevertheless, all participants felt that they were able to receive the individualized support of their teachers and that they could take advantage of the various resources that the school was able to offer to a degree far above what one may find at the local district school. This would indicate that OSA parents and students see education as a pathway to success and do not believe this to be an unobtainable goal.

Recommendations to Increase Academic Success and College Access for Latino Students

Based on student and teacher interviews, several themes emerged as barriers to the academic success of OSA's Latino students. The section below highlights recommendations to strengthen OSA's academic programs.

Charter schools need to broaden their curriculum to include training for specific trades/careers. Even with all these benefits to a charter education, several students, particularly those following non-college pathways, found their school lacking in technical training. While it seemed that students in the GPA category of 3.0+ all found their education to meet their needs of obtaining acceptance to a 4-year university, those who pursued other postsecondary pathways felt that they did not receive the guidance they needed to make better choices and were often left to their own devices. Brian shared that had it not been for his relationship with the Dean of Students, he would have had a harder time finding an outlet for his creative interests. The school seemed greatly knowledgeable about A-G requirements, as well as various college majors and career fields, but did not have the diversity of classes that was needed to hone in on students' individual interests and aptitudes.

Charter schools should partner with agencies to develop work studies programs.

Charter schools should develop partnerships with local businesses and agencies in order to improve its technical training programs and to support students in identifying potential interests

and career paths while still in high school. Several students interviewed indicated that while OSA was able to support students in getting into college, many had a difficult time identifying jobs that they would be interested in pursuing. A work studies program would give students the opportunity to test potential careers and network with potential employers. Additionally, students would have the opportunity to financially contribute to their family's income while working in a field of interest.

Charter Schools should increase professional development efforts aimed at cross cultural competency and communication. Both teachers and students shared that parents often felt more comfortable discussing their child's academic progress with office staff or non-teaching personnel than with their child's teacher. While translation services have been made readily available, both teachers and families did not utilize this resource. In order to strengthen home-school relationships, charter schools need to invest in professional development that targets successful ways that communication can be more easily facilitated between the school and its families. Professional Development targeting cross cultural competency would help teachers and leaders find methods that will be effective in building relationships with families so that all parties would be better aware of the strategies and reinforcements needed for student success.

Conclusion

Although the findings of this case study are unique to the participants and are limited to OSA's students and teachers, they add to the existing body of literature by providing the educational system, specifically charter schools, with strategies and resources they may use to better meet the needs of their Latino population. As Latinos are intensifying their impact on America's economy and workforce, it is now imperative that schools strengthen their programs

to support this growing population. Currently, Latino students are the most educationally underserved population in the United States and have the lowest rates of matriculation to 4-year universities (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Charter schools, as supported by this case study, have risen as one option to meet the academic needs of this student population. OSA, a sixth-12th grade STEM-based charter school seems to be maintaining its goal of providing a college preparatory curriculum, as evidenced by its high rate of student matriculation to 4-year universities.

The literature review indicates sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and structural barriers as having a great impact on minority students' ability to navigate high school and to access college. This study supports these claims and additionally cites personal motivation and finding a niche as having a direct correlation to college matriculation. OSA has incorporated in its educational program several factors found in the literature review and as evidenced by student interviews that have a direct, positive impact on student success rates, including opportunities for parental involvement, adult mentorship, small class sizes with individualized support, and prospects for credit remediation. These resources should be adopted by secondary schools looking to strengthen their programs to support their Latino populations. However, OSA's lack of technical training and lack of bilingual teachers and strategies for communicating across language barriers was identified as a great detriment to those students seeking postsecondary pathways other than college. To sustain successful academic programs, teachers and administrators should systematize peer and adult mentorship programs, bolster communication between the school and family, and incorporate curriculum beyond the traditional UC/CSU transferable course sequence.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following describe recommendations for further research:

Expansion of this study. A limitation of this study was its small sample size. The educational experiences of these participants may not reflect those of a greater group of Latino charter school students. Expanding this study to include a larger sample size would enable researchers to gain more insight into how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship and peer affiliation, and institutional barriers affected the K-16 pathways of Latino students. Additionally, with a larger population of participants, researchers could possibly discover other factors that have supported Latino educational attainment.

Future studies. Findings from this research raise questions about charter schools' ability to provide technical training to students following non-traditional higher educational pathways. Several students noted that the charter school lacked professional training or class options related to their area of interest. In order to support students in pursuing a field of study or career options, schools should explore alternative educational pathways. Future studies of minority students graduating from charter schools and their postsecondary educational choices could be focused on exploring programs aimed at supporting students seeking alternatives to a university education.

Furthermore, although this study focused on matriculation to four year universities, it would be interesting to further investigate preparedness and coping mechanisms once students enter into college after receiving a charter school education. As this study was limited to high school experiences, it is critical to study what factors successful college graduates found within their college setting to be helpful to their educational attainment.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the post-secondary pathways of six Latino students graduating from a STEM-based charter school in a working class,

suburban neighborhood in Southern California. The purpose was to investigate how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship, peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers impacted matriculation and college access to 4-year universities.

The findings revealed that although students did not immediately recognize socioeconomic factors as hindering their academic progress, the parental language barrier was in fact an obstacle to family-school interactions, as stated by both students and school personnel. Additionally, teachers reported that long work hours or lack of financial freedom put a strain on parental ability to support students academically and in the school setting, as they were unable to spend the necessary time and or resources their child needed to thrive.

Positive adult mentorship was found to have a great impact on students' academic success. Each student interviewed found at least one adult in the school setting who was able to provide him/her with support both socially and academically. Several students went so far as to say that without the guidance of these adult mentors, they might not have been able to graduate. School personnel also confirmed that the small school setting, 6-12 span schools, and caring adults allowed close bonds to form among teacher and students, which was one of the benefits of attending a charter school. Peers were also seen as advantageous to students if they were academically minded. Conversely, if students found themselves in non-scholarly peer groups, they tended to try to fit in rather than stand out academically.

The charter school setting itself also presented advantages and disadvantages. A small school setting provided students with individualized attention, academic resources such as tutoring and clubs, as well as the ability to form bonds with both students and adults alike. It did, however, make it difficult for students not following the traditional college going pathway to

take classes that matched their unique interests. A recommendation from students was for charter schools to broaden their scope of classes to meet the needs of all students.

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APPENDIX A

Student Questionnaire

The purpose of this research project is to assist charter schools in better supporting minority students as they navigate high school and persist through college. The information generated may be used for academic research or publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

This questionnaire will be used to collect basic data and purposefully select participants. More in depth information will be collected during the interview.

Name:

Age:

High School GPA:

Number of AP and Honors Courses completed in High School:

Highest Level of Math Completed:

University/College Attending:

College Major:

Prospective Career:

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter via Email

College Access: A Case Study of Latino Students in a Charter School and Their K-16 Pathways

Victoria Faynblut

Dear OSA Graduate,

I am inviting you to participate in a research study conducted as part of the requirements for Doctoral Studies in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate what in-school and out-of-school factors affected the k-16 pathways of former OSA students. It will be used to assist charter schools in better supporting minority students as they navigate high school and persist through college.

For this project, I will interview former OSA graduates and staff, and take field notes based on interview responses. Through this data I hope to learn about the factors which may or may not have led to college access and what charter schools may implement to better support the academic and social needs of their Hispanic populations.

You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you decide to do so. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED].

I hope you will enjoy this opportunity. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Victoria Faynblut
Doctoral Student of Educational Leadership,
Administration, and Policy
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX C

Written Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Victoria Faynblut

Title of Project: College Access: A Case Study of Latino Students in a Charter School and Their K-16 Pathways

I _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Victoria Faynblut under the direction of Dr. Anthony Collatos

The overall purpose of this research is:

For this project the researcher will gather data from multiple interviews and artifacts in order to examine how sociocultural characteristics, adult mentorship, peer affiliation, and structural/institutional barriers have affected the post-secondary pathways of minority youth graduating from a charter school. The purpose of this research project is to assist charter schools in better supporting minority students as they navigate high school and persist through college. The information generated may be used for academic research or publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

3. My participation will involve the following:

For this project, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions. The entire interview should take between 45 to 60 minutes. A follow-up interview may also take place. This will be done in-person. I will tape record the interview for accuracy, but at any point, you may ask me to turn off the tape or refuse to answer a question. After the tape has been transcribed, the tape will be erased and your identity will remain anonymous.

4. My participation in the study will last from 45-60 minutes with a possible follow-up interview. The study shall be conducted in a public venue of your determination.

5. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research are:

Through this data we hope to learn about the factors which may or may not have led to college persistence and what strategies charter schools may implement to better support the academic and social needs of their Hispanic populations.

6. I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. These risks include:
Possible discomfort in remembering events that have occurred in the past.
7. I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after the experiment will be:
Brief
8. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.
9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
10. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. I understand there is a possibility that my medical record, including identifying information, may be inspected and/or photocopied by officials of the Food and Drug Administration or other federal or state government agencies during the ordinary course of carrying out their functions. If I participate in a sponsored research project, a representative of the sponsor may inspect my research records.
11. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact (*insert name and contact information for faculty supervisor or other collaborator*) if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact (*insert name of IRB chairperson*), Chairperson of the (*insert name of appropriate IRB*), Pepperdine University, (*insert appropriate contact information*).
12. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
13. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
14. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent

to participate in the research described above.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]. I hope you will enjoy this opportunity. Thank you for your help. For questions about your rights, please call or write [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or Thelma Bryant, IRB Chairperson [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Victoria Faynblut
Doctoral Student of Educational Leadership,
Administration, and Policy

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

Interview Notes Template

Assigned pseudonym:	
Date:	
Time:	
Written Recording of Interview:	Comments:

APPENDIX E

Interview Response Matrix

Theme 1 Structural/Institutional Barriers	Theme 2 Cultural Characteristics	Theme 3 Mentorship	Theme 4 Peer Affiliation
<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>
<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>
<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>
<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>	<p>Question:</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Circle Most Applicable: SPP, PP NP, SNP</p>

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol for Graduates

The purpose of this research project is to assist charter schools in better supporting Latino students as they navigate high school and persist through college. The information generated may be used for academic research or publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

For this project, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions. The entire interview should take between 45 to 60 minutes. This will be done in-person. I will digitally record the interview for accuracy, but at any point, you may ask me to turn off the recorder or refuse to answer a question. After the audio file has been transcribed, the file will be erased and your identity will remain confidential.

Interview Protocol

STRUCTURAL/INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

1. What did you enjoy or not enjoy about going to school?
2. How were the classes offered to you by OSA aligned with what you felt you needed in college/career?
3. If you were having a hard time in a subject, what kind of academic support did you receive? How was it effective or not effective?
4. What academic interventions were available to you? What academic interventions would have helped you?
5. What type of counseling, tutoring, and credit recovery did you have access to? How did you take advantage of those things?
6. Did you feel like your school supported you to the best of its ability? How? Why or why not?
7. How did the school support you and your friends in pursuing STEM careers?
(Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Conchas, 2001; Foxen, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999)

CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. Who from your family has graduated from a four-year university?
2. How important was school to your family?
3. Did obligations to your family in anyway hinder your ability to focus on your schoolwork? Explain
4. How was your family able to give you the space and time you needed to finish your assignments?
5. How involved were your parents in your school? Did they chaperone fieldtrips? Go to parent teacher conferences? Volunteer?

6. Could your family have supported you in any other way? How?

(NCES, 2010; McCallister et al., 2010; Hernandez, 2006; Jensen, 2009)

MENTORSHIP

1. Was there anyone at school you could turn to if you had any questions about school, classes, etc.? Who? What made that person so effective?
2. Was there anyone who was invested and supportive of you continuing with your education? How did they support you?
3. Was there someone who could answer your questions about college and/or support you in finding answers? How?

(Zalaquett & Lopez, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Woolley et al., 2009; Sanchez, Esparza, & Colon, 2008)

PEER AFFILIATION

1. How many of your friends go to college? Are any of these friends from high school?
2. Were your high school friends college going? What about them showed that they were motivated to go to college?
3. How did your friends' attitudes and pathways after graduation affect your motivations? Did your relationships affect your interest in STEM fields?
4. Did any of your high school friends pursue careers in STEM fields?
5. Did many of them receive good grades?
6. Were they supportive of you going to college? How?
7. What extracurricular activities were you involved in? Did that affect how you looked at the school (were you more invested because of that)?

(Azmitia & Cooper, 2009; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005)

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol for Teachers/Administrators

The purpose of this research project is to assist charter schools in better supporting minority students as they navigate high school and persist through college. The information generated may be used for academic research or publication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

For this project, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions. The entire interview should take between 45 to 60 minutes. This will be done in-person. I will tape record the interview for accuracy, but at any point, you may ask me to turn off the tape or refuse to answer a question. After the tape has been transcribed, the tape will be erased and your identity will remain confidential.

School Climate and Expectations

1. How do staff and administration provide recognition to students showing appropriate behavior and excellence in academics? Do you feel that students respond positively to these devices? Why or why not?
2. How does or doesn't the school consistently communicate that high expectations are expected from all students regardless of gender, race, socio-economic status, LEP or SPED enrollment, or other personal characteristics?
3. How do teachers differentiate curriculum to provide for the needs of every student? How effectively do teachers respond to low achieving students?
4. How does the school provide teachers with the resources they need to effectively teach students?

Home-School Relations

1. How are stakeholders from all cultures encouraged to become involved members in the school community?
2. How is the school effective or not effective in reaching out to families?
3. How effective is teacher-parent communication? Do you believe this has an effect on student outcomes?
4. In what way do the parents and teachers have an atmosphere of trust, whereby both stakeholders know that each is looking out for the good of the child?

Mentorship

1. Describe the importance of a teachers/administrators role in teaching students strategies for successful ways to study and learn? How has OSA been effective or ineffective in doing this?
2. What kind of opportunities has OSA given its faculty and students to talk about balancing family obligations, expenses, work, and other responsibilities?
3. From whom do students seek out advice regarding their post-secondary pathways? Do those students seem to be more successful than others who have not?
4. What role do you think mentorship has on student success? Do you think this school has done a good job of mentoring its students?
5. How do teachers/administrators convey interest or concern for students?
6. In what way do students feel safe asking their teachers questions?

Peers

1. How do you think peer groups affect student achievement?
2. What kind of correlation has there been in student achievement and types of friends?

APPENDIX H

CITI Course Completion Report

LEARNER Victoria faynblut (ID: 3104701) **DEPARTMENT** Education **EMAIL**
 [REDACTED] **INSTITUTION** Pepperdine University **EXPIRATION DATE**
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH: This course is for investigators, staff and students with an interest or focus in **Social and Behavioral** research. This course contains text, embedded case studies AND quizzes.

COURSE/STAGE: Basic Course/1

PASSED ON: 07/17/2014

REFERENCE ID: 8821672

ELECTIVE MODULES DATE COMPLETED SCORE

Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Course Introduction 07/04/14 No Quiz Research Misconduct (RCR-SBE) 07/04/14 5/5 (100%) Data Management (RCR-SBE) 07/04/14 4/5 (80%) Authorship (RCR-SBE) 07/17/14 5/5 (100%) Peer Review (RCR-SBE) 07/17/14 5/5 (100%) Mentoring (RCR-Interdisciplinary) 07/17/14 4/5 (80%) Using Animal Subjects in Research (RCR-Basic) 07/17/14 4/5 (80%) Conflicts of Interest (RCR-SBE) 07/17/14 4/5 (80%) Collaborative Research (RCR-SBE) 07/17/14 4/5 (80%) Research Involving Human Subjects (RCR-Basic) 07/17/14 5/5 (100%) Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Course Conclusion 07/17/14 No Quiz

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI Program participating institution or be a paid Independent Learner. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course site is unethical, and may be considered research misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger
 Ph.D. Professor,
 University of Miami
 Director Office of
 Research Education
 CITI Program Course
 Coordinator

APPENDIX I

IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

January 14, 2015

Victoria Faynblut

Protocol #: E1014D04

Project Title: College Persistence: A Case Study of Latino Students in a Charter School and Their K-16 Pathways

Dear Ms. Faynblut:

Thank you for submitting your application, *College Persistence: A Case Study of Latino Students in a Charter School and Their K-16 Pathways*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Collators, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thema Bryant-Davis".

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Anthony Collatos, Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX J

Student Pseudonyms and Codes

Student Names	Codes for Names
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