

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: EXAMINING DIMENSIONS OF LATINA/O  
COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS: AN ANALYSIS  
OF INDIVIDUAL PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS  
Mark Anthony López, Doctor of Philosophy, 2007

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Latinas/os are considered "deprived" when it comes to educational achievement (Arbona & Novy, 1991), are lagging in postsecondary degree attainment, and are currently the most educationally "underserved" population in the United States (Fry, 2002). Although higher education institutions have increased efforts to proactively recruit, enroll, and graduate Latina/o students, the students continue to struggle with the educational disparities between Latina/o students and their White counterparts.

As the nation's Latina/o community experiences significant growth, the number of Latina/o students pursuing higher education is increasing. However, their increased enrollment within postsecondary education does not reflect their increased representation in the overall population (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Through the use of qualitative research methodology, this study employed case study research to explore graduating Latina/o college students' experiences at a large, public, predominantly White, research-intensive institution, specifically, Latina and Latino students who filed for graduation during the spring 2006 and fall 2006 semester. This study used case study methodology and focus group interviews to

(a) determine dimensions of success for graduating Latina/o college students; (b) contribute to the existing college student success literature; and (c) to assist and advance the success scholarship on policymaking.

From the data analysis, eight dimensions of success for Latina/o college students were identified. The dimensions were: (a) being involved, (b) the family's role, (c) the role of campus leaders and mentors, (d) embracing academics, (e) desire to be successful, (f) Latina/o students' "Latino Center," (g) "our situation is not the same," and (h) understanding the campus' Latina/o community. The Latina/o students' interviews indicated that the participants' experiences are contextual and distinct.

It is essential that policymakers and higher education personnel thoroughly understand the experiences of Latina/o college students to ensure their success within postsecondary education. There should be a concerted effort to explore Latina/o student success, increase consciousness around dimensions of difference they bring with them to the university, and validate their life experiences as well as their academic and personal endeavors. This study's findings have important implications for policy, research, and practice.

EXAMINING DIMENSIONS OF LATINA/O COLLEGE STUDENT  
SUCCESS: AN ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL  
PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to mi familia. Without your love and support, this journey would not have been possible. I love you with all my heart and soul.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for guiding me on this journey, through the "gift and the curse"; the doctoral experience." God ONLY knows the type of expedition this has been. The trials and tribulations that I have experienced while receiving my degree have inexorably changed my life. I have grown, evolved, transformed, discovered, struggled, cried, celebrated, rejoiced, argued, revolutionized, fought, conquered, prayed, loved, lived, and learned. I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Cordell Black, Dr. Sharon-Fries Britt, Dr. Marylu McEwen, Dr. Robert E. Waters, Jr., and Dr. Tom Weible for their guidance, support, and mentoring during this journey. You all have provided so much to me during my tenure at the University of Maryland – I thank each of you! Additionally, to the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, thank you all for your mentorship, professional experience, and professional development. I am extremely grateful for your support to grow as a practitioner-scholar and administrator. I have been blessed to work in a nurturing and supportive work environment at the university.

There is absolutely no doubt that I could not have completed this journey alone. During my trials and tribulations, I have turned to numerous individuals to seek their guidance, support, love, ears, and wisdom to pull me through this process. I recall attending the Office of Graduate Recruitment, Retention, and Diversity's graduate students of color my first semester and asking the question: Where is my Raza at? Ultimately, this is the question that shaped my research agenda and dissertation. It is this question that motivated me to persist. It is this question that shaped my critical consciousness, as Freire so eloquently describes, as a doctoral student. It is this question that allowed me to come to the realization that it was not only my Raza that is missing from the academy but other underserved students at the

undergraduate and graduate level. It is this question that brought me together with a tremendous community of individuals, scholars, and social justice advocates that I call mi Raza, mi comunidad, mi familia.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Latinas/os are considered "deprived" when it comes to educational achievement (Arbona & Novy, 1991), are lagging in postsecondary degree attainment, and are currently the most educationally "underserved" population in the United States (Fry, 2002). Although higher education institutions have increased efforts to proactively recruit, enroll, and graduate Latina/o students, they continue to struggle with the educational disparities between Latina/o students and their White counterparts. For example, Tornatzky, Pachon, and Torres (2003) noted that Latinas/os are two to three times more likely than non-Latinas/os to withdraw from high school. According to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (2005), 45% of all Latinas/os have less than a high school degree, 55% have graduated from high school, and only 13% have some postsecondary education.

Recent work by the Pew Hispanic Research center indicated that Latina/o high school graduates enroll in postsecondary institutions at a greater rate than other U.S. ethnic groups, yet they fall behind all racial and ethnic groups in attaining baccalaureate degrees (Rooney, 2002). As the nation's Latina/o community experiences significant growth, the number of Latina/o students pursuing higher education is increasing. Although the enrollment and graduation of Latinas/os is increasing, there remain disparities between Latina/o and White college student degree attainment. However, their increased enrollment within postsecondary education does not reflect their increased representation in the overall population (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Latinas/os are the fastest growing population in the United States. From 1980-2000, the Latina/o population doubled (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The Latina/o population has recently increased to 41.3 million citizens (not including the island of

Puerto Rico or undocumented citizens from Latin America and the Caribbean) in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Currently, in 23 out of 50 states, Latinas/os outnumber Asian American and African American communities as the largest ethnic group (Tornatzky, Pachon, & Torres (2003). Latinas/os also represent 20% of the population in the Eastern U.S. (i.e., the southern, the mid-Atlantic, and the northeastern United States) (See Figure 1) (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002).

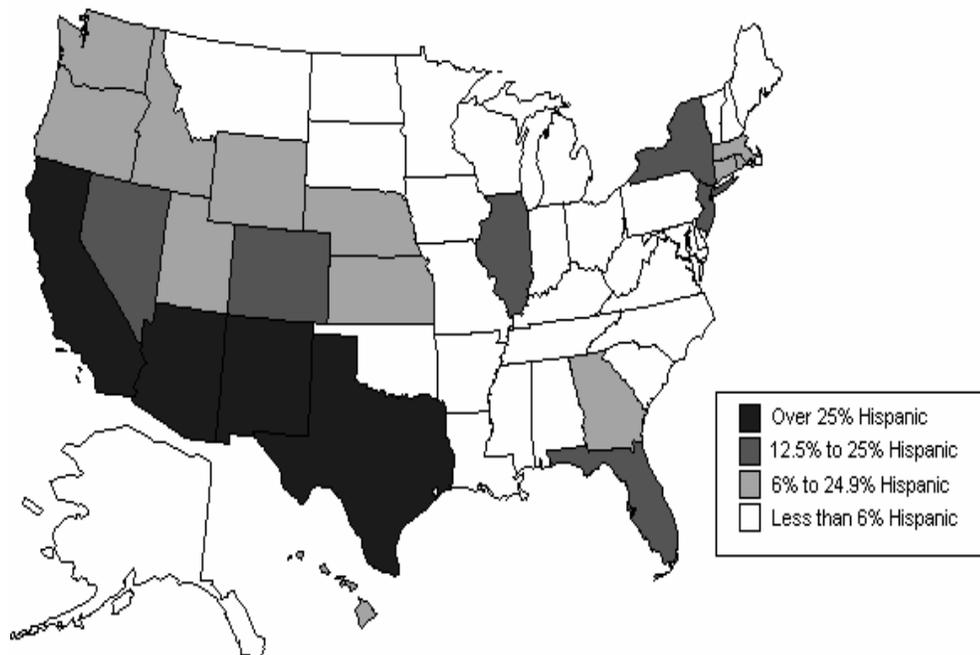


Figure 1. Latina/o population by state

Figure 1 depicts the percentage of the Latina/o population in our nation. A report issued by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Pew Hispanic Center (2004) indicates that the Latina/o population is expected to increase by 82% over the next 25 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

The diversity of the expanding Latina/o community is extensive and is comprised of varied nationalities, ethnicities, and social classes. Latinas/os reside in various regions within the United States and differ in immigrant and citizenship status (Chilman, 1993). The ethnic breakdown of the Latina/o community in the United

States is 66.9% Mexican, 14.3% Central and South American, 8.6% Puerto Rican, 6.5% other Latina/o, and 3.7% Cuban (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). In addition to ethnic classification, Latinas/os also categorize themselves racially as Indigenous, Asian, Black, White/European, or a mixture of the four (Hernandez, 1999).

Although studies and policy recommendations have addressed the ongoing concern of the educational attainment of underserved students, Latinas/os continue to lag behind their peers in degree attainment. Despite challenges and barriers within higher education, Latina/o college students *are* graduating from college and research has identified variables that influence their success within the academy (e.g., family involvement, belief in self, finances). While the education gap in terms of degree attainment between Latinas/os and Whites is wider today than in the 1960s and 1970s, Harvey and Anderson (2004) reported that between 1980 and 2001, Latina/o bachelor's degree attainment increased by 256%. In 2005, these same researchers indicated that between 1991 and 2001, Latinas/os led all populations in postsecondary enrollment with a 75% increase. The bulk of this growth occurred at the community college level.

To address the educational needs of the rapidly changing demographic shifts, higher education must respond to the growing Latina/o community. According to Altbach, Lomotey, and Kyle (1999), the demand for access to higher education is correlated with the continuous growth in the number of students of color on college campuses and institutions are committing themselves to increasing student representation on campus with respect to the changing demographics.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students at a predominantly White, mid-Atlantic

research-extensive public institution by exploring the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students. There is an abundance of research that has focused on the factors that affect the access and persistence for underserved populations within higher education (Astin, 1993; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Rendón, 2000; Tierney, 2002; Tinto, 1997). Higher education research must move beyond simply recruiting Latina/o college students to developing and implementing new and innovative approaches to assure Latina/o persistence and degree attainment. As these data regarding education disparities illustrate, there is a need to understand how Latina/o college students persist through the academy toward degree completion. By conducting in-depth interviews of graduating seniors, this study contributes to the research literature by examining Latina/o college student success as a process (how students achieve success) versus an outcome (students' results from their success).

### Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was:

What are the perceived dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students attending a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution? Additionally, three sub-questions were examined:

1. What do Latina/o college students reveal about dimensions of success at a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution?
2. What strategies contributing to success and persistence do Latina/o college students employ and what strategies would they recommend for other Latina/o college students?
3. What can predominantly White, research-extensive public institutions learn from the experiences of successful Latina/o college students?

## Overview of Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw- Williams, 1993; Thornton Dill, 2001, 2004, 2005; Weber, 2001). Intersectionality differentiates itself from other bodies of scholarship because of its analytical strategy. Most higher education scholarship tends to analyze how one or two social constructs (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, or age) and/or issues such as financial aid, access, or college choice, influence one another. This study takes into account the varying dimensions of difference and analyzes how such intersections come together to shape and influence college student success at a mid-Atlantic university. According to Thornton Dill (2004), intersectional scholarship consists of the following:

1. An analytic strategy that begins with the experiences and struggles of previously excluded and oppressed groups – primarily people of color – and examines ways multiple sectors [i.e., dimensions of difference] influence their life choices and chances;
2. Examination of the nature of power and its implementation in maintaining interconnected structures of inequality that affect individual and group identities and experiences; AND
3. Efforts to promote social justice and social change by linking research and practice, thus creating a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities. (p. 1)

Students attend higher education institutions with varying dimensions of difference. Dimensions of difference (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, or class) and how they intersect to influence student success are often overlooked. Discrepancies with Latinas/os and higher education and how dimensions of difference intersect have been a norm, yet remain understudied. Research on Latina and Latino college students is a relatively new body of literature and for the most part has been neglected in studies

pertaining to higher education. Studies that have focused on Latina/o students in higher education have explored factors of socio-economic status (SES), gender, and race/ethnicity independent of one another (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1992; Hernandez, 2000; Nora, 2003; Reisberg, 1999; Singley & Sedlacek, 2003; Villafane, 1994). To date few studies have analyzed how these dimensions of difference and others intersect to influence Latina and Latino college students. Weber (1998) stated,

People's real life experiences have never fit neatly into the boundaries created by academic disciplines: Lives are much more complex and far reaching. Just as the social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of everyday life are intertwined and mutually dependent, so too are the systems of inequality – race, class, gender, and sexuality – that limit and restrict some people while privileging others. (p. 13)

This researcher's interest in utilizing intersectionality was pivotal in examining Latina/o college student success and identifying dimensions of difference for this particular marginalized community (i.e., Latinas/os within higher education). It is important to have a sense of the intersectional issues that Latina/o college students experience within higher education that influence their success.

Studies analyzing Latina/o college students should also examine relationships of power and "structural arrangements," services that are offered, to whom they are offered, and how resources are dispersed (Crenshaw-Williams, 1993; Zambrana & Thornton Dill, 2006), all of which influence persistence and success in the academy. "In addition, intersectional analysis requires the simultaneous examination of multiple dimensions of inequality and difference" (Zambrana & Thornton Dill, 2006, p.194). The significance and relevance of this study is the role of intersectionality as it pertains to Latina/o college students. A major tenet of intersectional research is to examine how dimensions of difference intersect to form cultural and social constructs

(Thornton Dill, Murray Nettles, & Weber, 2001). Moreover, the intersectional framework emphasizes the way in which dimensions of difference inform and influence each other (Zambrana & Thornton Dill, 2006).

The college experience is an intricate process (Tinto, 1987); however, research on retention and persistence often overlooks dimensions of difference that students bring with them to college and those differences developed while in college. Thornton Dill, McLaughlin, and Nieves (2006) note:

Because this knowledge is grounded in the everyday lives of people of diverse backgrounds, it is seen as an important tool...and can validate the lives and histories of persons and sub-groups previously ignored or marginalized.... (p. 7)

An understanding of such intricacies is key to comprehending the implications of dimensions of difference across groups (Weber, 2001). The intersectionality of dimensions of difference among Latina/o college students must be considered as institutions of higher education: (a) shape, and develop policy, curriculum, and quality services to promote access and success for Latina/o students; (b) strengthen Latina/o student development; and (c) understand an institution's Latina/o community.

### Significance of the Study

The educational disparities of participation of Latinas/os in higher education can be addressed with more research at all levels of education (e.g., elementary, secondary, and post-secondary). To date, an overwhelming body of literature provides a view of students of color as a "problem" within higher education (Turner, 1996). Too often the research focuses upon what Latinas/os can be doing better to succeed.

According to existing data, Latinas/os are currently at one of their highest levels of degree attainment (7%) ever. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) stated that the

gap in degree attainment has "not been reduced in the past twenty years" (p. 15). In fact, it continues to widen. This figure also suggests that despite the adversity and barriers, some Latina/o college students are succeeding within the academy and there are factors and dimensions of success for this population. Identifying and understanding the dimensions that contribute to Latina/o college students' success is important for the higher education community (i.e., other Latina/o students, staff, faculty, and administrators). Research examining dimensions of success contributes to the literature regarding Latina/o students. Students who have persisted and reached degree completion are successful at their respective campuses and the factors that contribute to their success need further exploration.

The challenges I experienced as a Latino college student attending a predominantly White, public, research-extensive institution shaped my interests in studying underserved college students. As a successful Latino college student (i.e., one that has obtained a baccalaureate, master's degree, and is now pursuing a doctorate), my interest in this research agenda evolved. During my doctoral education, I began to investigate the access and persistence of underserved college students and I asked the question: where was my *Raza* within the academy? I did not possess a grasp on why there were so many educational inequalities that existed for Latinas/os or why Latinas/os who matriculated to a postsecondary institution did not graduate. Furthermore, for the Latinas/os who were enrolled in college, what were the means employed to succeed in higher education? How did Latina/o students "make it" in college? These questions guided my interest in examining the experiences of successful Latina/o college students, and exploring their perceptions of dimensions of success.

As my research agenda evolved and my interest in the Latina/o college student experience became more salient, my personal experiences and my research questions

have influenced my selection of case study methodology. Case study specifically examines "...a bounded phenomenon such as a...person [or] a process..." (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii) and is concerned with understanding the experience of individuals (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The Latina/o community's exclusion from U.S. postsecondary education is important to note. Work by Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) indicated that for over 30 years Latinas/os were the most unlikely group to pursue a baccalaureate degree. There are substantial data that support this (Fry, 2002; Harvey, 2004, 2005; Llagas, 2003; Tornatzky, Pachon, & Torres, 2002). Galindo and Escamilla (1995) cited how this community possesses limited access to advanced placement curriculum, lack of pre-college development, lack of representation in the curriculum, and lack of funding for postsecondary education. Abi-Nader (1990) found Latina/o students in college preparatory programs do not possess proper understanding and skills for enrolling in college and lack role models in pursuing a college education. She stated that successful students of color are rarely studied from a success perspective. These studies (Abi-Nader, 1990; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003) note how a Latina/o student can "leak" through the education pipeline prior to college, and are representative of the deficit focused research.

While there remains a lack of scholarship on Latina/o college students from a success-oriented perspective, it is important to briefly discuss the deficit perspective. Deficit models pose minimal expectations of success for Latina/o students (Valencia, 1997). Valencia stated, "deficit thinking is tantamount to the process of 'blaming the victim.' It is the model founded on imputation, not documentation" (p. x). Valencia also indicated that deficit thinking "...posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings... Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited

intellectual abilities [and]... lack of motivation to learn..." (p. 2). Deficit perspectives are grounded in what institutions are doing wrong or not doing at all (i.e., inadequately serving students or providing a disservice to students) and what students are not doing in order to persist and graduate. According to Pearl (1991), a major tenet of the deficit model argument is that,

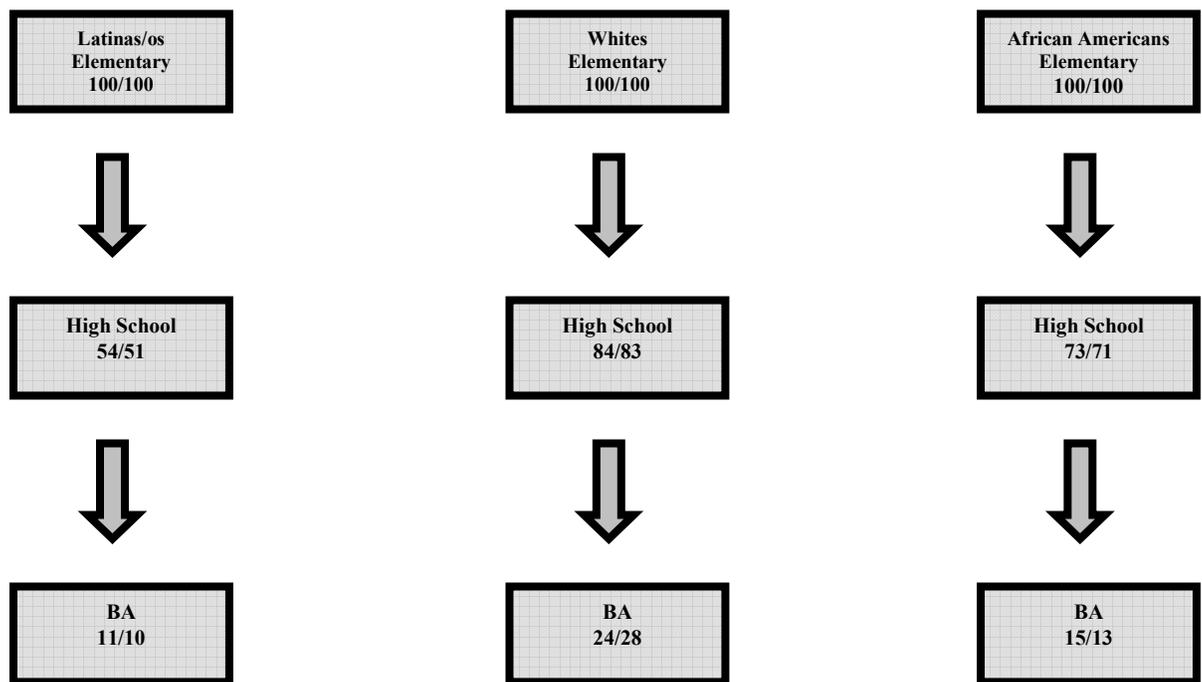
...what are really called deficits are organizations of the environment that biases the opportunity structure to increase the likelihood of certain groups to succeed at the expense of others; that is, the environment does not provide the "disadvantaged" and the "at-risk" with the same encouragements and opportunities provided the "advantaged." (p. 134)

Most research regarding student success has predominantly focused on K-12 education and many of these studies have focused on deficit modeling. However, there is a growing body of research being conducted to investigate factors influencing student success. The study that the researcher conducted employed a success approach to examine Latina/o student success at this university.

The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) (2002) reported that 71.2% of the Latina/o population within the U.S. has *no college education*. Roughly 75% of 18-24-year-old Latina/o college students are enrolled in college full time compared to 85% of White students (Lane, 2002). Nonetheless, between 1997 and 2002, the Latina/o community had *no* change in college enrollment rates at 4-year institutions (Harvey & Anderson, 2004).

Latina/o students who matriculate to higher education institutions tend to enroll in five states: California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (HACU, 2005). Over 40% of Latinas/os are enrolled in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HACU, 2005; National Center on Education Statistics, 2000). Of the Latinas/os who pursue a postsecondary education at the community college level, only 10.5% receive associate

degrees (HACU, 2005); more alarming, at 4-year institutions only 7% receive baccalaureate degrees (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2005; Harvey & Anderson, 2004). To illustrate the challenges, Huber, Huidor, Malagon, and Solorzano (2006) developed a pipeline-diagram of Latina/o students depicting Latina/o enrollment comparisons with whites and African Americans from elementary school through postsecondary education (Figure 2 and Figure 3).



*Figure 2. Latina/o students and the education pipeline 1*

*Note.* 1<sup>st</sup> number is female, 2<sup>nd</sup> number is male

Figure 2 compares Latinas/os to Whites and African Americans who began elementary school in the U.S. and continued on to high school and postsecondary education. The figure depicts 100 Latina and Latino students who begin elementary education and only 11 Latinas and 10 Latinos complete a bachelor's degree (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, & Solorzano, 2006).

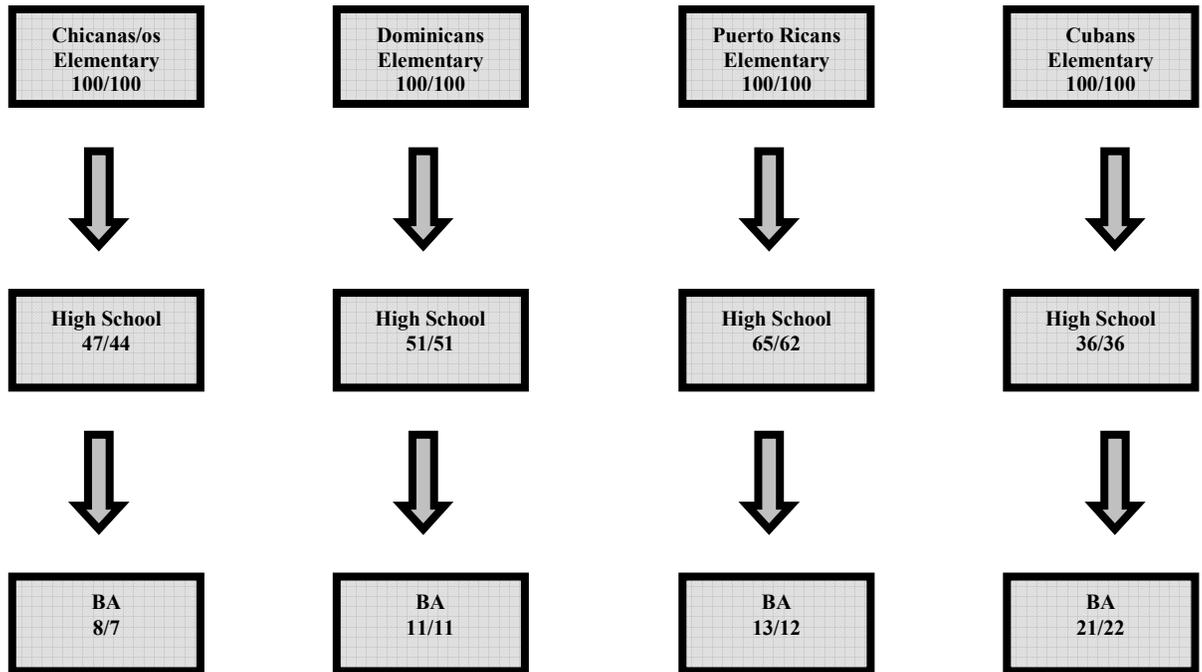


Figure 3. Latina/o students and the education pipeline 2

Note. 1<sup>st</sup> number is female, 2<sup>nd</sup> number is male

Figure 3 compares within-group differences of four Latina/o sub-groups who began elementary school in the U.S. and continued on to high school and postsecondary education. The figure depicts 100 Chicanas/os, 100 Dominicans, 100 Puerto Ricans, and 100 Cubans (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, & Solorzano, 2006).

Huber, Huidor, Malagon, and Solórzano's work (2006) emphasizes the need for education institutions (K-16) to proactively identify and address the concerns and needs of Latina/o students. Higher education institutions must be diligent in facing the challenges of enrolling and graduating Latina/o college students. Closing the educational gap for this population poses a significant issue for the higher education community.

## Overview of the Methodology

This study explored graduating Latina/o college students' experiences at a mid-Atlantic university, specifically, Latina and Latino students who filed for graduation during the spring 2006 and fall 2006 semester. Case study methodology was employed to: (a) determine dimensions of success for graduating Latina/o college students; (b) contribute to the existing college student success literature; and (c) assist and advance the success scholarship.

A case study was used to examine Latina/o student success and to determine the dimensions of success attributed towards degree attainment. Creswell (1998) stated that case study is "...an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). Case study is not only a method of research about a particular case but also a "product" of the particular inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Stouffer (1941) added, "case research seeks both what is common and what is something uncommon, drawing from all of the following: (1) the nature of the case, (2) a case's historical background, (3) the physical setting, (4) other contexts (e.g., economic, political, legal, and aesthetic), (5) other cases through which this case is recognized, and (6) those informants through whom the case can be known" (pp. 438-439).

Case study methodology is one means for studying Latina/o college students at this university. Given the tremendous heterogeneity of the Latina/o community, examining students at this campus is an attempt to learn about the experiences of the Latina/o community at this institution.

## Definition of Terms

*Case Study* – Case study is "...an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

*Dimensions of Success* – The scope or various magnitudes that Latina/o college students identify as attributes/elements towards degree attainment.

*First-Person Subjective Experience* – Rendón (2002) reported that such an experience is an "explicit and active component" of the data analysis. This allowed me to attend to my biases during data analysis. Usage of the first-person subjective experience allowed for thorough understanding of the human experience that is under analysis (Rendón, 2002).

*Hispanic and Latina/o* -- This study employed the terms Latina and Latino. However, if an author (s) used Hispanic or a specific Latina/o ethnicity in his or her work it was noted. The research literature often interchangeably uses multiple terms to describe this heterogeneous community. For this study, Latina/o was used throughout this text to include both males and females, unless addressing a specific gender (i.e., Latina (female) or Latino (male)). Arbona and Novy (1991) note that,

At most universities, the distinctions between Hispanic subgroups are ignored when data are collected on ethnicity. Typically, in studies with college students, researchers often aggregate Hispanics from various subgroups into one category. Because there is some evidence to suggest that subgroups of Hispanic students differ in demographic characteristics that are related to academic success, the practice of aggregating all Hispanics in one category may distort research results related to Hispanic college students. (p. 335)

Under the Office of Budget and Management, the term *Hispanic* was adopted in 1978 as a category for the growing "Spanish-speaking" population in the United States and having descendents from Spain. Hispanics can be of any race, yet, "the term Hispanic is used to describe a diverse group of people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American descent that have come to the United States at different times and for different reasons" (Arbona & Novy, 1991, p. 335). The term *Latina/o* is an identity that collectively includes the rich ancestral diversity of indigenous people of Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean Islands that were assimilated with Spanish, African, and/or Portuguese ancestry. Hayes-Bautista and Chapa (1987) establish that *Latina/o* is more inclusive of individuals from Latin America and communities who do not essentially speak Spanish (i.e., indigenous languages and Portuguese).

The term *Latina/Latino* emerged as a direct counterpoint to *Hispanic*. It challenged the privileging of Spanish or Hispano lineage over the other indigenous and African lineages of the Spanish-speaking individuals in the United States. The renaming was imperative as it centered the multiple roots of Latino and Latina cultural identity, and the dialogue surrounding this issue raised awareness of the multiple lineages and histories of Spanish-speaking people in the United States, particularly the historically underrepresented groups and more recent Caribbean immigrants (Zambrana & Thornton Dill, 2006, p. 197).

*Intersectional Scholarship* -- consists of:

1. An analytic strategy that begins with the experiences and struggles of previously excluded and oppressed groups – primarily people of color – and examines ways multiple sectors [i.e., dimensions of difference] influence their life choices and chances;

2. Examination of the nature of power and its implementation in maintaining interconnected structures of inequality that affect individual and group identities and experiences; and
3. Efforts to promote social justice and social change by linking research and practice, thus creating a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities.

*Success* -- Student success is broadly defined within the research literature, is institution specific, consists of multiple layers, is interdisciplinary, and encompasses multiple indicators. The operational definition of success is *degree attainment* (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Padilla, 1999; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, Trevino, 1997; Santiago, Andrade, & Brown, 2004; Wolf-Wendel, 1998). Specifically within postsecondary education, success is a longitudinal process that is multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and contextual.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One discussed the introduction and the purpose of the study, the research questions, overview of conceptual framework, significance of the study, overview of the methodology, and definition of terms. Chapter Two includes discussion of the conceptual framework and relevant literature, specifically focusing on successful scholarship and higher education persistence factors. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology, research methods, and the research design. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five addresses the study's summary and conclusions, and includes a discussion of limitations and delimitations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, research studies are discussed that focus on college student persistence as well as studies that identify factors that influence Latina/o college student success. The final section of the chapter discusses intersectionality, which provided a conceptual framework as well as a theoretical context for the study.

#### Retention Theories

Previous studies have attempted to document the challenges Latinas/os face concerning degree attainment. While there is a growing movement to look at success factors for Latinas/os, higher education research has predominantly focused upon issues of access and persistence. An important body of work is Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student persistence scholarship, which has been extensively analyzed, critiqued, and adopted by scholars since the 1970s. The fundamental premise of his model is that both social and academic integration are necessary factors in college student persistence. Social integration is the interaction between the student and other individuals at the institution. Tinto (1975) stated that such formal and informal interaction occurs by way of peers, staff, faculty, administrators, and various co-curricular activities. Tinto's integration model has been both empirically tested and employed in the field; however, Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) argued that this work presumes that students of color must disconnect their "cultural realities" and integrate themselves into the campus community in order to succeed. Rendón et al. maintained that students of color, specifically Latinas/os, should retain their cultural identity rather than assimilating into the institution's social and academic environment.

Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of college student retention is focused upon work identifying factors to help explain why students leave college

either deliberately or unwillingly. Bean and Eaton examined how "individual psychological processes can be understood in the retention process" (p. 55). Their work suggested student behavior is an individual choice and the choices that students make lend themselves toward or away from a particular behavior and whether students persist or not. Bean and Eaton assumed each campus interaction is a psychological process (i.e., self-efficacy, locus of control, and stress reduction) that increases a student's motivation to persist. For Latinas/os in higher education, students who have a stronger sense of validation (Rendón, 1994) will have a stronger sense of efficacy and integration within the fabric of the institution resulting in student success.

Astin's (1962, 1970a, 1970b, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1993) input-environment-output (I-E-O) model is another body of work widely accepted within the higher education community. Central to his model is a theory of involvement. Astin posited that becoming involved in the campus environment enhances students' learning, which in turn increases their persistence at their respective institutions. He reported that students who become involved with campus life are more aware of the campus environment and more integrated with the college experience. Astin's work did not take race or ethnicity into account when examining college student involvement.

The Student Attrition model (Bean, 1980) is also focused upon the college student's persistence. Bean's model presumed that student persistence is parallel to turnover in the work place. He reported that the reasons college students leave institutions are similar to the reasons employees leave their jobs. Bean's model recognized that external factors also influence a student's decision to leave or stay at their institution. The Student Attrition model has been extensively tested; "results have been largely supportive of organizational, personal, and environmental variables in shaping attitudes and intents as well as the effect of intent to persist" (Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992, p. 145). Recent work by Hernandez and López

(2004) noted that external factors (i.e., beyond the institution) affect Latina/o college student persistence as well. Such factors include community involvement, the role of spirituality/religion, and gender dynamics within the Latina/o community. Their work complemented Bean's model in detailing factors that have a distinct influence on Latinas/os in higher education.

There is an overwhelming amount of research over the past 30 years related to college student persistence (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005) and the literature reported an array of persistence factors. Studies in education have analyzed and dissected numerous variables that contribute to college student persistence. From Spady's work (1970, 1971) to Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993), research focused on college student persistence continues to develop and evolve, identifying new factors that affect student persistence and moving toward innovative approaches to increasing graduation rates.

#### Persistence Factors

Several questions remain unanswered regarding Latina/o college students and factors influencing their persistence; thus it is important to examine the literature and how it relates to this population. There are reported in the literature a number of factors that affect Latina/o students' enrollment, retention, persistence, and success.

#### *La Familia*

A Latina/o's worldview is comprised of many complex factors, but at the nucleus of the individual is family. "Latino family literature is often shaped by discussions of familism, defined as the behavioral manifestations of Latinos that reflect a strong emotional and value commitment to family life" (Hernandez & López, 2004, p.41). *La Familia* is viewed as the foundation of Latina/o culture (Heyck, 1994). In a traditional Latina/o family structure, *la familia* is a pyramid-shaped formation where authority is passed down from the father to other family members

(Heyck, 1994). This family structure is heavily influenced by tradition and obedience. Rendón and Taylor (1989) identified a "traditional family" culture as one that consists of a family orientation that possesses strong familial ties. Within one's family, a tremendous burden is placed on children to uphold traditional customs and values and to often assume family economic responsibilities. However, the literature reported that it is often the case that the participation in education is not a priority. Hernandez and López stated,

It was a sense of responsibility and belief that they [Latina/o college students] "owed a debt" to their parents. This was particularly true for students who were the first in their families to attend college. Some expressed it was "their contribution" to the family, particularly after seeing their parents struggle. (p. 41)

As early as the eighth grade, parental involvement in school-related functions has been linked to student enrollment in higher education (Perna, 2002). Cabrera and La Nasa (2002) noted, "...parental encouragement and involvement, a pivotal force in the emergence of occupational and educational aspirations, is conditioned by the ability and high school preparation of the child" (p. 123). Parental and overall family support of the college student is also crucial during his/her post-secondary journey. In their study, Haro, Rodriguez, and Gonzales (1994) reported that parental and overall family support is a key element in the educational journey of Latina/o students. The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (2002) found the lack of parental awareness of higher education to be a major concern for the Latina/o community and Hernandez (2002) found that students need a stronger sense of emotional support from la familia while they are in college.

Reisberg (1999) noted that Latina/o students who were retained and who persisted at their respective institutions often found that parental and family concerns

regarding higher education continued to exist. Contreras, Kernas, and Neal-Barnett (2002) noted that families find it difficult to comprehend that their student must be present to conduct research or attend a study group at their institution. Parents cannot grasp why their student attends class on specific days and not on others, or why they do not visit home during the weekend. They often demand that students fulfill family tasks and duties and fulfill other parental expectations while their student tends to course work (López, 1995). A common understanding among Latinas/os and their family is that the wellbeing of la familia takes priority over personal ambitions (Schwartz, 2001).

In addition to parental and family involvement, there is an overwhelming amount of "knowledge" that one must possess when pursuing a post-secondary degree. This includes issues regarding college choice, admission criteria, admission examinations, and seeking financial assistance, to name a few. The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (2002) termed this information as *college knowledge*. "Development of expectations and perceptions about the quality of the institution, campus life, availability of majors, and one's ability to finance enrollment are the primary considerations shaping actual matriculation" (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000, pp. 9-10; Choy & Ottinger, 1998; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Tinto, 1993). However, many Latina/o families lack college knowledge (The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2002). Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) explained that in attempting to acquire such knowledge, a Latina/o student encounters numerous obstacles, which may negatively impact Latina/o persistence and success.

### *Community Orientation*

Related to la familia is community orientation. La familia, as stated, is a central element of the Latina/o community. Heyck (1994) defined a community as

people who experience familial relations through traditional cultural bonds. Families sharing values, customs, and traditions are important in the Latina/o community. Heyck continued, "It is not just a collection of people living in proximity, but a kind of extended family connected by self-help organizations, places of worship, neighborhood networks, community centers, business associations, educational centers, and artistic establishments" (p. 162). Heyck described how a sense of community has "...little meaning without the qualifiers 'Mexican,' 'Puerto Rican,' 'Cuban,' or 'Dominican.' With these adjectives in mind, the term 'community' comes to life. It connotes pride in the barrio and its ethnic heritage" (p. 163). Hernandez and López (2004) noted that the legacies of these communities endure regional histories that influence Latina/o culture and thought. These communities of family members, networks, community centers, and peers can operate as both a resource and a barrier to Latina/o college students (López, 1995). Hernandez and López (2004) stated that one's community can extend well beyond where an individual was raised or lives. Latinas/os often view themselves as "representatives" of their barrio and, more importantly, their familia (Grossman, 1984).

### *Spirituality*

Along with an individual's family involvement and community orientation, the role of an individual's spirituality and religious affiliation may be a factor that impacts Latina/o student participation and success in higher education (Hernandez & López, 2004).

Hispanic spirituality is the expression of a complex cultural phenomenon. Hispanic spirituality, thus, must be seen as part and parcel of the creative synthesis of the Hispanic value structure and orientation that has emerged from the three root streams that inform its

cultural traits and personality. Hispanic spirituality responds to the Spanish, Amerindian [sic], and African makeup of its "soul."

(Villafane, 1994, p. 153)

"Religiosity/spirituality" is a persistence factor (Low & Handal, 1995; Nora, 2003). Nora and Anderson (2003) indicated that Latina/o college students having a satisfaction with their spiritual self-concept were more likely to persist at their institution. Considering oneself a "religious" individual, specifically for Latinas/os, does not always indicate taking part in church activities, attending church, or having a religious affiliation (Heyck, 1994). For numerous Latinas/os, the role of religion and spirituality has a direct relationship with morals, values, and family customs and traditions. Regardless of religious affiliation, there is a strong sense of spirituality among Latinas/os college students (Hernandez & López, 2004).

Religion is often regarded as a "family affair" and events such as baptisms and quinceñeras are central to cultural celebrations within the Latina/o community (Heyck, 1994). Religious and spiritual traditions often take a priority over one's education. According to Hernandez and López (2004) "...spiritual matters often weave themselves into the daily lives and decisions made by Latino[/a] students" (p. 54). Witham (2003) conducted a study of 7,000 Latina/o students and parents that indicated the importance of religion on educational opportunities since the Latina/o spiritual/religious culture often endorses the value of education. Latina/o college student spirituality and religion are generally entangled with family cultural ties and significantly affect their lives as college students.

### *Identity Development*

As Latinas/os become socialized within la familia and their community, their individual notion of identity will fluctuate depending on their stage of commitment to

their group, geographical location, and even socio-economic status. Latinas/os are frequently reminded and encouraged by family members, peers, and mentors not to forget where they "came from," and to remember their ancestry and history. Their understanding of identity emanates from a sense of culture, tradition, and identification within their ethnic group and contributes to a sense of dignity and honor (Banks, 2000). Since the college years are a crucial time, conflicting notions of identity development can positively or negatively affect Latina/o retention, persistence, and success.

Latinas/os are a heterogeneous group. Individuals may be bilingual, bicultural, multicultural, and self-identified as Latina/o, Hispanic, Spanish-American, and/or by country of origin (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian, Brazilian, or Chilean). Casas and Pytluk (1995) defined Latina/o ethnic identity "...not only by their own cultural environment but also by both the dominant cultural group with which it is in contact and the nature of ethnic group/dominant group interaction" (p. 160). Ethnic identity development involves an individual's participation within a particular group as well as the level of participation with peers, family, and community members and one's cultural traditions (Thornton, 1996). Banks (2000) stated:

When an individual identifies with his or her cultural or microcultural group, he or she feels a part of the group; internalizes its goals, interests, and aspirations; and also internalizes its values and standards. An individual's level of identification with his or her cultural group can vary greatly. (p. 76)

Torres (1999) developed the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM), which identified four categories of cultural orientation for Latina/o college students (Bicultural, Anglo, Hispanic, and Marginal). She described Anglo and Hispanic orientations as Latina/o students at opposite sides of the model. The Anglo orientation

reflects a Latina/o student who demonstrates a high level of acculturation leading to involvement with mainstream campus activities and minimal involvement with Latina/o organizations. The Hispanic-orientation student seeks involvement with Latina/o-based activities and minimal mainstream activities. Torres noted that Latina/o students exhibiting high levels of acculturation still maintained varying levels of ethnic identity.

### *Finances*

Financial assistance is a key factor in the retention, persistence, and success of students from low-income backgrounds (Nora, 2001). Financial aid and its relation to Latina/o retention, persistence, and success in higher education is consistent within the literature (Abrona & Novy, 1990; Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1992; Hernandez, 2000; Nora, 1990; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997). Nora (1990) noted that the lack of finances poses a significant barrier for Latina/o students. Tinto (1993) stated that financial aid does impact college student persistence and success, especially students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Hernandez (2000) indicated that financial assistance both positively and negatively has had an effect on student persistence (i.e., providing the financial means to afford tuition or the fear of debt). He continued by adding that Latinas/os reported a higher level of stress that related to financial concerns while in college. Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1992) found that aid which meets Latina/o financial responsibilities indirectly and directly affects their persistence. Studies indicated that financial assistance for Latina/o students impacts their persistence within the academy (St. John, Hu, & Tuttle, 2000).

### *Living and Working (On and Off Campus)*

Living arrangements and employment while in college also affect Latina/o student persistence. Living and/or working on or off campus are realities for Latina/o college students. Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1992) found that students who work off campus are limited in their interactions with other students and faculty. Singley and Sedlacek (2003) reported that Latina/o college students when compared to non-Latina/o students are more likely to be employed during college and work longer hours. Rooney (2002) indicated that Latina/o students work long hours during their undergraduate years to pay various costs associated with attending college. Hernandez and López (2004) stated that "institutions must attempt to provide additional resources for Latino [/a] students who must work to supplement their educational expenses, in order to lower the total number of hours they work while in college" (p. 45).

### *Peer Interaction*

While college students are away from family and non-collegiate friends, the peer group is a source of support for students within the academy (Hernandez, 2000). Student-to-student interaction leads to the development of relationships at a student's institution, which contributes to an individual's ability to persist (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella 1996). Pascarella (1980) stated, "...the informal student-peer culture may be one of the most potent campus influences in shaping student academic values" (p. 556). Astin (1993) reported that a student's peer group is the most effective basis of influence throughout their undergraduate years. The more interaction with fellow students, and the more academically and socially invested the student is to the campus, the more likely one's persistence will increase (Tinto, 1998). Peer influence has a positive impact on student behaviors, resulting in improved grade point average, persistence and success on college campuses (Lang & Ford, 1992).

### *Mentoring*

Student-faculty interaction is an important factor in retention (Lang & Ford, 1992). As the student develops his/her interactions with other college students, staff, and faculty, mentoring opportunities present themselves. For such opportunities to be meaningful, faculty must be available and demonstrate the enthusiasm to engage their students (Tinto, 1993).

Effective mentoring involves not only the transfer of academic skills, attitudes, and behaviors but a level of interaction, trust, and communication which results in a psychosocial comfort that empowers a student with the knowledge and confidence to grow academically and socially. (Parker-Redmond, 1990, p. 191)

Parker-Redmond reported that mentoring has a positive impact upon student persistence. Sedlacek (1989) added that success of students of color in higher education is more likely if they have identified a mentor and/or role model at their institution.

Student-faculty interaction, specifically faculty mentoring, can positively contribute to a student's development (Astin, 1993). A positive rapport with a role model or faculty member is a factor for academic success (Hernandez & López, 2004). Hernandez (2000) reported the frequent comments from the Latina/o students in his study that noted the positive effects of faculty on their retention. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) added that Latina/o college students who identify a student-centered faculty member and who are aware of the possibility for interaction with faculty members are more likely to adjust to college life. As a student interacts with faculty in a variety of environments, personal relationships arise and a student is less likely to withdraw from their institution (Pascarella, 1980). Faculty members constitute a direct link to knowledge at the institution and student interaction with faculty is

necessary for student development (Tinto, 1993). "Mentoring programs for Latino [/a] students should be developed because mentoring may serve as a retention tool particularly for students who may be at risk of leaving the university before graduation" (Hernandez, as cited in Hernandez & López 2004, p. 47).

### *Campus Climate and Support Services*

Research by Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998) indicated campus climate directly relates to the failure or success of students in post-secondary education. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1998) noted the changing landscape of higher education correlates to an increase in campus conflict and tension. It is important to acknowledge that campus climate will vary from institution to institution (e.g., institutional type—community colleges, Historically Black Colleges & Universities, research-extensive institutions and Hispanic Serving Institutions) (Hernandez & López, 2004). Diversity and a positive campus climate benefit all students, not just students of color (Milem & Hakuta, 2000). With the history of prejudice and discrimination of people of color in the United States, underrepresented groups should anticipate a chilly climate within higher education (Washington, 2000). There is a need for institutions to have an increased understanding of the causes of a racially tense campus and take into account how these specific incidents affect students' development (Hurtado, 2000). A 1993 study by Hurtado found that Latina/o students experienced discrimination while in college, influencing their decisions to persist at the institution. However, many institutions have now implemented an array of support programs specifically for Latina/o students to become acquainted with the campus community (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003). Such programs assist students with transition issues, academic needs, and emotional and psychological concerns. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1989) indicated students who utilize

culturally-specific support services have increasingly utilized general campus support services as well. Hurtado and Kamimura stated, "having programs in place that help students maintain their cultural connections can alleviate 'homesickness' and provide the tools to navigate the college experience" (p. 141).

The presence of a campus community, while away from family and non-collegiate friends, is a significant source of support for students within the academy (Hernandez, 2000). Student-to-student interaction promotes a sense of community on campus, which in turn leads to an individual's persistence (Nora et al., 1996). Astin (1993) noted that a student's peer group is the most effective basis of influence throughout his/her undergraduate years. The opportunity for students to interact with groups of individuals at their institution leads to persistence. The more interaction students have with fellow students, the more academically and socially invested they are, the more likely their persistence will increase (Tinto, 1998). Peer influence has an affirmative impact on study behaviors, which in turn leads to improved grade point average, retention, and persistence (Griffin, 1992). Latina/o students often establish this peer and community support through Latina/o organizations and cultural centers (Hurtado & Kamimura, 2003).

Student involvement on campus is also correlated with persistence and increased graduation rates from college (Astin, 1993). Abrahamowicz (1988) reported that student involvement with campus organizations equated to an increased level of involvement with the entire college experience (i.e., beyond the involvement of student organizations).

Hernandez (2000) stated,

For many Latino [/a] students, involvement in an ethnic-based student organization positively impacts retention: by aiding students' feelings of comfort at the university (Rooney, 2002); by incorporating,

retaining, and nurturing their cultural community as a means of achieving success in college (Padilla, et al., 1997); and as a way to stay culturally grounded, particularly at Predominantly White institutions. (p. 48)

They concluded that higher education institutions must provide Latina/o college students with a variety of opportunities for involvement that represents the heterogeneity of the Latina/o community.

Darder, Torres, and Gutierrez (1997) reported that over the past 30 years the following variables affecting persistence have been examined: integration (i.e., social and academic) (Bean, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993); support systems on college campuses (Nora, 2004; Nora & Cabrera, 1996); and finances (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1992; Olivas, 1986; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2001). There is a growing body of research that examines how variables such as the racial campus climate, community orientation, parental and family involvement, the role and importance of family, identity development, "college knowledge" (Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2002), the role of community, one's spiritual orientation, employment issues, mentorship, interaction with other college students and faculty, campus support services, and an individual's involvement on campus are impacting Latina/o persistence (Hernandez & López, 2004). Such studies not only examine Latina/o student persistence but move beyond the traditional persistence literature.

### Success

This growing body of research examines students of color as successful and high achieving within higher education (Fries-Britt, 1998, 2002; Harper, 2001, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hrabowski, 1991; Hrabowski & Maton, 1995; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998). Hrabowski and colleagues conducted cutting-edge research to

identify factors that hinder and/or assist success for African American college students. To do so, these scholars focused upon how African American students attained academic achievement. They identified numerous variables that assist high-achieving African American students to attain academic success (e.g., educational aspirations, family and peer support, one's persistence, and education and family background). In analyzing a single case, Fries-Britt (1998) performed in-depth interviews of high-achieving successful African American students affiliated with a scholarship program at a mid-Atlantic institution. From her study, Fries-Britt found that high-achieving African American students felt a strong sense of "achiever isolation" from other students as well as feeling that being in a "race-specific" scholars program contributed to their success on their campus. Harper and Quaye (2007) examined a single case as well to locate what factors influence successful African American development among involved students on campus. They reported two major findings: First, they studied how successful African American students' engagement with Black and "mainstream/majority White" organizations influenced their leadership development; second, they identified how their participants strengthened and developed their "cross-cultural communication skills." Harper (2005) developed another research project that examined high-achieving African American students. He studied 32 African American male students at six different higher education institutions to "...expand our understanding of African American male collegians by providing insight into the experiences of high achieving student leaders" (p. 9). Research based upon high-achieving and successful African American college students is an area of scholarship that continues to grow and is relevant to the higher education community.

Along with the work focused upon African American college students, there has been a recent increase in research regarding high-achieving Latina/o college students and success. Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) stated,

To better understand the issues surrounding both attrition and retention of Latinas/os at four-year institutions, educators need to take on several investigative tasks. The institution needs to take a closer look at several dimensions that affect the climate for diversity, including their historical legacy...structural representation...the psychological climate...and behavioral dimensions...all that can affect the retention of Latina/o college students. (p. 148)

Research revealed that upon Latina/o matriculation to college, multiple factors affected both persistence and success on campus (Hernandez & López, 2004). The more recent persistence scholarship regarding Latina/o college students is examining college students from a success approach (Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Padilla, 1999; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997; Rendón, 1994; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Scholars are utilizing varying methodologies to study success and to move beyond examining persistence from deficit modeling and student failure. This research varies in the definitions of success. Some studies include grade point average and persistence, while others focus upon academic achievement, student engagement, and graduation rates. The literature reported that student success is contextual and varies by institution and student community.

Regarding the literature of student success, there are a handful of scholars who are approaching the issue of persistence of students of color using this approach. Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) noted, "in order for Latina/o students to succeed in college, we [scholars] must understand that retention [and persistence] is contingent

on numerous structures of institutional support and student experiences in college" (p. 139).

There is an abundance of work detecting "what to avoid" to enhance student retention in postsecondary education. Swail, Cabrera, Lee, and Williams (2005) stated, "most studies focus on the barriers these students [Latina/o] face as compared to others, most notably White students" (p. 4). Padilla (1999) mentioned that it is crucial for the higher education community to begin to look at what successful students are doing to reach degree completion. "Now is the time for government to intervene and talk about success rather than open doors. Future public policy needs to focus on prying open the exit doors to our institutions while continuing to open those at the entrance" (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, p. 11).

The student success model (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997) addressed persistence of underrepresented students. Central to this model is the notion that research must move to an analysis of what college students are doing "right" that leads to degree attainment. They posited that students must possess better theoretical and heuristic knowledge (Harmon & King, 1985) in order to succeed. Theoretical knowledge is "book knowledge that is learned on campus through coursework and formal study," whereas heuristic knowledge is "locally defined and is acquired experientially" (p. 126). Padilla et al. noted that successful students possess a knowledge base and execute certain actions to overcome barriers to assure their success within the academy. Their studies indicated that while knowledge is central to ensure student success, it is also necessary for college students to attain a certain level of heuristic knowledge to function within a given institution.

In their study of student success, Padilla et al. generated a local model of success at a research-intensive institution located in the southwest U.S. Their research revealed that students had to overcome four types of barriers: discontinuity

barriers, barriers connected to a lack of nurturing, barriers connected to a lack of student of color presence on campus, and a lack of resources. Padilla and colleagues indicated that successful students take specific actions in order to surmount such challenges.

Rendón's validation theory (1994) stated that institutional agents such as academic counselors should be proactive in outreaching to students and "affirming" their capabilities of succeeding. "An enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in-and-out-of-class agents fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 644). Rendón's work explored how institutional agents are needed to enhance Latina/o student development. Rendón proposed that Latina/o students are "knowers" and are regarded as active contributors to the campus learning community as affirmed by institutional agents. This occurs through both academic and interpersonal validation. Academic validation "occurs when in-and-out-of-class agents take action to assist students to 'trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student'" (Rendón, p. 645). Interpersonal validation "occurs when. . . agents take action to foster Latina/o students' personal development and social adjustment" (Rendón, p. 645). Her validation theory consists of the following components:

1. Validation is an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in-and-out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development.
2. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable.
3. Validation is a prerequisite for student development.

4. Validation occurs both in-and-out-of-class consisting of in-class agents and out-of-class agents.
5. Validation suggests a developmental process. It is not an end in itself. The more students become validated, the richer the academic and interpersonal experience.
6. Validation is most effective when offered early on in the student's college experience, during the first year of college and during the first weeks of class. (pp. 44-45)

In addition to the work of Padilla et al. (1997) and Rendón (1994), Hernandez's work (2000) assessed the Latina/o college student experience from a retention perspective. Hernandez specifically examined environmental factors that affect Latina/o college student retention at a mid-Atlantic institution. His retention model consists of factors identified by students enrolled at a predominantly White, research-intensive, public 4-year institution. Hernandez attempted to gain an understanding of Latina/o college student retention and how Latina/o college students perceived their acceptance at their institution. A central tenet guiding his work was the identification of factors that supported Latina/o college student success. Participants in this study included a diverse representation of the Latina/o community who had been successful on their campus.

Hernandez (2000) identified 12 categories that were developed into a conceptual model of success for Latina/o college students. The model represents the interdisciplinary relationships of each category that positively affected the students in the study. The categories included: "I want to do it"; "the family"; "friends and peers"; "faculty and staff"; "cocurricular involvement"; "finding a Latino community"; "money matters"; "I'm going to make within the environment"; "environment = people"; "personal experiences shape the perceptions of the physical environment";

and "involvement as a way to break down the environment" (p. 133). In addition to the 11 categories listed above, Hernandez, in his summary, stated that "the desire to succeed was expressed as the single most influential category" (p. 583). Hernandez concluded that the desire to succeed is an area for needed future research.

Padilla's (1999) work on Chicana/o college students contended that student success should be the "foundation of college student retention efforts" (p. 132). He stated:

While it is necessary to understand why some students fail to complete their programs of study so that students and institutions can be told what to avoid, it is crucial to understand what accounts for students' success when they do complete a degree program so that students and institutions can be told what to do. (p. 132)

Success within the academy is uneven for Latinas/os, Native Americans, and African Americans when compared to Asian Americans and Caucasians in terms of degrees conferred (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003).

Padilla (1999) proposed a local model for Chicana/o retention to increase success in college. In studying Chicanas/os who completed their degree programs and those who stop out, drop out, or do not complete their degree, he noted that successful students develop knowledge and experience to combat challenges in order to attain their degrees. Padilla conducted a qualitative research study to identify theoretical and heuristic knowledge that Chicanas/os utilized to attain success at their campus. Using the participants' responses Padilla developed and implemented a model of Chicana/o student success for a specific campus.

Galindo and Escamilla (1995) examined the socio-cultural factors and the education experiences of Chicanas/os through life-history methodology and autobiographic data. The researchers identified success being affected by the

following: retention and graduation policies and programs (Halcon, 1989); mentorship and peer support (Abi-Nader, 1990; Achor & Morales, 1990; Halcon, 1989); and support staff. Cabrera, Burkum, and La Nasa (2005) noted that "background characteristics," "encouragement received in high school," "college preparation," "degree aspirations," "college path patterns," "academic involvement and success," "college curriculum," "collegiate experiences," "financial aid," and "parental responsibilities" influenced retention and graduation rates as well.

Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot's (2000) research on Latina college students also addressed factors contributing to success within the academy. Their study sought to identify issues (i.e., barriers, "labeling", success factors, and strategies to support Latina students) that are unique to Latinas. Their emphasis on Latina college students is important because of the increasing presence of Latinas within higher education, a community that is "largely ignored by higher education" (p. 512). The researchers identified barriers such as socioeconomic status, cultural and gender-role stereotypes, under-preparation, stress factors (e.g. financial, academic, and social), and institutional marginalization. Their work noted biculturalism, school attended, marital status, "type of parenting received," and gender roles as factors that had a positive influence on Latina educational achievement. Rodriguez et al. stated, "to promote the success of Latina college students, efforts should be concentrated in the following areas: financial aid, academic support systems, social/cultural support systems, and campus environment" (p. 522).

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt's (2005) Developing Effective Educational Practices project (DEEP) studied 20 college campuses to determine what they do well to promote student success. They identified two critical components that enhance success: (a) the amount of time and individual effort students contribute to their studies and extracurricular activities and (b) resource allocation and "learning

opportunities." The researchers concluded regarding student success: "...a unique combination of external and internal factors worked together to crystallize and support institution-wide focus on success. No blueprint [for success] exists..." (p. 21).

The Educational Policy Institute (2005) conducted a recent study focused on Latina/o students and their pathway to degree attainment. In this study, Swail, Cabrera, Lee, and Williams (2005) provided a comprehensive review of the literature. The review focused on the challenges that Latina/o students face during their college years. The study also portrayed how Latinas/os navigate through the education pipeline to excel in higher education. The researchers employed the Geometric Model of Persistence and Achievement (Swail, 1995; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003) and Pathways to College model (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000) to identify factors that impacted upon Latina/o degree completion. According to the Geometric Model, a student's college experience is correlated with the relationships of cognitive, social, and institutional factors, while the Pathways Model asserts that factors contributing to success in college begin at the junior high school level.

Swail et al. found that the following factors influenced Latina/o degree attainment: socioeconomic status, parental expectations, planning, course taking patterns, student postsecondary behaviors, gender, income, educational legacy, planning for college, and financial aid. The researchers suggested that by attending to the above factors, the chances that "Latinos will graduate from a four-year institution at rates comparable if not equal to those of Whites" (p. 15).

During 2006, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) sponsored a 3-day symposium to identify what factors influenced success for college students at a variety of institutions. NPEC sought the assistance of higher education scholars (i.e., Kuh; Tinto; Perna; Braxton; and colleagues) to draft reports to address the question, "What is student success?"

A report by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) responded to the NPEC question by asking "What Matters to Student Success?" and "What can colleges and universities do to uphold their share of the social contract and help more students succeed?" (p. 3). They approached this initiative by producing a synthesis of the success literature and developed a broad definition of success. Analyzing the literature, they utilized a "holistic-approach" and asked how the following can promote success for students:

What can the federal government do? What can states do? What can the for-profit postsecondary institutions do? What can the not-for-profit and private postsecondary institutions do? What can families do? What can high schools do? What can and should students do themselves? (p. 4)

Kuh et al. (2006) noted that an array of definitions of college student success exists and that such definitions fluctuate and are contextual. They stated, "many consider degree attainment to be the definitive measure of student success" (p. 5), but noted that student success may be measured by utilizing more "traditional measures" of achievement (i.e., test scores, grade point average in college, earned credits, and other post-baccalaureate plans (e.g., job, graduate/professional school, and/or salary)). Kuh and associates demonstrated that there are numerous factors that influence a student's ability to achieve a degree. They concluded their work by noting, "there is certainly much more to learn about these and related matters..." (p. 105).

Tinto and Pusser (2006) also drafted an NPEC Report that included a model of campus action that assists in promoting student success. Their work argued that there has been a paucity of scholarship on how higher education institutions offer specific action to raise student persistence and success. Tinto and Pusser noted that while the research literature over the past three decades has continued to grow, there remains the

lack of a success model from a longitudinal approach that colleges and universities may implement to nurture student success. These researchers defined success as degree completion, yet included both persistence and success as factors throughout the report. They examined both persistence and success within the specific context of the campus, stating, "our concern here is with the capacity of institutions to enhance the persistence and degree completion of their students" (p. 2). "We do so because it is too easy to see the absence of student success as solely the responsibility of students" (p. 5).

Tinto and Pusser (2006) responded to NPEC's charge of addressing "What is Student Success?" by approaching the issue from an institutional perspective and asked what can institutions do to promote student success. Tinto and Pusser identified five "conditions" that colleges and universities uphold:

1. Institutional Commitment – "...Institutions are committed to the goal of increasing student success, especially among low-income and underrepresented students..." (p. 6).
2. Institutional Expectations – "...No student rises to low expectations...it is too often the case that institutions expect too little of students..." (p. 6).
3. Support – Providing students with "...academic, social, and financial" support (p. 7).
4. Feedback – "Students are more likely to succeed in settings that provide faculty, staff, and students frequent feedback about their performance" (p. 7).
5. Involvement or Engagement – "The more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and graduate" (p. 7).

Tinto and Pusser argued that if institutions foster these "conditions" on campus students will persist and, ultimately, achieve degree completion.

Another report issued by NPEC was authored by Perna and Thomas (2006). The focus of their work was to create a conceptual model for student success across race/ethnicity, class, and income. They aimed to advise policy and practice that will promote "success for all students" (p. 1). Adding to the research of Kuh et al. (2006), Perna and Thomas noted that student success differs from community to community. They advocated a framework that will close gaps in success, particularly within racial/ethnic and class differences. In doing so, they developed a conceptual model that incorporated various "frames of analysis" (p. 3) that promote success. Using research from sociology, economics, psychology, and education, Perna and Thomas created a framework to inform policymakers and practitioners how to close gaps in student success and bring to the forefront the theoretical and methodological perspectives that scholars have proposed as contributing to student success. From the literature, Perna and Thomas identified four "key transitions" that contributed to student success. These included college readiness (e.g., educational aspirations and academic preparation); college enrollment (e.g., college access and college choice); college achievement (e.g., academic performance, transfer, and persistence); and post-college attainment (e.g., post-BA enrollment, income, and educational attainment) (p. 5).

Perna and Thomas (2006) summarized their findings by stating the following:

Student success is a longitudinal process. Multiple theoretical approaches inform understanding of student success. Student success is shaped by multiple levels of context. The relative contribution of different disciplinary and area perspectives to student success varies.

Multiple methodological approaches contribute to knowledge of student success. Student success processes vary across groups. (p. 7)

The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative published yet another report authored by Braxton (2006). In his work, Braxton identified four goals that he would address when pondering the question, "What is student success?":

1. To create a theory of faculty choices that contributes to success;
2. Identify in the research literature what explains "markers" of success;
3. Identify faculty "teaching role performance" that influences student success; and
4. Policy and practitioner recommendations. (p. 1)

Searching for the "effects on students" (p. 2), Braxton (2006) reviewed the literature to identify "markers of student success," which he arranged into eight indicators: "academic attainment, acquisition of general education, development of academic competence, development of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions, occupational attainment, preparation for adulthood and citizenship, personal accomplishments, and personal development" (p. 2). Braxton concluded by stating, "although student retention and graduation are markers of student success, the meaning of student success extends considerably beyond these two well-recognized indicators" (p. 30).

Laura Rendón (2006) issued a paper that critically analyzed the NPEC reports. She noted that emerging models of student success must take into account the dimensions of difference that students bring with them to postsecondary education. "It is impossible that a single 'mega model' can account for everything related to the success of such widely diverse students who should not be 'megagrouped' (Anderson, 1995; Lee, 2004) into one group..." (p. 1). Her critique focused on success for students that have been historically underserved or marginalized in higher education.

Rendón identified cultural and academic incongruity, validation, encouragement, and support from significant others as additional factors to take into account when researching underserved students.

Rendón (2006) concluded that from her analysis of the NPEC reports, a reconceptualization is necessary. She noted, "...present models [tend] to be lacking in an authentic representation of the experiences of underserved students as they flow in and out of multiple systems" (p. 18). In her "multiple systems" approach, she developed an "Interactive Model of Success for Underserved Students" (p. 18). She argued that her approach is one that is contextual and student-population specific, a deliberate approach that she endorses that other scholars must consider. Her model posited that students interact between multiple worlds (e.g., higher education, their community, their family, etc.) where they participate within multiple "structures and actors" where they have an array of experiences. "Race, class, and gender—as well as the larger system of societal structures of rewards and opportunities that foster equality and inequality—may shape these interactions" (p. 18). Rendón stated,

The student has demographic characteristics such as race/ethnicity, SES, gender, immigrant status, language, worldview, religion/spirituality, aspirations, and so forth. The student has prior life experiences in the K-12 system and in the military and work environments that help shape aspirations and the drive to succeed. Student success is conceptualized in a holistic fashion with an emphasis not only on intellect, but also on social, emotional, and spiritual development. (p. 18)

Rendón maintained that scholars must move beyond quantitative-centered "student-fit" approach and deficit approach to analyzing underserved college students.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality framework is imperative to examining college student success for the reason that dimensions of difference cannot be exclusively examined (Crenshaw Williams, 1993; Thornton Dill, 2001, 2004, 2005; Weber, 1998, 2001). The bulk of higher education research explores a social construct and access and/or persistence factors without investigating the varying dimensions of difference that intersect to influence college student success. Intersectionality focuses on varying dimensions of difference for marginalized communities. Weber (1998) identified five themes to conceptualize the intersectional frame:

### *Contextual*

Dimensions of difference are contextual and change regularly (Weber, 1998). She noted that meanings of difference depend on geographic region and time. "It is important to take into consideration a group's context to understand their current situation" (p. 17). For Latina/o college students, context is significant. This community represents tremendous within-group diversity, varying immigration and migration patterns as well as regional settlement patterns. Where a student lies on the continuum of difference depends on the context in which he or she resides. Understanding the context for Latina/o students helps one understand transformations may have taken place across time and the changes that occurred in dimensions of difference over time.

### *Socially Constructed*

Weber (1998) noted when dimensions of difference are viewed as separate entities, individuals are designated a position along a continuum of differences that are not fixed. She stated, "This practice reinforces the view of race, gender, and sexuality as permanent characteristics of individuals as unchangeable, and as polarities—people

can belong to one and only one category" (p. 18). Although students' perspectives and experiences vary, it is crucial to remain mindful of individuals' racial, ethnic, regional, class, national, and gender identities for this study.

### *Systems of Power Relations*

One of the critical themes of intersectionality is systems of power relations (Weber, 1998). Such power relations are situated in history and are generated from "hierarchies of domination" (p. 20). Such power relationships exist where:

There can be no controlling males without women whose options are restricted; there can be no valued race without races that are defined as "other"; there can be no owners or managers without workers who produce the goods and services that the owners own and the managers control; and there can be no heterosexual privilege without gays and lesbians who are identified as "abnormal" or "other." (Weber, p. 20)

### *Social Structural (Macro) and Social Psychological (Micro)*

Dimensions of difference are situated and have a social meaning at the micro and macro levels of one's life. At the micro level, an individual's everyday social life is embedded with dimensions of difference, while at the macro level, an individual is situated within a plethora of social institutions and varying communities. Weber (1998) noted that scholars must analyze individuals within a community or institution as well as the context on a personal level. For example, students from the barrio, from working-class families in predominantly Latina/o cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, or San Antonio, possess a starkly different experience from a Latina/o who is from a middle- to upper-middle-class family from a less populated Latina/o region. Students growing up in a predominantly Latina/o community may acquire resources and skills

that support their academic endeavors and promote a strong sense of *Latinidad* (Latinaness/Latinoness).

### *Simultaneously Expressed*

Dimensions of difference function concurrently in every social situation (Weber, 1998). Weber stated that people who are members of both subordinate and dominant groups are situated along a dimension of difference continuum and this shapes their identity and social interactions. Social position and social construction may grant an individual power in a specific situation while containing an opportunity in the same situation (Weber).

The "traditional" dimensions of difference considered when analyzing marginalized and oppressed communities include gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. The intersectionality framework includes as many dimensions of difference as possible, enabling the researcher to ask: how do dimensions come together and intersect? The literature reported a number of dimensions of difference that Latina and Latino students bring with them to the academy. Table 1 presents the dimensions of difference typically identified in the research literature.

Table 1

*Dimensions of Difference for Latina/o College Students*

Dimension
1. Race
2. Ethnicity
3. Socio-economic status
4. Language
5. Nationality
6. Gender
7. Geographic location
8. Generational status1 – U.S.
9. Generational status2 – College Educated
10. Religious and spiritual affiliation
11. Sexual orientation
12. Class standing on campus (1st yr, 2nd yr, transfer, etc)
13. Current living situation
14. Family situation (e.g., single parent, both parents, number of siblings versus only child)
15. Campus climate
16. Latina/o community's history on campus and region
17. Field of study
18. Student's involvement on campus
19. Employment situation

This chapter reviewed and summarized literature associated with Latina/o college student success and persistence. Studies that influenced Latina/o college student retention were presented as well as studies related to persistence from a student success perspective. The literature review chapter concluded with a discussion of the framework of intersectionality, which formed the theoretical context for this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The focal point of Chapter three is to discuss the methodology the researcher used in examining dimensions of Latina/o success. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the significance of qualitative research and case study methodology. The researcher then identifies the data sources, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures for the study. Finally, the researcher addresses the importance of validity in qualitative research.

The purpose of this study was to investigate dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students at a predominantly White, mid-Atlantic research-extensive public institution by exploring the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students. There is an abundance of research that has focused on the factors that affect the access and persistence for underserved populations within higher education (Astin, 1993; Rendón, 2000; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Tinto, 1997). Higher education research must move beyond simply recruiting Latina/o college students to developing and implementing new and innovative approaches to assure Latina/o persistence and degree attainment. As data regarding education disparities illustrate, there is a need to understand how Latina/o college students persist through the academy toward degree completion. By conducting in-depth interviews of graduating seniors, this study contributed to the research literature by examining Latina/o college student success as a process (how students achieve success) versus an outcome (students' results from their success).

#### Context of the Study

The study was conducted at a large, mid-Atlantic, research-extensive institution. According to the institution's mission statement:

The University counts among its greatest strengths and a major component of its excellence the diversity of its faculty, students, and staff. It is committed to equal educational opportunity. It strives to hire a diverse faculty and staff of exceptional achievement through affirmative action, to celebrate diversity in all of its programs and activities, and to recruit and retain qualified graduate and undergraduate minority students...ensure a university environment that is inclusive as well as diverse and that fosters a spirit of community among faculty, staff, and students by increasing the diversity of its faculty and staff; by recruiting outstanding and diverse graduate and undergraduate students; by improving the graduation rate of ethnic minority students. (Board of Regents, 2000)

Though possessing a history of racism and exclusion at the institution (Gillian, 1989), today the campus is nationally regarded for its diverse student body and diversity initiatives. With an undergraduate enrollment for fall 2006 of 25,154 students, the ethnic and racial composition consisted of 56% White, 5% Latina/o, 13% African American, 14% Asian Pacific American, 0.4% American Indian, 2% international, and 9% unknown. Although the Latina/o representation within the institution and within the state is 5%, Latina/o students remain underrepresented in enrollment and degree attainment at the undergraduate level in comparison to African Americans, Asian Americans and White students. In fall 2004, Latinas/o were 5.5% of the undergraduate population; in 2005, were only 5.7%; and in 2006, were 5.7% as well. In both 2004 and 2005, Latinas/os represented 5% of bachelor degree recipients at the institution (Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2005).

For the past three years, the institution has supported a small number of Latina/o-centered initiatives. During the 2004 fall semester, the institution's College

of Education initiated the Latina/o Access and Success Project (LASP). The purpose of LASP was to gain insight from the experiences of undergraduate Latina/o students and identify factors that influence their access, retention, and success at a large, mid-Atlantic research institution. Using case study methodology, the LASP research team conducted first-year, continuing, transfer student, and graduating senior focus group interviews to examine the Latina/o undergraduate experience. LASP also researched institutional archives and data banks to locate data pertaining to students of color and issues of enrollment, access, campus climate, persistence, and graduation rates as well as analyzing the demographic data and focus group transcripts. The LASP research team consists of a faculty member in the College of Education, three doctoral students, and a master's student.

Student participants in the LASP study were identified through listservs from campus staff who work closely with the Latina/o community. Once identified, students were sent electronic email messages inviting them to participate in one of four focus groups, depending on their class standing. Once students agreed to participate in the study, during the focus group session, they completed a research consent form as well as a 22-item demographic questionnaire to identify race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, year in college, major, employment, living situation, and expected graduation date. Students then participated in a semi-structured focus group with their peers, facilitated by the graduate student research team members.

Along with the LASP research project, over the past three years, the Provost's Conversations on Diversity, Democracy, and Higher Education have brought to campus nationally recognized scholars to discuss Latina/o issues within the academy. Additionally, in 2005, the undergraduate Latina/o community staged a town hall meeting with the university's president and upper-level administrators at which the

Latina/o undergraduates were provided the opportunity to have institutional administrators hear their views about the campus climate and status of Latinas/os on campus. In 2005, the institution hired its first full-time Latina/o program coordinator and in the spring 2005 semester, the campus initiated the Latina/o Graduation Celebration. In conjunction with several campus student organizations, academic units, and support services, the office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost sponsored this event to recognize the successes of graduating undergraduate and graduate Latinas/os. Families, peers, mentors, faculty, staff, and administrators, and allies of the Latina/o community attended the celebration.

In fall 2006, the undergraduate Latina/o community staged another town hall meeting. Most recently, the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost initiated a charge in 2006 to develop a U.S. Latina/o Studies Department and a committee consisting of faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students to examine current institutional initiatives, resources, faculty, needs, and other campus best practices and models regarding Latina/o studies project. The committee was chosen to propose a program focused upon Latina/o studies and the issues of the Latina/o community.

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methodology was used to analyze the college experience of graduating Latina/o students. Marshall (1985a, 1987) identified the following components of qualitative research. First, qualitative research investigates complexities and processes, and research on a developing phenomenon. Next, it is a body of research that "cannot be done experimentally for practical or ethical reasons" (Marshall, 1985a, p. 57). Finally, qualitative methodologies examine constructs that have not been identified.

## Qualitative Rationale

The research question that guided this study was:

What are the perceived dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students attending a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution? Additionally, three sub-questions were examined:

1. What do Latina/o college students reveal about dimensions of success at a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution?
2. What strategies contributing to success and persistence do Latina/o college students employ and what strategies would they recommend for other Latina/o college students?
3. What can predominantly White, research-extensive public institutions learn from the experiences of successful Latina/o college students?

The research questions guided and informed the research methodology (Patton, 1991). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) cite five principles of qualitative research used for this study.

*Principle 1:* Qualitative inquiry is naturalistic in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This study focuses on the experiences of successful Latina/o college students, specifically, the dimensions of success that graduating Latina/o students identified. Qualitative research is contextual research, stresses multiple realities, and tends to the effects of knowledge generation (Fonow & Cook, 1991). The factors participants attribute to their success vary depending on the setting.

*Principle 2:* Qualitative inquiry is concerned with words and is descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The data for this study are gleaned from Latina/o college students' experiences on campus. The data collected for this study were based on the experiences of successful Latina/o college students and were analyzed to locate dimensions of success.

*Principle 3:* Qualitative research is interested with process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Case study allowed the participants to share their experiences and elaborate on factors attributed to their success in college. Qualitative research is a rigorous process that is concerned with meaning making and the lived experience. By examining success as a process (how students achieve success) versus an outcome (students' results from their success), dimensions of success emerge.

*Principle 4:* Qualitative inquiry is inductive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Mertens (1998) states, "by using an inductive approach, the researcher can attempt to make sense of a situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study" (p.160). Because success for this study is defined as degree attainment, the researcher recognized pre-existing biases that he possessed as a successful Latino college student. Thus, it is the dimensions of success to which the researcher attempted to gain insight.

*Principle 5:* Qualitative inquiry relies on the precision of meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative researchers attempt to accurately portray the experiences of participants. In this study, the researcher intended to represent the voices of successful Latina/o college students by highlighting the dimensions of success they describe.

In addition to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Rendón (2000) offered several observations when conducting qualitative research:

- The questions, agenda and structure are open to development and change;
- Research is conducted with small groups of individuals, as opposed to large sample sizes, knowing that a single case study yields extremely rich data;
- The interaction of the interviewer and interviewee influence the data, as do additional contextual factors;

- The research work is interpretive, a process that is personal, partial, and dynamic;
- The work requires dialogical listening, and individuals are treated as storytellers rather than respondents; and
- The research does not require replication of results as a criterion for its evaluation but does require self-awareness and self-discipline in the overall data analysis and interpretation. (p. 649)

### Case Study Rationale

"Case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Marshall and Rossman (1999) described case study as a method that focuses on a specific program, institution, or phenomenon under investigation. Mertens (1998) added, "...case study research is not defined by a specific methodology but by the object of the study" (p. 166). Case study is not only a method of research about a particular case but also a "product" of the particular inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Stake (1995) added that case study is defined by the object of the research study, not by the intended methodology. Case study research identifies and defines the unit of analysis or the case itself (Yin, 2003). "The more the object of the study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the rationale for calling it a case study" (Mertens, 1998, p. 166). If the social unit or phenomenon is not bounded (i.e., no set number of participants and no end to the total interviews to be completed), it is ultimately not a case (Merriam, 1998).

Case study methodologists frequently define case study as an examination of a "bounded system" through rich, thick description and in-depth data collection that

utilizes multiple sources of data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Within case study methodology, it is essential that the boundaries for the case be established for the study to be "exemplary" (Yin, 2003, p. 160). Case study is often defined by its "end product," as a "... intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 21).

Beyond the bounded system and thick description, Merriam (1998) identified three characteristics of qualitative case studies that distinguish it from other methodologies. Case studies can be:

1. Particularistic. This form of case study emphasizes a single instance, program, event, social unit, or phenomenon.

- It can suggest to the reader what to do or what not to do in a similar situation;
- It can examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem; and
- It may or may not be influenced by the author's bias. (Merriam, p. 30)

2. Descriptive. This characteristic requires the end product to be a thick description of the unit of analysis and:

- Illustrates the complexities of a situation;
- Obtains information from a wide variety of sources; and
- Spells out differences of opinion on the issue and suggest how the differences have influenced the result. (Merriam, pp. 30-31)

3. Heuristic. This particular trait means that case studies will further the reader's conceptualization of the unit of analysis by:

- Explaining the reasons for a problem, the background of situation, what happened, and why;
- Discussing and evaluating alternatives not chosen; and

- Evaluating, summarizing, and concluding, thus increasing its potential applicability. (Merriam, pp. 31)

Examining graduating Latina/o college students at a large, research-extensive institution and determining dimensions of success makes case study methodology a good fit for this study. Analyzing the experiences of successful Latina/o college students on campus gave voice to their perceptions of dimensions of success.

#### Data Collection: Participant Selection

The data source for the study consisted of a purposeful sampling of Latina/o college students graduating in the 2006 spring and 2006 fall semesters. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that purposeful sampling directly addresses the core of the research questions by locating multiple respondents and that "the sample is to be selected in ways that will provide the broadest range of information possible" (p. 233). The principle behind purposeful sampling is "...not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (p. 201).

Students were identified by the researcher by selecting Latina/o student participants that reflected the heterogeneity of the Latina/o community (e.g., Chicana/o/Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadorian, etc.) at the institution. To ensure a diverse student representation, the following demographics were considered: (a) gender (male/female), (b) place of residence (on/off campus as well as commuter students), (c) ethnicity, and (d) college generational status. Participants were selected using the Office of the Registrar and selection was based upon their filing for commencement during the 2006 spring and 2006 fall semesters. The Office of the Registrar compiled a list of Latina and Latino graduates who filed for commencement during the 2006 spring and 2006 fall semester. Graduates received

a letter of invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A). Students who agreed to participate filled out a participant consent form (i.e., name, address, and contact information) (Appendix B), and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C).

A total of 167 letters were sent out by U.S. mail to spring and fall graduates and 45 participants returned the self-enclosed envelope by U.S. mail. Of the 45 graduating seniors, 18 were males and 27 were females. Additionally, 23 students were identified as Salvadorian, 7 identified as Peruvian, 5 identified as Guatemalan, 5 identified as Puerto Rican, 2 identified as Mexican, and 3 identified as multiracial. From the 45 participants, the researcher sought to represent the demographics of the institution's Latina/o student population. Although there is no existing institutional data that identifies the ethnic breakdown of Latina/o students, it is known is that this population on the campus is predominantly students who trace their lineage to Central and South America.

Although the participants represent a small distinct population on the campus, their profiles reflect the heterogeneity of the Latina/o community on campus. To ensure a diverse student representation, the following demographics were considered in order to narrow the 45 participants to 10 (e.g., five males and five females): (a) gender (male/female), (b) place of residence (on/off campus as well as commuter students), (c) ethnicity, and (d) college generational status.

Once participants were identified, the researcher sent an individual email message to locate a time and date to participate in one semi-structured interview (Appendixes D, E, and F) during the fall 2006 semester. An important note to keep in mind is the researcher's rapport with the Latina/o community on campus, which may have influenced students to return the consent form and demographic questionnaire as well as encouraged graduating students to participate in the study. After the interview

was completed, the researcher sent a follow-up email-guided journaling activity (Appendix G) to each participant.

A total of 10 graduating Latina and Latino students (five female and five male) participated in this study. Patton (2002) stated "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research" (p. 244) and that the sample size depends on the research question (s), the purpose of the study, and what is feasible with the resources and time (Patton, 2002). Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) noted that sample size is dependent on whether or not the sample will enable the researcher to secure the knowledge and understanding about the case at hand. They concluded with the question "will the sample provide an information-rich case and provide insight about the phenomenon?" Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) stated, "one is looking more for quality than quantity, more for information richness than information volume" (pp. 83-84). Patton (1990) emphasized that sample size is related to the knowledge one is seeking, the intention of the study, and what type of study can be accomplished with the resources one has. For qualitative research, the depth and quality of data is seen as more important than the number of participants and cases for the study (Jones, 2002). For this study, the researcher concluded that 10 participants were appropriate to answer the research question and the sub-questions. Jones et al. (2006) stated, "when themes or categories are saturated, then the decision to stop sampling is justified. Saturation occurs when the researcher begins to hear (or observe or read) the same or similar kinds of information related to the categories of analysis and/or "...until patterns in the data continuously emerge" (p. 71) and as Creswell (1998) stated, "...until new information obtained does not further provide insight..." (p. 151). Themes from the data analysis began to sound the same and as Jones et al. stated, themes "continuously emerge" (p. 71).

For this particular study, the researcher did not foresee a problem gaining access to the Latina/o students on campus. Throughout the researcher's time on the campus, the investigator had been highly involved with the Latina/o community and had served as a consultant and advisor to several Latina/o organizations and the Hispanic Heritage Coalition, inaugurated a course focused on the Latina/o community entitled *Leadership for Today's Society: Through a Latina/o Context*, and chaired the inaugural Latina/o Graduation Celebration for three years. For this study, the researcher did not have difficulty locating participants.

### Data Instruments

Data instruments for the study were adapted from the institution's LASP Project (see Appendix H for description of the LASP Project). The researcher gained access to the instruments as a member of the research team. The researcher also played a pivotal role in developing the instruments for the LASP study. The LASP demographic questionnaire and interview questions for the project's focus groups were used as a guide to construct the data instruments for this study.

Two instruments were developed to explore Latina/o students' dimensions of success. In creating both the demographic survey and interview questions which were employed in the LASP study, the research team reviewed the access, retention, and success research literature and drafted a demographic questionnaire to determine socio-economic status, geographic location, transfer versus non-transfer student, major, citizenship status, financial assistance, employment, grade point average, parent's education level, gender, race, ethnicity, preferred language and generational status of the participants. The interview questions were designed to explore issues of access, college experiences, retention, and success with the intention to better understand the Latino/a undergraduate experience at a large, research-extensive

institution. It is important to note that the LASP data instruments only served as a guide to create the data collection tools for this study.

#### Data Collection: Four Phases

Data collection took place in the following four phases.

*Phase I* – The first phase consisted of identifying and contacting students. Students were identified by the Office of the Registrar filing to graduate. Over 160 formal letters of invitation were sent to graduating Latina and Latino students. The goal of participant selection was to reflect the institution's Latina/o community by tending to the demographic characteristics of gender, place of residence, ethnicity, and college generational status.

Upon agreeing to participate in the study and completing the appropriate consent form, participants completed the demographic questionnaire and returned it to the researcher in the supplied stamped envelope. The researcher, upon receipt of the questionnaire, scheduled times and dates for interviews and notified each participant electronically.

*Phase II* – After each participant scheduled an interview, students met with the researcher for one to one-and-a-half hours. Each interview was audio taped. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, and participants received a \$25 gift certificate at the end of the interview.

Interview questions were semi-structured and focused on dimensions of student success. Students were asked a series of in-depth interview questions designed to "uncover and describe the participant's point of view" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108). The interview protocol was designed to promote "a purposeful conversation" that was guided by the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Initial questions directed the conversation between the participant and the

researcher and were designed to promote dialogue between the two. Sub-questions delved into the context of the participant's responses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Once the semi-structured interviews were completed, participants were electronically mailed a *guided journaling* activity the following day. This activity intended to provide fruitful data and allow for the students who may be more inclined to respond in writing to further detail dimensions of success during their undergraduate career (Hernandez, 1999). The electronic guided journaling activity asked students to elaborate upon experiences of success at their institution (Appendix G). Participants identified and wrote about *one* successful experience they have had as a college student. They also were asked to reflect upon the questions that they previously answered, their experiences throughout their tenure on campus (i.e., during your first year on campus, during winter or summer session, or even during a class), and journal why they believed this was a successful experience. Participants had one week to return the document via electronic mail. Five participants returned their journals. It was believed that students journaling about their success would allow participants to express in writing their experiences not shared during the interview. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated,

A study focusing on individual lived experience typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy, although this may be supplemented with journal writing by the participants in the study...the primary strategy is to capture the deep meaning of experience in their own words [through interviews and journals]. (p. 61)

*Phase III* –Member checking took place upon completion of the individual interviews. Mertens (1998) noted that member checking is vital for establishing credibility.

Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcription service. The transcription service was sent a digital file of the interview to be transcribed. Once the transcription was complete, the transcription service sent the file via electronic mail to the researcher. The transcription service was instructed to contact the researcher for clarification of any questions or concerns that they had. Seven participants returned their files. No questions or concerns were raised from the transcription company.

Immediately following the return of the completed transcriptions, the researcher checked the transcripts against the digital recording to ensure accuracy. Upon completing transcripts for each interview, participants were sent an electronic transcription of their responses and were asked to verify that their shared experiences were accurately represented (Mertens, 1998). Participants were asked not to spend over 30 minutes reviewing and providing comments on their transcription.

*Phase IV* – This last phase consisted of researcher reflections and memoing. Although this was the final stage of data collection, the researcher simultaneously engaged in researcher reflections and memoing throughout the data collection process. Researcher reflections and memoing ensured that the methods were consistent with the data collection procedures as well as making certain the interview questions were addressed. Although a question and answer format was the general design, interactions among participants and the researcher were taken into account.

#### Procedures for Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), the case study analytic process can include a wide range of qualitative analytic methods. Riessman (1993) described data analysis as a process "to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (p. 2). Jones et al. (2006) identified two steps in case study analysis. The first is to locate the unit of

analysis. In this study, the story, experience, and narrative of graduating Latina/o students are the unit of analysis. The second step is to revert to the theoretical framework of intersectionality, a first person, subjective experience as the explicit and active component of the analysis.

Intersectionality is significant to the investigation of Latina/o student success because individual dimensions of difference (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, and class) cannot be solely examined when analyzing student success. In a conversation with Bonnie Thornton Dill (Personal communication, April 25, 2006), she indicated that scholars should ensure that they integrate as many dimensions of difference as possible when using intersectionality and be mindful of how such dimensions intersect. The assertion of the researcher is that Latina/o college students have several dimensions of success that must be considered.

Spence (1982, 1986) also noted that the researcher should include personal experiences, which are an essential source of "narrative truth." In a sense, exploring dimensions of Latina/o college student success is writing about myself. Rendón (2002) noted that incorporating personal experiences into the analysis assists the reader in understanding his role as a researcher in the study. Incorporating personal experience allowed this researcher to take into account and address any of his biases when analyzing the data.

This process recognized the researcher's interpretive biases when coding transcriptions and journals, and employed the researcher's memos/reflections as a successful Chicano student (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly continued by noting that the researcher spends numerous hours immersed within the data—reading and rereading transcripts and data to construct themes and highlight the participants' experiences as successful students.

Data were analyzed by first reading the transcripts for accuracy and listening to the digital recording simultaneously and then reading the participants' electronic mail journal responses. Following the first reading, a re-reading of the transcripts and electronic journals took place in order to gain a thorough sense of responses as well as underlining and taking note of key concepts. Next, relevant data were organized into broad categories in a codebook. Charmaz (2002) added that narratives and stories should be analyzed according to emerging themes. Data were then coded into more specific categories by examining words, paragraphs, and sentences. Coding in qualitative research is a technique utilized to generate categories and subcategories on the basis of the researcher's understanding of the data (Charmaz, 1983). The constant comparative method was used to organize the data into smaller units. According to Charmaz (2002) constant comparison involves:

- Comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences);
- Comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time;
- Comparing incident with incident;
- Comparing data with a category; and
- Comparing a category with other categories. (p. 515)

The demographic questionnaire was used to create descriptive tables based upon responses from the 22-item survey. Demographic data solicited students' living circumstances, race, ethnicity, gender, college-generation status, employment status, academic major, parent's educational level, citizenship and/or generational status. These data provided a greater understanding of participants as well as insights to the campus' Latina/o community.

As with the individual interviews, the electronic data were analyzed to gain a sense of participants' personal success stories. Electronic mail messages were analyzed by first reading the message for accuracy followed by a re-reading to locate key concepts. Following the location of key concepts, relevant data were organized into broad categories in a codebook. Data were then coded into more specific categories by examining words, paragraphs, and sentences the participants wrote about in their electronic mail.

### Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefers played an essential role in the study. Mertens (1998) noted the researcher should engage in a discussion with non-research parties. Mertens continued that the individuals (e.g., peer debriefers) should provide critical feedback regarding the study itself as well as the findings. Two doctoral students and one master's student acted as peer debriefers and reviewed data collection procedures for accuracy. Debriefers had an understanding of higher education scholarship and were identified as Latina or Latino. Both doctoral students have taken qualitative methods courses within their doctoral program. The peer debriefers were aware of issues confronting underserved student populations within higher education.

Each peer debriefer was required to participate in an orientation session conducted by the researcher. The orientation session consisted of an orientation to peer debriefing, the protocol for peer debriefing and the study, and a sample peer-debriefing activity. Peer debriefers worked with the researcher to review and solidify data collection methods and instruments. The three peer debriefers ensured that the data collection tools were driven by the methodology and research questions at hand. This took place through review of the study's research questions, demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interview questions, and guided-journaling question.

## Validity and the Quality of Qualitative Research

### *Transferability*

Although transferability is important in qualitative research to locate implications for varying populations and sites of investigation, this study was not intended to be transferable. Mertens (1998) mentioned that transferability is how the researcher may generalize the findings and/or results to other similar situations. This study is not applicable to all Latina/o college students, but is designed to provide insights to better serve Latina/o college students from an angle of success. This study was designed to encourage scholars and policy-makers to utilize its findings to assist Latina/o college students at their respective institution. Due to the thick description of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and data from Latina/o students, this body of research provides a perspective regarding student success at a large mid-Atlantic, research-extensive institution.

### *Confirmability*

Mertens (1998) stated "confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher's imagination" (p. 185). It is important to identify the legitimacy of the analyzed data from the study as well as to identify and eliminate any researcher biases that may arise (e.g., utilizing first-person subjective experience). As Yin (1994) noted, a "chain of evidence" is highly recommended to minimize the researcher's biases. This "chain of evidence" that Yin referred to was addressed through the use of thick description of the study and experiences of successful Latina/o students.

### *Credibility*

This study incorporated triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Mertens (1998) described triangulation as "involving checking information that has

been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data" (p.183) (e.g., graduating students' interviews, participant journals, and researcher memoing). Member checks were another crucial piece to the analysis. As Mertens stated, "this is the most important criterion in establishing credibility" (p.182). Checking in with the participants on a regular basis, specifically after the semi-structured interview and electronic guided journal activity, ensured that the data collected were reflective of the participants' responses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of this study which focused upon examining factors of success for 10 graduating Latina/o college students at a mid-Atlantic, research-extensive institution. The chapter starts with an overview of the research questions, followed by an explanation of eight dimensions of success and persistence. The researcher then presents a brief participant profile, followed by the eight dimensions and the sub-themes that emerged under each. The chapter closes with a discussion of barriers that students encountered in their academic experiences. It is important to note that issues of persistence addressed by the participants are interjected within the discussion of each of the eight dimensions. Persistence factors are salient throughout each dimension of success and more importantly, within each participant's voice.

The primary research question that guided this study was: What are the perceived dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students attending a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution? Additionally, three sub-questions were examined:

1. What do Latina/o college students reveal about dimensions of success at a predominantly White, research-extensive public institution?
2. What strategies contributing to success and persistence do Latina/o college students employ and what strategies would they recommend for other Latina/o college students?
3. What can predominantly White, research-extensive public institutions learn from the experiences of successful Latina/o college students?

I addressed each research question by providing information shared and examples from the experiences of the students in their own voice. I analyzed and coded the data into categories and ultimately into themes which I referred to as dimensions of success. I employed a first-person subjective experience as a component of this analysis (Rendon, 2002).

Identifying dimensions of Latina/o success is to some extent writing about myself. Doing so allowed me to discuss and take into consideration any biases during data analysis. I also remained cognizant of Riessman's (1993) propositions for analysis—to analyze the participant's story and experience, how that story and experience were constructed, the cultural relevance, and the story's authenticity.

During the interviews and the related guided-journaling activity, I learned valuable insights from the participants' responses and found myself filled with empathy as participants shared glimpses into their lives. They shared both struggles and challenges, as they recounted their experiences at the mid-Atlantic institution in anticipation of their graduation. Participants eloquently spoke from the heart as they addressed the open-ended questions (Appendix E), bringing to life their campus experiences. I often reflected upon my own undergraduate experiences and how similar our accounts appeared to be. Students repeatedly noted the timeliness of this study and their gratitude for a research project that valued their voices and experiences. Participants expressed hope that the study would improve conditions for other Latina/o college students at their campus and other higher education institutions.

### Dimensions of Success

The dimensions of success were identified and categorized as I read and re-read the interview transcriptions and electronic mail responses. During this process I took notes and underlined key concepts from the participants' interviews. As data

emerged from the interviews I used the constant comparative method to develop categories. I took the key concepts from each participant's interview transcripts and transferred them into a codebook (Appendix F). The relevant data were then organized into categories. Once they were placed into the codebook, I identified recurring and dominant concepts. Next, the dominant concepts were transferred into a refined set of categories. I then compared each student's data within the categories to determine more salient themes. Within each core category I further analyzed and defined dimensions of success and persistence.

It is important to note that along with establishing the core categories, each interview question served as a guide to establishing the dimensions of success found in the study. Thus, dimensions of Latina/o college student success are defined as the core categories found during data analysis. These dimensions are derived from the dominant and recurring themes identified from participants during their interviews. Eight dimensions were identified from the data analysis. The eight dimensions represent common themes shared by participants in the study. The dimensions indicate that the 10 participant experiences are contextual and specific to this Latina/o student community.

The findings in the chapter have been organized around the following eight dimensions: (a) being involved, (b) the family's role, (c) the role of campus leaders and mentors, (d) embracing academics, (e) desire to be successful, (f) Latina/o students' "Latino Center," (g) "our situation is not the same," and (h) understanding the campus' Latina/o community.

The participants in the study reflect the heterogeneity of the Latina/o community at their campus. Every effort was made to ensure diversity in several areas (e.g. gender, place of residence, ethnicity, and college generational status). The Office of the Registrar identified graduating Latina and Latino students between May 2006

and December 2006. The researcher identified a total of 10 graduating Latina and Latino students (five males and five females) who participated in this study.

Each student participated in a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview. Additionally, students were sent a follow-up email-guided journaling activity to respond to. Lastly, all participants self-identified as Latina or Latino and met the institution's graduation requirements. Table 2 provides profiles of the 10 participants.

Table 2

*Synopsis of Participant Profiles from the Demographic Questionnaire*

Name	Synopsis of Participant Profile
<b>Tish</b>	Female; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; theater major; 3.2 GPA; works on campus; both parents have a high school degree or less; lives on campus; received financial assistance in the form of grants and loans; English is the primary language spoken at home; identifies as a Latina and Nuyoricana (e.g., Puerto Rican from New York City); she is the first in her family to attend college; involved with markets and society, Hispanic Coalition, and a sorority on campus; is a second generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and does not have employment lined up after graduation
<b>Ruben</b>	Male; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; sociology major; participated in the Academic Achievement Program; 2.75 GPA; works on campus; both parents have high school degree or less; lives locally with family; received financial assistance in the form of need-based scholarship or grants; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; identifies as a Latino and Salvadorian; he is the first in his family to attend college; involved with the hip hop coalition; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and does not have employment lined up after graduation
<b>Mario</b>	Male; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; criminology/criminal justice major; participated in the Academic Achievement Program; 2.22 GPA; works off campus; mother has high school degree or less, father has some college; received financial assistance in the form of need-based scholarships or grants; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; younger sister also attends the mid-Atlantic institution; identifies as Latino and Salvadorian; he is the first in his family to attend college; involved with the Hispanic Heritage coalition and a fraternity on campus; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently has employment lined up after graduation

Table 2 (continued)

*Synopsis of Participant Profiles from the Demographic Questionnaire*

<b>Debora</b>	Female; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; criminal justice and psychology major; participated in the Academic Achievement Program; 3.86 GPA; works on campus; both parents have a high school degree or less; received financial assistance in the form of need-and non-need-based scholarships or grants; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; identifies as Hispanic and Guatemalan; involved with the University Honors program and the Latino Student Union; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; does not have employment lined up after graduation
<b>Alvaro</b>	Male; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; education major; 4.0 GPA; currently in between jobs; both parents have baccalaureate degrees; received financial assistance in the form of loans; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; identifies as Latino and Puerto Rican; not involved with campus organizations; active in various community organizations and schools; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently has employment lined up after graduation
<b>Anita</b>	Female; transferred from the community college; natural resources management major; 2.7 GPA; works off campus; both parents have baccalaureate degrees; did not receive any form of financial assistance while enrolled; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; identifies as Latina and Peruvian; involved with Enlaces Latinos Americanos and the Langley Park community; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently has employment lined up after graduation
<b>Jasmine</b>	Female; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; business major; 3.5 GPA; participated with the University Honors program; works off campus; both parents have a high school degree or less; received financial assistance in the form of loans; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; identifies as Latina and Peruvian; involved with Latino Student Union, Hispanic Student Union, and a sorority on campus; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently has employment lined up after graduation

Table 2 (continued)

*Synopsis of Participant Profiles from the Demographic Questionnaire*

<b>Jaime</b>	Male; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer, government and politics major; 3.1 GPA; participated with _____ Scholars, University Honors, and Civicus; works on campus; mother has a high school degree or less, father has some college; received financial assistance in the form of non-need and need-based scholarships or grants and loans; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives on campus; has a sibling who is in college; identifies as Latino/multiracial and Costa Rican; he is the first in his family to attend college, involved with the Hispanic Heritage Coalition and Latino Student Union; is a first generation American; never stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently does not have employment lined up after graduation
<b>Kristie</b>	Female; enrolled as a freshman, non-transfer; public and community health major; 2.7 GPA; participated in _____ Scholars; works off campus; mother has a high school degree or less, father has some college; received financial assistance in the form of need-based scholarships or grants or loans; English is the primary language spoken at home; has two siblings who attend the mid-Atlantic institution as well; lives locally with family; identifies as Latina and half Ecuadorian/half Salvadorian; involved with a sorority on campus; is a first generation American; stopped attending the institution for a short period while enrolled; and currently has employment lined up after graduation
<b>Juan</b>	Male; transferred from community college; government and politics major with minor in philosophy; 2.84 GPA; both parents have baccalaureate degrees; received financial assistance in the form of loans; Spanish is the primary language spoken at home; lives locally with family; identifies as Latino and Salvadorian; is not active on campus; is a first generation American; stopped attending the institution while enrolled; and currently does not have employment lined up after graduation

The participants represent a small distinct population on the campus; nevertheless, their profiles reflect how diverse their backgrounds are (Appendix I). Although the purpose of this study did not include developing a model or building a theory, the data generated from their experiences offer insights into the experiences of other Latinos on the campus. More importantly, participants' experiences will assist policymakers and higher education personnel in improving the campus climate for Latina/o students.

## Being Involved

The first dimension of success for Latina/o college students identified from the data analysis is "being involved." Participants indicated that this dimension of success was significant to their achievement on campus. Many students were involved with one or more organizations and held leadership positions during their tenure at the institution. The being involved dimension of success included leadership, experiences with peers and student organizations, a sense of belonging on campus, and giving back to the community. Each of these is represented as a sub-theme.

### *Leadership*

When asked about their involvement on campus, many of the students gave typical answers. Examples of these responses included, "I've been very active on campus," "I've been a student leader since my freshman year," and "I am a student leader and have been involved with the Latina/o community on campus." Jaime elaborated,

I've been able to take a position of student leader for the Latino community, and I think I've – I've had a lot of successes in being part of the leadership team since my sophomore year. And then this year...I've had the role of on my exec board, I don't have too many experienced leaders, so I have the role of kind of shaping the leadership of the Latino students this year, 'cause I'm the only person that was on the exec board last year who has some extensive leadership experience. So I think that I've – I've done a fairly good job and I've been successful in molding some good leaders and I've been a part of some really good initiative on campus.

Jaime's experience as an involved Latino ultimately was instrumental in his role in assuming leadership positions early in his college career, which in turn allowed him to serve as a role model and mentor for younger Latinas and Latinos on campus.

Similarly, Jasmine shared her experience as an active member of the Latina/o community. She explained how her involvement influenced her success.

I joined Lambda Theta Alpha. I became part of the HHC, Hispanic Heritage Coalition, and started going out to more Latino Student Union events, getting more involved with the Pan-Hellenic Council, and just trying to work around and figure what it is exactly that I want to do. I think it's helped me a lot, too, in terms of – I help – I think helping other people succeed and reach their full potential, too.

Kristie's account was similar. She shared,

I'm part of a sorority, which is Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Incorporated, and just that has helped me expand my views and learn how to become a leader, so I think that I've become very successful, and I've learned more about myself and how to become a leader. I was a part of different boards – the Hispanic Heritage Coalition. I'm the Secretary, and I've held different positions in my sorority's chapter. So I was Community Service Chair and I was Vice President as well.

Mario shared how his membership within a fraternity contributed to his success while in college.

It was just really me taking, you know pulling LUL [Lambda Upsilon Lambda, Latino Fraternity, Inc.] and making sure that LUL stays alive... You know throwing events and then finally, you know getting enough interest in people coming after me. It was definitely the biggest accomplishment. And just seeing the younger brothers, how they've

done and how we've set the tone. We've set basically the blueprint of how to do things. And they've followed and they did well. And then, you know, now Omar and Ricardo are graduating and basically still staying active. Those are accomplishments within ourselves that we see that, you know we've done a good job. We've showed each other how to be very successful in the fraternity as well as graduating.

Several participants felt they attributed their success to their leadership opportunities on campus. Participants shared that although involvement was important to their success, they gained a great deal from their leadership role.

Some students were more involved than others and found that being involved in multiple organizations was very beneficial. Jasmine talked about the many activities that she was involved in and how this was important to her development. She asserted,

I'm a huge advocate of joining student organizations because I feel like you get those tools that you don't get in the classroom, those tools that are absolutely necessary for you when you get out into the world. I think just getting involved in student organizations, period, on this campus, whether it be Latino students, SGA, anything– because obviously, not everyone joins a group organization. I think probably the thing that has made me most successful is being part of my sorority...and being involved in school, being a leader in the community.

Several of the participants felt that they gained personally and professionally from their involvement. They felt that while the university had an impact on them they also were influencing the university. This is reflected in Jasmine's comments.

It's not like you're leaving the [campus] with just your degree. You're leaving knowing that you left your mark on the campus, and I think that for the student leaders that I know, the students I know who are involved within the community, that gives you a feeling of success because you know you're helping those who are coming in after you to help get their issues out there so that their experience is a more positive one, a better one.

Similarly, Kristie shared,

Being involved, in general, and getting to know different people, and just having that experience of the university and what it offers was very important, and I think that's a huge characteristic—that's how I perceive it, that I have to be engulfed. And I guess that was brought to—that was kinda my personal goal – to make sure I was involved.

#### *Peers and Student Organizations*

Also connected to the involvement and leadership dimension are peers and student organizations. Participants described how peers and the organizations they were affiliated with influenced their success while attending college. Alvaro, while describing the importance of a close group of friends, noted,

The important part is they were still both there for me, supporting me, and egging me on. "You can do it. You can do it. You can do it." During my second year of college, I think between still adapting and having problems in some of my core classes, like the general education classes .... – and having just broke up with my girlfriend, I almost dropped out of school. And my friends supported me through this tough juncture and I kept at it. They just made me a lot more strong.

But up to that point, I could have easily [dropped out] – if I didn't have them.

Jaime shared the importance of his friends in achieving success on campus. As a well known activist leader in the Latina/o community, he attributed his success on campus to a small group of individuals.

I have a group of about four friends that I'm really close to. So a lot of times when the family is not – the family is not here, so a lot of times when you need that support right away, those friends provide that support. Them just being there, just giving me advice, giving me guidance about school, about putting my – putting my priorities, thinking about my priorities and then just executing what I need to do.

Along with close friends, Kristie credited her peers within organizations in which she was involved and other executive board members for influencing her success.

I would have to say different people as well as just my peers, in general, people that I came in contact when I was on the Hispanic Heritage Coalition Board, when I was on Lambda Theta Alpha Executive Board, so I would have to say, definitely, those people that I came in contact contributed to my success.

Peers were important as trail blazers who had gone before many of the students and could serve as sources of motivation. Several of the students talked about looking up to their peers and admiring their success. This is illustrated by Mario:

I looked up to everybody [fraternity brothers] that came before me. And I looked at them as inspiration. And I just told myself, "You know what? One day I want to be where they're at." You know, be it that they were walking across the stage, or in high positions, and just being

inspirations to other Latinos like they were to me when I was coming in.

Ruben declared that, in spite of the fact that he was not necessarily involved with organizations on campus, there were peers with whom he had established a rapport. He expressed his gratitude for developing a relationship with them.

I've had many people along the way that have contributed to my success. Whether it's other students or student leaders that have helped me along that I feel grateful towards. Because I feel like without them helping me up I couldn't have, as the saying goes, pulled myself up by my bootstraps. I feel like everyone needs some assistance along the way. And there were fellow students and leaders there that saw that and were able to help me out when I needed it.

What is important about the peer sub-theme is that peers influenced students' success by their own hard work and achievement. Through words of encouragement or emulating their leadership qualities, students' peers and organizations on campus played a role in their success.

### *Sense of Belonging on Campus*

As students reflected on the opportunities they gained from campus organizations, they began to discuss the importance of a sense of belonging and how this was important to doing well in their academics. Several of the students expressed a direct need for Latinas/os to be connected and to feel like they belonged on the campus. Ruben suggested,

I think there have been initiatives made by Latino students to foster a kind of a sense of belongingness and in the Latino community here on

campus. I think that may have to do with the Latino students that succeed here.

Ruben noted that his sense of belonging has been fostered by other Latinas/os on campus. Whether this was through outreach initiatives on campus or through specific organizations, Ruben noted that a sense of belongingness for Latinas/os on campus is an important element for Latina/o student success at the mid-Atlantic institution.

Kristie related her experience of attending a predominantly White high school and not feeling that she belonged. She agreed with Ruben that it was important for Latinas/os to gain a sense of belonging on campus. She shared,

My personal goal when I came into the university was kinda to expand my views and feel like I belong to a community, and my experiences of course 'cause when I went to high school, I was very much—I went to an all Caucasian private school, so it wasn't—I didn't have too much culture, and I couldn't really express to my peers... where I was coming from, so when I came here, I kind of engulfed myself in that—the Latino environment. I kinda felt at home, so I kinda made it—made sure that I was there and that I was part of that community.

Kristie and Ruben believe that a sense of belonging for Latinas/os is necessary. As they both spoke about their experiences, it was evident that identifying with and being involved in the campus environment contributed towards their success.

### *Giving Back to the Community*

Also connected to the being involved dimension is giving back to the community. When participants were asked about their community, students emphasized the importance of giving back. Participants shared their experiences

regarding the importance of serving the Latina/o campus community as well as the surrounding local Latina/o community. This sense of giving back included various actions and behaviors. Juan declared, "trying to reach out to other Latinos, which is something I've seen on this campus, specifically, giving back to the Latino community." Anita also implied, "I think it [being successful] would be like serving the community – serving the Latino community." Mario affirmed how giving back to the local Latina/o community has not only been gratifying for him, but also serving a community in which he was raised and to which he could relate on a personal level. He disclosed,

One community service event that I felt...you know great pride in doing was going to Langley Park and being mentors to little kids on weekends. So, you know playing soccer. Doing various things...I could see myself basically, see when I was younger. And basically I grew up in the area...So I know that area. My cousins still live there. My grandmother still has a house there. So my family's still pretty much rooted in the Langley Park area. So I know what the kids are going through...I just wanted to be an inspiration to them and show them...So, just being an inspiration to younger Latinos is probably one thing that, you know I took great pride in doing those community services.

Mario continued by adding,

In my eyes I think it's giving back more than anything. You know you could come here all you want. Go to classes. And just walk, you know on the same path you do every day. But if you don't do anything to change the community around you then I don't feel that you're being successful or showing your full potential. Something hit me and I was

like, "Man I really want to get involved." So that kind of drew me to the frat first. And then it drew me to go to more LSU meetings. I believe that if you don't do anything to change the community around you nothing's ever gonna change... You know not take a proactive step and change something. Make sure you, you know you do something today that'll change something in the future... We need to do more community service events like, you know reaching out to the youth.

Mario disclosed the value of giving back to the community where he was raised and still has family but he also acknowledges the importance of giving back to the campus community. He felt that often, students attend the university to attend class and never give back. This is not only reflected in his comments but his actions as a leader and involved student.

Alvaro revealed that he is currently involved with elementary students in the local community as a means to giving back. He stated,

My main focus is on my kids, my students. I try to work with them early on with their emotional intelligences. And by that, I try to teach them empathy techniques. And specifically their history...the history of all of Latin America. So they understand who they are culturally. They start developing kind of a moral base. I love that! The reaction of the kids – especially the Latino kids that I had put so much effort into last year – it felt good. Because it was the first time I kind of really – I knew I had done good for them.

Mario declared,

What can we do for ourselves? Like it's more important like what we can do for ourselves? Like yeah we don't expect the institution to – I don't expect the institution to change for us. I don't want to take that

excuse. You know, put the blame game on them. I want to see what can we do as Latinos here on campus, post graduates and undergrads, what can we do together to help each other out? Like what I can do for them? You know what can I do being that I have already gone through that path? What can I do for them? That's the mentality I always have. Like, you know you can't just settle. You have to keep pushing and aiming. It's just that important. Like you can't just settle and say, "OK. You know I did as much as they did, you know. I'm happy." No it's more than that...

Kristie concluded giving back to her community as a cultural value and how it complemented her college education.

As Latinos, we want to give back to our community, and we're very community-oriented, so that gives you a way of giving back to the community, and it makes you feel better about what you're doing in school.

Participants spoke in depth about being involved on campus. From the data analysis, this specific dimension of success for Latina/o college students consisted of leadership on campus, their peers and organizations, a sense of belonging on campus, and giving back to the community. Participants spoke at length about the various means of their involvement as a Latina and Latino student. Students disclosed the value of leadership roles they took on while tending to other student duties and responsibilities as well as the significance of giving back to the campus community and surrounding Latina/o community. To conclude, the being involved dimension of success contributed significantly to the participants' success on campus.

## The Family's Role

Participants frequently acknowledged that their families or a particular family member contributed to their success while in college. Participants talked about the role of various family members and how these individuals taught them how to be successful. In most cases, it was either their mother or father, or at times, both. This is intriguing because seven of the participants identified themselves as first generation college students. In spite of their first generation status, students identified their families as the place where they learned how to be a successful college student. Family members offered words of encouragement, direct challenges, moral support and understanding. In many cases the students gave vivid examples of how the families personally sacrificed so that the students could achieve their goals. Typical responses that reflect this support are evident from Alvaro who revealed, "The important part is they were still both there for me, supporting me, and egging me on." Juan also shared "the fact that my parents were big influencers in how I learned how to be a successful Latino." Kristie also spoke about the importance of her family's role.

My parents were all like, you can do it, you can do it. You know, we weren't able to. We know you can, we know you can. Even when I, myself, didn't believe in myself. So I owe a lot of it to my family for showing me how to be successful and more importantly always being there.

Participants felt that the role of their family was a contributor to their success on campus. Whether this was through personal influence, support, or words of encouragement, family had a role. In the case of Alvaro and Kristie an important distinction from their family is how they provided direct motivation to them.

Debora also shared,

My mother definitely played a role. Whenever I get stuff from the university like oh, come to this awards ceremony and oh, you've been nominated for blah, blah, blah, she's all like, this is wonderful. Aren't you excited? But, you know, she's happy. She's like you're so, you're doing well. I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud. And I guess just hearing those words just makes me want to do more and do better, you know? I think that was my motivation for going from like, you know, getting one B and the rest A's to getting a 4.0.

Debora described that her mother wanted a better life for her, which was why she came to the United States. Because of her mother's choice she felt like she had a responsibility to do well and to help her mother create this better life for their family.

Other families made similar choices. Juan's parents immigrated to the U.S. so that they could secure a better education for him. Juan also noted from the time he was young, his family instilled the importance of education in his life. He shared,

My family always, from, like I said, a very small age, always told me that there is nothing that they could have given me, but there's nothing better I could do than have an education. Back in El Salvador...they were very disciplined. My parents were very disciplined. When we were young, we'd go to school, we would dedicate two hours with no TV, no radio, no playing and do homework. I think that is a reflection of, of course, a little bit of what my parents taught me and then what you see out there. So you know what? I think we can finish it. I think we can do something with it. So the fact that my parents were big influencers, I mean, they pretty much, you know, you studied or you studied. There is no other option.

Kristie disclosed that as a child, her parents stressed the importance of her academics and the value of an education. She added that her parents were not highly educated but rather stressed the value of her education. She stated,

As children our parents always—well, for me, from my perspective, my parents, they were always like, "Make sure you focus on your grades. Make sure you're doing well in classes," so I think that's one of the—how my family played a role. Getting good grades is one of the main things. So, making sure that you're on top of your grades. My parents always encouraging me saying, "Make sure you're on top of your classes," and my parents weren't really like, "Oh, let me see your report card," every semester. They weren't—they're not that type of people, but they just wanted to make sure that we—that I was on track, and I wasn't going to fail.

Ruben, when asked about the role of his family, mentioned the significance of his mother's role in his success. He declared that growing up, it was just he and his mother. Ruben stated,

I live with my mother and I live alone but she has always – well I have many responsibilities at home since it's just the two of us. She's always been very understanding of me [and] taking time out for my education and studying and things like that. She's always pushed me to do well in school.

As Ruben spoke about his mother's role in his success, Tish also commented on the significance of her father's role in her education,

I think it's – my father – what's always been a big influence, my father is a high-school dropout, and my father is pretty much illiterate, and – but he's the smartest man I know. He just can't read. He has always

pushed me to do well in school and to get good grades, so I think definitely getting good grades is a lot of him, because for him not to be proud of me, it's like the worst nightmare on the face of the earth.

In addition, when Anita was asked about the role of her family in her success on campus, she spoke about her mother's sacrifice as well as her support that led her to immigrate to the U.S. in search of a better life for her family. She mentioned,

My mom had the best – like she is the one that is actually making it for me. You know, she's always been there, and her – like she's my idol and she's the one that's always been like the one that always pushes me, and she's the one that has contributed the most...I think that immigrating from another place, not just because you – for work, but for, you know, to be with you, and immigrating at that age, it's really hard. And it's really hard to get used to the new place, so that's one thing. It's really hard to not speak the language. The language barrier is something really sad for people at some ages, and not being able to communicate as they could. But she'll be here, you know, supporting me and helping me, and doing all those things for me...Sacrifice. So all these years were a sacrifice for her, and I really appreciate it.

As Anita spoke about the role of her mother and the sacrifices she made for her, when asked about the role of family, Juan also spoke about his family's sacrifice to help him during a trying time while in college. He spoke about how his family's dedication attributed to his personal success. Juan revealed,

My family were panicking, saying, you know, "We'll do whatever it takes," but don't stop going to school, you know? You must go to school this semester. And I said, "No, I can't. I cannot go to school." My mom and dad, they were very afraid 'cause then, you know what?

You're not gonna go back to school. They were afraid of that, like I said, gap, cause I've seen many cases where, you know, people go to school for a year and then they stop 'cause they don't have the resources, financial resources to go to school. Maybe not financially much, but every now and then, I'll give you some money for books. Not enough for tuition, but, you know, at least it will help out with books.

In another episode, Juan disclosed how his family had a role in achieving success as a Latina/o student. Through their moral support as well as their understanding that he had to tend to academics and other class responsibilities, Juan shared,

The moral support. Specifically, the understanding that Juan has to do homework...At least in my case, as a Latino, as a son. Four of us, I'm the oldest one. There are responsibilities that come along, so the understanding of, you know, Juan is not taking – my mom doesn't drive. My dad does, and my dad might not be able to take my mom somewhere. So it's my responsibility to take her, and maybe to the mall or take her places, whatever the case may be. And the moral support, you know, has everything in school. Maybe not like back in high school or middle school when your parents are checking, you know, "Did you do your homework? Let me see your grades." Not in that sense anymore, 'cause, you know, they consider you a grown up individual by the time you've reached college. So the fact is everything is good in school, how's everything coming along? Do you need money? Is there something we can do? So the fact that, you know, I can always count on them, I think has helped a lot.

In conjunction with the role of family, several participants discussed the important role of finances within the family and the critical decisions families had to make in regard to money matters. When asked about the role of his family in his success, Mario spoke about his experiences in which he must work and attend school to assist his family's income. He added

You know especially my family who is not fortunate enough to, you know we don't come from privileged homes or privileged backgrounds. You know money is big in my house. That's basically a top way, you know unfortunately. But that's what – I guess going to this school also kind of makes you, you know. That's why I'm so fortunate that my family helped in any way they could so I could graduate.

Tish's experience was similar when she was not eligible for financial aid because her father was assisting other family members. She added,

My father brought in too much money for me to get grants. What they don't realize is that yes, my father lists me as a dependent, but he has five people who depend on him: my mother, my grandmother, my brother, himself, and then his parent, his mother. They don't realize that though he may only list one person as a dependent, but all those people, so really, how much money was going to me? But that is okay, I know my family relies on him.

To conclude the role of family in the participants' success and their development, students expressed how values emerged from the family; in particular, the value of education by family and/or parents was indicated as influencing Latina/o college student success. Debora commented, "I think those that do succeed have a very good foundation at home, at least the parents tend to, you know, encourage their kids to strive for the best." Jasmine also disclosed,

Like, for me, I know it goes back – way back to the factors from growing up. Like my parents, when I was little, they're – like instilled in me like education first, no matter what. And even though they really couldn't help me with my homework or they didn't really understand it because it was in English and they spoke Spanish, but I always knew that's what I had to do, and then it just became what I wanted to do.

The values families instilled had a positive effect on students' success; whether at an early age or prior to attending college, and were crucial for Latina/o students' success.

Participants spoke in depth about the family's role as contributing to their success while in college; from instilling the value of education and importance of focusing on school work to reminiscing about their education as a child, participants revealed the importance their family had on their success.

#### The Role of Campus Leaders and Mentors

The third dimension of success that emerged from the data was the important role of campus leaders and mentors. The participants indicated that a specific individual or group of individuals on campus had contributed to their success. Those identified included administrators on campus as well as peers and faculty. The participants described how these individuals served as a support base they could talk to. Jasmine's comments are representative of discussions regarding such individuals on campus. When asked about the role of others on campus influencing her success, she stated,

I think just having a faculty member who's Latino, and like someone you can talk to, like \_\_\_\_\_, for example. She's a great woman, like just people there, people who can motivate you or help you out or in different ways. I think that's really important. I know like Dr.

\_\_\_\_\_, I don't know her personally, but I know a lot of people who work with her or who go to her for a lot of advice and things like that. That's one thing that drew me here too is because even though there wasn't a bigger Latino body, there was Latinos here who were working with the undergraduates.

Mario also shared the role his fraternity advisor played in his brother's and his own success on campus.

I would have to say that definitely one person that was very important was \_\_\_\_\_. You know, she's LUL's advisor. You know definitely, she definitely kept up with my grades. Made sure I was doing well. She always looked at, you know always made sure that I was doing well and going to class. We would come in there and talk to her.

Mario continued by disclosing,

What I think attributed to my success was looking at people that were successful. Latinos like you, you know brothers like my older brothers. I mean, you know 'til I got involved I didn't think there was anybody that could honestly, you know kind of relate to me. But then after I got involved I started seeing more Latinos like you. Like I saw you, Mark, and I was like, you know wow, he's definitely where I want to be at, you know. Like one day I definitely want to be where you're at, you know writing your dissertation like there was people that I looked up to and I said, "You know what? I want to be where they're at."

Mario's testimony of feeling that no one could relate to his college experience at home was consistent with the other students. Although Mario and I do not have a close relationship, he admits that simply seeing the work that I have done on campus influenced his success.

Jasmine also shared how her sorority's advisor played a significant role in her success while attending college.

\_\_\_\_\_ is in the health department... If it's just like a personal issue, she's just there to listen, and she has the greatest advice on everything. Julia helped me just clear everything out... "Where can we go from here?" Helping me map out what I can do. I think that the main thing that she taught me was just to stay focused and stay motivated... I felt like, "what am I gonna do? How am I gonna do this? I can't go to work, but I need to go to work because I need the money, but I have to go to school, too."

Juan viewed his advisor as being instrumental in his success. He stated, Mike is an excellent dude. So I think that's the way – when I see our university, I see \_\_\_\_\_. My advisor has been a great help. I think that – I think I wouldn't have been able to navigate through the system without his help. I think he has done a great job.

The findings of this study reveal that the success of the students is a collective experience and not an independent endeavor. The participants identified a network of support that they relied on which included their peers, professional staff and faculty on the campus. Whether participants addressed one individual or several, their success was influenced by others on campus. Students in the study repeatedly disclosed that their success was contingent on others' support.

### Embracing Academics

Many participants talked about the importance of their academics. This particular dimension of success includes the sub-themes of grades matter and graduating and learning in and outside of the classroom.

### *Grades Matter and Graduating*

Participants made several general observations about their academic standing. Participants frequently spoke to academic standing (e.g., not receiving lower than a C on a paper or exam, being a straight-A student, keeping a 3.0 GPA or better, making the dean's list for their college, doing well overall in course work and examinations and pursuing a double degree).

Although students identified a number of positive experiences, some students struggled at times academically. Tish spoke about her experience of struggling academically and turning herself around by excelling within one academic year.

I brought my GPA up from a 2.6 to a 3.2 in one year. I think to me that's – to be happy in school and to be able to be successful in my major and to love what I do and to still get good grades.

Kristie noted as well that she did gain knowledge and is satisfied with her academic standing. However, she commented that she wishes she could have done better. "In terms of—academically I feel like I could've been a little bit more proactive in trying to do better in my classes but I did learn a lot and am graduating with a 2.7 GPA and I am okay with that." Similarly, Jaime stressed the importance of keeping one's grades above par. He added,

I guess the most basic thing that was set before you is to know that you have to do well in school and you have to get good grades...As long as you do that, you're not gonna get kicked out of the university or anything or you're not gonna lose scholarships. So that was the major thing that I focused on to be successful, just as long as I'm getting good enough grades.

When asked about his academics, Mario also spoke to how he felt Latinas/os on campus find a community of peers within their major. From this sense of

community, he added how individuals feel connected to their field of study. In Mario's opinion, Latinas/os eventually "find their niche" in their colleges and programs. He stated,

Latinos, you know they find their little niche in these programs and they stay there. I feel that this institution...you know they have top programs in...They stay motivated because they are connected to their field. I'm gonna stay close to this because this is the only school that offers this program in the United States. So I, you know I did my research and was like, "You know what? I'm gonna stay with this program because I am guaranteed a job after graduation."

While Mario's emphasis was on his major, Anita eventually discovered the field most suited to her, after initially choosing the wrong major. She revealed how changing majors improved her academics.

I consider myself successful because upon switching majors, I improved my grades, and I really discovered something that I really like. I was initially caught up into something that, you know, I thought I liked, but then at the end, I wasn't enjoying it. And when I switched majors, I found out something that I really like and something that I enjoyed. Plus, I got good grades at it!

Ruben's view is that success is measured beyond receiving good grades, and extends to the connection to his area of study.

It may be too specific as far as getting a certain grade as opposed to connecting with your field and learning the material for one's own mastery in whatever area they're studying. Yeah. I think people may get so caught up in letter grades that they skip the, I guess the point of going through this. Of not only getting a degree so you can get a job

but connecting to your major/area of study and getting the knowledge so you can perform well in your career.

Several participants, when asked about their academic success, also noted that the fact they were graduating was a success to them. Students felt that in addition to their GPA or even double-majoring, graduating from the institution in itself was significant. This is reflected in the participants' responses. Anita mentioned "graduation and the ceremony itself" as a milestone. Debora stated, "I think that anyone who achieves like above a 3.0 could consider themselves successful. So I think anyone who gets a 3.0 is a milestone of a successful Latino student." Ruben shared,

I think it's especially important to succeed academically in your first year and definitely within the first at least two years here at the university. Most of my peers that I've seen that didn't complete their undergrad education left during the first or second year because they didn't – they may not have experienced immediate success. So they chose not to continue with their schooling. The first two years are crucial for Latinos specifically if they want to reach their ultimate success of graduation.

Tish also disclosed in regard to her success on campus that she was graduating in four years and viewed this as a major accomplishment. She stated,

I'm graduating in four years, and to me, that's a huge milestone. I've had to take 18-credit semesters and really bust my butt, but I think that for me, especially with the retention rate and all of that – and the statistics show that you're not gonna graduate in four years, and for me to say, no, "I am graduating in four years," that's very successful to me, just for me to be here and graduate.

For some participants, academic success was measured by their personal satisfaction with their grade point average, their class standing, connecting to their major or field of study, or even graduation. Regardless of how high or low their GPA was, they each expressed contentment with their academic progress. Other participants noted accomplishments in course work and being a double-degree seeker, and some indicated being recipients of an academic award or not receiving a below satisfactory grade.

Also related to grades mattering and graduating, participants revealed that knowledge attainment was crucial for their success on campus. Several participants acknowledge their success is more than graduating from college and how knowledge attainment is a noteworthy indication of their success. Students revealed acquiring knowledge, learning how to navigate two cultures while attending the institution, and learning about one's roots and not forgetting about who you are while in college as important to their success.

In Juan's case, he disclosed his gratitude for being challenged to think differently than high school. He shared his appreciation for his college experience.

The understanding that you have after having a higher education is pretty broad from what I came in with from high school. Learning more concepts, getting involved in what it really takes to have a higher education, to be challenged, to think differently, to view things from different points of view, to understand others as well, to respect others' points of view, and to work with others as well. So I think I've learned to do all those things thanks to the education I've gained.

Alvaro continued by asserting how he had to navigate two cultures as a college student and how this was a challenge for him. He affirmed,

I'm navigating two cultures, and navigating yourself as not academically successful – and then finally becoming academically successful, you have many different levels of self-esteem. You have academic self-esteem where you are trying to gain and understand the course material. And then you have personal self-esteem. There are many different levels of just feeling good about yourself. And academically, when I started excelling, I started feeling really good about myself when I finally got it [the course material]!

Juan also spoke about the importance of acquiring knowledge and understanding one's culture and heritage. He touched upon the issue of successful Latinas/os, who, having "made it" (i.e., graduated from college and have a successful career), have forgotten about the Latina/o community. He stated,

We all have to be reminded where we come from and keep our roots in the back, because it plays a big role, I think, for the community and for you as an individual...I've seen a lot, those that have succeeded sometimes tend to forget where they're coming from. And it's something that really hurts me, to see people hold an office in Congress or people in general, when you see lawyers, when you see Latinos, don't really connect with the Latino community. It really hurts sometimes to see someone, a Latino that has succeeded and forgets the community.

### *Learning In and Out of the Classroom*

As participants were asked about their learning that was taking place in and out of the classroom, students responded to the experiences they gained on both fronts.

Participants talked about learning both in and out of the classroom. This is expressed by Jaime.

I think that a lot of times I accidentally ran into a lot of these good learning opportunities in and out of the classroom by signing up for a class that just was part of my core requirement or by going to certain events without even really knowing what they were going to be. I accidentally ran into a lot of these things, and I think that— knowing that those opportunities are out there kind of engaged me. And I started looking for more opportunities and I started taking my — the education part more seriously.

As Jaime spoke to how his education transcends the classroom environment and into the campus community, he also discussed his experiences learning outside of the classroom.

The primary reason you come to college is to learn and I feel like I'm learning a lot in and out of a classroom. So at the same time I'm getting the adequate grades to be able to graduate. So I've taken a lot of classes—I'm not just taking them to take them. I'm taking them because they interest me and they're part of my major...And I'm involved a lot outside of the classroom, both in learning a lot of different things and...teaching other people about new things, about different things that they may not — they may not have known about before.

When speaking to her about outside-of-the-classroom learning she gained, Anita spoke to how she would notice and appreciate that other Latinas/os around her were succeeding on campus. She revealed,

I think that good things could come from especially those people, those college students that I have seen, like my classmates that are Latinos as well. I have a lot of respect for them because I can see they've been successful, they are good students, and they do all the things that I have previously mentioned [regarding success].

Jasmine also spoke to her outside-of-the-classroom involvement contributing to her success. She shared,

I was kind of surrounded by a group of girls that were like me in terms of very dedicated, wanna do better in their school work, and at the same time be involved with different activities that are going on on campus or actually putting on these activities. So, I can definitely say that LTA [Lambda Theta Alpha Sorority, Inc.] has helped me to excel in just finding out about—more about myself and being able to learn how to study and just different aspects and strategies that I could use to excel.

Overall, participants spoke as to how their academics contributed to their success while attending the mid-Atlantic institution. Participants also viewed their success more than graduating from the institution. Participants shared that attending the institution caused them to learn and think in new ways and that they were academically challenged.

#### Desire to Be Successful

Self confidence, desire, drive, motivation, belief in self, and peace within one's self are a few of the responses that participants used to describe the "desire to be successful" dimension. Students frequently articulated that one's success comes from within and that this was necessary to achieve success on campus. Several participants discussed the need for Latinas/os to want to succeed and have an understanding of

one's sense of self and own dedication. This dimension of success also includes the sub-themes of understanding of self, one's dedication and persistence, and plans after graduation and getting your career and financials in order. Alvaro asserted,

So I feel that one of the main factors that I saw in my own personal success was when I was able to believe in myself as well as come to peace, in terms of who I was as a cultural entity on campus. And I feel I gained a lot more because I wasn't afraid to, at the same time, challenge my White peers, or at the same time, agree with them. And sometimes I felt that pain, that anger sometimes came out towards my other peers.

Alvaro confessed that his success did not take place until he came to the self-realization of peace with who he was as an individual. Understanding who he was as a "cultural entity" led to his belief in himself. When asked about her success on campus, Debora spoke to her experience as an individual who promotes self-confidence and how this was important to her performing well academically and graduating. She declared,

Yeah, you have to want something. If you don't - you've got to want it. You've got to envision that you already have it and I think when you have those two factors, it's like, you know, the saying goes. If you can believe it, you can achieve it. And I think people really have to believe in themselves as well...So I believe it and I tell myself that I am going to get that A and I get my A...You have to believe in yourself and be confident.

On a similar level, Jasmine advocated for one to have the drive and desire to succeed in college. She suggested,

You have that drive and that desire, like you need that... Without that, you know, if you don't know what motivates you... I think you won't be as successful as you could be because you're just gonna be like doing it for somebody else, so it's just like you kind of don't care. If you don't want to do it, there's no reason not to. But I think –motivation and drive, like all of that. Without those, you really won't be able to do anything.

### *Understanding of Self*

Also connected to the desire to be successful dimension is an understanding of self. Gaining an understanding of self was a significant factor related to this dimension of Latina/o student success. Participants noted that such an understanding of self often took place through their involvement with organizations and acknowledged that self-exploration during such involvement had been instrumental in attaining success while in college.

Becoming involved and holding various leadership positions, and their interaction with peers and other campus leaders as well as campus personnel, provided a platform for self-exploration and understanding. Kristie declared,

I am happy that I was involved and not just a bookworm. It is because of my leadership roles that I gained a better sense of who I am as a Latina and a soon to be professional woman.

Alvaro offered another example of an understanding of self. He indicated, I came to some understandings about who I was and my identity, and applied that to my success in college. Initially when I had got to college, I knew that this was going to be a tough transition period but I viewed it as an opportunity for growth.

Alvaro continued by sharing, in his opinion, that successful Latinas/os must believe they are successful in order to reach success.

It comes down to, I think, everyone needs to believe in themselves and people to believe in them. It doesn't matter what race you are. As a human, you need someone to believe in you. But when you're a minority, you really need more belief. And you need belief in yourself too. And I think a lot of times, we just don't.

In other accounts, participants discussed their personal motivation and succeeding on their own as a means to their success on campus. Kristie revealed, "my self-motivation just to be successful and just to complete college. I think that helped me a lot in terms of just wanting to succeed. And I think that helped a lot in just getting back on track and succeeding on campus." Juan also added, "I think the desire, the desire to succeed, the desire to accomplish what others have not been able to because whether they didn't have the opportunity to do so or because they didn't want to, for whatever reason, they did not." Debora and Jasmine disclosed that they had to "succeed by themselves" because in many instances there were no individuals to whom they could turn for assistance. Debora stated, "I had to do it on my own." Jasmine declared, "Besides myself, who else was I going to turn to?"

Important to the understanding of self sub-theme is that participants discussed that their success on campus was attributed to their own understanding of who they were as a college student and as an individual. Through self-exploration to possessing the desire to succeed and feeling they had no one else to look to, understanding of self was a significant factor in their success.

### *One's Dedication and Persistence*

Also associated with the desire to be successful dimension is one's dedication and persistence. Several participants recalled how their dedication and persistence was an important element to identify as a successful student and to graduate from college. Anita suggested how she had to be persistent in order to succeed at the mid-Atlantic institution, but commented that some students around her would simply give up when times were challenging.

I could see it in myself. I'm persistent...Some of the people would just give up, and I didn't want to do that. They [Latina/o students] just have to be persistent and go for it...so I seriously think that's a point, you know.

Mario commented about his own persistence when revealing he was faced with an important family matter during his first year in college.

I think it was just more of me just being resilient...I remember my freshman year – and I think that's what helped me too. Like when my sister was diagnosed with cancer. Like they found a tumor in her. So, you know that hit the family hard. So, you know when that happened like that actually helped me put things in perspective. Helped me, you know make sure I put enough time on everything. Make sure I put time and effort in the family. So it's more of me just doing it. There was really no practice. It was just me knowing what I had to get done in the short amount of time there is in a day. And just making sure I spend enough time on everything. And knowing what is more important.

Juan related his experience as a student who was dedicated to giving back to his community and the gratification he gained. He believed that his dedication to his

community was a positive element that contributed to his success on campus. He added,

At least for me, I have the desire to give to my community and the ones in my community. Once again, I'm referring to the Latino community. Maybe what it's lacking, maybe what it needs, so maybe someone else with a different perspective or an extra mind to work with the community. I think that might be a reason.

Anita also disclosed that she had to "suffer" in order to recognize personal success as well as to "sacrifice" a great deal to learn how to be a successful Latina college student. She stated, "By suffering. I would say by suffering and the sacrifices that I have made." She continued,

I've also noticed one quality that I do possess – it's persistence. So I think if you – like if you strive for something that you want, that's one tool for being successful. If you, you know, how is it said? You have to dedicate yourself.

As participants shared about the role of their dedication and persistence on campus, Alvaro suggested that his desire to become someone greater added to his success on campus. He revealed,

I think, for me at least, it's the desire, once again, the desire to be someone. The desire to be better than someone else. Like I said, you have to be, I think, in certain times in life, you have to be selfish and say, "You know what? I can do better than Juan." Or, "I can do better than Juan and maybe help Juan once I'm up there where I want to be."

### *Plans After Graduation and Getting Your Career and Finances in Order*

Since all participants were merely weeks away from graduation during data collection, several students discussed their plans after graduation and the importance of having an understanding of what they would like to do for a career. They spoke about graduating and having plans after graduation as motivation for succeeding on campus. Participants shared post-graduation plans – graduate or professional education and/or employment and even relocation. Several students shared they were going to attend graduate school immediately following their baccalaureate degree or soon after, had already secured employment, relocating to another area, or were in the process of locating employment.

Students recognized that graduation was in fact a dimension of success for them on campus, but it was quite interesting to observe how participants spoke of their plans for post-graduation. Jaime spoke of his experience among peers and other student leaders. He declared how perceptions of success were not just employment or financial rewards. He said, "I think Latino students at the university as a whole would perceive success as just graduating from college and getting that degree."

Participants shared graduate and professional education plans varying from relocating outside of the mid-Atlantic area to staying with their current employers as a means of success. The desire to be successful dimension also related to the importance of getting one's career and financials in order.

Tish spoke about the importance of choosing a major that is going to be financially lucrative; specifically, how Latinas/os choose a field of study that will prepare them to attain financial security. She stated,

I feel like because a lot of Latinos come from families that aren't well off, and they're trying to make as much money as possible, to get a degree that will make them as much money as possible. I feel like

that's why a lot of Latino students are engineering majors or business majors and all of that, I feel like because they come from families that aren't well off, and they're trying to make as much money as possible, to get a degree that will make them as much money as possible.

Mario also advocated for having a good job lined up after one graduates from college. He added that one's success is also dependent on obtaining employment. He asserted,

If you don't graduate and have a good job after you're done with school then you're not successful. And if you're not getting paid well you're not successful. As a soon-to-be graduate, I think that's the perception of success for us. You know unfortunately that's the way it is. Like they kind of, you know especially me when I was, you know began looking I said, "Man I gotta get that good job. I gotta, you know I gotta get that money." That's what's important, you know.

While financial gains and employment opportunities were regarded as important in the perception of success, as Jaime noted, there is more than just money and career after graduation.

#### Latina/o Students' "Latino Center"

This particular dimension is identified as students possessing a "Latino-center." Participants spoke to the need to understand who they are as Latinas/os, as a community, and even giving back to the community and educating others about Latinidad. Several students stressed that successful Latina/o students must remain cognizant of their culture and heritage and maintain their cultural identity. Alvaro stated,

You have to be at peace with who you are, in terms of as a cultural body. I'm seeing it [success] from my cultural lens. It has a definite point. It's definitely saying something about I am successful here. I came to understand that these things were my culture, the ways of communicating through other cultures, and especially my culture – which is not what professors teach you. And actually, sometimes it came to the point where – you know sometimes when I am at \_\_\_\_\_, I would not defend my cultural body and identity. I would not. I would say, "No. This is who I am." And I didn't understand what I was doing. I was defending my cultural identity.

Kristie commented, "it is important that a Latino does not forget his or her – like their heritage, or always is proud of her culture when they are on campus."

Debora spoke about one experience she had when she held an executive board position for the Latino Student Union. She proactively wanted to educate Latinas/os about their culture and heritage but she also intentionally wanted to educate other student organizations about Latinidad (i.e., Latinaness/ness). Debora also disclosed,

When I became the vice president of culture and programming I managed to, I mean, beyond culture and getting others - not only exposing Latinos to their culture and others to Latino culture but exposing Latinos to other cultures too. We co-sponsored an event with the Filipino Cultural Association and I made an effort to not only attend my own, you know events with the Latino Student Union but also with the Filipino Cultural Association. Like, we formed a bond. Until this day, I still have a lot of friends that are in the Filipino Cultural Association and I also promoted the Filipino Cultural Association events and got other Latinos to go to their events.

When asked about their sense of who they were as a Latina or Latino student, participants shared the various ways they attributed their sense of Latina/o identity on campus. As Ruben disclosed, he believed that this is a characteristic that Latina/o college students should maintain as successful college students. He advocated, Latino success also has to do with maintaining certain Latino-center. And using this institution and the resources it has for pursuing one's own edification within one's own culture and to pursue your own education and knowledge of your own culture and yourself. I think it has to do with campus involvement and specifically within the Latino organizations.

Ruben eloquently described Latinas/os as people who are involved and give back to the Latina/o community. He also suggested that Latinas/os should simultaneously pursue an understanding of their culture and heritage in the process.

Possessing a "Latino-center" influenced participants' success on campus. Although students did express the value of learning about one's roots and history, equally important was educating other campus students about Latinidad.

### "Our Situation is Not the Same"

Although similarities exist among college students at this institution, the Latina/o experience on campus is distinct. This particular dimension is the phrase that characterized dimensions of Latina/o college student success: success is contextual, institutionally based, and varies from individual to individual, and is echoed in Anita's words. Also associated with this dimension is the sub-theme "different factors for Latinos [as]." As Anita stated, "our situation is not the same." She asserted, Our [Latina/o students] situation is not the same as other students...we are different and most of us have to have besides a school life, a family

life, and we also have to be more like – most of us might have full-time jobs. So that's another difference from other students...

When asked about her experience, Tish also disclosed,

I didn't grow up eating tortillas, I grew up eating platinos and pacalitos and things like that...I was like I don't know what I can identify myself as? I'm very – I consider myself Nuyorican. That itself is hard, and I know that a lot of Caribbean Latinos feel the same way, because Black – they are Black Latinos who are *pregueña* or *pregueño* which is like a color and things like that are issues we face while we are [on campus].

Ruben revealed how his experience was unique during his tenure on campus. He spoke to how some Latina/o students may experience obstacles such as financial hardships that may not be faced by the other students. He added,

While certain things can be attributed to the group such as you know having things in common such as maybe financial difficulties or feelings of alienation on campus. It varies greatly from person to person. And it has to be taken into account that you can't assume things about a Latino student simply because they're Latino. And that Latinos are very, very different from person to person, from group to group, from subgroup to subgroup and so on. I think it differs as far as there are certainly some people that encounter fewer obstacles and there are certainly individual differences as far as motivation and innate ability.

#### *Different Factors for Latinos[/as]*

Participants commented that multiple factors mitigate Latina/o college students' success, and students admitted that there was simply not enough time to

Alvaro stated, "there are all of these different factors for Latinos [to achieve success] – especially culturally!" Jasmine shared,

Everyone's different, you know. Every person's experience is different, but no matter what, I think like the core struggles are the same... It's just like we all have the potential to be successful. I know like people who I know just because they're struggling doesn't mean that, you know, they're horrible students. Like I think it's so wrong like to base a student based upon like, you know, there's so many other issues, and you can't say that a student's not gonna succeed because they have a low GPA or because, you know, they're not meeting certain requirements. They are doing their best.

Another example is when Tish spoke about her experience with identity and immigration as well as combating racism. She disclosed,

A lot of the issues that Latinos face are not the issues that I faced, and a lot of issues I faced in my family in getting people out in the city, having the mentality that the government has been putting in our heads for several years. Coming from the part of the state I came from, combating racism and discrimination, because people don't know. They automatically assumed that I was Mexican. They automatically assumed that I was an immigrant. They were shocked I could speak a word of English. In fact, they were shocked I can't speak a word of Spanish. For me, at least the focus of what the Latino issues here [on campus] are, it's not necessarily what all Latinos face. There are so many things going on...

Participants identified pertinent factors of which the institution should remain cognizant. These ranged from family involvement, obligations and understanding,

working more than 20 hours a week and attending classes full time, remaining mindful of one's culture and heritage, issues of immigration (for their family and friends), socio-economic status, different factors for U.S. Latinas/os and international Latinas/os, in-state and out-of-state Latinas/os, identity issues, and grappling with prejudice and racism.

### Understanding the Campus's Latina/o Community

Another dimension identified was the importance and need of understanding the campus's Latina/o community. As students reflected on why some Latina/o students were succeeding on campus and others were not, participants spoke of the lack of understanding on the part of the institution. Several students spoke to the within-group differences that exist for Latinas/os on campus. These ranged from race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and levels of involvement, to plans after graduation, to name a few. Participants stressed that Latinas/os on campus are not a homogeneous group and it is a major challenge for the institution to fully understand the complexity of the Latina/o student community. Students commented that "there is not just one Latina/o community on campus" and there is a Latina/o presence on campus that is financially well off, with the means to finance education, while some of their Latina/o peers on campus are not as well off and are struggling to finance their education. Jaime expressed his concern,

For the lower SES group, I think that hard work is a major factor. Like it's kind of – it's the common denominator between everybody, and you have to have that. And I feel like a lot of people that do have hard work still don't make it... Whereas in the higher SES community, they don't necessarily need the hard work as much, because they have a lot to fall back on because if they don't do so well one semester, you know,

if – if you have a student whose parents are trying to pay their tuition and they don't have to pay for it themselves. They have their family's money to help them out...

Alvaro commented regarding the importance of understanding the community. I just feel like one of my main issues is that it's kind of identifying who the Latino community here on campus really is...if you look at the Latino community on campus, you wouldn't – if you looked at the numbers versus what you see in every day life, you would – like the two don't necessarily match. So just aware that other people are and what kind of people they are...I feel like a lot of those differences could be – could be researched.

Tish also stressed the heterogeneity of Latinas/os on campus. She shared how issues that some Latina/o students may face are not necessarily the issues that the entire community is struggling with. She affirmed,

I think that definitely, how – for me, at least the focus of what the Latino issues here are, it's not necessarily what all Latinos face. For me, I think definitely like – I don't know. I know like within – I can only speak from like the Caribbean Latino perspective of where you have different identities, so before, I was like I don't know what I can identify myself as, because I do not consider myself White, I do not consider myself Latina, and I do not consider myself Black.

Tish continued by mentioning, "I feel like with all the diverse races and cultural within the Latino community, different groups that are on campus, it would be kinda hard to just target one group of Latinos."

Participants addressed the importance of understanding the Latina/o community on campus as multidimensional. Given the heterogeneity of the

institution's Latina/o community (e.g., generation status [immigration and college educated], ethnicity, and class), participants noted that the institution must have a better understanding of Latinas/os on campus in order to increase student success.

### Barriers and Challenges Facing Latina/o College Student Success

Participants spoke throughout the data collection process about the barriers and challenges that students experienced in attaining success on campus. Although the purpose of the study is to examine dimensions of Latina/o college student success, when asked about the impediments to their success on campus, participants spoke freely about the barriers and challenges that their community faced.

The researcher identified the following sub-themes that students identified as hindering Latina/o college student success: one's finances and employment situation, family issues and obligations, pre-college development, and lack of understanding of the Latina/o community.

#### *One's Finances and Employment Situation*

Participants frequently spoke to their current financial and employment situation as a major barrier that they encountered. In many instances, students gave vivid examples of how they struggled financially to make ends meet during college, often while working multiple jobs. In Jaime's case, he spoke to his frustrations that are facing Latina/o college students. He asserted,

Specifically, I feel that financial troubles are plaguing the Latino community. One of the big things is the money and not being able to finance school. I know I talk to a lot of Latina and Latino students all the time and – and I experience a lot of them dropping out of school because they don't have the financial resources to come to school or they're misinformed about, for example, the payment terms on their

loans or things like that. That's a problem that whether it's the major issue with some people, it's an issue at some level. So for some people it is the issue that kinda tips you over the fence and for other people it's just – it's one of the underlying issues that – that can help you pretty much not succeed. So I think that's the major issue.

When asked about her financial and work situation, Jasmine added her sentiments dealing with school as well as the struggles she faced at home. Jasmine expressed her frustrations,

When you're overwhelmed and stressed out, you're broke, and you can't afford to pay for school. That's a big thing – financial aid, too. I didn't get any financial aid to come to this university because, you know, my parents make a reasonable amount. They [the institution] don't see that my dad was paying for my school and for his brother's school, my uncle is a graduate student here at \_\_\_\_\_ in aeronautical engineering. So like my dad's helping pay, but they don't see that on – you know, 'cause he's not his dependent. They don't see that...it's like, it's unfair, and thankfully, we were able to get loans, or I was able to like work with my parents, and I contribute to that. If you can't afford to pay for school, you can't come here.

Ruben also spoke to the financial concerns facing Latina/o students, which he believed was the greatest challenge and struggle for the community. He addressed his frustrations as well,

I think financial obstacles may be the biggest thing. Whether it's having enough money to continue with their college education or having to work to fund their own college education. Having financial

obstacles to overcome en route to gaining a college education is the biggest thing for us [Latina/o students].

Tish's struggle was similar. She spoke to her challenges paying for her tuition.

She asserted,

I think that definitely the money is a huge thing of how am I gonna pay for school, how am I gonna pay for school? How am I gonna hustle to pay for classes and then – because I've, I mean – like I know my parents said that they'll pay the first two years and then I have to pay the last two years because they can't afford it. Then you wind up having to take less classes, or you do bad in classes because you're trying to pay for them and you don't have the time to actually do that. I just got off of financial block today, so (*Laughter*). Financial block is when you cannot register for classes next semester because you owe the school money. Definitely, I think that finances are a huge thing, a huge thing for Latinos.

Kristie also discussed the financial challenges that plague Latina/o college students. When asked about the barriers that successful Latina/o students are faced with, she noted,

I feel like many times—it's also that, and I think it has to do with just financial reasons. It might be that they're not able to—'cause I had—I lived on campus for two years, and then, I—now I live back at home, and it was just saving me money – loans and money that my parents had to pay, and I really didn't wanna put them in that situation, and so, sometimes just that or family issues and concerns, like health concerns. That could be it as well if they're not graduating.

In addition to being faced with personal money issues or tuition, Mario revealed that he had to assist his family to make ends meet while attending college. He disclosed,

It goes back to the financial. Yeah. Like honestly we, you know be it that we don't come from families that, you know are privileged, the financial, you know financials always comes into play. And then say your family – say one of your family members gets sick. Like fortunately like my dad didn't get sick until I graduated. So and I was able, I'm able to help him now, you know put in my time and effort, you know when it comes to like yeah after work I know I have to go help him out...And the financial part like your family can't eat if you're not making money. And if you're a source of income in the family, you know and they depend on you for that income then you know you're gonna have to drop school. One has to give, you know. Family definitely is not gonna give and, you know what's gonna give is school.

Students overwhelmingly raised the challenge of working beyond 20 hours a week. Students referred to the obligation of working while attending the institution. The participants noted that working and attending college is challenging, yet a necessity for their families and themselves. Of the ten participants, nine currently worked (the one student who did not was currently in between jobs and searching for employment. Juan revealed,

I was working with a courthouse as a case manager/probation officer. It was a very good job, very good opportunity...it was a great door that opened to me, and I went ahead and took it, and it was a great opportunity. I did it for three years and then I had to actually resign that position in order to finish school by December because I was going

to school part time and working full time. So I went to them after three years and told them, "Listen, I want to go back to school full time and maybe work with less hours, or maybe a couple days off here and there." And they couldn't work with my school schedule, so they decided that – they wanted me to change my school schedule... It's been great, but at this point, I think I'm not gonna do that. I'm gonna stick with my school plans. And they said, "Well, then I guess we're just gonna have to let you go." I said, "if that's the case, that's gonna have to be it."

When asked about their work load, participants shared an array of responses. Typical responses were reflected from Jasmine who added, "You have a lot of Latino students who have two jobs. They have – or they work like 40 hours a week, plus doing school full-time, that most other students don't ever have to do." Mario also mentioned, "I always had a job as a undergrad. I never went without a job. So I think that was also one of the things that was kind of difficult for me to, you know juggle the job, work – I mean job, school..." He continued, "We work our butts, you know, in school. We work, you know outside of school keeping that job, you know keeping that part-time. Making sure we pay our bills and helping out our families."

### *Family Issues and Obligations*

Although participants spoke intimately about the role their family and/or parents played in their success on campus, students also addressed the issues and obligations that their families had imposed on them. As students felt that financial issues and employment concerns were a norm for Latinas/os, participants shared their experiences as well regarding family issues and obligations while attending college. Typical responses that are reflective of this sub-theme are apparent from Anita who

noted, "their family wasn't able to help them academically...Latino parents, lack that." On a similar note, Debora added, "support that you need from your family, but you can't really get it because they don't understand because they've never gone through the process."

As Anita and Debora reflected on the lack of understanding and assistance from their family, Debora continued about the lack of understanding and support she received from her family. Additionally, she asserted that, from her experience, her White peers did not face a similar concern. She shared,

There's some support that you need from your family, but you can't really get it because they don't understand because they've never gone through the process versus, you know, a lot of White students who have college-educated parents, you know, they've gone through the process. They know what it's like so they can relate a little more and they can understand their children a bit more than Latino parents. So there's kind of like that disconnect between like, you know, Latinos who are attending college and their parents who have never attended college...Latino parents because they don't really know the process, they're not really aware of what college is like, they don't understand some things. Like, for example, if I told my mom well, you know, I want to do Peace Corps, she would say, oh you're crazy. Why would you do that? That's not going to benefit you at all. But then, you know, if you tell that to someone else who's, you know, more aware...they'd say oh, okay. Well, yeah that could definitely help you. You know, maybe when you go to law school it'll give you a different edge and, you know, my mom wouldn't see it that way.

In Tish's case, when describing the lack of understanding from her parents, she spoke to family obligations she was faced with. She disclosed,

Parents don't understand that their children need to be at school and that they can't study at home, that they – that they can't watch the kids – because especially I know lots of Latino students who have been the oldest in their family, and they pretty much raised their brothers and sisters. Their parents have to work a ridiculous amount of hours, so then they can't be at school...

As Jasmine reflected on a difficult period while she was attending college, she had to assist her family, specifically when her father lost his job.

...Like groups that don't have that like close knit, I mean there's a family, but it's not that close as I perceive Latino families. Let's just say if something happens, it's like, Yeah, whatever. Okay. It happened... But it's not to the point where you're gonna run there and be there to support them. Like when my father lost his job, I picked up a job to help my mom cover expenses. You know, I don't see other people doing that. I only see that happen within the Latino community, maybe because that's all my own personal experience. I'm not sure others have experienced that before.

### *Pre-College Development*

Participants also noted several references to the pre-college development that Latina/o students lack prior to attending the institution. Students talked about the importance of possessing some form of pre-college preparation. Kristie pointed out the lack of pre-college development and preparation for Latina/o students. She stated, "the schools they've gone to are not, you know, don't keep them – like give them

special preparation or like the preparation they need to attend this university." Debora also added, "a lot of Latino people come from like public schools, which, in my opinion do not adequately prepare you for college."

Students believed more Latinas/os would succeed at their campus if they participated in some sort of college prep program. Juan stressed how success begins prior to entering the institution; Latina/o students should begin preparing for college while in high school.

I think it should start in high school. Yes, we are doing a lot by going in high schools and telling them there are Latino affairs, there are Latinos here. We can do that, you can apply to different scholarships. But you get to a point where you don't find those sources anymore. No one's telling you about how to succeed at the high school level about how to succeed in college. It's like, if you don't look for them, you don't know about them. So I think that would be a reason why I think less Latinos are being successful on campus.

Kristie disclosed how she did not receive the education "foundation" in high school prior to arriving on campus and needed to work twice as hard to excel in her courses. She spoke to how she regrets not participating in any college prep at her high school. She stated,

I think it really has to do with the foundation in terms of how – when you come into the university. If you have the capability – the study skills, or if you have that basis for math, reading because it's very hard in terms of – when you write papers...I feel like if you're not really educated in high school, and you haven't had the basis for English or math, that you're gonna do—it's gonna be harder for you to excel in the classes that you take...I think a lot of Latinos and Latinas come from

different high schools that aren't as challenging, you know, academically challenging, and it does hurt when you come to the university, and you're kinda given all this information, and you don't know how to process it – or not really process it, but it's harder for you to catch on if you don't have that basis of education.

### *Lack of Understanding of the Latina/o Community*

Students also noted a lack of understanding that the institution had for the Latina/o community. Participants stressed that the institution must better serve Latina/o students yet struggled in this area because they felt the institution did not understand the Latina/o student body. Students indicated that this was an important element to assuring Latina/o success at an institution-wide level. This sentiment was felt by Mario who added,

This institution isn't knowledgeable or isn't aware of all the issues that are facing a Latino family or even a Latino student. I don't think professors understand that even in the school about us that we're very family oriented. Our culture is very family oriented. Like if something happens to your family that's, you know you run to your family. If you know your family is not making enough money to put food on the table then what do you have to do? You have to go to work because family comes first. So I don't feel like the professors and even administration are knowledgeable of that.

When asked about the institution's role in promoting success for Latina/o college students, Jaime stressed the lack of support towards the Latina/o community. He stated,

If anything else, maybe the lack of support from the institution...I think at more towards the institutional level, I don't think they've been doing enough for us. And I think that it can always be better to make us feel welcomed and that we belong too.

Alvaro continued by expressing the need for the institution to provide a smoother transition to campus for Latina/o students. He emphasized,

Help them adapt to the changes, especially at a huge state school...[the campus] needs to understand this kind of cultural disconnect that there is for Latinos on campus...I think then there will be a greater level of communication between the faculty and students, which sometimes cripples the student – the Latino success...I think that they [the institution] could do a lot more to break that...You [e.g., the institution] have to help them adapt to the changes, especially at a huge state school, where their professors are gonna be lost with some 34 – you know I mean some 300 students in one class. So I think there needs to be more of that. And I didn't see that much while I've been here.

As participants spoke to a lack of institutional fit, students spoke to how Latinas/os do not feel they "belong" on campus or to a certain extent, "not feeling welcomed" by other students and personnel. Mario spoke about the "disconnect" between the campus, the Latina/o community, and how he feels the institution does not understand the community. He stated,

I want the university to learn from that, yeah, we're, you know we have special needs. But all we're asking from you is to kind of open your eyes to the Latino students and, you know be it that they might not have the greatest, you know SAT scores but we do work hard and are dedicated. We are the most hardworking students here because we're

the ones that have to fight every day to make sure that we get that good grade.

Although the majority of participants were involved in various extra-curricular activities throughout their college years, students believed that the institution should do more to ensure that Latinas/os are successful at the institution.

The chapter's intent was to explore, identify, and analyze the experiences of the 10 Latinas/os at a large, public, research-extensive institution in the mid-Atlantic U.S. This section gave voice to the mid-Atlantic Latina/o college student experience by exploring and analyzing the dimensions of success of graduating Latina/o college students. The interviews were a means of addressing and organizing the identified dimensions of success to ultimately attend to the perception of success for graduating seniors at this institution.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What are the perceived dimensions of success and persistence for Latina/o college students attending a predominantly White, research-extensive institution? This chapter discusses the findings of the research and conclusions drawn. The purpose of this study was to determine dimensions of success for Latina/o college students by exploring the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students. Furthermore, the researcher sought to identify new and innovative approaches that ensure Latina/o degree attainment by analyzing Latina/o college student persistence from an angle of success. While the disparities in education remain, there is a need to better understand how Latinas/os succeed in degree completion. This study examined Latina/o college student success as a process (how students achieve success) versus an outcome (students' results from their success).

The chapter summarizes the eight dimensions of Latina/o college student success that were identified by the participants of the study and states some conclusions, describes how the findings are related to the existing research literature, and gives implications for policy and practice, limitations, recommendations for future research, and the researcher's final thoughts.

#### Overview

This study utilized intersectionality framework (Thornton Dill, 2001, 2004, 2005; Weber, 2001; Crenshaw Williams, 1993) as a lens to examine Latina/o college students attending a predominantly White, research-extensive, public institution. The findings of the study validate the assumptions upon which intersectionality is based because an analysis of dimensions of Latina/o success must take into account all possible perceived dimensions of difference when examining this community (B.

Thornton Dill, April 25, 2006, Personal communication). When analyzing historically marginalized groups, policymakers and higher education personnel must take into account one's race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Anderson and Hill Collins (2001) state,

Thinking about race, class, and gender need not entail thinking about all groups at one time. Rather, it means understanding the experience of any group in context...it involves discovering how race, class, and gender – along with factors like age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion – frame people's lives. The point is not just that people are diverse, as if that were a nice and interesting fact of life, but that race, class, and gender are fundamental axes of society and, as such, are critical to understanding people's lives, institutional systems, contemporary social issues, and the possibilities for social change.

(p. 3)

All 10 participants identified various dimensions of difference as graduating Latina/o students. According to the analysis, the original dimensions of difference (i.e., race, class, and gender) are consistent with Weber's intersectionality framework. All participants cited dimensions of difference as being a factor in their success on campus. I concluded that most of the eight dimensions of Latina/o college student success (being involved, the family's role, the role of campus leaders and mentors, embracing academics, desire to be successful, Latina/o students' "Latino-Center," "our situation is not the same," and understanding the campus' Latina/o community) generated from the participants are associated with Weber's five themes (see Chapter 2).

### *Contextual*

Throughout the analysis, participants addressed the context from their experience as graduating Latina/o students. Participants spoke to Latina/o heterogeneity at their institution, immigration and generational status (e.g., both college educated and nationality), how they have (or have not) been successful on campus, as well as transformations that they have gone through while attending the university. I concluded that participants described what the institution can do to foster and increase Latina/o student success on campus and focused outreach to their communities.

### *Socially Constructed*

Related to the contextual theme, dimensions of difference are socially constructed and are apparent within the dimensions of success. Again, all participants noted at least one dimension of difference contributing to their success. With a diverse group of participants, each of the dimensions of success illustrated Latina/o heterogeneity on campus (e.g. race, ethnicity, class, socio-economic status, etc). Although participants' experiences varied, their dimensions of difference were taken into consideration during the analysis and were salient within the eight dimensions of success for Latinas/os at the mid-Atlantic institution.

### *Systems of Power Relations*

As noted in the case description, the institution possesses a history of exclusion and segregation for communities of color. There are power relationships and systems on campus that are gatekeepers to the institution's resources. Participants referred to recent student movements designed to raise awareness for campus administration of the need for increasing outreach to Latina/o high school students, working with the office of financial aid, the hiring of a full-time advisor, the movement to create a U.S.

Latina/o Studies department, the importance of creating cultural space for Latinas/os as well as being admitted to the institution. It is concluded that these specific initiatives were direct attempts to expand access to the campus' systems of power and resources.

#### *Social Structural (macro) and Social Psychological (micro)*

Weber (1998) noted that individuals are both entrenched and situated within dimensions of difference that exist within multiple communities. Taking into account how the participants, on a personal level, were positioned on campus and were embedded within multiple communities (i.e., student organizations, family, peers, classroom, etc.) while attending the institution was salient. As participants spoke of the institution's Latina/o student body and its members, they stated that the students were coming from a diverse community that consisted of ethnicity, class differences, generational status, bilingualism, growing up in the barrio, attending predominantly Latina/o schools, and their geographic location. Throughout the eight dimensions, it is concluded that participants addressed at length how both the social structural and social psychological elements were significant to their success.

#### *Simultaneously Expressed*

Weber (1998) noted that dimensions of difference function concurrently within an individual's social situation. She continued by mentioning how such dimensions shape their identity and that how they experience a social interaction depends on their affiliation with both. The eight dimensions of student success are represented within Weber's five themes of intersectionality. Thornton Dill (2006) stated that scholars must be mindful of all potential dimensions of difference and how they intersect with one another. I concluded that participants identified numerous dimensions of difference and how such dimensions influenced their success. Students elaborated on

how their dimensions of difference simultaneously influenced their success on campus. The use of intersectionality as a framework authenticates the need to examine dimensions of difference for Latina/o college students.

The eight dimensions were addressed in the research question and the sub-questions. The ensuing section summarizes the study's findings and draws conclusions in relation to the research questions.

### Dimensions of Success and Some Conclusions

Participants noted a variety of dimensions of success while attending college. From the data analysis, I concluded that eight dimensions of success for Latina/o college student success were identified: (a) being involved, (b) the family's role, (c) the role of campus leaders and mentors, (d) embracing academics, (e) desire to be successful, (f) Latina/o students' "Latino Center," (g) "our situation is not the same," and (h) understanding the campus' Latina/o community. The most compelling statement and dimension from the participants was from Anita. Her words are the archetypical descriptor of the dimensions of Latina/o college student success. She stated, "our [Latina/o students] situation is not the same as other students...we are different and most of us have to have besides a school life, a demanding family life, and . . . most of us might have full-time jobs. So that's another difference from other students."

Prior to this study, one of my assumptions was that Latina/o college student success was affected by on- and off-campus factors, and student success was different between student communities. This notion was correct. From the participants' stories and experiences, I conclude there are some differences between Latina/o student success and the success of other students. Latina/o college student success may appear as common knowledge, yet, as the participants affirmed during their

interviews, success is a dynamic process and more than simply graduating from college. Participants experienced success as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional process.

The eight dimensions reveal a shared relationship among all students; when collectively analyzed, they portray dimensions of difference and success for Latina/o college students. The participants' experiences and eight dimensions indicated that their success was different from that of other students on campus, and that their success was savored in multiple ways (e.g., based on the influences of multiple personal, social, and contextual factors). In addition to Anita's statement, Alvaro stated, "...one of the main factors that I saw in my own personal success was when I was able to believe in myself as well as come to peace, in terms of who I was as a cultural entity on campus." Anita continued by speaking about dimensions of success, "it depends on the person, and I think it depends on the background or what the person wants." Mario also noted, "Just being an inspiration to younger Latinos is probably one thing that, you know I took great pride in doing..." Lastly, Tish mentioned, "I am graduating in four years, that's very successful to me, just for me to be here and graduate."

### *Strategies for Latina/o College Students*

Along with the dimensions of Latina/o college student success, participants spoke directly to strategies for other Latinas/os. As the being involved, embracing academics, the desire to be successful, and possessing a Latina/o-center dimensions address, from the analysis I conclude that students' strategies varied from participant to participant. They spoke of giving "words of wisdom" to other students as well as encouragement and guidance they received from family and/or parents, peers, or faculty and administrators. In Alvaro's case, he shared how words of wisdom were

one strategy to help him succeed. He stated, "try to get Latinos' confidence up, to believe in themselves because they don't believe in themselves. They're lost. They're culturally lost. They're not at peace with their cultural identity. They need this to succeed in college." In Jaime's case, he shared some guidance for other Latina/o students. He stated,

Academically, of course, would be graduating and having plans for what to do after graduation. Someone who is pursuing to achieve their goals, someone who is working on something for the better of himself, herself, and for the better of the community as a whole.

Debora also shared, "I think people really have to believe in themselves as well. You have to want something...You've got to envision that you already have it."

#### *Revealing Dimensions of Student Success*

According to the analysis, I concluded that success is multi-layered, multi-dimensional, consists of multiple definitions, and varies from Latina/o student to Latina/o student. Along with the eight dimensions, I concluded that there is not just one way for students to achieve success on campus. When asked how she achieved success, Kristie stated, "I think my experiences, my involvement, and I-that-that's helped me become a successful student." In Jasmine's case, she added, "the more people say, 'No. You're not gonna be successful.' The more I was like, 'No. I will be and I will prove you wrong, and I will graduate.' So I think it carries on from way back in terms of what will make you successful." Jaime spoke to the role of his family. He added, "I think that a lot of students attribute their success to their family and their family support. So I know that's a big part of mine."

In addition to the eight dimensions, I concluded from the analysis that Latina/o students experience success in multiple ways during college. Participants added that

success is a complex process for themselves and other Latinas/os at their campus. As the participants frequently alluded to, I concluded that their success is influenced by multiple on- and off-campus factors. Participants revealed that Latinas/os succeed on campus because of their "values," "specific individuals on campus who encouraged me to persist," "graduating and plans after graduation," "involvement on campus," "sense of belongingness," "giving back [to the community]," as well as "one's drive."

Given that the bulk of scholarly work on Latina/o college students emphasizes the Chicana/o and/or Puerto Rican/Boriqua experience, I assumed that factors would vary considerably from the mid-Atlantic Latina/o experience. This notion was incorrect. I concluded that there were only two factors from the research literature that *were not* highlighted in the discussion. Surprisingly, spirituality/religiosity and sexual orientation were not mentioned as influencing success. This does not mean that students did find spirituality/ religiosity and sexual orientation influencing success; it just might not have been applicable within the context of this study. Some of the factors mentioned from the participants were: La Familia, Identity Development, Finances, Living and Working (On and Off Campus), Peer Interaction, Mentorship, Campus Climate, Support Services, and Presence of Community on Campus (Peer Interaction and Involvement). Finances, family and parents, and involvement and leadership were significantly noted to influence Latina/o student success on campus.

### *Learning From Successful Latina/o College Students*

Higher education institutions may learn a great deal from the experiences of successful Latina/o college students. Beyond dimensions of success, I concluded that participants spoke directly to what they felt their campus and other institutions could do to facilitate Latina/o student success in the "our situation is not the same" and "understanding the campus' Latina/o community dimensions."

When asked what his campus could do to serve Latina/o college students, Jaime asserted, "I think they [the institution] do have a role, and so far I don't think they've been doing enough. And I think that it can always be better." Mario also emphasized, "I'm just asking them to be more aware. I feel that our situation is very unique." As Jaime and Mario stressed, Kristie also declared,

There has to be somebody there that knows the different problems that we face as a community to really understand and grasp, or to produce types of programs that would be of benefit to us, so if there were these type of programs, I feel like it would be great if there's a program in which there's a Latino leader that actually knows the different problems that we're facing.

Participants also addressed the timeliness of a study of this nature. They referred to the problem of the institution not meeting the needs of Latina/o students and felt that even though administration knows what to do to assist Latina/o students, participants say not enough is actually being done. I could not help but think about the necessity of qualitative research and students' voices, experiences, and stories in policy making; nor could I help but think about the need for policymakers and administrators to listen to students. The participants' stories and the richness and thoroughness of the data are evidence of the need for research on Latina/o college students, and even more, on how such scholarship gives voice to this community within the research literature. Lastly, participants expressed their gratitude for including their experiences and bringing to life their voices and journey on campus. They hoped that their stories would be heard by the university and help improve the conditions for current and future Latina/o students at their institution.

Participants also spoke directly to the mid-Atlantic institution by mentioning the need for an "increase in financial assistance," "understanding the 'cultural

disconnect' of Latina/o college students," "strengthening pre-college development," "understanding the campus' Latina/o community," "our community is diverse," "immigration is not always an issue," and "there are numerous within group differences on campus." As the researcher, I conclude that policymakers as well as administrators and faculty must listen more carefully to the needs of Latina/o college students.

### Relation to Existing Literature

There has been an increase in the student success literature (Allen, 1985; Braxton, 2006; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Ridges, & Hayek, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Padilla, 1999; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997; Padilla & Pavel, 1986; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, 2006; Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). The authors' work is evidence of the need to study student success rather than to work from a deficit approach. Starting with the early work of Walter Allen (1985) and Raymond Padilla and Michael Pavel (1986) who were trailblazers in this body of scholarship, the success literature has gained momentum. Additionally, due to the gradual widening of the education gap, there has been a considerable increase in the importance of success scholarship which leaves policymakers, scholars, and administrators asking the question: What works for Latina/o college students?

There are essential works within research literature that are relevant to Latina/o college students attending the predominantly White, research-intensive institution and their dimensions of success. The dimensions of success draw a parallel to the emerging success literature and are validated by this body of work. The following research confirmed all eight dimensions of Latina/o college student success. In the

case of Padilla et al. (1997), their work examined what students were doing "right" that led to degree attainment. Rendón's validation theory (1994) examined how institutional agents foster student development in and out of the classroom and affirm their potential to succeed. Swail et al. (2005) analyzed how Latina/o students navigate through the education system and flourish within postsecondary education; Swail identified factors that affect Latina/o degree completion. And lastly, NPEC (2006) charged an initiative on college student success to locate factors that affect success on different college campuses. The established literature and dimensions of success denote that success is contextual, varies by institution to institution and definition, varies from community to community (Perna & Thomas, 2006), and is multi-layered and multi-dimensional.

Participants in this study spoke frequently to their involvement on campus. They addressed that their involvement ultimately influenced their success on campus, often with multiple organizations and, at times, while holding a leadership role. As evident within the research literature, the findings from this study are consistent with this body of work. The findings are echoed in the work of Abrahamowicz (1988), who found that one's involvement with organizations is associated with an increased level of involvement within the entire college experience. In addition, Astin (1993) noted students' involvement enhances their learning which influences their persistence and success on campus. His work is consistent with the findings in that Latinas/o students who are involved with organizations are more integrated with the college experience. From this study we can learn that involvement for Latina/o college students can help understand why some Latina/o students are succeeding in college.

Closely tied to the participants' involvement was their interaction with their peers. This body of research is another area that is widely studied (Astin, 1993; Hernandez, 2000; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Pascarella, 1980;

Tinto, 1998). Both Nora et al. (1996) and Hernandez (2000) reported that an important support source for students while away from friends and family is the presence of a campus community, while Pascarella (1980) noted that a student's peer culture is a significant factor in their academics. As Tinto (1998) found, students' persistence and success increases as students interact with one another. Peer interaction and involvement reveal the importance of Latina/o college students becoming engaged in the campus community to their success in college. However, it is not clear from these data that students who were not involved would have achieved success on their campus.

Another factor that participants frequently spoke about was the role of their family. In numerous accounts, students asserted that their family and/or parents were crucial to their success on campus. As evident in this study, Haro, Rodriguez, and Gonzales' (1994) work found that family support is an important factor in the success of Latina/o students. Work by Cabrera and La Nasa (2002) found involvement as well as parental encouragement was also a significant factor in Latina/o success. Additionally, participants spoke to being successful for their parents and family. This was apparent in work by Hernandez and López (2004) who mentioned students often felt they "owed a debt" (p. 41) to their family and parents because their family would continue to struggle to make ends meet and wanted to assist them. The research literature around the importance of family and parents in Latina/o college students' experience is apparent in the findings of this study and as Hernandez (2002) mentioned, Latina/o college students found a stronger sense of *la familia* while they were in college.

From this study I concluded that parents and family are crucial to the success of this group of participants. The findings reveal the importance of family to Latina/o

college students. It is important for families to become more involved in their child's college experience and support the student's persistence to succeed.

In addition to student involvement and family/parental involvement, participants spoke of the importance of role models and mentors on campus. The finding of this study also revealed the value of role models and mentors to Latina/o college student success, which participants found significant in order to navigate through the college environment. However, it was not clear from the findings that the participants believed that staff and/or faculty sought out students or student groups.

As this study demonstrated, student interaction with faculty and other campus personnel is important to persistence (Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez & López, 2004; Lang & Ford, 1992; Parker-Redmond, 1990; Sedlacek, 1989). The findings in this study were also consistent with Sedlacek's (1989) work which found that college student success is more likely to occur for students of color if they locate a role model or mentor on campus. The findings also agree with the work by Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996). They found that Latina/o students who identify a role model or mentor have an increased chance to adjust to the college environment. The data exposed the importance of role models and/or mentors to Latina/o college students, which is essential for students to identify and build/strengthen rapport with campus personnel.

Throughout the analysis, students frequently mentioned that social and academic elements were crucial to their success. Moreover, participants spoke at length about how they embraced their academics. This finding is consistent with Tinto's (1993) work. To reiterate, his model found that both social and academic integration are fundamental to persistence while in college. Yet, it is important to note that while Tinto's work presumes students of color fully integrate themselves into the campus culture, Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) asserted this specific community, in

particular, Latina/o students, should maintain their cultural identity rather than fully assimilating into the campus community.

Understanding that academics (e.g., grades, major, and maintaining a specific GPA) and graduating from college are of great importance for Latina/o college students, we learn that more emphasis must be placed on these values. It is unclear from this study that Latina/o college students excelled in a specific major or maintained a certain GPA in specific courses they took while in college, or whether more Latinas/os were graduating from a specific field versus other fields.

The findings also revealed that participants spoke to their campus experience and the importance of their institution having an understanding of the Latina/o community on campus. From the data analysis, I conclude that the Latina/o student experience is distinct from other student communities and could benefit from better efforts to help this community to reach degree attainment. One salient example is when participants revealed that their financial challenges were barriers to reach success and they often had to assist their families while attending college. This finding is consistent with other scholars who have studied Latina/o college students and their financial situation (Abrona & Novy, 1990; Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Hernandez, 2000; Nora, 1990; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997).

Directly related to their financial challenges is students' current work situation. Participants spoke of having to work close to 40 hours per week as well as working multiple jobs while attending class and being involved. As evident from these data, I concluded that working and attending college are realities for Latina/o students. This conclusion is also supported within the research literature (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993; Rooney, 2002; Singley & Sedlacek, 2003). In addition, the findings from this study are consistent with a study by Hernandez (2000) who found that

Latina/o students experienced greater financial stress while in college. Students also discussed being faced with racism and/or discrimination. These data are consistent with several bodies of work examining campus climate and Latina/o students (Helm, Sedlacek, & Prieto, 1998; Hernandez & López, 2004; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Although participants spoke to the racism and discrimination they experienced, it is unclear how any specific actions directly affected their success while in college. I conclude from the analysis that understanding the climate for successful Latina/o college students may be useful in assisting the institution to better serve all students and make the institution a positive learning environment free of racism and discrimination.

As a final point, participants spoke of a number of factors that they believed were unique to the Latina/o student experience. As the researcher, I conclude that such factors are necessary to understand to better serve the Latina/o community and foster their success while in college. Furthermore, these data make known the fact that the Latina/o experience is unique and the community is a heterogeneous group. Students in this study wanted the institution to know that they were not all bilingual or recent immigrants to the U.S. or were academically at risk; rather, participants identified themselves as high achievers, bicultural, and often identified by their country of origin. This finding suggests that the institution needs to do a better job in getting to know and understand who the Latina/o student community is on campus, which may bring about a more welcoming and positive climate for Latinas/os and increase success on campus.

#### Implications for Policy and Practice

It is essential that policymakers and higher education personnel thoroughly understand the experiences of Latina/o college students to ensure their success within

postsecondary education. This suggests that policymakers and higher education personnel make a concerted effort to explore Latina/o student success, increase consciousness around dimensions of difference with which the students arrive at the university, and validate their life experiences as well as their academic and personal endeavors.

Several implications are raised from the study's findings. One suggestion is to *emphasize* and *promote* a culture of success for Latina/o college students. Such an emphasis on success defuses deficit thinking and modeling for Latina/o college students. Working with Latinas/os from an angle of success demonstrates that dimensions of success exist and in the end, degree attainment is possible.

The second implication from the study suggests that *actively* reaching out to the on-and-off campus Latina/o community would be helpful. Focused outreach includes increasing recruitment and campus visits (in and out of state), providing student support services and academic enrichment activities/workshops, promoting involvement and leadership opportunities on campus, and increasing collaboration efforts between local and community-based organizations and the institution.

Stressing the significance and role of parental and family involvement for Latina/o college students is important. This could take place through application workshops (e.g., college admission and financial aid), workshops aligned with the college experience, and the implementation of Latina/o parent associations and a Latina/o family weekend celebration.

The third implication suggests *informing* and *increasing* the funding sources for Latina/o college students in the means of grants and scholarships. Swail and associates (2005) advocate for a "link [between] the financial aid office with academic and social services to ensure that students are provided with a coordinated level of support that encourages continued enrollment and progress toward student goals" (pp.

24-25). There must be an increase in local, state, and federal spending on Latina/o students to ensure degree attainment for this community.

The fourth implication suggests *strengthening* the institutional investment/commitment to the Latina/o community. Reinforcing such an investment/commitment takes place by demonstrating and expressing the importance of the Latina/o community to the larger campus community. For example, include the Latina/o community in conversations regarding campus life, creating and implementing a U.S. Latina/o studies department, a campus curricular transformation projects which includes the "Latina/o experience," increasing the number of Latina/o scholars to speak on campus, a first-year and transfer orientation program in Spanish to focus on Latina/o students as well as administrative, faculty, and staff hires who have specific experience/research on Latina/o college students and development. Also, collaborating with off-campus/regional Latina/o-based policy organizations and cultural groups/centers and locating allies would demonstrate a strong commitment to Latina/o students on campus.

Fifth, it might be wise to *increase* the number of Latina/o decision makers on campus (e.g., policy makers, presidents, provosts, vice-president, deans, department chairs, and directors). Raising the number of such individuals creates not only leaders and high-level Latina/o decision makers, but creates mentors, role-models, and leaders within the academy.

A sixth implication would *emphasize and encourage* faculty mentoring, involvement, and engagement. Jasmine spoke to how specific staff and faculty on campus have been instrumental for the campus' Latina/o community through both mentoring and encouraging students to succeed. There needs to be a dedicated effort to recruit Latina/o scholars on campus to promote a rapport with Latina/o students, one that encourages mentoring and engagement of Latina/o students.

The seventh implication suggests *strengthening* the institution's support toward Latina/o student organizations and Greek-letter organizations. Several participants spoke to their involvement with multiple organizations and/or their involvement with a sorority or fraternity and how their participation influenced their success on campus. Although the number of Latina/o-based and Latina/o Greek-lettered organization has grown over the past five years, participants spoke highly of their campus organizations and the need for institution to strengthen its support towards student groups.

### Limitations

The following section addresses the study's limitations. One shortcoming is that the study was conducted on a single mid-Atlantic, public, research-extensive institution. Due to the study taking place on a single campus, the findings may not be generalized to other Latinas/os attending another campus. The inclusion of Latinas/os who attend community colleges, for-profit institutions, tribal colleges, Historically Black colleges and universities, other public, research-extensive institutions, private, and liberal-arts campuses may generate an array of other dimensions of success for Latina/o college students.

Another limitation is that the study did not focus on one specific ethnic group within the Latina/o community. Due to the heterogeneity within the Latina/o community, this study analyzed 10 participants who are part of a small Latina/o community located in the mid-Atlantic U.S. Again, this community is predominantly Central and South American with the majority Latina/o group tracing their roots to El Salvador. By pinpointing a specific Latina/o group, one must ask, would dimensions of Latina/o success vary? Would dimensions of success differ from Chicana/o college students and Boriqua college students, Guatemalan American students, Cuban American students or Peruvian American students?

A third and final limitation of the study is the guided journaling activity. This electronic mail activity was attempted to accommodate the participants' multiple learning styles and grant individuals an opportunity to review and describe a successful episode that they may have forgotten during their individual interview. Following their interview, participants were asked, via email, to write about one successful episode that they had on campus and review their interview transcriptions. Students were asked to respond in no more than a one-page reflection. Of the 10 participants, unfortunately, only five students responded. Due to the timing of the data collection phase being close to final exams and the end of the semester, participation in my study may have been an inconvenience for students preparing for finals, graduation, or job searching. In hindsight, I am grateful that 10 graduating seniors participated in my study; yet, more emphasis and significance could have been placed on the guided email activity.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Laura Rendón's remarks (2006) validate the need for scholars to include the voices and experiences of students of color. In addition, she promotes race, class, and gender as a unit of analysis for higher education research. She affirms my research by stating the need to reconceptualize success. Rendón's presentation confirmed that success is a complex process. Padilla (1999) also mentioned that scholars must critically examine what is working for Latina/o college students to reach degree completion.

College student success is a dynamic process that is multi-dimensional, multi-layered, and varies by student and institution. Further research examining and analyzing the dimensions of Latina/o college student success is required. Additional studies need to take into account the within-group differences of the Latina/o

community. Scholars, administrators, and staff must be cognizant of the dimensions of difference that Latina/o students are bringing with them to the academy. To restate, Latina/o students arrive at their institution with the following dimensions of difference: (a) race; (b) ethnicity; (c) socio-economic status; (d) language; (e) nationality; (f) gender; (g) geographic location; (h) generational status (i.e., U.S. citizen and college attendance); (i) religious and spiritual affiliation; (j) sexual orientation; (k) class standing on campus (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> year, transfer, etc); (l) current living situation; (m) family situation (e.g., single parent [mother versus father], both parents, number of siblings versus only child); (n) campus climate; (o) Latina/o community's history on campus and region; (p) field of study; (q) student's involvement on campus; and (r) employment situation. Along with the dimensions of difference and within Latina/o community differences, further research needs to utilize the intersectionality framework (Thornton Dill, 2001, 2004, 2005; Weber, 2001; Williams Crenshaw, 1993) to study underserved college students. Dimensions of difference cannot be solely examined to explore factors that are important to student success. College students, specifically students of color, arrive at their respective institutions with varying dimensions of difference. Practitioners and scholars must remain mindful of the dimensions of difference and how they intersect with one another to construct and have an effect on Latina/o college student success.

In conjunction with the incorporation of the intersectional frame, there is a need for further research of Latina/o success that addresses institutional type (i.e., research-extensive, community college, minority-serving institutions, liberal arts, and for-profit), geographic location within the U.S. as well as Latinas/os within particular fields of study. Would dimensions of success at a predominantly White, mid-Atlantic research-extensive institution warrant the same results at a community college in Arizona or California or at a Historically Black College or University or tribal

college? What about Latinas/os who are attending a small, liberal arts institution in New Jersey or Connecticut versus Latinas/os who are attending a large Hispanic-serving institution in Florida? Let us also consider Latinas/os in the STEM fields versus the humanities or social sciences. Would dimension of success differ?

As the numbers of Latina/o college bound students increase and access continues to widen at higher education institutions, implications for research on Latina/o college student success consist of increasing scholarship on the mid-Atlantic Latina/o student experience, utilizing intersectionality, the creation of a local model(s) of Latina/o student success, and remaining mindful of Latina/o heterogeneity and dimensions of difference. Further research may explore the different dimensions of success for other Latina/o-specific communities as well as African American, American Indian, and White student communities and analyze their similarities and differences to ensure college student success.

Finally, participants cited overcoming adversity and breaking barriers as a means to achieve success on campus. As Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, and Treviño's (1997) local model of student success described that successful students possess a knowledge base and execute certain actions to overcome barriers that enable their success within the academy, their model contains heuristic and theoretical knowledge, and is necessary to ensure student success.

In essence, what heuristic and theoretical knowledge do students have and attain in college to reach success? The methods used by Latina/o college students to overcome such adversity to reach success, and ultimately for degree attainment, requires additional research. What can institutions do to eliminate and/or overcome such adversity? How can institutions proactively prepare Latina/o students to develop heuristic and theoretical knowledge?

## Final Thoughts

What is college student success? This question is a hot topic, one that has gained recent momentum for higher education institutions, think tanks and policy firms, and scholars; however, there is no silver-bullet answer. I recall during my first semester in my doctoral studies reading Padilla and colleagues' local models of success and writing in the margins the question, "Why isn't a success approach used more often?" These two questions during my graduate education influenced my success throughout the dissertation journey and ultimately shaped this study.

There are obvious education gaps that affect the access of Latinas/os to the academy; whether in elementary, secondary, or post-secondary education, attention is required. The challenges and barriers for this community between high school and higher education remain constant. The issues surrounding the access and success of Latinas/os require a commitment by students, parents/families, faculty, administrators, key stakeholders and policymakers. Such an investment to the Latina/o community is multi-tiered, beginning with upper-level administration and trickling down to faculty, staff, and graduate assistants.

In attempting to utilize dimensions of success as a framework for college student persistence, institutional personnel must proactively infuse empirical research and recommendations that address underserved students' needs. Campus stakeholders must express and demonstrate the importance of the Latina/o community to the higher education community. Such an investment will serve as a commitment by the institution to empower and validate the Latina/o community and experience. Castellanos and Jones (2003) stated,

The shift of a paradigm [i.e., one that understands the dynamics of Latina/o college students within higher education] will establish benefits for a university [and the higher education community in

general], community, and society in general. However, change must be organization-wide and everyone needs to gain an understanding of the Latina/o experience in higher education" (p. 286).

To conclude, it has been a wonderful experience to speak with a group of dynamic and inspirational students. Their stories have provided an innovative approach examining student persistence; their stories have provided a glimpse into the lives of the mid-Atlantic Latina/o experience; their stories have provided an understanding of dimensions of success at a predominantly White, mid-Atlantic research-extensive institution; and their stories have provided a voice for mid-Atlantic Latina/o college students and other underserved students. Examining their experience as a process versus an outcome has challenged the persistence paradigm to examine college students from an angle of success. Higher education personnel must move beyond simply recruiting and retaining Latina/o students to nurturing, developing, and implementing cutting-edge approaches to foster a culture of success on campus.

To revisit Chapter One, I equate collecting, analyzing, and writing about the data collected from successful Latina/o college students with writing about myself. Writing authentically about successful Latina/o students, I have connected my history and experience as a successful Chicano college student with the graduating Latina/o students. My background and my undergraduate and graduate experience as well as the dimensions of success have enabled me to succeed at a predominantly White research-extensive, public institution as the 10 participants in this study have done. Listening to accounts of their journeys and experiences in college and plans for post-graduation has influenced the work in which I engage on a daily basis, and has served as encouragement to me as I embark on the next juncture of my higher education career.

Appendix A  
Participant Letter

Mark A. López  
1119 Main Administration Building  
College Park, MD 20742

DATE

Student's Name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Student's Name:

Felicidades on your recent graduation! I know this is a very exciting time for you as you are about to embark on new a new journey in your life.

My name is Mark A. Lopez and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Policy and Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education. The title of my dissertation is *Examining Dimensions of Latina/o College Student Success: An Analysis of Individual Persistence and Success*. The purpose of my study is to analyze Latina/o college student success at a predominantly White, research-intensive institution by investigating the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students.

There is a need to understand how Latina/o college students "make it" through the academy towards degree completion. In attempting to gain such a perception, I am interested in examining Latina/o college student success by conducting in-depth interviews of graduating seniors. I am in the process of identifying graduating Latina/o college students.

I plan to conduct my research during October-December 2006. Participants who agree to partake in my study must commit to one in-person interview and an electronic mail activity. The meeting times and dates will be based around your availability.

Please complete the attached *Research Intent Form* and *Demographic Survey* if you are interested in participating. Students identified to participate will receive a generous \$25 gift certificate from Target retail stores for their time.

My contact information (email, address, and phone number) is listed on the attached forms. If you have any questions regarding the study or your participation, please feel free to contact me directly.

**Please respond no later than DATE, 2006.**

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate and again,  
congratulations on your recent success!

Sincerely,

Mark A. López  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational  
Policy and Leadership  
Higher Education Program

## Appendix B

### Examining Dimensions of Latina/o College Student Success

Examining Dimensions of Latina/o College Student Success:  
An Analysis of Individual Persistence and Success

*Research Intent Form*

*Background:*

The title of my dissertation is *Examining Dimensions of Latina/o College Student Success: An Analysis of Individual Persistence and Success*. The purpose of my study is to analyze dimensions of Latina/o college student success at a predominantly White, mid-Atlantic public institution by investigating the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students.

I plan to conduct my research during July-December 2006. Participants who agree to partake in my study must commit to 1-3 interviews. The meeting times and dates will be based around your availability. Students identified to participate will receive a generous **\$25.00** gift certificate for their time.

*Willingness to Participate:*

\_\_\_ **YES**, I am a recent graduate of UM and am interested in participating in Mark A. López's study during the 2006 summer. (*If yes, please fill out the demographic questionnaire*)

\_\_\_ **NO**, I am not interested in participating in your study.

-----

*If you have responded YES, please complete the following.*

Name:

Address:

Phone Number (s):

[Home]

[Mobile]

Email:

---

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Mark A. López  
1119 Main Administration  
College Park, MD  
301-405-7211**

Appendix C  
Demographic Questionnaire

## Demographic Questionnaire

*Thank you for participating in this study! Please complete the demographic questionnaire to the best of your ability by circling your responses.*

- 1) In applying to Maryland you were a
- a. New student (non-transfer)
  - b. Transfer from community college
  - c. Transfer from another 4-year university
  - d. Other: (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What college are you enrolled in?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A. James Clark School of Engineering
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
  - \_\_\_\_\_ School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Arts and Humanities
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Behavioral and Social Sciences
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Chemical and Life Sciences
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Computer, Mathematical and Physical Sciences
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Education
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Health and Human Performance
  - \_\_\_\_\_ College of Information Studies
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Philip Merrill College of Journalism
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Robert H. Smith School of Business
  - \_\_\_\_\_ School of Public Policy
- 3) What is your current major?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Have you been a part of any special programs on campus? (Circle all that apply)
- a. Academic Achievement Program
  - b. College Park Scholars
  - c. GEMSTONE
  - d. Honors
  - e. Ronald E. McNair
  - f. Other (e.g. Upward Bound, Talent Search):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is your cumulative GPA?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Do you currently work?
- a. Yes: (please indicate where)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
- 7) Do you currently have a job lined up after graduation? If so, where?
- a. Yes: (please indicate employer)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
- 8) Did you ever stop attending the University of Maryland for one or more semesters since enrolled at UMD?
- a. Yes
  - b. No (Skip to number 10)
- 9) If you did stop attending UMD, what were the circumstances? (Circle all that apply)
- a. Financial reasons
  - b. Health concerns
  - c. Family obligation
  - d. Academic reasons
  - e. Personal
  - f. Other: (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 10) Did you receive financial aid this past year in the form of: (Circle all that apply)
- a. Did not receive financial aid
  - b. Loans
  - c. Need-based scholarship or grant
  - d. Non-need based scholarship or grant
  - e. Work-study
  - f. Athletic Scholarship
  - g. Other: (please specify)

- 11) Please indicate your citizenship and/or generation status. (Circle one)
- a. My grandparents, parents and I were born in the U.S.
  - b. My parents and I were born in the U.S.
  - c. I was born in the U.S., but my parents were not
  - d. I am a foreign born, naturalized citizen
  - e. I am a foreign born, permanent resident
  - f. I am on a student visa
  - g. None of these apply to me
  - h. My parents were born in US, but I was not
  - i. Other: (please specify)
- 

12) What is the highest level of education completed by your parents or guardian? (Circle one in each column.)

	<u>Mother or Female Guardian</u>	<u>Father or Male Guardian</u>
High School or less.....	1	1
Some college.....	2	2
Associates degree.....	3	3
Bachelors degree.....	4	4
Masters degree.....	5	5
Doctorate or professional degree (JD, MD, PhD)....	6	6
Don't know.....	0	0

13) What is your parent/guardian's occupation?  
Mother or                      Father or  
Female Guardian              Male Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

- 14) What is your current living situation during this semester?
- a. Live on-campus
  - b. Live off-campus (not with family)
  - c. Live locally with family

- 15) Are you the first in your family to attend college?
- a. No (skip to #17)
  - b. Yes

- 16) Do you have any siblings who have attended or graduated from college?
- 1. No (skip to #18)
  - 2. Yes

17) If you answered yes to number 15, please list your relationship with each sibling (e.g., brother or sister), whether the sibling is older or younger, and the college/university attended.

<u>Relationship</u>	<u>Older/Younger</u>	<u>College</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

18) What is the primary language spoken in your home?

\_\_\_\_\_

19) Please indicate the city, state, and county that your parents reside in.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20) What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other

21) Race (i.e., Black, White, Latino/a, Multi-racial, Bi-racial, American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander, etc.) Please be as specific as possible.

---

22) Ethnicity (e.g., Chicana/o/Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadorian, etc.) *Include multiple ethnicities if applicable*

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\*\*\*Thank you for completing the demographic questionnaire portion of the study.

Please remember to include the demographic questionnaire and consent form in the stamped envelope and mail by *DATE 2006*\*\*\*

Note. Adapted from Latina/o Access & Success Project, 2005

Appendix D  
Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

### **Introduction**

Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You have been selected to participate because your point of view and experiences on this campus are very important to this research project. I know that this is a busy time of the year and greatly appreciate your contribution to this project. This project seeks to better understand Latina/o college student success at a predominantly White, research-extensive institution. The interview is not a test, nor should it be viewed as a series of questions having right or wrong answers. I am interested in *your* perspective and insight. I want to know your opinion on these issues.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my study is to analyze dimensions of Latina/o college student success at a predominantly White, research-extensive, mid-Atlantic institution by investigating the experiences of graduating Latina/o college students. There is a need to understand how Latina/o college students persist through the academy towards degree completion. In attempting to gain such a perspective, the conversation will center on your success in postsecondary education, in particular how you have succeeded at the University of Maryland.

## **Guidelines**

Before we get started, I want to remind you that this interview will be taped. All the information that is shared in this room will be kept confidential. Information will be used for research purposes, but no specific identifying information will be used. Also, there are a few guidelines I would like to ask you to follow during this interview. First, there is no right or wrong answer. I am interested in your individual perspective and experience. Second, please speak from your own perspective or experience. Do not try to respond about how you think others think or feel. Finally, because we have a limited amount of time together, I may need to move a particular conversation along so that we stay within our allotted time together. Do you have any questions? Okay, let's begin.

Note. Adapted from Latina/o Access & Success Project, 2005

Appendix E  
Interview Questions

## *Interview Questions*

### **Warm-Up**

Tell me about yourselves (e.g., name, major, hometown, plans after graduation).

### **Questions**

1. Describe the different ways in which you have been successful at UM? Please be as specific as possible.

Sub-question 1: What milestones indicate success for Latina/o college students?

2. What are the characteristics of a successful Latina/o college student?

Sub-question 1: How do Latina/o college students perceive “student success”?  
Sub-question 2: Why do Latinas/os succeed at UMD? Please explain.

3. Do you consider yourself a successful college student? Please explain.

Sub-question 1: How did you learn how to be a successful college student?  
Sub-question 2: How have you practiced success at your campus? What did you do specifically?

4. Based on your perceptions and experiences as a soon to be graduate from UMD, why do you think more Latinas/os are not graduating?

Sub-question 1: Do you think they face obstacles/challenges in achieving success at their institution? If so, please explain.

Sub-question 2: Do you think your institution has a role in promoting success for Latinas/os? If so, what is that role?

5. Who contributed to your success at UMD?

Sub-question 1: Has your family had a role in contributing to your success? If so, how?

Sub-question 2: What advice or guidance have you received at UMD to achieve success?

Sub-question 3: What role did YOU play in achieving success at UMD? What did you do specifically?

Sub-question 4: Other than family, have you received additional advice regarding success? If so, whom from?

### **Final Open Question**

6. What would you like me to know that we have not talked about? Think also about the experiences of any other Latina/o students that may not be represented here.

### **Wrap Up**

As we come to a close, I need to remind you that the audiotape will be transcribed. Your comments will remain anonymous. False names will be utilized for the purpose of the transcript and data analysis. The tape will be destroyed after five years. Are there any questions that I can answer?

Thank you for your involvement!

Note. Adapted from Latina/o Access & Success Project, 2005

## Appendix F

### Coding Format for Semi-Structured Interviews

*Coding Format for Semi-Structured Interviews*

*(Adapted from Jones, July 12, 2005)*

\*Larger into smaller

<b>CONCEPTS</b> <b>(their own words)</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>CORE</b> <b>CATEGORIES</b> <b>(relationship</b> <b>among categories)</b>	<b>KEY</b> <b>CATEGORIES</b> <b>(dimensions of</b> <b>success)</b>

Appendix G  
Guided Journaling Activity

## Guided Journaling Activity

15-20 minutes

Date

Dear **[Student's Name]**:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. As we discussed during your interview, this is the guided journaling portion of the study. In an electronic message, please respond to the following:

*I would like for you to write about one successful experience you have had on campus as a college student.*

Think about the responses you have shared with me during your interview and why you believe this is a successful episode. This could have been during your first year on campus, during winter or summer session, or even during a class.

Please respond by [Day/Date] which is one week from today to [lopezma@umd.edu](mailto:lopezma@umd.edu).

Again, thank you for involvement in my study! I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mark A. López

## Appendix H

### Description of Latino Access & Success Project

## Description of Latino Access & Success Project

*Center for Research on Latino Educational Success (CRLES) Project Summary*

*Latino Access and Success Project*

*(<http://www.education.umd.edu/institutesandcenters/MIMAUE/projects/CRLES/projectSummary.html>, retrieved on June, 2006)*

### *Overview of the Project*

The purpose of this project is to increase and improve Latino student participation and success in higher education through research and development activities focused in higher education, K-12, and local community venues. The project studies the current Latino student population at the university in an effort to identify needs and improve support systems.

### *Goals*

- 1. Improve the experiences of Latino students at the mid-Atlantic institution*
- 2. Increase and improve the participation of local Latinos in higher education.*

Appendix I

Dimensions of Difference for Latina/o College Students

### Dimensions of Difference for Latina/o College Students

Dimension of Difference	Tish	Ruben	Mario	Debora	Alvaro	Anita	Jasmine	Jaime	Kristie	Juan
Race	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ethnicity	X	X	-	X	X	X	-	X	X	X
Socio-economic Status	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
Language	X	-	X	-	X	X	-	-	-	-
Nationality	X	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	-	X
Gender	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X
Geographic Location	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	X	X	X
Generation Status 1 - U.S.	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	-	X
Generation Status 2 - College-educated	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	-	X	X
Religious & Spiritual Affiliation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sexual Orientation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Class Standing on Campus (1 <sup>st</sup> yr., 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr., transfer etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Current Living Situation	X	X	X	-	-	X	X	-	-	X
Family Situation (e.g., single parent, both parents, no. of siblings vs. only child)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Campus Climate	X	-	-	-	-	X	X	X	-	-

Latina/o Community History on Campus and Region	-	-	X	-	-	-	X	X	-	-
Field of study	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X
Student's Involve- ment on Campus	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
Employ- ment situation	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X

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