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Latina¹ First Year² Experience: Factors that Contribute to Persistence from the First to the Second Year in Higher Education

by

Guadalupe Rodriguez Corona

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Education³
University of San Diego

May 2010

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Robert Donmoyer, Chair
Dr. Lea Hubbard, Committee Member
Dr. Carmen Barcena, Committee Member

¹ Refers to women who self-identify of Latino, Mexican or Central American decent.

² First year experience refers to students who are the first in their family to experience college during their first year. In my efforts to use inclusive language, I will intentionally use the term first year instead of freshman.

³ University of San Diego

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2. Twice on page 12 and once on page 13 it is stated that the group will be provided with sample quotes from a participant displayed to the right of her name. However, in the consent form the researcher has indicated that the subject's name will not appear on any study materials and that a code number will be used instead. This code number should be used rather than the subject's name with the quoted material.
3. Nowhere in the consent form does it indicate that subjects' responses will be shared with the focus groups. This fact needs to be included in the consent form.
4. Given the small population size and their similar backgrounds some of the subjects may know one another and have discussed these issues previously, there is a chance that one subject may be able to associate some responses with specific other subjects. This possibility leads to two necessary modifications. First, the subjects need to be warned about this risk, and second, the subjects need to be told that any responses they read from other subjects are confidential and not to be discussed with anyone outside of the context of the study.

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Abstract

There is limited research that identifies the university, familial and community factors that support the persistence of Latinas in higher education from the first to second year. The research that does exist has tended to focus on how institutional programs and activities have failed to work for first-generation students. Therefore, there is a need to study the persistence of Latinas in higher education that is as focused on discovering what works as it is with documenting what is ineffective. Research that focuses on Catholic universities is especially needed since many Latinas come from Roman Catholic families and, consequently, Catholic universities are highly appealing to the parents of Latinas and the Latinas, themselves.

This qualitative study used a survey and a series of focus group interviews with Latinas who had made it through their first year in one Catholic university. The goal was to explore how the university, along with family members and the community, supported Latinas who are the first in their families to attend college. The study also identified a number of less-than-positive factors. A focus group interview with student affairs professionals who worked at the university was used to triangulate the data gathered from students.

The study revealed that, for all of the student participants, the university was unfamiliar territory. Indeed, most participants spoke of experiencing culture shock generated in part by the very different cultural backgrounds of most of the other students on campus but also by the considerable economic disparity between themselves and most of their peers. Even an invitation to go along on a shopping trip to the mall was fraught with challenges: If the Latina did not go, peers criticized her for being antisocial; if she

went along but did not have money to shop, she was criticized for not purchasing anything.

The study also documented how Latino/a campus organizations, some but not all campus initiatives, and sympathetic faculty and staff helped the students overcome—or at least manage—the college environment. The study could not determine what would have happened had the students been less acculturated than they were or less well-prepared academically.

Dedication

“Para que necesito pies, si tengo alas para volar”

by Frida Kahlo [Mexican Painter 1907-1954]

This dissertation is dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose name I carry given by my mother Guadalupe Rodriguez. My mother has blessed me with hope and inspiration to continue with my educational dreams, despite the many life hardships and challenges I have overcome.

To my husband, Cristian Hernandez, and children, Endo Javier Rosales and Dariel Hernandez, for their patience during this journey and for their smiles of inspiration.

To my family: Claudia, Armando and Gabriela Barrera; and my brothers, David and Gabriel Corona.

To two women whose lives impacted my cultural and artistic inspiration, Doña Herminia Enriquez and Aida Mancillas whose lives touched many of us and generations to come.

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A special thank you to my chair, Dr. Robert Donmoyer. He has truly believed in my potential and consistently supported my academic growth and pushed me to achieve this lifetime goal. A million thanks on behalf of my family and extended *familia* who is thankful for this wonderful blessing.

In gratitude to Dr. Lea Hubbard for her continued contributions to education and for providing our children with the tools to achieve the dream of a college education.

For the wonderful source of constant inspiration and drive to get this done, to Dr. Carmen Barcena for being an excellent Latina role model in pursuing my doctorate

To my guide, Dr. Kenneth Gonzalez who set the path and provided me with the guiding principles to get this completed.

To my *hermanas* [sisters] whose constant blessings of friendship and support have given me the energy to stay on my journey: Association of Chicana Activists, MANA of San Diego, Angels [Aurelia, Maggie, Venus, Veronica, Wendy] and the women who contributed to this study, Ms. Graciela Casas-Silva, an angel who was a guide in my last phase of this journey. To Andrea Fuentez , Lupita Jewell, Martha I. Lara, and Rafael Barcena who have consistently been a source of support and continue the journey with me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The demographic profile of the United States has been shifting rather dramatically in recent years. Dr. David Hayes-Bautista, a leading scholar of Latino research, said that “a Latino baby is being born every thirty seconds in California.” There are more Latino babies being born than traditional American [i.e., White] babies across the country. This ever growing young population will impact our future economy. It is predicted, for instance, that by 2040, one in every five Americans will be of Latina/o descent (U.S. Census, 2001). This is due to the number of increased births to deaths in the Latina/o community.

Due to the population increase, many more Latinas will be contributing to the economic base of the country. Latinas in the “U.S. workplace will hit 60.5% [of Latinas and Latinos combined] of the workforce in 2020,” (Cooper, 2009). In fact, in the state of California, a study titled, “*Latinos and Economic Development in California*,” described the economic benefits to California of educating Latinas as well as Latinos: “In the long run, the economic benefits for the state are estimated at \$28 billion in the form of increased wages circulating in the economy. For the state, that would mean \$1.7 billion more in income tax revenues.”

Given this growth, it should come as no surprise that Latina/os are enrolling in universities and colleges in ever increasing numbers. Indeed, the American Council on Education Minorities in Higher Education reported in 2003 that the enrollment of underrepresented ethnic groups surged by 122 percent over the past 20 years. The surge

for Latinos has been even greater. Carnavel (2003), citing U.S. Census data (2001), notes that the number of Latinos between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in college increased by 165 percent during the previous decade; he suggests that this increase has, quite literally, changed the face of many campuses.

There is another noticeable trend in university/college enrollment data: The national percentages of women who pursue higher education have for the first time in history begun to exceed male enrollment in colleges and universities. Choy (2002), for instance, writes, "In 1999-2000, women made up 55 percent of undergraduates at four year universities, and ever since the 1980's women have been earning over half of all bachelor's degrees awarded annually" (p. 9). Data on Latina enrollment suggest that this gender-based pattern holds for them as well as for their White counterparts. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 1998, the year the 2004 graduation rate cohort first enrolled in postsecondary education, women (of all ethnic groups) made up 55 percent of the freshmen cohorts (Horn, 2006, p. 23). Most importantly, according to NCES, in 2006, the total Bachelor's degrees awarded to White women were 70.8 percent versus 8.0 percent to Latinas. The data suggests either that it may be taking Latinas longer to graduate or that Latinas drop out of college prior to graduation in greater numbers than their female White counterparts. Latinas, in fact, represent one of the fastest growing female ethnic populations in the United States, so it is hardly surprising that their numbers in colleges and universities have increased. Harvey (2003), in fact, reports a 10 percent increase in the number of Latinas attending colleges and universities during the past decade, despite the fact that there has been little sustained progress evident among Latino men during the same period. However, the picture is less positive

for Latinas when other statistics are examined. For instance, the percentage of Latinas attending college or universities relative to their percentage within the population of the country as a whole continues to be well below comparable data for White women. All of this suggests the importance of focusing research on Latina's college and university experiences and on the need to identify factors that contribute to and interfere with Latina's remaining in higher education through graduation. This issue will be the focus of the dissertation research that is being proposed here.

Statement of the Problem

At present, there is some literature that can be somewhat helpful in understanding the persistence issue with respect to Latinas, but the literature is limited for a number of reasons. First, much of the literature does not differentiate Latinas from the Latino population in general. My review of the literature, in other words, reveals that most of the earlier studies of Latino persistence in colleges and universities did not differentiate between women and men. More recent studies (Cuádriz, 1992; Gándara, 1982; González, 2003; Hurtado, 1993; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn & Pascarella, 1996; and Rendón, 1996), many of which were conducted by Latinas, did focus specifically on Latinas' collegiate experiences, but these studies are small in number.

Furthermore, the studies that have focused on Latinas also have tended to focus on identifying the problems that currently exist, not with identifying potential solutions or even Latinas' perceptions of existing institutional solutions. This work is still valuable, of course. In particular, Hurtado, Carter & Spuler's (1993) work suggests that

interventions will be valuable if they target the needs of Latina students and validate Latinas' prior experiences as part of an institutional effort to support Latinas' adjustment (See, also, Cuádras, 1992; Eimers & Pike, 1997; González, 2001; Hurtado, 1993; Kenny & Stryker, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Oliver, et al., 1985; Rendón, 1996; Trueba, 1997; and Vasquez, 1982). What is missing, however, are more context-specific analyses of Latinas' perceptions of what works (and also what is not working) in different types of university programs aimed at supporting Latinas in college.

It seems especially important to study perceptions of university persistence programs at Catholic institutions, since many Latinas are Roman Catholic or at least come from Catholic families and are inclined to attend this type of institution if they have or can find the resources to support a private education. Enrollment in Catholic colleges and universities, in fact, has been growing; in the "25 years between 1980 and 2005, enrollment in Catholic universities and colleges has increased 60.9 % (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman, 2007), and Catholic institutions have begun targeting their recruitment efforts toward Latinos and Latinas. The strategic plan for 2006 for National Catholic College and Admissions Association, for instance, listed the goal to develop services and materials to increase the enrollment of college bound students from Spanish speaking families in Catholic higher education." Moreover, even before 2006, Catholic universities had a history of providing access to underserved communities (Gallin & Gallager, 1989). In sum, because of the Catholic tradition of promoting social justice, "Catholic colleges have a particular role in educating new immigrants, respecting their human dignity and worth, and developing their individual capacities" (Kelly, 1989, p. 16).

Catholic universities have invested in the development of strategies to support Latina success in higher education. Case in point, the support for the evolution of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, known as HACU. This organization is the leading educational advocate for Latinas in the country (Rigual, 1989). Their roots began at a Catholic university, Our Lady of the Lake University, and with them, they have grown to be the largest and most sought after policy maker for Latinas in higher education.

It's important to note that most research available focused on women's' Catholic colleges whose social justice mission, has a history of outreach to Latinas and their families (Forni, 1989). At some institutions, commitment is beyond recruitment. For example at Incarnate Word, they instituted a marketing plan with additional financial funds to make educational accessible (Agnese, 1989). Their motto, "We don't care about incomes, we care about outcomes," is a good model that supports ethnic balance in an academic world which seldom reflects society at large" (Agnese, 1989, p. 12). Yet, there is limited research on Latinas in Catholic universities. Most of the available research focused on outreach initiatives in the late 1980's and when a search was conducted, there were only twelve articles citing Latinas/os and Catholic identity. Most of the research available focuses on Latinas/os as a group and the impact of high school and its impact on academic achievement. Therefore, this study will make a major contribution to the field on how Catholic universities impact the retention of Latinas in higher education.

Thus, as valuable as the existing literature is in identifying problems and suggesting, indirectly, general solutions, there is still a need for research to focus on specific solutions to problems. Thus, there is a need to begin to conduct a new type of

study, i.e., a type of study oriented toward identifying what universities do—and could do—to increase the graduation rates of Latinas. Along the way, such studies also will undoubtedly shed light on what universities do that inadvertently decreases graduation rates, but, given what is currently under-discussed in the literature, it would seem that the positive strategies should be fore-grounded and dysfunctional or neutral strategies should be secondary in importance.

One additional related point needs to be made here: Given the fact that attrition often occurs during the crucial first year in college (Astin, 1993; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; and Hurtado, 1993) it seems important that initial studies focus on Latinas' first year experiences. That will be the focus here.

To summarize, there is certainly literature available on the persistence issue. Until recently, this literature did not disaggregate findings about Latinas from findings about Latinos in general. Even the recent literature has tended to be focused on problems rather than on identifying intervention and support strategies that work. Furthermore, the limited numbers of studies that do focus as much on positive factors as on negative factors have not looked at Latinas' experiences in Catholic universities and in the programs that these universities offer to improve Latina retention. Thus, there is a need for a new kind of study, one that focuses directly on (a) Latina experiences and perceptions, (b) Catholic institutions, and (c) the interventions these types of institutions use to attempt to increase the likelihood of Latina retention beyond the first year in school and persistence to graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to respond to the needs articulated in the previous paragraph by focusing on the experiences and perceptions of a small group of Latinas in their first year attending a private, predominantly White, Catholic institution. Emphasis will be placed on understanding how university services and other support systems inside or outside the university appear to aid Latinas and increase the likelihood that the Latina students in the study will return to the university after the first year and persist through graduation.

Research Questions

The study will focus on how first generation, first year Latinas adjust during the first year. The questions guiding the research, at least initially, are:

What do the Latinas in the study say about their first year experience?

What do they say about the university's attempts to support and retain them at the university?

What other sources of support do the Latinas' identify either inside or outside of the university?

What impediments to their graduation do the Latinas identify?

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In order to describe what is already known about the needs of Latinas during the first year in college, the review of the literature will be organized around five topics: (a) Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) widely used model of persistence and criticisms of that model; (b) how Latinas and other students learn to navigate the first year of college; (c) Latina's cultural capital and their efforts to achieve cultural congruity between their prior experiences and their experiences within the university; (d) an absence of traditional forms of social and cultural capital and what to do about it; and (e) culturally appropriate institutional interventions.

A Widely Used Model of Persistence and Criticisms of That Model

A theoretical model referenced in most of the literature about college students' persistence to graduation was developed by Tinto (1975; 1987; 1993). Tinto's model of persistence, which has been used not only by researchers who publish in higher education journals, but also by higher education practitioners (Attinasi, 1989; González, 2002; Hurtado, 1993; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996; and Kenny & Stryker, 1996), emphasizes the linkage between persistence and students' getting involved in activities on campus (Eimers & Pike; 1997).

The problem is that Tinto's model was not designed to address the adjustment of non-White students, in general, and it certainly was not designed to focus on the factors that impact the persistence of Latinas. Consequently, many researchers and practitioners

have challenged Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model due to its limited application to non-White student groups (Attinasi, 1989; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; and Murguia & Padilla, 1995).

For example, according to Eimer & Pike (1997), one problem that has been highlighted is that Tinto's model emphasizes the importance of students' social integration into university life but ignores the need for universities to accommodate the different cultural backgrounds of their students. Practitioners also argue that Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) model encourages underserved students to acculturate to the institution. This line of thinking ignores the cultural differences that Latinas bring to the university. Moreover, the model says nothing about the fact that underserved students, including Latinas, may perceive the environment as unwelcoming as well as feeling excluded from day to day majority student interactions. Nora & Cabrera (1996) note "minorities were more likely to perceive a discriminatory campus climate, sensed more prejudice on the part of faculty and staff, and were more prone to report negative in-class experiences than were whites" (p. 130). The lack of interaction can lead to a student feeling isolated and disengaged. This behavior leads to student's poor academic performance. For example, Valenzuela's (1999) study⁴ of Latino students, notes that the lack of "caring" by teachers in the classroom, affects how students interact with teachers. This disconnection can lead to a student losing interest in all of their academic endeavors and thereby affecting their overall experience at the institution.

In short, Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) model encourages students to adopt the values of the dominant college environment and assimilate. Hurtado & Carter (1997)

⁴ Valenzuela (1999) argues that schools subtract resources from youth in two major ways: first by dismissing their definition of education and by assimilationist policies and practices that minimize their culture and language.

note that Tinto modified his model three times, but, even with its amendments, Tinto's model still does not acknowledge the need for universities to change:

Criticisms of the use of models of integration have noted that underlying the concept of acculturation is the assumption that the cultural differences of ethnic groups should be diminished and that to be successful minority students must adopt the values of the dominant college environment—an assumption that is potentially harmful in practice (p. 327).

Thus, Tinto's (1975; 1987; 1993) model has both strengths and weaknesses when it is applied to minorities, in general, and Latinas, in particular. Padilla (1988) sums up the strengths and weaknesses of Tinto's model by acknowledging both Tinto's major insight and the insight of Rendón (1982), one of Tinto's critics: Tinto (1998) argued that students must be integrated academically and socially into the campus culture if they are to be successful, while Rendón (2004) focuses on the importance of validating student's experiences. Each has its advantages. While Tinto's approach may help in getting students acclimated to a new environment, it lacks cultural sensitivity to the needs of Latinas. Most programs geared towards orientation and first year experience has typically been designed to serve traditional students (White and Middle Class) and it lacks cultural relevance to Latinas who are for the first time going to college.

To summarize, Tinto's model reminds us that all students, including those who come from non-mainstream cultures, must be integrated academically and socially into the campus culture if they are to be successful; Tinto's critics, in turn, suggest that such integration is unlikely to occur unless colleges and universities find ways to acknowledge and value the cultural experiences minority students, including Latinas, bring to a university setting.

How Latinas and Other Students Learn to Navigate the First Year of College

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's (1988) report, *Knocking on the College Door*, estimates that, beginning with the high school graduating class of 2008, Latino high school graduates will, for the first time, surpass African Americans as the largest under-represented group on campuses within the United States.

As the Latina population in the United States continues to increase, population increases also are reflected in college and university enrollments; and, as more Latinas have enrolled in higher education institutions, their presence has provided researchers an opportunity to study this population. In addition, due to their increasing numbers in universities, there is an incentive to study this population. Researchers, in fact, need to pay attention to Latinas enrolled in higher education since, despite their increased numbers; they continue to be under-represented in enrollment numbers; and, especially to persistence data when compared to their White counterparts (Oliver et al, 1985). From 2000 to 2004, for example, the number of college-bound Hispanic women increased by 22 percent – 6 percent or more over the increase for Hispanic males and non-White males and females (NCES, 2007). Although the numbers may be rising slightly, it still doesn't catch up to population growth.

Problems Encountered While Reviewing the Literature on Latinas' First Year Persistence

Unfortunately the review of the literature on Latina persistence presented a major challenge for two reasons. First, most of the literature aggregates all Latinos, i.e., males and females, together. Ginorio and Huston (2001) add that "because national data are rarely disaggregated by sex and race and ethnicity, we know little about how the

educational needs achievements, or problems for Hispanic males may differ from those of Hispanic females” (p. viii). Research that focuses exclusively on Latinas as a group that even disaggregates Latina data from Latino data has been very difficult to find. Yet, according to Ferdman & Gallegos (2001), “For Latinas, both gender and ethnicity/race are significant and salient elements of their identity” (p. 36). It is critical to ensure that the data being studied reflects the gender specific areas of interest being studied.

The second reason that finding literature on Latina’s first year college experiences is difficult is that most articles about Latinos were published in the late 1980’s (Gándara, 1982; Justiz & Rendón, 1989; Oliver, Rodriguez & Mickelson, 1985; Vasquez, 1982 and Zeff, 1982). Thus, most of the articles that have been published about Latino persistence provide limited up-to-date perspectives on even Latino students, much less Latinas’ experiences during their first year in higher education institutions. Essentially, the problems encountered when trying to find literature on Latina’s first year experiences in college reinforces the need for the study I am planning to conduct.

Insights from Recent Work by Research on Latina Persistence Conducted by Latina Scholars Either Individually or with Latino Scholars

The more recent work that has focused on Latina persistence has often been conducted by Latina scholars (Cúadraz, 1992; Gándara, 1982; Gloria, 1999; Rendón, 1996 and Vasquez, 1982). Their work provides valuable and culturally based perspectives about Latinas’ higher education experiences on which my study will build. For example, one article by Gándara (1982) speaks to the potentially positive impact of an important attribute of Latinas upbringing: “persistence and hard work” (p. 174), Gándara notes, contribute to Latinas’ persistence in higher education. Additional studies

need to be conducted to develop models that highlight how these and other cultural values and norms Latinas bring with them might, be tapped into, to enhance their persistence rates during their first year of college.

Another important contribution of the recent research conducted by Latinas is the researchers' sensitivity to gender as well as cultural issues. According to Gándara (1982), "Mothers were also more likely than fathers to encourage higher education and nontraditional roles for their daughters" (p. 171). Information like this suggests that parent programs intended to increase the persistence of Latinas can be expressly tailored to Latinas' mothers as one of the many means to increase Latina retention. Institutions can develop programs to invite Latinas' mothers to campus to enhance their positive influence and support the success of their daughters. This insight also signals researchers studying Latina persistence not to ignore the mother-daughter relationship as a possible variable that helps explain persistence. Certainly, this variable will be looked at in the study that I am planning.

Not all recent research on Latina persistence has been conducted exclusively by Latinas. Recent research also has provided opportunities for collaboration amongst Latina and Latino scholars. In fact, a vast contribution of literature on both Latinas and Latinos has emerged in recent years (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; González, 2001; González, Olivaz and Calleroz, 2004; Murguía & Padilla, 1995; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; and Trueba, 1997). An example of the type of research being conducted is a study by González, Stone and Jovel (2003); they "attempt to address the problem of Latina individuals' college attendance behavior by providing a more helpful explanation on how some students complete their primary and secondary

schooling with more opportunities for postsecondary attendance than do others” (p. 14). The work of González, Stone and Jovel (2003) certainly influenced me to ask interviewees about their school experiences prior to entering higher education.

Concurrently, Valenzuela’s (1999) study on Subtractive Schooling, asserts that parents do care about education. She adds that education is a value that Latino families instill in Latinas. I would like to know more about this area from the study that will be conducted.

What Still Needs to be Done to More Fully Understand (and Also Positively Impact) Latina Persistence to Graduation?

Thus, the literature has begun to identify the strengths and needs of a growing student population within higher education: This literature also highlights, at least implicitly, the need for universities to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for Latina students. Some universities have developed model programs that target Latina students; interventions, such as summer bridge programs, meetings with the parents and family and advising have been used to support this emergent population (Hurtado, 1993). Yet, few studies have been done to assess these programs and identify the programmatic factors that facilitate persistence and those that are either irrelevant or, possibly, even negative influences. Hurtado (1993) argued, “that understanding Latino student experiences is the first step in developing successful intervention strategies that may eventually improve student outcomes” (p. 37). Since programs designed to facilitate Latina persistence are often a part of Latinas’ first year experiences in higher education, studying such experiences should provide opportunities for researchers to highlight

model programs and initiatives, and to identify and describe successful as well as apparently unsuccessful intervention strategies.

Latina's Cultural Capital and Their Efforts to Achieve Cultural Congruity between Their Prior Experiences and Their Experiences within the University

The review of the literature suggests one particular topic that is worth focusing on when studying Latina persistence beyond the first year of college: Latina cultural capital. It is essential that we focus on this very issue, since Latinas strength in persistence is derived from their families, the core values they bring with them to higher education: persistence, hard work and cultural strengths which are bilingualism, and cultural traditions (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; González, 2002; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000 and Vasquez, 1982). This third section of the literature review focuses directly on literature that addresses this potentially important variable.

Various subtopics in cultural capital will be discussed. These include: the different types of cultural capital, traditional and emergent meanings of cultural capital; the absence of traditional cultural capital; cultural differences and racism as compounding problems; approaching cultural capital from a strength based perspective; family relationships as a source of cultural capital and the value of family. Each topic area will be addressed as it relates to the Latina experience.

The different types of cultural capital. The following paragraph distinguishes between social capital and the more general construct of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) in Dika & Singh (2002), in fact, suggests that it is critical to examine the relationship between three sources of capital: economic, social and cultural. Additionally,

he notes that the three areas combined equate to cultural capital which normally functions to perpetuate the replication of social class and the existing power structure. Essentially, the university is a system that reproduces the dominant group's position of privilege. Bourdieu (1991) suggests this form of social reproduction is due to habitus, i.e., the "product of the relation between a position in the field and the dispositions (habitus) of its occupant" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 10). This notion of habitus provides a challenge for Latina students in higher education. They don't have the forms of social capital that would enable them to continue in higher education in contrast with their peers who have historically been perpetuating the social reproduction of access to higher education. In sum, Bourdieu notes that "social capital is the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to a possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 33). Therefore, the challenge for Latina students to succeed in higher education is to look for networks and seek mentors that will provide access to individuals who are part of the institution or networks that will give them the skills and resources to succeed.

On the other hand, Coleman (1988) suggests that social capital can be defined by three forms: the level of trust, information channels, and norms and sanctions that promote the common good over self-interest (Dika & Singh, 2002). Both Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) examine cultural and social capital as it relates the unequal access to systems of power. They concur that the lack of educational opportunities for under-represented groups perpetuates inequality at all levels of society and most particularly in educational opportunities. This is quite important as Coleman (1988) suggests that "family norms and intergenerational closure (forms of social capital)

promote educational achievement, school related motivation and engagement” (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 41).

This phenomenon is further explored in Valenzuela’s (1999) study on Latino and Latina youth and the impact of their families on their education. Valenzuela (1999) suggests that a key contributor to the lack of Latina student’s success is their lack of social capital. As defined by Bourdieu (1986) as the social reproduction of power is manifested in three key areas: economic, cultural and social networks. In this case, Latina students lack the knowledge about the educational system to succeed. Yet, Valenzuela (1999) argues that Latinas have developed social relationships with their teachers that have enabled them to have “positive social relations at school that are highly productive, because they allow for the accumulation of social capital that can be converted into socially valued resources like good grades and high school diploma” (p. 28). Ironically, Valenzuela (1999) also notes that they have plenty of cultural capital that is derived from the values their families have taught them at home. The engagement of parent support for the students in Valenzuela’s (1999) study was reflected in the value, she defines as *empeno* (diligence). She refers to this concept as the reason for the achievement of immigrant students. She provides examples of the *empeno*(diligence) of students being responsible for doing homework and doing well in the classroom setting and how teachers see them as model students. The family value of education was reinforced in the study, *Si! Se Puede, Yes We can, Latinas in School*. The researchers who conducted state, “Latinas state that their families are their main source of support for pursuing their educational goals” (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 42). The problem noted in these studies is that the family-based cultural capital Latinos and Latinas possess is not, in and of itself,

necessarily useful nor valued by mainstream society in negotiating the mainstream culture. Therefore, the kind of social capital Latinas and Latinos do have access to can provide additional challenges for Latinas to succeed in higher education.

An absence of traditional forms of social and cultural capital and what to do about it. Students who are the first in their families to attend college often lack the requisite social and cultural capital to navigate the university setting. As a group that is increasing in numbers, Latinas often fit into the first-generation-to-go-to-college category; they also, not surprisingly, often lack the traditional sorts of cultural capital (including both economic and, especially, social capital) needed to navigate the university environment with ease (González, 2001). If a student's parents have not gone to college, for instance, she may not be able to get advice on a whole host of subjects, everything from how to prepare for a test to how to handle a problematic roommate whose behavior interferes with studying. Other examples of challenges students face due to the cultural differences they have with their White peers range from listening to their favorite Spanish music or their favorite Spanish soap operas either of which may not be readily available on a predominately White student populated campus or, if they are, will not be valued by most other students on campus. To add to their challenges, most students are already trying to even out the playing field while at college. Yet, for many of them, language skills may still be a factor in their academic achievement. According to Gándara, P., Rumberger, R., Maxwell-Jolly, J. & Callahan, R. (2003), "One reason for the underachievement of English learners is that they begin school significantly behind their English speaking peers," (p. 6). Another way of saying this is that they lack social and cultural capital.

All of this suggests that at least some students may need on-campus programs and/or people to guide them. Gloria (1999) asserts that “support from a mentor [who] has negotiated the higher education system as a student and faculty member can be helpful” (p. 8). Such support seems essential for students who cannot rely on family members to be their guides through the collegiate experience. Essentially the inability of family members to support their daughters during the first year of college creates “discordant value bases for individual achievement and social interactions that contribute to exclusionary and discriminatory practices in the educational system” (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002, p. 46).

Traditional and emergent meanings of cultural capital. Traditionally, the concept of cultural capital, when applied to the issue of persistence within colleges and universities, has referred to the implicit and internalized beliefs and values, including attitudes and perceptions towards education, that are associated with success in higher education. The notion of cultural capital, when applied to the university setting, also often refers to the knowledge that is required to “play the college game.”

More recently, researchers have begun to rethink the notion of cultural capital, especially when the notion is applied to underserved students in university settings, who may not bring the same sorts of strengths to the setting that mainstream students bring. These researchers note that underrepresented students bring other strengths—other forms of cultural capital—that can help insure under-represented students’ success if university personnel act in appropriate ways and the “rules of the game” are modified to support the forms of cultural capital that under-represented students have at their disposal (Cuádriz,

1992; Gloria, 1999; González, 2001; González, Stone & Jovel, 2002; Oliver & Mickelson, 1985; & Trueba, 1997).

Most Latina students, for instance, are first generation college students and, consequently, often lack the awareness and skills of how to apply for colleges and seek financial aid assistance. Another way of saying this is that they lack the *social capital*—a subcategory of *networks and explicit resources*—to understand the college application process. This is a problem since most parents lack the awareness of the American educational system to help their daughters navigate the challenges they will face with higher education (Ginorio & Huston; 2001). Valenzuela (1999), however, has provided a framework for understanding the patterns of immigrant achievement from a cultural lens that addresses the cultural capital first generation students bring to higher education. Among other things, her study reveals that Latino parents not only value education; they also pass on the valuing of education to their children as well. The valuing of education, therefore, is part of the cultural capital Latinas bring to the higher education setting, even if they sometimes lack the social capital (e.g., resources to know how to apply) to apply for admission and financial aid.

Cultural difference and racism as compounding problems. Compounding the problems created by Latinas' lack of social/cultural capital is the ugly phenomenon of racism. Latino students are more likely to perceive racial tensions due to their emergent presence on university campuses across the nation (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996 & Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Problems associated with minorities' lack of traditional forms of cultural capital can be compounded if students encounter a culture in the university that is not only different from the culture they grew up in but also, at times, downright

hostile to them. Researchers, in fact, have documented that racism often is alive and well on college campuses (Cuádriz, 1992; Hurtado, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Latinas who face discrimination often resort to family, friends and university administrators who understand them for support. For some, it can affect their decision to stay on campus if they fear for their own safety. Additionally, for some, it may affect their focus on their academics for worrying about an experience they may or may not be able to solve.

Hurtado & Carter (1997) study on the effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging suggests:

Chicano and other Latino students reported that students on predominantly White campuses face specific stresses associated with their under-represented status and that under-represented first year students' exhibit considerable psychological sensitivity to the campus social climate, including interpersonal tensions with White students and faculty and actual or perceived experiences of racism and discrimination (p. 330).

Furthermore, even if overt racism is not present, researchers suggest that Latina's face a host of stressors due to the differences between their home environments and the university environments they have entered. The tensions begin their first day with feelings of isolation and invalidation by the institution. From the start of their college/university experience, some Latino and Latina students perceive a "hostile climate directly affecting those students sense of belonging in their colleges" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 330). Many students—even those who come from mainstream culture—experience similar feelings, of course, but for Latinas (and, of course, to some extent, also Latinos) the feelings often are more extreme because the university environment is not congruent with their cultural experiences. González, Olivaz & Calleroz's (2004) study of Latinas supports the idea that they "feel like they don't fit in" (p. 112). These

feelings are often compounded by the lack of a Latina critical mass in the universities enrollment. Some universities, do not understand the need for a critical mass of Latina students. Their cultural insensitivity to this area hinders the ability of Latinas to feel welcomed and validated at the university.

Hence, the university lacks the knowledge that critical mass matters to the Latina students to have a community she can belong to, a place to share similar experiences and place where her culture, values and beliefs are validated by other students. Therefore, it is vital for universities to “value the cultural assets and strengths she brings as social capital on which to build her academic success” (Zambrana and Zoppi, 2002, p. 45).

Latinas often have difficulties adapting to a new organizational culture, in part because the culture and community perspectives Latinas bring to a campus often are incongruent and not reflective of the campus’ culture. This lack of connection can be compounded by the fact that educational institutions, at times, devalue Latinas as a group by sending indirect messages that their culture is not a good fit at the university. In short, many Latina college students are, initially, at least, quite literally strangers in a foreign land (Oceguera, Locks & Vega, 2009 and Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

To summarize, there is a need to research how Latinas have learned to navigate the campus stressors. The limited research that does exist, however, suggests that first-generation Latinas who have limited access to cultural capital are often unable to navigate the daily campus micro-aggressions. These aggressions, also known as stressors, are the daily negative experiences Latinas experience while trying to transition to the new campus environment (Attinasi, 1989; Cuádriz, 1992; Gándara, 1982; González, Stone, and Jovel, 2003; Hurtado, 1993; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007

and Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). The stressors faced are linked to Latina's underrepresented status, to a lack of critical mass, and to the campus' lack of cultural competency in welcoming and validating Latinas' presence on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). These other factors, however, serve to compound the problems caused by the fact that Latinas lack the sort of traditional cultural capital that most mainstream students use to navigate the university setting. As Zambrana & Zoppi (2002) suggest "translating cultural wealth into social capital will foster resilience and hope among young Latinas and increase their opportunities to develop cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally" (p. 47).

Approaching cultural capital from a strengths-based perspective. Although programs designed to compensate for the absence of traditional forms of cultural capital are undoubtedly helpful (and will be discussed in the final section of this review), if they are based only on deficits models, they are also likely to be problematic or, at least, certainly not as helpful as programs based on a more expanded view of cultural capital would be. In fact, the research suggests that Latinas normally bring many assets to campus; they have their own forms of cultural capital, in other words. Gándara (1985) for instance has noted that "persistence and hard work was such an important part of their upbringing" (p. 174), and these attributes can be major assets on college campuses. Thus, it makes sense for individuals and programs to build on these strengths (valuing hard work and persistence) and assets (family support) and not focus on the weaknesses revealed by employing a too limited view of cultural capital.

Family relationships as a source of cultural capital. Although there is limited research on first-year persistence among Latinas and what the family, community and

university contributes to retention of Latinas from the first to second year, there have been studies done on the impact of parental involvement. Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) provide insight on the role of parent's cultural capital and its impact on their children. They add, "The level of social capital in the student's network is positively related to the socioeconomic background of the student's family"(p. 120). In Valenzuela's (1999) study, on Latinas she validates the notion that Latina family social capital is key to supporting students who are the first in their families to persist by adding that "those who come with more positive orientations or greater skills, as do Mexico-born students are better equipped to offset the more debilitating aspects of schooling" (p. 6).

Furthermore, Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) suggest that "bilingualism may play a prominent role in determining access to social capital (p. 127). For Latinas, who are fluent in Spanish and English, they become the translators of two cultures. In one, their native culture, in the Spanish language, they connect to their family, traditions and culture. In their English culture, they become the translators of knowledge for themselves and their families. This dual language skill provides Latinas social capital to engage in two cultures and therefore acquire additional needed information to have access to educational networks. Therefore, language may provide access to social groups that may serve as cultural translators to social capital. In particular, Latinas who are the first in their family to attend college may still be adjusting to the English language which provides challenges for them to have knowledge about how a university functions, and this challenges them in being aware of the types of programs, activities and resources that are available to help them navigate the first year.

Still, a central thread that the literature identifies as encouraging Latinas to persist in higher education is the value of family and their families' support. Shirley & Morales (1980) note that Latinas' families traditionally have "fostered traits of self-esteem and self-confidence [that] are conducive to personal growth and development" (p. 275). Moreover, Zambrana & Zoppi (2002) suggest that "through social capital, Latino families can translate and transmit their cultural assets inter-generationally" (p. 45). The literature provides a variety of perspectives on the type of support and challenges faced by Latinas and their families. Most importantly is how Latinas can maneuver in and out of two cultures. Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva (1994) note that students who develop a "border crossing strategy that is useful for minority students, because it provides them with experiences in moving in between two cultures: a high achieving academic culture and supportive community culture" (p. 555). This was evident in Valenzuela's (1999) study on Latina students. Other research suggests that Latina's family support is critical in a Latina's decision to stay in school (Gándara, 1985 & Gloria, 1991). Even though many family members may not understand some of the challenges students face, the student knows she can share her experiences and feel supported by the family. Marin & Marin (1991), in fact, describe a concept which, they label *familismo*. The concept refers to the material and emotional support that comes from family. Hurtado, Carter & Spuler (1996) add that, "the support of family was an important aspect of college adjustment in the first year" (p. 153). The role of family involvement in the retention of Latinas is one of the key areas of the study I am about to conduct.

The literature also suggests that the differences between the home and collegiate environments actually can be seen as an asset: Valenzuela (1999) asserts that Latinas are

part of a family that values education, “children from Mexico and other parts of Latin America are strongly driven to succeed and they adhere to traditional enabling values like familial, respect for teachers, and a strong work ethic in their quest for upward mobility” (p. 11). Additionally, Latinas, who attend colleges and universities, over time, have a wide variety of experiences; they learn to live with multiple roles and change like chameleons in new environments. When they visit home, they speak and listen openly to their Spanish music, and, when at school, they learn to adapt to the institutional culture (Attinasi, 1989; Cuádriz, 1992; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Gándara, 1982; Gloria, 1999; González, & Figueroa, 2002; Hurtado, 1993; and Oliver & Mickelson, 1985). This type of border crossing (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994) provides a new set of skills that are critical for the success of Latinas in higher education and in their professional networks. The opportunity for the Latina student to become engaged in new networks will depend on her access to new networks via professors, peers and institutional programs that will give her new opportunities for growth. Of course, for things to work out as just described, Latinas must remain in school beyond the first year of their college or university experience.

Culturally Appropriate Institutional Interventions

In supporting the transition of Latinas into a new institutional environment, appropriate, culturally sensitive institutional interventions are key to their success. The following discussion of the best practices described in the literature will be organized around the following topic areas: culturally sensitive programming; first year programs; Latina student organizations; mentorship; and inclusion in the classroom.

Culturally Sensitive Programming

Hurtado and Kamimura (2003) write that culturally specific programs are sometimes viewed as “more welcoming, and provide an entry point for the use of many of the general services” (p. 141). For Latinas, it is important that program delivery is at least somewhat consistent with cultural norms that Latinas are familiar with. The presence of these cultural norms will provide an opportunity for Latinas to connect with something they can relate to. These initiatives allow Latinas an entry point to their own heritage and values that help them connect with the institution’s values as well.

According to Tinto, “Social integration consists of faculty interaction, peer relations and involvement in extracurricular activities” (Murguía & Padilla, 1995). The goal of programming, therefore, should be to insure that social integration includes programs that exhibit cultural sensitivity and opportunities for Latinas to connect and engage with Latina/o faculty and administrators. Latinas, who relate well to faculty and staff, are often provided the skills by these mentors when it comes to addressing concerns of feeling isolated or discriminated against (Oseguera, Locks & Vega; 2009). Cuádriz (1996), for instance, asserts that role models serve a pivotal role in inspiring Latinas to pursue higher education. Some universities provide cultural centers, which focus on supporting the transition of non-white students to the university community; cultural centers also “provide students with the opportunity to interact socially and academically with each other,” (Capello, 1994). The centers provide a home away from home and are typically staffed by student affairs professionals who can relate to the challenges faced by Latinas and other minorities. They also provide support in helping Latina and other minorities navigate the university by explaining cultural norms that may be new or

unfamiliar. Moreover, centers also provide an additional bonus: student leaders, usually the upper-class-men, and women, who can serve as mentors to help new students understand the institutions cultural norms and expectations and help get students involved in the sorts of extracurricular activities that Tinto indicates contribute to persistence. This is an area of interest for this study, because one of the goals for cultural centers is to help Latina students connect to the institution with relevant programs and services, while at the same time providing a nurturing, safe and welcoming environment for them.

First year programs. One way that first year students get to know the university is by participating in programs that help them understand how the university works. These programs range from Orientation Programs, Welcome Week events, First Year meetings, clubs and organizations, outreach and involvement opportunities. González (2001) writes that involvement in these sorts of programs, especially during a student's first year at the university, helps her figure out all the information available to them. Such figuring out is important for a student's success. I'm interested in finding out how first year programs support the retention of Latinas by providing them the skills necessary to continue their education beyond the first year.

Latina student organizations. One of the most effective tools for promoting new skills in the adjustment process is the peer-to-peer interaction that occurs in student organizations (González, 2001 & Gloria, 1999). One way practitioners have supported the students in achieving cultural congruity has been by supporting the development of culturally based student organizations. These groups have served students, like Latinas, as a source of connection, as a family away from home, as a source of mentorship and as a laboratory for leadership development.

Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to addressing the impact of culturally relevant student organizations and how it impacts the Latina experience and retention on campus. Hurtado & Carter (1997) note, for example, that “forms of affiliation that may reflect specific interests of Latino students, such as participation in ethnic student organizations and in cultural forms of expression on campus have been excluded from measures of social integration that include college activities” (p. 327). For example, at the University of San Diego (USD) there are two Latina student organizations: Association of Chicana Activists (A.Ch.A.) and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A.). Both organizations are dedicated to the empowerment and retention of Latina students. What is significant here is that neither of these organizations has been studied in any sort of systematic way. We do not know, for instance, what first year Latinas say about these organizations and the contributions the organizations make to their university experiences.

Mentoring. Most Latinas are the first in their family to attend college. The most challenging experience for most is how to prepare for the new environment. At the same time, they lack Latina faculty role models that can serve as mentors in this process. Nora, et. al (1996) found that “for females, the most significant positive effect on college persistence came from mentoring experiences in the form of non-classroom interactions with faculty” (p. 427). It is critical that Student Affairs professionals help fill the void when possible to assist and mentor these students in their first year to find a faculty mentor. Faculty-Student Interaction—“the amount and quality of students’ informal interactions with faculty outside the classroom has been shown to be a consistent predictor of student persistence” (Eimers & Pike, 1997, p. 84). Yet, some students will

be fortunate to have even one Latina faculty cross their path at some point in their academic experience. Most Latinas on university campuses may not be able to find a Latina faculty member administrator or even, another woman or male of color to guide them through their first year experience. The number of Latinas who complete doctorates and pursue teaching in higher education is dismally small.

Inclusion in the classroom. A major challenge for Latina students is in the academic classroom. Many of them have already overcome many challenges in high school to get to this point. Valenzuela (1999) in particular cites that “immigrant students who possess essential skills in reading, writing, comprehension, and mathematics in their own language (or those who acquire these skills through a bilingual education program) outperform their U.S.-born counterparts” (p. 11). Although, they have been honor students and come to the university academically prepared, they are still challenged by the stereotypes of affirmative action. At times, students are singled out as representatives of a diversity quota, which affects their sense of feeling included in the classroom. Often, their backgrounds are not integrated in the classroom and they find it difficult to relate to course materials. Sometimes, faculty members may make them invisible to the class by not choosing them to speak in the classroom or ask for their opinions on the subject matter. For some, this can be one of most humiliating experiences of all; when they raise their hand and the teacher ignores them, they, in essence, become invisible. This invisibility only gets altered when an item of conversation in the course relates to their cultural experience. This typically occurs during a heated conversation when the student is expected to defend or speak for her entire cultural group. Most devastating is when Latina students attempt to express their own experiences or challenges, and the faculty

member downplays their stories as surreal or not as important to the classroom dialogue. According to Gloria (1999), these are examples of “culturally restricted dialogue [which] minimizes the academic, personal, and social experiences of all students. As a result, Chicana/o students feel alienated and isolated in their classroom” (p. 7). Ultimately, this affects their participation in the classroom and overall academic experience.

On the other hand, those who are involved in student organizations, tend to have a better transition in and out of the classroom. According to Murguia & Padilla (1995), “Mexican American student organizations may foster academic achievement” (p. 548). It’s in these organizations and cultural centers that students who feel excluded find comfort in sharing their experiences in and out of the classroom. It is through the support of other students and student affairs professionals that they learn to address these challenges in a more pro-active and emotionally healthy manner.

Conclusion

In summary, this review of the literature has described what is already known about the needs of Latinas during the first year in college. The review covered the following five topics: (a) Tinto’s (1975; 1987; 1993) widely used model of persistence and criticisms of that model; (b) how Latinas and other students learn to navigate the first year of college; and (c) Latina’s cultural capital and their efforts to achieve cultural congruity between their prior experiences and their experiences within the university; (d) an absence of traditional forms of social and cultural capital and what to do about it; and (e) culturally appropriate institutional interventions for Latinas.

The study makes a contribution to the field by providing knowledge on what resources contribute to the empowerment and validation of Latinas who are the first

within their families and their communities to attend college. My assumption is that programs that validate Latinas cultural capital contribute to their persistence from the first to second year. This research focuses on the needs of Latinas who are the first in their families to seek the bachelor's degree by asking them about the sorts of programs and services they find helpful, those that they find unhelpful or even counterproductive, and additional programs and/or services that they believe are needed to further enhance the likelihood of retention and to increase persistence toward graduation. This review of the literature attempts to highlight what is known about the factors that appear to contribute to high educational attainment (Gándara, 1982), in general, and first year persistence of Latinas, in particular.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

As has already been noted in the prior chapters, there is a need to do research on the persistence of Latinas at colleges and universities. Because many Latinas are Catholic and, consequently, often attend Catholic colleges, there is a particular need to study Latina persistence at predominantly White Catholic universities. Most research on Latinas and Catholicity focus on church and not university settings. (Rubio & Lugo-Lugo, 2005). But, because of the Catholic tradition of promoting social justice and helping those in most need, Catholic universities have made some efforts to reach out to Latinas. The results of these efforts, in terms of Latinas' success in Catholic colleges, have not been researched (Gallin & Gallager, 1989).

Since many Latinas do not make it past the first year in college, at least some studies of Latinas in Catholic colleges need to focus on Latina first year experience (Astin; 1993 & Hurtado; 1993). Up to this point there had been limited research available to help us understand what factors—e.g., the family, community, and various university initiatives and interventions--support Latinas in any type of college setting. The research on first-year Latinas at Catholic universities is especially sparse (Ruth & Lugo-Lugo, 2005). This study was designed to begin to fill the gap that currently exists in the literature. This chapter describes the research design that was used in the study.

Review of Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As was noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was to begin to ascertain the needs of Latinas who decide to pursue their bachelor's degree. Specifically, it aimed at providing valuable data about Latinas' experiences during their first year attending a private, predominately, Catholic institution.

The study was focused on the various sources of support that Latinas identify, as well as their perceptions of barriers. In addition, the study has provided insights about the impact—or possibly the lack of impact—of programs the university, under study, have set up to assist first-year Latina students negotiate and succeed in the university environment. Although positive and negative results are reported, there is an emphasis on reporting about services that Latinas perceive as supporting their retention at the university, since the results are most helpful to other universities that decide to design and implement retention initiatives.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

What do the Latinas in the study say about their first year experience?

What do they say about the university's attempts to support and retain them at the university?

What other sources of support do the Latinas' identify either inside or outside of the university?

What impediments to their graduation do the Latinas identify?

Site and Respondent Selection Process

There was only one site for this study. That site was a predominantly White Catholic, liberal arts university with four relatively small professional schools located in Southern California. The researcher intended to randomly select sixteen undergraduate Latinas who, at the time of the study, would be in their sophomore year. As it turned out, it was impossible to meet the predetermined targets. There will be more on this and a discussion of the size of the actual sample used in the study below.

The original design also specified that there would be two groups in this study named Group 1 and Group 2. For Group 1, the intention was to email an online survey to their university email address, which had to be completed within two weeks in order to participate in a focus group two weeks later. The plan was to review the survey results during the focus group interview and get additional comments on their own and other group members' survey comments.

The second group, Group 2, did not take the online survey, but rather only participated in a focus group interview. This group was designed to get group members' reactions to Group 1 survey results, as well as the initial groups' comments during the follow-up interview. This group was initially scheduled to meet two weeks after the Group 1 meeting was completed. This second focus group, Group 2 was used to triangulate findings from the survey and the first focus group results.

After the proposal defense and as a response to suggestions made by committee members, a third focus group, Group 3, was added. This group was comprised of university administrators who work with first year students. This group was asked to

comment on the responses of the first group that were displayed in a printout of quotes from the two groups. Group 3 Responses were used for triangulation purposes as well.

As it turned out, there were additional modifications in the initial design once the researcher attempted to solicit student volunteers to participate in the study. To begin the research project, the researcher sought participants for focus Groups 1 and 2. The researcher received from the university registrar a complete list of all undergraduate sophomore Latina students who had completed their first year at the university. The students self-identified as Latinas and claimed that neither of their parents had obtained a college degree in the United States of America. The researcher used the Google randomizer¹ with the initial list of 31 students, which included an email address, to identify 16 Latinas for Group 1 & 2. (Since all students who attend this university are required to have a student email account, it was decided the best way to connect with them would be via emails.)

The students were invited to participate in the study via an email explaining the study and the Questionnaire was included, which was sent thru Qualtrics Survey program. One return email was received. And that email data had to be deleted, since the student was a transfer student and did not complete her first year at the university being studied. After that the researcher went through the entire list in groups of 8 randomly selected, hoping to get the sixteen students specified in the original research design. After two months of emails and no response, the researcher went back to IRB committee to ask if students could be contacted by phone or in person. The IRB approved the request with the stipulation that a university employee would make the calls to contact the students.

The staff member who agreed to do this task was a trusted member of the student community. She was able to relate to them the importance of the study and how their contributions would impact the experience of future students. She convinced a number of students to volunteer, though the actual number of students who ended up participating was considerable lower than what had been planned. Many students were reluctant to participate since their story's were so personal. In general, Latinas are taught not to share their personal challenges or families struggles in public, their family problems stay within the confines of the home and with people they trust. Therefore, it was difficult to engage Latinas who were willing to exposes their personal stories of struggle given the sample was small and it was a small campus. Confidentiality was a challenge since most of them knew each other. In sum, some compromises also had to be made with respect to stipulations about the characteristics of participants.

Specifically, only three students were able to be part of Group 1. When it came time to conduct the group interview with these three individuals, scheduling became an issue. A time when everyone was available finally was found, but, at the last minute, one of the three members of the group could not attend. The researcher used a preparation check list and preparation questions to guide the focus group interviews [Appendix D and E]. This individual was interviewed separately about her responses to the survey responses of all three members of Group 1.

Four other student participants also were identified, but three of these had siblings in College. Originally, the plan was that no participant would have another family member in college. In part because of the need for participants, but also because it seemed it might be interesting to see the effects if having an older sibling concurrently

enrolled in a college environment, it was decided that Focus Group 2 would consist of the two students who had (or had had) older siblings in higher education. The remaining student who had not been part of Group 1 but did not meet the revised criteria for Group 2 participated in an individual interview about Group 1's responses to the survey/interview questions. It is important to note that Patton (2002) suggests that "in a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say" (p. 386).

Finally, an invitation was sent to seven student affairs professionals at the university. Five indicated a willingness to participate in the study. They formed Focus Group 3. It is important to note that two of the five student affairs professionals were part of the group and the other three, due to limitations with schedule availability, were conducted as individual interviews. In Patton (2002) the notion of individual and focus group interviews provided individual interviewees and group members that same level of confidence in sharing their voices. Yet, it was important to note that, at times, when women heard other women speak, and related to the same experience, they validated each other publicly and their story was richer and the participant provided more in depth details.

Data Collection and Preliminary Analysis

There were five phases of the data collection and the preliminary analysis process. The first phase began by giving the participants in Group 1 an online survey instrument (See Appendix C). The second phase was a focus group interview with members of Group 1 during which those who filled out the survey were asked to clarify and expand

on some of their own and/or others' survey responses. The survey responses were arrayed on a handout given to the participants at the start of the focus group.

After the Group 1 focus group was completed, their focus group interview responses were incorporated into the handout that was made available to both the person who was interviewed individually (Phase 3 of the study) and the participants in Focus Group 2 (the study's fourth phase). Their responses were added to the written document that was reviewed and commented on during the focus group interview with Group 3 (5th phase). Finding a meeting time for all members of Group 3 was difficult. Therefore all of the members in Group 3 were interviewed individually.

Post-Data Collection Analysis

After all the surveys had been filled out and all interviewing was complete, the responses to each question were organized into the figures that are included in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The researcher then reviewed the responses for each question that were arrayed on individual figures and summarized the major themes found in the data.

Limitations of the Study

Internal validity has been addressed by providing trustworthiness to the data by having different forms of data used for review. The focus group in phase three was part of a second group who had not answered the online survey. Generalizability could be considered a limitation of this study and the researcher acknowledges the limitation of study with only six participants out of a selected group of 31 that attend a predominantly White, private Catholic university. Yet the stories of Latina women may be of some utility to other institutions in terms of alerting officials at these institutions to issues about

the challenges Latina women face in their persistence towards graduation. They need to consider their experiences in order to see if there are issues at their campuses. Another limitation of the study is that it focuses on successful first year students who have persisted beyond their first year. As a comparison, further research is needed on first year students that dropped out.

Researcher bias is also a potential limitation in a qualitative study, and that certainly may be the case here because I am conducting the study, and as a Latina who has had experiences that may have been similar to the experiences of the participants in the study. My attachment to this area of study leads me to support my own hypothesis. I may hear what I want to hear and see what I would like to see.

The potential for bias will be minimized in a number of ways. First, the researcher is aware of her own ethnic maintenance. Peshkin (1988) defines this as the perpetuation of your own identity and how one can potentially ignore those who prefer to assimilate. Second, the research employs an online survey as well as interviews in focus group settings. Finally, the researcher uses the process of triangulation to verify interpretations of the content provided by the study's participants.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents the results of the study. As indicated in the previous chapter, the study was built around: (a) written responses to open-ended questionnaire items from an initial group of three Latinas who were the first members of their families to attend college; (b) a focus group interview with the three Latinas who responded to the survey about their survey responses; (c) an interview with a fourth Latina who was also the first member of her family to attend college about her reactions to both the questionnaire responses and the initial focus group responses; (d) a second focus group interview—also focused on the questionnaire responses as well as prior interview responses—with two Latina college students who had older siblings in college; and (e) a third focus group made up of university personnel who reacted to the data generated from the students.

The data generated from each of the procedures listed in the previous paragraph will be summarized in a series of figures that contain actual quotations from the questionnaire responses and/or the interview responses. Each figure will summarize the responses to a particular questionnaire item. When appropriate, a numerical summary will be presented at the top of the figure; then the written and oral responses of the first Focus Group will be presented (with the interview response italicized). After Focus Group 1 responses are presented, the responses of the individual interviewee will be presented, followed by the second and third Focus Group responses respectively. Focus Group three, incidentally, tended to only respond to the later questions.

Responses to Questions about Parents' Education Levels

Question 1 asked participant's about their father's level of education; question 2 asked about the mother's education level. In addition, there was also a question about the education level of other parents such as step-parents, though, as Figure 3 indicates, none of the respondents had much to say about this question, largely because 5 of the 6 participants came from traditional two-parent families.

The responses to questions about father's and mother's education levels are summarized in Figures 1 and 2 respectively. What is interesting here is that, in all but one case, the mothers educational level was higher than the father's education level. Five of the six mothers, in fact, attended college, though one of the participants whose mother had some college wrote high school on the questionnaire, presumably because her mother did not get a college degree. In fact, only one mother actually got a college degree. This was done in Mexico, though this parent later got a Master's degree in the United States. Two of the other mothers had to drop out of college because they were pregnant. Still, even in these cases, the pattern of going to college was established by the mothers.

Responses to Question about Father's Education Levels

The fact that fathers, in all but one case, had a lower education level than mothers is not especially surprising. In Mexico wives often have more education than their husbands, even if the wife does not work outside the home. In this study, however, all the fathers but one had a high school education, indicating at least some familial support for taking formal education seriously.

One interesting remaining question is what would have happened if the children had been boys rather than girls. Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered by the data gathered from this study. What is clear, however, is that in five of the six cases in this study, there was an established pattern for females in their families to attend college before the participants in this study were even born.

Figure 1. Summary of Responses to Question # 1:

What is your father's highest level of education?

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-High School

“My father didn’t really have an impact on me since he lives in Colombia and I was raised by my mother. I went to Colombia to meet him when I was 14 and it was awkward.”

Lorena-Elementary (3rd Grade)

“My dad only went up to third grade and was taken out of school to work to help his parents.”

Esperanza-High School

“My dad didn’t finish school, because he had to work to support himself and his brothers and sisters, there were seven kids. He really wanted to go to school, but he could not due to his family’s financial situation. He always expected me to go to college.”

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-High School

“My dad was able to complete a high school degree; however he didn’t go to college. He had some dental issues before he went to college. He started working and never went. My dad was kind of poor growing up and had no role models. My dad is the only one who graduated from high school among his brothers and sisters. He was my inspiration to continue going to college.”

Figure 1 (con't)

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-High School

“My father has a high school diploma; he graduated from high school in California. He is first generation. He didn’t have the opportunity to go to college. He basically didn’t think about college while growing up. Basically, he is one of nine siblings. His older sister went to college. He kept working to support his family. That really impacted us, because he has tried to give us many opportunities as he could that he didn’t have. He has really pushed us to go for an education. He really understood that working this into our lives, then we can provide more if we had an education. He has really pushed us to use our brain. I am one of four girls, the youngest. All of my other sisters have gone to college, my oldest has her master’s in family therapeutic studies from Cal Baptist University, my second oldest has her bachelor’s from Cal State San Bernardino in Criminal Justice and she is going back to Cal Baptist University for her Master’s and Teaching Credential and my older sister went to Boston University and is studying for her MCAT so she can go to medical school and I am at enrolled here. Both of our parents are proud of us, they have pushed us to do the best we could and to use our brains. To be smarter.”

Veronica-High School

“My dad graduated from high school here in the U.S.A. . . I could relate to the other student’s experiences, my dad was a very hard worker and he did work in the fields. He worked in a “pueblo” {small town} in Guatemala. He was one of eleven kids. My dad was the oldest male and seeing he’s youngest siblings growing up, he wanted to at least finish high school to be an example to his younger brothers and sisters. Education is very important for my dad; he was my inspiration to go to college. His stories were very inspirational. He would say how they would walk a lot and do not even have shoes. He had to go to school in the morning and then come back and do field work. It definitely is an inspiration to go to college because I want my children to focus on college. I do not want them to work. That’s what my parents did for me.”

Responses to the Question about Mother’s Highest Level of Education

It is important to note in Figure 2, that five of the six participant’s mothers had some college experience. Two of them dropped out since, they became pregnant in the process. And one mother had a sixth grade education, yet she continued her education in the United States by attending adult school to obtain her high school diploma. Overall, if

you compare Figure 1 and Figure 2, one can observe that the mothers had more education than the fathers. This may have contributed to the persistence of Latinas in pursuing higher education.

Figure 2. Summary of Responses to Question #2

What is your mother's highest level of education?

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-Some college

“My mother got accepted to college, but wasn’t able to go since she got pregnant with my oldest brother. My grandfather cut her off completely, you know that Spanish dilemma. She had to go do it on her own.”

Lorena-Elementary-6th Grade

“Both of my parents went to elementary level. My mom finished her elementary when she was older. My mother completed her high school diploma by attending adult school. She got to work in the fields with my grandparents. Since she was the oldest, she was taken out of school to work in the fields or she would stay at home and do all the cleaning and cooking.”

Esperanza-Undergraduate in Mexico City and Master's in San Diego

“My mom went to college in Mexico. I grew up with her expecting me to go to college.”

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-Some College

“My mom attended two years at a community college. Then, she had to drop out since she got pregnant with me. And she has never gone back to school. My mother would tell me, if you achieve that higher education, you basically have the world as your oyster and you can do whatever you want.”

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-Some College

“In order to graduate from high school in California, my mother had to take extra classes and go to adult school since she moved a lot in order to complete her credits. It was really interesting to know about her experience; it wasn’t until recently that I

Figure 2 (cont'd)

realized that was the path she had taken. She would have wanted to go to college, but she didn't have that opportunity. And not knowing or being exposed to college, none of her sisters or brothers had gone to college. Again, she has always pushed us to do the best we could and she values education. She has especially pushed us toward math, the thing she really enjoys. I think I have taken on that role. I really enjoy math. I have a concentration in mathematics as well. They are amazing parents; I would not have done it without them. They have allowed us to see there is a different life, maybe than what our other family members have lived and what they have gone thru. They have definitely made tremendous sacrifices for us. I love them to death and they have done so much for us. My mother had to work when she was young to help out her family. She had to help clean houses, taking care of older people."

Veronica-High School

"My mother grew up in the City, in Santana, El Salvador. Everything was more accessible to her and she came from a wealthier family than my dad. They had more money to go to school. They ended up leaving El Salvador to come to the United States, before she could finish high school. She finished high school here. For my mom, from the stories she has told me, it was definitely hard for her due to the language barrier and the different culture. That is basically what affected her and her school because she didn't like going to school. It was really different. For both of them, it was just a big culture shock. My mom has some college because her work requires it. She really hasn't had a chance to get to it. She's working two jobs for my sister and I go to college."

Responses to the Question about Other Parent's Highest Level of Education

This section was important to find out if students had other relatives or step-parents or non-traditional parents that participated in reaching their educational objectives. All but one student had traditional, mother and father families. The one student, who didn't have a traditional family, had a step-father.

Figure 3. Summary of Responses to Question #3:

About other parent's highest level of education?

	Focus Group 1 Responses
Maria-N/A	
Lorena-N/A	
Esperanza-N/A	
	Individual Interviewee Response
Heather -N/A	
	Focus Group 2 Responses
Martha-N/A	
Veronica-N/A	

Responses to the Question about Self-Identifying as a Latina

Question 4 asked whether a participant self-identified as a Latina. All three of the respondents who filled out the questionnaire indicated that they did, indeed, see themselves as Latinas. This view was also echoed by the other three participants. These responses are not surprising, because all of the participants would have had to self-identify as a Latina on their application to attend the university in order to be considered as a participant for the study.

Things become a bit more complicated—and somewhat more surprising—however, when the participants' comments, which are presented in Figure 4, are examined. Although all indicated at one point or other that they self-identified as Latina, the student who participated in the individual interview stated at another point, -“I actually have a really hard time identifying as a Latina, because I am of mixed descent.”

Another student indicated that her family used a different word to characterize family members' ethnicity, Chicano/Chicana, and that this term emphasized the fact that family members were from Mexico, not simply from someplace in Latin America. This student had a unique experience since both of her parents attended high school in the United States and she was the first to attend college.

All of the students indicated that their experiences with self-identity awareness were heightened as they spent their first year at the university. For some, it was immediately noticeable that they were the only ones of ethnic or Latino descent in their housing area. Students who were not Mexican had an especially hard time because they could not relate to the limited aspects of Mexican culture—for example, food and music—that was not present on campus. Yet, they all commented that finding other Latinas made them feel connected and validated their Latina identity on campus. Interestingly, all had participated in an activity of the two Latino clubs on campus and most had connected with other Latinas on campus as well.

Finding a peer group of Latinas was not always a completely positive experience. For some, not-speaking Spanish, made them feel fraudulent and not Latina enough. Even if they felt challenged by their Latina peer groups for not being Mexican enough or not being able to speak Spanish, it was evident that they all felt that connecting to other Latina students re-affirmed their identity and presence on campus.

An over-arching item that came up for all students was the notion of culture shock. For most, culture shock was heightened by the amount of White people in contrast to under-represented groups on campus. But economic factors as well as

ethnicity also contributed to culture shock. A number of students commented on the amount of wealth that some students brought with them to the university.

Undoubtedly, the sense of isolation and difference was heightened by the fact that most of the students were leaving home for the first time. All but one, in fact, lived on campus during their first year. It was challenging for most, since they have cultural norms and behaviors that often conflicted with the norms of others in their living experiences. For example, for one student, being clean was quite important. She could not understand why not cleaning up after oneself seemed so difficult for others in the dorm. Nor washing your own clothes also seemed unfamiliar. In addition, roommates, at times, could not understand why going to their family on weekends was more important than staying on campus and going out.

There is one other interesting point in the responses to Question 4: A number of students indicated that being out of the mainstream ethnically and culturally on the campus actually strengthened their resolve to persevere and remain on campus. One student affirmed her presence on campus by saying:

What am I doing here? I was like, What should I do? Should I assimilate? I said I'm not going to assimilate to them. It was then, that I begun to feel really proud of whom I am. Right now, I am so proud of being Latina, I can't even express it.

The student affairs professionals had a number of comments after reading the quotations from the students that are presented in the Focus Group 3 section of Figure 4. They all, in fact, acknowledged that what the Latinas in the study had said about the importance of finding ways to connect with their culture was important. There was one comment about Mexican Americans self-identifying as

Mexican. One student affairs professional, for example, took note of this and also articulated other reasons why Latinas can be isolated on a campus where most students are not only White but also affluent:

A number of the students identify as Mexican, even though they are Mexican-American. They predominantly identify with Mexican and Mexican culture. They are startled that they can't speak their language with others on campus. A number of students find it challenging with the White culture on campus. The isolation from their culture, language and food is very impactful and that looks very different from other students on campus. They are impacted by class issues and socialization issues, because they do not want to go out to drink and party and take part in indiscriminate sexual behavior.

Figure 4. Summary of Responses to Question #4:

Do you self-identify as a Latina?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		6	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		6	100%

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria- *"I'm Latina, Yes, I'm Colombian. Being Latina is the first thing for me. I grew up speaking Spanish, I love the culture, and in New York, you grow up with all this diversity and Latinas are part of the culture. I'm really glad my mom made me speak Spanish to her at home. We could not speak English to her. It is one of the main things I identify with my life."*

Lorena- *"When I first got here, I was trying to find people who looked like me. In order to find people similar to me, you had to go to specific places to find these (Latinas) people. The things I wanted to do were very different than my peers. I lived on campus, in the female housing area, and you can find out what everyone was doing in the weekends,*

Figure 4 (cont'd)

you heard everyone talking in the hallways. I didn't like what my roommates wanted to do. I wanted to listen to my music and no one in my hall liked what I listened to. It was hard to find people who grew up listening to the type of music I listened to. It was difficult to find people who had the same interests as I did. Since my involvement on campus, I have been able to re-affirm my Latina identity even more."

Esperanza—*"It is really hard in the beginning. You are thinking, like, Oh My God! Everybody is White, like, what am I doing here? I was like, what should I do? Should I assimilate? I said I'm not going to assimilate to them. It was then, that I began to feel really proud of whom I am. Right now, I am so proud of being Latina, I can't even express it. I got involved with A.Ch.A. (Association of Chicana Activists) and M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan), that is where I met most of the Latinas, that's where I met a lot of friends. I am so happy I joined, because I got to meet really amazing people."*

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather—*"I actually have a really hard time identifying as a Latina, because I am of mixed descent. My dad is Irish and German and my mother is Mexican. Growing up, I never really felt comfortable identifying as a Latina, because I felt fraudulent. Because I do not have a Hispanic last name. My first experience as a Latina was with food. My grandma actually helped out more with identifying as a Latina. My grandma was from Mexico and my mother was born and raised here. My grandmother came to the U.S. when she was six or seven and she picked apricots, field work. Although my grandma spoke to me about the culture, she never spoke to me in Spanish. My grandma recently is starting taking Spanish classes to reclaim the language. Sometimes during Spanish class, my other classmates sometimes would look at me and say, Aren't you Mexican, do not you already speak Spanish. So I kind of met some of those expectations. Then I would have to explain I am mixed, not very Hispanic. And they would say oh like they were very surprised. I do not think they said any of those comments to be mean, but I think it was like an expectation they had of me. They didn't mean anything negative by it; I think they just had their own preconceived ideas. Other Latinas were also surprised; sometimes they expressed surprise because I wasn't raised watching novellas {Mexican soaps}. One time somebody told me, you are the worst half-Mexican ever. What does that even mean? They never explained it to me. I think it is because I am not overly Hispanic. They would tell me, you need to act more Mexican. I know you are half and half, but you are like a White girl. I am half, but I grow up eating the food, I have a Tia (aunt). My experience is unique within the Latino population, because I am half and half. It presents its own unique challenges to deal with being from both worlds and trying to see where you fit in. Since, I am half, I feel weird about joining Latino clubs. I know about Chicano pride and Si Se Puede. I know Si Se Puede. This is why I was interested in doing the*

Figure 4 (cont'd)

survey, I think I am the only one in SSS that is half and half of the student population. I have asked students but most are full Mexican."

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-*"I am Mexican. My dad has always told us we are Chicanas. We are American of Mexican descent. We are Americans in this country but we also need to remember our roots. I didn't grow up speaking Spanish and my parent's didn't grow up speaking Spanish. I speak broken Spanish. Some people would tell me, you are Mexican and do not speak Spanish and it was kind of looked down upon. As if you were not trying to identify as much. This is coming from mostly from Latinos. I have been involved in M.E.Ch.A. I haven't been completely involved in it but I go to their events. Where I come from, there are mostly Latinos. Coming to this campus is completely the opposite. So by coming here, people would make bad jokes about me coming. They would say 'you are going to be like one of five Mexicans on campus, the only people you are going to relate to, are the workers and the gardeners. Just very cruel jokes and everything. Coming here at first It is like a shocker. Coming here, I did feel like, Oh No! This is a very select group. But then, by getting more involved in community service and in different clubs, you realize there are a lot more Latinos. It just depends where you look. I'm involved in M.E.Ch.A. and Crew. It helped me meet new people and meet new friends. I like to get up early in the mornings. I do Salsa dancing. It is really fun and a different environment. Now I feel more at home and welcomed. I definitely, agree with other students when it relates to how you feel at first, you feel culture shock. You do not know who to go with or if you are welcomed. If you belong. You do not know how it is going to be."*

Veronica-*"I strongly identify as a Latina. I am very proud of it. That is also my motivation. I want to be a doctor when I grow up, a surgeon. You do not see many Latinas and women who are out there being doctors. Being Latino motivates me in many ways, It is kind of like my driving force. When I came here, my sister introduced me to some of her friends and primarily they are all Latinas and Latinos. It was really hard for me to make friends with White people. To tell you the truth I feel more comfortable with Latinos. Not sure why or what it is, like the culture or what it is. One of the students shared that she could not identify with what her roommate was doing and what music they were listening to. It was like my roommates, they were going out every weekend. They would go party; they would drink and get drunk. But, what I would do, I would go home to my family. You know I would go and hang out with my family and I know that a lot of other people would go like you are in college, why would you want to go back to your family. I was brought up, as part of the Latin culture that family comes first no matter what. I like listening to Bachata and Merengue, it is so refreshing and soothing. It*

Figure 4 (cont'd)

is hard listening to music you cannot identify with sometimes. Definitely being a Latina has been a challenge on campus. You definitely do not see that many Latinos on campus. It is hard trying to find a place here. Like my friend said one time, I feel really bad because my friend told me one time, I wish, and she's Black, that I was Latina, so I can hang out with you since I did hang out with a lot of Latinas I felt so bad because that was not really my intention. The reason why I felt so comfortable and welcomed here is because of my sisters friends. They are always including me in everything and they are Latinos. That has definitely helped me. I have always identified as a Latina but not to this extreme. I have learned so much about the Latin culture. But I feel like as Latina I am really passionate. I get really defensive when it comes to Latino racist jokes. I get more defensive. I have become more aware. The events on campus have made more aware and I am sticking up for Latinos. I am so proud."

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther- *"It is very important for Latinas and any minorities that their families traditions and lifestyles, culture and music is shared. The student's life experience that the parents share is what they have experienced, which means their culture tends to be very rich. Our goal should be to maintain that identity, to let them identify with who they are naturally instead of trying to mainstream them. For example, one of the students feels fraudulent because she doesn't look Latina. They fail to identify since they are afraid of being harassed and a lot of students struggle with dual ethnicity and race. Students should not have to struggle with bi-racial identity, that's who they are and that's where in fifteen years the entire USA population will be like that."*

Sol- *"A number of the students identify as Mexican. Even though they are Mexican-American. They predominantly identify with Mexican culture. They are startled that they can't speak their language with others on campus. A number of students find it challenging with the White culture of the campus. The isolation from their culture, language and food is very impactful and that looks very different from other students on campus. They are impacted by class issues and socialization issues, because they do not want to go out to drink and party and take part in indiscriminate sexual behavior. A student, who was not associated with the United Front, came to a Latina event and felt it was like a home. She came to volunteer for the event and then came back and joined them by participating in Salsa night. All of the Latinas are coming together and helping each other, I see that."*

Responses to the Question about Being the First Member of Their Family to Attend College

As the graph in Figure 5 indicates, all of the students self-identified as being the first generation in their family to attend college. This is a bit confusing since some of their parents had attended college and dropped out. To add to the confusion, most of these students had responded to an earlier question by marking that their parent's education had ended at the high school level, even though most had mothers, at least, who attended college. Presumably, students saw a difference between attending college and graduating from college and reinterpreted the question to mean the latter. This might also explain why the two students who made up Focus Group 2 also indicated they were the first member of their family to attend college even though they had older siblings concurrently enrolled in college. At any rate, it seems clear that the six Latinas in the study saw themselves as trailblazers in the college environment.

For the most part, the students articulated a sense that persisting in college through graduation was a commitment and responsibility to the family. All of the interviewees knew early on that going to college was a familial expectation. For the two who had older siblings in college, the expectation seemed especially strong: "It was never a question of whether I would go to college, but rather which one. And, What I wanted to do with my life."

For two of the students who had siblings concurrently enrolled in college, their first year may have been easier to transition than for those who truly were the first family member of this generation to attend college, yet they still felt the sense of homesickness and newness of a new and somewhat unfamiliar environment. They, however, had an

elder sibling to guide them. One student shared her experience: “My older sister has led the way and she kind of opened the doors for all of us. Without her, I would not have known so much about college.” The sense of support from older siblings and also from parents was apparent from both the students that made up Focus Group 2, i.e., both of the students who had older siblings attending college.

Though the transition may have been made a bit easier by having an older sibling who had blazed the trail to college attendance previously, according to a student affair professional the first year experience was difficult for all six students and part of the difficulty was the very factor that encouraged persistence.

They come here with an expectation that is not only their expectation of being successful, but the family’s expectation to fulfill a dream and educational opportunity. That itself is a burden. Most of them had not been exposed to responsibility of life and career, they really do not know what that is, so that in itself is new to them. They are preparing themselves for something that for the most part is unfamiliar.

Figure 5. Summary of Responses to Question #5:

About I am the first in my family to attend college in the U.S.?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		6	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		6	100%

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria- *“I knew I needed to finish school. I knew I had to go to college. I lived with my grandma when I was little. I used to cry when nobody helped me with my homework that was when I was seven. While growing up, I knew school was not a joke. My mother would*

Figure 5 (cont'd)

drop us off at the local Boys and Girls Club. I knew I could not do karate and ballet, until I finished my homework. Although I had a boyfriend at 17, my mother disapproved of this. She said I was too young. I told her, I knew school came first and that I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that I was given."

Lorena- *"It makes it more of an accomplishment when you know, that I stuck through this regardless of all the struggles, regardless of all these barriers I had or all the stuff I had to go through. I was able to overcome this and I became the person I have become today. It is time for me to be more involved and take that lead."*

Esperanza- *"My parents think college it is like high school, but it is not. It is really harder. They tell me I still have chores to do and pick up and watch after my sister. They think that being at school its fun for me. They tell me, you have been in school all day; you already had your fun. I would say, like Oh My God! I am tired, doing things all day. I work hard and I'm not like a robot. Recently, they have been more lenient on me, since they know I am more involved. I really do not have to do a lot of chores now. Recently, there was a week, where I had four midterms, plus I Co-Chair Latino Graduation Committee and lots of other responsibilities. I told them I had a really bad week coming up and that I could not do chores that week, they understood."*

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather- *"I am the first to go to college. I have a sister who will graduate from high school this year and go to art school."*

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha- *"I have other sisters that have gone to college, so I was exposed to it a lot sooner. It made a big impact. It was never a question of whether I would go to college, but rather which one. And, what I want to do with my life. My older sister has led the way and she kind of opened the doors for all of us. Without her, I would not have known so much about college. Even in high school, the professors would know us, since they knew we worked hard; they pushed us and gave us a lot of guidance. In that sense, I feel that just made the biggest impact, not only was I exposed but I had those other experiences to go off. I wasn't just jumping out there going for it, other than just coming out to a new campus and coming out here by myself."*

Figure 5 (cont'd)

Veronica- *“My parents know that college is not like high school. We are always so exhausted and busy that sometimes we can't talk to our parents until 10 p.m. We, my sister and I, are the type of girls that call our parents every single day; I talk to my parents at least three times a day. I could be walking to class and call to say hi to my mom and tell her, I will talk to you later. Yet my first experience, when I came as a first year student, the first time I came in, the only thing that intimidated me, was that the only people who I saw that were Latinos, were the workers, that worked here. I felt really overwhelmed. Like I have been around White people and other races but I have always gone to a school where there has been a balance, where there is color. As Latinas, we find each other and introduce each other. It is all about networks. I really like to talk. It has helped me thru my first few weeks. Even though I had my sister here, it was still very hard for me. All I could focus would be the house and how badly I wanted to go home. I do not' want to be here. I would talk to my sister all the time. I would tell her I really miss the house. I would cry to her. Even up to this day, I am still home sick. I have found a home in my friends and work place that is where my home is too. There was a point when I was really exhausted and I wasn't doing very well in classes. I also had a lot of family problems that was really though for me. My friends were really there for me. During my first year, I was definitely homesick. I found friends immediately. I feel blessed to have found them, because most people do not' have that. It is really hard to find friends like that. I went home two weeks after I started. I could not help it. We go home every other week, and when we see our parents we still cry. I kept balling every time I saw my parents. It is such a great feeling seeing our parent's cry, since they saw us and everything, even though they had just dropped us off. They are also my inspiration to stay in college. Just to see how proud they are. Even though they are already happy for me, I want them to be even more. I can't even explain. It is something so hard to explain. It is been a tough road, It is been fun.”*

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther- *“They come here with an expectation that is not only their expectation of being successful, but the family's expectation to fulfill a dream and educational opportunity. That itself is a burden. Most of them had not been exposed to responsibility of life and career, they really do not know what that is, so that in itself is new to them. They are preparing themselves for something for the most part is unfamiliar. Their parents are not professionals and it is a huge responsibility to carry that and at the same time the connection and respect to their family. Being here is a struggle emotionally and financially for the student and their family. For the most part, it is important to complete their degree and make their parents proud.”*

Responses to the Question about Participating in the University's Orientation Program

Figure 6 summarizes what interviewees said about participating in the university's orientation program. As the graph suggests, all students participated in the university's orientation program. Yet, as the narrative comments shows, for the most part, they felt that it did not target their needs because the orientation program was too general. The two students who had participated in the Student Support Services program's orientation, which was held one week prior to the university's regular orientation, were much more positive about the orientation put on by the federally funded Student Support Services program office which was much more tailored to their needs as Latinas and was pitched only at incoming students from underrepresented groups.

Of course, participating in both orientation programs made the general orientation even less valuable than it would have been had there not been two orientations because of duplication. One interviewee, for example, stated:

I participated in the SSS [Student Support Services] Program, a week earlier. A lot of the information provided in the orientation program was the same, for me, it was not helpful and I had heard the information already. The information provided was for the population in general, but it wasn't for me. It didn't answer any of my questions nor did it relate to my needs. I already heard the information. I didn't really need to hear it again.

For all the students, it was important to note that the orientation program helped them connect with other students on campus. It provided a sense of community. Another

student shared that the orientation program supported her in developing a social network, “I participated in the orientation program. I met my closest friends there.”

Another participant for whom the orientation seemed a bit irrelevant was the participant who had an older sibling attending the same college. This participant stated:

I was not really interested, since my sister was already here. When I came here, my sister was already a junior and we already knew a lot of the information. I was already familiar. I felt like it was kind of boring. I said, ‘I know that.’

On the other hand, another student who had an older sibling already attending college (albeit a different one) indicated that she and her roommate, who was also the first family member to attend college, were left with many unanswered questions at the end of orientation. They acknowledged that they may have contributed to this lack of information because of their hesitancy to ask questions and mark themselves as naïve, in contrast to their mainstream peers:

It was just the idea that I hated asking questions. I hated feeling like that person that had no clue on what to do and take the time out to go figure out what it was. You just still go through the same as like my sisters did their first year. I was just scarred, I didn’t know what to expect. My sisters really wanted me to experience my first year. They really didn’t hold my hand and walk me through every step. They kind of guided me and left me to do it on my own. That has helped. If you need something, you are going to have a way to do it and by asking questions it pushed me to open up.

For the most part, the student affairs professionals who participated in Focus Group 3 and whose comments on the students’ responses to the question about the Orientation program were also summarized in Figure 6 agreed that there is room for improvement in the orientation program. One student affairs professional who has worked with other

students with older siblings in college even added, “In my experience, if a student attends, then the sibling following up doesn’t since the family feels the first one already had the experience. If they have a sibling that already went through it, they are very fortunate.

Figure 6. Summary of Responses to Question #6:

I participated in the university’s orientation program?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes		6	100%
2	No		0	0%
	Total		6	100%

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria- “One of the squad leaders became a good friend of mine. And she told me where she worked, I told her I had work study and she helped me get a job on campus. Now, I work with her. I really love my job.”

Lorena- “I participated in the SSS (Student Support Services) Program, a week earlier. A lot of the information provided in the orientation program was the same, for me, it was not helpful and I had heard the information already. The information provided was for the population in general, but it wasn’t for me. It didn’t answer any of my questions nor did it relate to my needs. I already heard the information. I didn’t really need to hear it again. SSS was the place where I could go and ask for information that was helpful for me, because they know you are first generation and low income. They are more focused on our needs. They know about culture-shock, financial aid and things going on at home. I have more of a personal relationship with the people who run the program and some of the people I met thru that program are now people I am very close to, because we have the same experience.”

Esperanza- “I participated in the orientation program. I meet my closest friends there. Yet the information provided, was information I already knew.”

Figure 6 (cont'd)

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-*Yes, I did.*

“However, I was also in the Student Support Services Program, Summer Bridge, which was a week before the orientation program. During that time they explained to us most of the rules of the university, they told us where to find counselors. They pointed where the office of financial aid is. They just basically told us some tips for living on campus. For the orientation program, I do not really remember much of it, since it was mostly recycled information for me due to the Summer Bridge experience. They did the ice breakers and where the library is, pretty much the same information.”

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-*“It really helps, I guess, never really been on a campus before. It really helps you, directs you where to go, and the basics you need. So that’s good. But there are a couple people I met there, that I continue to speak to. Other than that, I do not talk to my squad leader or have any communication with her. But with my preceptor, I had one meeting then after that no communication which is understandable since everyone gets busy. It was kind of more like a directory, here are the basic things that you need to know. It was basic and that was okay for me, just to get through the first semester. It was not a very personable experience, my roommate was in the same group which helped us getting to know each other better, spend time with each other. And kind of find out what we needed to know together. So we kind of would pull our brains together and get this done. We were first generation and our family was away and we experienced that. I think it really helped having that support. Every time it is different. It was just the idea that I hated asking questions. I hated feeling like that person that had no clue what to do and take the time out to go figure out what it was. You just still go through the same as like my sisters did their first year. I was just scarred I didn’t know what to expect. My sisters really wanted me to experience my first year. They really didn’t hold my hand and walk me through every step. They kind of guided me and left me to do it on my own. That has helped. If you need something, you are going to have a way to do it and by asking questions it pushed me to open up. And to say that it is okay that I do not know something. I do not have to act like I know everything. I am learning that this has been a good experience for me. So I am really happy.”*

Veronica-*“For the orientation program, just like the other girls said, it was a lot of repeated information. Because I didn’t attend any of the programs. I wasn’t really interested, since my sister was already here. When I came here, my sister was already a junior and we already knew a lot of the information. I was already familiar. I felt like it was kind of boring. I said I know that. I met some of my closest*

Figure 6 (cont'd)

friends through the orientation program. Although I was a little shy at first, I ended up hanging out with some girls from my hall. I hung out with them for one day. Just the way they are, I could not really relate to them. I would say what I am doing. These aren't people I would normally hang out with or share similar belief I guess you could say. If I got lonely I would go up to my sister and hang out with her. She made it a lot easier and during the orientation program, my sister introduced me to her friends. It was really easy for me. I made friends, due to my sisters friends."

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther- *"The orientation program is very general to the traditional White college bound student. In my experience, if a student attends, then the sibling following up doesn't since the family feels the first one already had the experience. If they have a sibling that already went through it they are very fortunate. The first generation commuter student that comes is treated totally different that the student who lives on campus. Unfortunately, the commuter student is always the less supported since they do not have anyone they can relate to and ask for help."*

Yvonne- *"A number of students did participate in the orientation program and some have applied to be leaders next year. They are very conscious of wanting to be part of that to help students connect sooner, to connect in a way that is more tangible, from the perspective of a commuter student, from a perspective of a student of color on campus. They are very conscious of mentoring."*

Responses to Questions about Living on Campus During the First Year in College

As Figure 7 indicates, five of the six students who were part of the study lived on campus during their first year in college. All indicated that they missed their parents' and those whose homes were near the campus indicated that they went home often. The notion of family connections, in fact, seems a key to the students' sense of identity and emotional well being. For most, staying connected to their family gave them a sense of security and emotional support.

Staying connected with family, however, came at a price in terms of peer relationships, but the price was worth paying in terms of parental support, even if a parent did not understand completely what the student was going through. One student, for example, said the following:

It was weird for my roommates to see me go home often. For them, getting out of their house was like they were excited about it. For me, it was just easier living on campus than commuting to and from campus. They really didn't understand why I was going home so often. I would share with my mom some of challenges in fitting in, but not all; I didn't want to worry her. For me it was like high school again. I was the one Latina girl in honors courses. In my mind, it was the same but in another place.

The limited sharing alluded to the student quoted above was typical of other students' in the study, as well. It was really important for them not to worry their families by discussing their adjustment challenges. There undoubtedly was in some cases also a concern that by sharing their challenges at home, their families might ask her to come back home where it was a safer place for her.

Although students did not discuss most of their frustrations with living on campus at home—which, for the most part, they kept as a secure sanctuary from the cultural conflicts they experienced in their lives in the dorm—they clearly had frustrations generated by living in the dorm. These frustrations were undoubtedly cultural, but they also, at times, had something to do with social class.

The same student quoted above, for example, also mentioned how it bothered her that her roommates were not cleaning up after themselves. She noted how one of her roommates:

Would not do her own laundry. She would go to her grandma's house, because she [her grandmother] would do her laundry. I was like, the laundry place is just right around the corner, and It is not that hard to do. It was kind of difficult, because I met people who were not used to cleaning after themselves, doing their own things and being responsible for themselves.

Complaints about a fellow student not doing their own laundry or other students not cleaning up after themselves might seem trivial and, possibly, they are. Other complaints about differences with mainstream culture students, however, were most certainly not trivial. Most students, for instance, noted that, for the most part, their White (their characterization) roommates engaged in heavy drinking and partying. For most of participants, that behavior was not part of their upbringing or valued as a means to socialize with others.

All of these differences with peers who came from the majority culture and who far outnumbered Latinas and Latinos on campus added up to something that is potentially quite significant. One Latina in the study, for example, explained that she most certainly stood out among roommates, that being different was a norm for her, and that her roommates inevitably characterized the differences in ethnic terms:

I noticed cultural differences, it was apparent. It was respected and talked about it. There were cultural differences, but it was always referred to, 'You are Mexican that is why.' I was just, 'Maybe it is, and everybody thinks this way and believes this.'

Not all of the participants experienced dorm life in the same way that the student quoted above did, especially if they were accustomed to function in predominately White, mainstream culture environments. Another student, for instance, indicated that she did not realize that she was the only Latina among her roommates until

recently, yet she realized how important it was to connect with other Latinas who had the same background. She said:

I did not notice I was the only Latina last year among my roommates until this year, when I met my Guatemalan roommate. I am used to all White students in high school, yet it was good to share my Latina experience with my Guatemalan roommate. We would talk in Spanish and shared our common experiences.

One thing that is obvious when one reads many of the students' comments is the way they frame their frustrations and the problems they are having with their mainstream culture peers. With one noticeable exception, they tend to code problems as personal and individual. Most do not seem even to entertain the possibility that there may be larger societal forces playing out in their interactions with culturally different peers, much less that they may be victims of ethnic discrimination. Indeed, in some cases, the participants seem almost to be apologizing for the conflicts they are having and appear to blame themselves for their problems. This fact was noted by one of the student affairs professionals who stated the following:

The Latina students said their White roommates were nice, yet every single one of them pointed out a reason for what was uncomfortable or what became uncomfortable. Each of them identified hardship or some form of harassment. All of them expressed the important connection with home and identified it as a safe place where they can be themselves.

Another student affairs professional echoed the notion that Latinas do not establish strong interpersonal connections on campus and, also, suggested the long-term consequences of the lack of connections:

A lot of my students will not make strong connections on campus and leave home every weekend. Most of the Latina students tend to live off campus [after the first year] and the ones who live on campus do not connect very well. Because they tend to socialize differently, they do not drink socially, there are issues of class, and, therefore, they do not feel well connected.

Even though they articulated frustrations associated with living on campus and indicated that they often felt isolated, some of the Latinas in the study did not view the experiences negatively. This was certainly the case with one student who said:

Living on campus helped me with what my beliefs were. What did I really believe in? Do I really want to do this because everyone is doing it, or because I really believe in it? I hope to find people that have the same beliefs and interests as I do.

Overall, most of the student's sense of belonging on campus related to their culture, class level and what they had been taught about how to socialize with others.

One brief addendum to what has been said about the experience of living on campus. For the student that commuted to and from campus, adjusting to and connecting with campus was especially difficult. She stated:

It was hard for me in the beginning, because I didn't know where to find friends. I only went to classes then I went home. I met some people through the orientation program, when the commuters stayed on campus; It is when I met some of my commuter friends.

This particular student eventually got involved and made connections with student affairs professionals and, eventually, other students. This involvement, in turn, appeared to contribute to her persistence toward getting her degree.

Interestingly, student affairs professionals all acknowledge the need to do a better

job in addressing the needs of commuter students. This is the first year they have developed some targeted initiatives and are awaiting the results of their impact.

Figure 7. Summary of Responses to Question #7:

I lived in campus housing during my first year?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	5	83.33%
2	No	1	16.66%
	Total	6	100%

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-*“I lived on campus my first year, since I didn’t have any family in California. I wanted to move away from Connecticut and experience something new. I loved living on-campus. I was used to living at home with my little brother and my mom wasn’t home a lot. Here I have freedom. There are a lot of girls around. We had eight girls in four rooms and two bathrooms, it was still better than living and home, and you just had to learn to share with girls. Me and my roommate were close but not like best friends. I didn’t notice I was the only Latina last year among my roommates until this year, when I met my Guatemalan roommate. I am used to all White students in high school, yet it was good to share my Latina experience with my Guatemalan roommate. We would talk in Spanish and share our common experiences.”*

Lorena-*Living on campus helped me with what my beliefs were. “What did I really believe in? Do I really want to do this because everyone is doing it, or because I really believe in it? I hope to find people that have the same beliefs and interests as I do. I would share with my mom some of challenges in fitting in, but not all; I didn’t want to worry her. For me it was like high school again, I was the one Latina girl in honors courses, in my mind, it was the same but in another place. It was good living on-campus, because it made it easier to get involved in things. It helped me in getting to know people. It was also hard, because I am very close to my family; it was one of the reasons why I decided to stay in San Diego. I could go home whenever I wanted. Yet, I still remember the first week, I was very home sick.*

Figure 7 (cont'd)

Just moving out of the house was a big thing for me. It has helped me be more independent, not just with school stuff, but also my personal things, like going grocery shopping and all the stuff my mom used to do for us. Last year, my roommates where both White, I noticed the cleaning stuff. At home I would help around the house, I am a very organized person, and I like to have the space clean. My roommates weren't clean and it was difficult for me to deal with it. I didn't want to tell them to clean their side of the room and I sometimes I would event think of cleaning after them, but I said no that is not my responsibility. One of my roommates would go to her grandma's house, because she would do her laundry. I was like, the laundry place is just right around the corner, and It is not that hard to do. It was kind of difficult, because I met people who were not used to cleaning after themselves, doing their own things and being responsible for themselves. I was kind of like the opposite of that, I had to help around the house and clean our home. When, I am home, I am expected to have the house clean and have dinner ready by the time my mother gets home. Sometimes, I kind of do not like it, she's assuming the traditional women's roles, yet at the same time, I am not doing anything, If I can help her out, it is less work for her when she gets home. It was weird for my roommates to see me go home often. For them, getting out of their house was like they were excited about it. For me, it was just easier living on campus than commuting to and from campus. They really didn't understand why I was going home so often."

Esperanza-I lived off campus.

"It was hard for me in the beginning, because I didn't know where to find friends. I only went to classes then I went home. I met some people through the orientation program, when the commuters stayed on campus; It is when I met some of my commuter friends. One of them was in EOP (Educational Opportunity Program), and I wondered why I didn't get into EOP. I went to their office and asked. They told me they selected students and I was not on the list. I met, Esther at that office and she offered me a job. That was a very big help for me, and I started to meet a lot of people there. Those people told me you can do this and that, and I started getting involved and it was easier to make friends."

Heather-I lived on campus.

"It was interesting for me, since I lived in a quad. I shared one room with three other people. I kind of got the feeling that out of the four of us; I was the least economically well off. Just because they had so much more stuff than I did. They would talk about, like let's go to Steve Madden, this really expensive shoe place. I was like okay. And they would say, 'Heather when we go out, you never buy anything'. Well look at where you guys go. I do not know how you afford it. They were sweet girls and I got along well with them the first semester. We had roommate conflict we were not able to resolve. I have never felt they were

Figure 7 (cont'd)

discriminating me because how I looked or where I came from, it was more a personal thing."

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha- *"It is definitely though for them and even though I do not go back for some of the holidays to visit. It is definitely though for them to see me growing up. It is though since we are very family oriented and do a lot of things together. It was different having to share a restroom with thirty girls that you do not know. You have doubles and two bathrooms in the whole floor. I felt very blessed since I heard there were worst stories in other dorm areas on campus. It was just different having to take your entire shower stuff with you to the bathroom and shower while other people are showering next to you. I am very self-conscious and private. It was probably the toughest. Then living with someone else you really do not know, It is all about trust and energy and vibes. Because if you are not getting a positive vibe, then that is not good. I was sleeping right next to a complete stranger. I would admit I could not sleep during the first week. It wasn't like I felt in danger; it was just a comfort level. I was used to my sisters and my family. Even coming back to my dorm from classes, it was hard. I was used to having my mom there. Even though we didn't interact much, I was used to having someone there. I noticed cultural differences, it was apparent. It was respected and talked about it. There were cultural differences, but it was always referred to, you are Mexican that is why. I was just maybe it is, everybody thinks this way and believes this."*

Veronica- *"My roommates where White. A lot of the stuff they did was drink a lot. I didn't relate to that. They were really sweet girls because they respected what I believed in. I felt that I was really blessed, since a lot of my friends had really bad experiences. One of my friends that came from my high school, she said that her roommate was racist. I have never experienced being discriminated but I really felt for her. Thankfully, I didn't have to go through that. We always respected each other's needs and made it a lot easier. I was hard for me, since I was having a really good time and she was having a terrible time the first few days of college. I felt so sad. I feel fortunate. Although my parents have provided me with everything we need. It has always been hard for me to afford things that other people can afford. I am so simple. Other people wear extravagant clothes or expensive bags. My roommates were very wealthy. I could never see myself doing what they did, buying expensive clothing, because I could not afford it. They would always ask me to go shopping with them. I would say, I can't, I have something to do. I didn't want to feel the embarrassment for not being able to afford it. I still feel like it here. Everybody dresses up and drive BMW's. When I get my car, It is going to be simple. I never felt discrimination, I have never experienced that, It is a personal thing. It is about image and wanting to impress people like that."*

Figure 7 (cont'd)

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther- *“It is not an easy transition to be living on the dorms on campus, part of the college experience of the White person is to be exposed to diversity and to be exposed to the different cultures and different people’s views, but at the cost of the price of a handful that the university tends to neglect. Is that right? Is that just? Are we allowing that student to develop and grow? Where is the campus providing support for them [Latinas]? There should be more of an option for grouping for students of the like. The Latina students said their White roommates were nice, yet every single one of them pointed out a reason for what was uncomfortable or what became uncomfortable. Each them identified hardship or some form of harassment. All of them expressed the important connection with home and identified as a safe place where they can be themselves.”*

Yvonne- *“A lot of my students will not make strong connections on campus and leave home every weekend. Most of the Latina students tend to live off campus and the ones who live on campus do not connect very well. Because, they tend to socialize differently, they do not drink socially, there are issues of class, and therefore, they do not feel well connected. Most of the student’s live at home; they want to stay close to their family. For some It is the first time away from home. I had an overnight retreat and for some, it was the first time they had slept a night away from home. For some students, they contribute to their family income. For some It is a sense of achievement coming to here, than coming to a state school.”*

Responses to Question about Completing Their First Year at the University

In order to participate in this study, the student had to meet the criteria of completing their first year at the university. The list provided by the university included all students who, in fact, had completed their first year. Unfortunately, the list provided by the university also included transfer students who had completed their first year in college at another institution. Because the focus here was to be on students who had attended the particular institution being studied during their first year in college, transfer students were eliminated from consideration in the study.

Figure 8 confirms that this elimination process was successful.

Before moving on, I should note that it certainly is important to study the persistence of transfer students and the adjustment problems they experience when they move from one institution—in this case, often a community college—to a very different type of setting. Unfortunately, this investigation was beyond the scope of this particular study. The study, of course, also did not focus on students who did not persist past the first year. This group also needs to be studied in institutions like the one that was the focal point of this study, but, again, this study was delimited by a focusing on those who persisted past the first year and who had spent their first year on the campus that was the focal point for this research.

Figure 8. Summary of Responses to Question #8

About I have completed my first year at the university.

#	<i>Answer</i>		<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>
1	<i>Yes</i>		6	100%
2	<i>No</i>		0	0%
	<i>Total</i>		6	100%

Responses to Question about the Participants' Educational Experiences Prior to Entering College

The students provided insights about what their educational experiences prior to entering college had been, and these data are summarized in the form of excerpted quotes, in Figure 9. Among other things, the students described their parents' influence on their decision to go to college. One student, for example, spoke of the impact of her mother both on her decision to go to college and her motivation to persist in school: "My mother was my drive to stay in school," she

said; “I knew I could not disappoint her. After all she has done, I can’t disappoint her.” Another student mentioned her father:

My dad taught me that education is the number one goal in life. For me growing up it was never a question about going to college it was about where I was going. It was so important for both of my parents that I was going to college.

Although all of the student participants in the study indicated that parent’s supported the notion of attending college, some also took note on their parents’ unfamiliarity with college life and what might be called *the college game*. For one student, for example, the lack of awareness of higher education in her family challenged her to seek additional help in other places. She noted:

I had to rely on teachers, friends, and myself to figure out the process of applying to universities, getting information about scholarships, and knowing deadlines of when everything was due. It was cultural capital that my parents lacked because of their inability to continue with their education.

Though they may, at times, have lacked the knowledge and skills—i.e., the social capital—to help their daughters negotiate the strange new world of higher education, parents’ desire that their daughters received a good education was well established before the time of applying to a higher education institution. Figure 9, for example, indicates that the students, at least three of the six participants, attended a private Catholic high school both to insure that they went to school in a safe environment and to insure that they got a good private school education.

Although many parents were not financially well off, they found ways to raise funds to support a private school education for their daughters. “My mother [who at the time was a single parent] worked with the local parish and her employer to help pay for my private school education.” Another student also indicated that

her parents would always find the means to provide for a private school education. She added, "I have always gone to Catholic schools. Even though my parents were not economically well off, they thought it was important for me to go to a private Catholic school." A third student said the following about her parent's commitment to get her to college, no matter what the expense and the impact of that commitment on her:

I was raised in public schools until I went to high school. It was then that I attended a private Catholic school. I think that is where it all changed. My high school focused on preparing us for college. They would provide tours to different colleges around where we lived. There was a counseling center that provided information about colleges. We had meetings. I was always aware. But, it was my parents dream for us to go to college. It was never really a question, if you were going to college, but more whether how are you going to afford it. My parents said they would take out as many loans as you are going to need. We do not care if we go into debt. My dad has even told us, he's 57; I am not going to stop working until eleven years have passed, until I finish medical school.

A Student Affairs professional noticed that the students who came to this campus from private Catholic schools tend to be most successful. She shared her experiences with both Catholic and non-Catholic students:

For those who came from Catholic schools, they had a lot of support and put a lot of value on education and success. Even the ones who didn't, found their own way to put a value on education. Probably because she was quite capable and had the ability to do that and see that. She made that change to be successful. These women have worked really hard and took the challenge to go to this campus. They are coming prepared since the family support was there to support them for this type of education.

Not all students were fortunate to attend private Catholic schools. For some, due to their parent's financial circumstance, the challenges of inner city

communities made it difficult to stay focused and driven. One student, for example, shared the challenges of staying focused in the midst of many of her friends getting pregnant:

My experience is different than those students who went to private schools. I have attending public schools and usually they were the lowest performing. I tried to excel and be someone better and make something of ourselves. It was always the idea of exposure. Even looking back now. I remember my friends being pregnant. It wasn't anything bad, because they were taught they could not do anything more.

For one Latina's family, the lack of financial resources and not knowing about financial aid availability negatively influenced their support for their daughter pursuing higher education initially. Although they knew that education was a door for a better future, their financial circumstances made them doubt their ability to support their daughter's educational endeavors. The daughter shared her confusion about pursuing college, since she would receive mixed messages from her parents:

Both of my parents, when I was smaller, encouraged us to go to do very well in school. It was my dad's biggest goal to see his kids go to college. Yet, it was like something that was expected but, at the same time, it got to the point, when I was older, we want you to go to college, but we can't afford it. They pushed me to believe, I wanted to go to college, but when it got to reality, they would say, "We want you to go, but we can't afford it."

It is important to note the amount of self-motivation and persistence these students embodied. Although they faced many challenges and overcame many obstacles, they all were committed to going to college. They all started at different times of their lives thinking about college, though their level of awareness and support varied. For one student whose parents had the lowest educational level, the struggle was noticeable. Her story was one of persistence, she noted:

I started thinking about college in middle school, since I was in the AVID program. It really got me thinking about college. I went on college tours. I had all this information about college that was not provided at home. My mother knew nothing about college and the process of getting into college. It was pretty much, me working on it on my own and asking teachers about college, asking them what I needed to do, by when I should turn in these items by. It was a tough time for me in middle school, since my father passed away. Therefore going to college for me was like I wanted it even more. It had been his goal for his kids to go to college.

For another student, whose life was being challenged by hanging out with the wrong type of kids at school, thoughts about going to college occurred later rather than sooner. She shared her experience:

I didn't really start looking into college until my sophomore year in high school. Because I never really thought about it, like I knew I was going to college, but I didn't know how to start. I had not done any visits.

The challenge of inner city schools' lack of funding for AP courses didn't stop one student and her family. The parents supported her daughter's request for AP courses. The student had to fight for her education, since the school was not supportive and did not provide many AP courses due to some of her peers not being able to successfully complete them. She described her struggle:

The AP courses were very limited. I had to really push it since they would say a lot of people can't take more than one AP course at a time, because they drop out or it is too much work load. It was one of those things I wanted to do. If I wanted to do it, I had to try it. I took four at one time while I was working and playing sports.

Educators often talk about a hidden or informal commitment that teaches students important things. Some of the data in Figure 9 could, in fact, be construed as being about a hidden or informal curriculum. In one case, this informal

curriculum was taught by family members. One Latina, for example, talked about the influence of her sister on her own decision to go to and succeed in college:

I didn't even date in high school. I didn't go to prom, but it was because my sister was graduating from college and we wanted to be there to support her since my parents could not attend her graduation. My sister worked really for it and I wanted to be there to support her. She was the first one to move across the United States to live in Boston and go to school. If she would not have done that, then I would not have been able to come to San Diego. She opened the path for us and especially for me for having to live on campus.

In other cases, student's spoke of the hidden curriculum taught by their parents' actions. Many parents, for instance, took on additional jobs to support their children's education, and this action had both real consequences in terms of providing resources to support their daughters' education and also symbolic consequences related to reinforcing the message that education is important. Interestingly, the students have a strong work ethic and considerable drive, both of which, undoubtedly, have something to do with their parents' modeling. A student best summed up this point by saying:

My parents have always believed in a good work ethic. If you work hard one day it will pay off. You might not see it in your whole life, but in the end it will pay off, they say. They have worked hard all their lives and they have really pushed us to go on to college to make something of ourselves.

Figure 9. Summary of Responses to Question #9:

Please describe your educational experiences prior to entering college.

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-*Prior to entering college, I attended a private, Catholic high school in the next town over. My mom did not want to send me to the local high school, because there were many gang and violence problems at that school. She got some help from the parish to be able to send me to the Catholic high school nearby. This was mostly a white, middle-class school with a small percentage of minority students. However, everyone seemed to get along just fine. I worked hard on my studies because I knew I needed to get a scholarship to be able to attend college. My mother worked with the local parish and her employer to help pay for my private school education. During high school, I was very much into my studies. I knew I had to get into college and it was all about school. I was involved in a lot of clubs and president of the French club. During my junior year, I was already writing essays for college applications. My mother was my inspiration, but when it came to school, she left me on my own, because she knew I was responsible. I didn't get a lot of help with school and stuff, since my mother was at work a lot. My mother was my drive to stay in school; I knew I could not disappoint her. After all she has done, I can't disappoint her."*

Lorena-*Getting to where I am today has definitely been difficult. Ever since middle school I pushed myself to do well in school and started getting information about colleges. When I entered high school I signed up to take honors, AP, and IB classes to prepare myself for college. High school was difficult because there was no one in my family who could help me with homework and we did not have internet until almost my senior year. Doing homework was also challenging because I did not have my own quiet room in which I could concentrate. I had to rely on teachers, friends, and myself to figure out the process of applying to universities, getting information about scholarships, and knowing deadlines of when everything was due. It was cultural capital that my parents lacked because of their inability to continue with their education. Regardless of these struggles, I got accepted to all 4 universities I applied to and got a full scholarship to this campus. Both of my parents, when I was smaller, encouraged us to go to do very well in school. It was my dad's biggest goal to see his kids go to college. Yet, it was like something that*

Figure 9 (cont'd)

was expected but, at the same time it got to the point, when I was older, we want you to go to college, but we can't afford it. They pushed me to believe, I wanted to go to college, but when it got to reality, they would say, we want you to go, but we can't afford it. I left the house, moved out, and since I am a girl, my parents are more protective of me, they worried more about me. I was always a good girl. I never misbehaved. I always got good grades in school. I started thinking about college in middle school, since I was in the AVID program. It really got me thinking about college. I went on college tours. I had all this information about college that was not provided at home. My mother knew nothing about college and the process of getting into college. It was pretty much, me working on it on my own and asking teachers about college, asking them what I needed to do, by when I should turn in these items by. It was a tough time for me in middle school, since my father passed away. Therefore going to college for me was like I wanted it even more. It had been his goal for his kids to go to college. I really needed to work hard and I really needed to focus to get into college. I pretty much set up my own plan and what I needed to do get into college."

Esperanza- *"I started first grade in Mexico City and moved to San Diego to start second grade. Spanish is my first language and it was very hard to learn English because there was a large Hispanic population at my elementary school. I attended 2nd to 8th grade in the same community and in high school I moved to a different high school in another community. I was a very smart student and hardly needed any assistance in classes and activities. I was really bad; I go into trouble and was kicked out two times from high school. These girls who wanted to fight me and I did. They could not get rid of me since I had really good grades. It was then, that I noticed a lot of my friends were not doing anything with their lives where I lived, they used to smoke weed all day. I said I do not want to be like them, Why I am doing these things; it helped me see what I didn't want to be. When I was a senior, I told myself, What am I doing, and I started going on the right path. I didn't really start looking into college until my sophomore year in high school. Because I never really thought about it, like I knew I was going to college, but I didn't know how to start. I had not done any visits. Then my mom was trying to fill out the FAFSA form and she didn't know what to do. I had graduated a semester early and my parents sent me to Mexico for three months. She had to go to several orientations to get help in filling out the form."*

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather- *"My dad taught me that education is the number one goal in life. For me growing up it was never a question about going to college it was about where I was going. It was so important for both of my parents that I was going to college. I have always gone to Catholic schools. Even though my parents were not economically*

Figure 9 (cont'd)

well off, they taught it was important for me to go to a private Catholic school. Because I would get a better education that way and smaller classes. Also, they taught there were better teachers there. They also taught I would be safer there, because generally in Catholic schools there isn't race conflict, because really there wasn't, because the classes were so small. You really do not want to start a fight with fifty people in your class. The public schools aren't the best in the area. Even if they had to scrape the barrel a few times, they wanted to send me and my sister to private Catholic schools. My high school was pretty good about college information. The classes were tailored to meet the UC school requirements. During my junior year to think about college and would invite your parents to come. They would talk about college requirements and financial aid, the FAFSA. They would encourage students to sign up for Pell grants as well. Since it was a smaller school, they were more invested in their student's; there were 72 students in my graduating class. They did such a good job since the parents are paying money, so they want to go far."

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha- *"My parents have always believed in a good work ethic. If you work hard one day it will pay off. You might not see it in your whole life, but in the end it will pay off, they say. They have worked hard all their lives and they have really pushed us to go on to college to make something of ourselves. This has been their reward. Putting your heart into everything you do really makes a difference. My experience is different than those students who went to private schools. I have attending public schools and usually they were the lowest performing. I tried to excel and be someone better and make something of ourselves. It was always the idea of exposure. Even looking back now. I remember my friends being pregnant. It wasn't anything bad, because they taught they could not do anything more. I could not imagine being pregnant having to manage school and children. Some of my girlfriends were pregnant. It was common. So many of them could have gone to college. They got pregnant and it didn't work out. I had structure and I knew I wanted more out of life. I want to have a family. I wanted to go to college and having to make something of myself, before having a family. So I can provide a better situation for them. I didn't even date in high school. I didn't go to prom, but it was because my sister was graduating from college and we wanted to be there to support her since my parents could not attend her graduation. My sister worked really for it and I wanted to be there to support her. She was the first one to move across the United States to live in Boston and go to school. If she would not have done that, then I would not have been able to come to San Diego. She opened the path for us and especially for me for having to live on campus. In terms of AP course, my parents and teachers have pushed us. The teachers have talked to our parents, and our parents have talked to our teachers. The AP courses were very*

Figure 9 (cont'd)

limited. I had to really push it since, they would say a lot of people can't take more than one AP course at a time, because they drop out or It is too much work load. It was one of those things I wanted to do. If I wanted to do it, I had to try it. I took four at one time while I was working and playing sports. I knew it would pay off some day. You really had to be motivated and my family was behind me. My campus had a career center and they provide us with many opportunities. They offered workshops on how to fill out the FAFSA. They would refer me to scholarship opportunities."

Veronica- *"I was raised in public schools until I went to high school. It was then that I attended a private Catholic school. I think that is where it all changed. My high school focused on preparing us for college. They would provide tours to different colleges around where we lived. There was a counseling center that provided information about colleges. We had meetings. I was always aware. But, it was my parents dream for us to go to college. It was never really a question, if you were going to college, but more whether how are you going to afford it. My parents said they would take out as many loans as you are going to need. We do not care if we go into debt. My dad has even told us, he's 57; I am going to stop working until eleven years have passed, until I finish medical school. I can see my parents have always had financial problems. Yet they wanted us to have a good education. They did want us to experience bad temptations. They really wanted us to have a good education. I was a really hard worker in high school and students looked up to me. I got good grades and I was in honors. It was difficult as financials go, but school was easy. My sister left a deep mark in the high school and she has left a mark here on campus as well. I'm afraid of failure and I have failed a lot of times. I feel like I am learning. I should be learning from the things I failed."*

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther- *"For those who came from Catholic schools, they had a lot of support and put a lot of value on education and success. Even the one who didn't found their own way to put a value on education? Probably because she was quite capable and had the ability to do that and see that. She made that change to be successful. These women have worked really hard and took the challenge to go to this campus. They are coming prepared since the family support was there to support them for this type of education."*

Yvonne- *"There's Latinas who went to predominantly Hispanic schools to students who went to private Catholic schools where they were underrepresented and didn't experience much culture shock. Then we have some students who went to Mexico private schools and came here to school."*

Responses to the Question about Making The Final Decision About Which College to Attend

The decision to go to college is an important one; equally important is the decision about which college to attend. Figure 10 summarizes what students said when asked how they decided on a college. Among other things, the responses provide information about the involvement of parents in this decision.

There were several factors that students considered in their decision making. All of them, however, made their decision based on the amount of financial aid they received. Getting the best package—a package that covered most if not all expenses—dictated their final decision about which college or university to attend. This is hardly surprising since it is evident that most students could not depend on their parent's to contribute to their educational costs. One Latina in the study made this point when she stated:

The main reason I selected this college was because of the scholarships and financial aid I received to attend here. I basically do not have to pay anything, so this was an extremely important factor for choosing this school. Many of the schools I applied to gave me scholarships, but the campus scholarships covered most of the tuition. I did not want to take out a lot of loans and I knew my mom could not help me pay for college, so I based my college decision on who gave me the most scholarships and financial aid to attend their institution.

For some, their initial offer did not cover all their expenses. They waited for another offer to come in before they made their final decision to attend. One student was excited about going to this college, yet she hesitated. She said:

I finally received the acceptance letter and discovered the scholarship that they were offering me. I knew it was very expensive and something I could not afford, but also knew that it was very

prestigious and had aspects that I really liked. In the end, I decided to attend it because they later offered me more money that covered the rest of the expenses. I chose this campus because it is close to home, it has small classes which allow me to get more attention from professors, it is a beautiful campus, and most importantly it covered all expenses.

Another student shared the same experience. She got a prestigious Presidential Scholarship, but she still needed additional aid to cover living expenses. This particular student had other siblings in college and knew that her parents could not help her pay for school. She waited for an additional response about financial aid and this is what happened:

It wasn't until I got the acceptance later that I was excited, but I knew I could not afford it. I got my first financial aid offer letter with the presidential scholarship. It was not a lot, but then my second offer gave me more scholarship and covered most of my expenses. Here, I got a nice scholarship and it helped me make my choice. Coming down to it, it was the financial aid offer that made me make my final decision.

A Student Affairs professional noted that financial aid is important for most Latinas who attend this university, not just the participants in this study. The person also took note of an ongoing concern about the university's commitment to provide a high level of financial support:

We have more first generation Latinas go here because of the financial aid they are given, even with the choices of going to UCLA, UC Berkeley. A concern many of them have is the universities commitment to continue providing their financial aid assistance to stay and persist. This student affairs professional also spoke of other reasons, beyond the financial aid reason that attracted Latinas to this particular campus.

“Most decided to come here due to smaller classes, more resources available and being closer to home,” she stated. These same reasons also were cited by

students in this study. For one student who applied to several schools and got admitted, for example, indicated that the small classroom experience and student-to-teacher ratio helped her make her final decision. Although she was accepted to several schools, this campus was on one of her top two. She noted:

I got into most of the schools I applied for, UC Davis, UC Berkley, UC Los Angeles, Pepperdine and this campus. My final two were this campus and UCLA, which are two extreme opposites. But the reason why I ended up choosing this campus over UCLA is mostly because I realize two things: I really enjoyed the small school atmosphere I got used to growing up and I would miss that if I went to UCLA. I like the student to teacher relationship here.

Another student had a unique experience. She called this school the dream school: “I thought I could not get in, I saw it as my dream school. To be honest, I kept it as the last application to do, I did the others first.” She was introduced to this school when she came to visit with her high school basketball team. She discussed her first campus exposure:

I play basketball and came here to play in a tournament. As soon as we got to the campus, I said, jokingly, “I think I am going here to college.” But I already knew it would probably cost a lot more than I could afford. I finally told my coach about my campus choice since he was bothering me about which colleges I was interested in. I told him I am going here and he said, “It is expensive, too expensive. I said, ‘Oh yeah, you are right.’ I told my sister and she said it had a good education program.

Even if it was her dream school, she still had to wait for her letter and the financial aid package discussed in the letter. It finally came! She said, “You should never lose hope, because you have to work hard for something and put your mind to it. When I got my letter, I had to hide it, and I could not tell anybody without crying.”

Of all the students, only one student had a sibling in the same college and both are first generation students. This is not common for first generation students, yet their parents were strong advocates for education. The student said, “I got introduced to this campus through my sister who was already attending here. At first, I said I do not want to go to the same school as my sister, but I loved this school.”

For other students, this campus was not initially on their radar screens. As reported in Figure 10, several students indicated how they found out about the particular private school they eventually decided to attend. Two of the students were encouraged by their high school counselors to consider applying for a private school. Both counselors mentioned that private schools usually gave better financial aid packages and it was worth applying. Another student talked about the role of her AVID teacher:

I was not even considering this school, but I was forced by my AVID teacher in high school to apply to a private university. Since I wanted to stay close to home, here in San Diego County, I decided to apply to it.

The desire to stay close to home also was a factor in deciding to attend this particular college for most of the students in the study. All but one student, in fact, is from San Diego. Interestingly, the out-of-state student chose the campus because she wanted to be far away from home. For the rest, however, staying near home was a priority and most certainly influenced their decision to attend the campus they eventually chose. One student summed up her thinking—and the thinking of most other study participants—on the matter as follows: “I did not want to leave

San Diego because I am very attached to my family and that is the reason I decided to live at home.”

One factor that surprised me when I reviewed the data about reasons for choosing the college that was chosen was the student’s response to the Catholicity of the university. Nobody indicated that they chose this university because it was a Catholic institution. Even those who attended Catholic high schools did not indicate that the Catholic nature of the institution was a factor in their decision to attend it.

As reported in Figure 10, one student stated:

I grew up Catholic, but knowing this campus was Catholic, it was not an issue for me to encourage or discourage me to come here. Since I have been here on campus, I have been able to learn more about that [i.e., the Catholic] religion. I was taught Catholicism at home, but I really didn’t practice it.

Another student, who was raised Catholic; also indicated that the college’s religious affiliation did not impact her decision making process. “This campus being Catholic did not impact my decision,” she stated unequivocally. Our family sometimes goes to Church as a family, but not always.” This same theme was echoed by another student who stated: “I am also Catholic but it was not the main reason [for deciding to come to this particular college]. It wasn’t until I get accepted that I realized they had mass on campus.”

A student affairs professional summed up the reasons other Latinas come here. She mentioned the same factors that the Latinas in the study mentioned, but she also included the university’s affiliation with the Catholic church as a reason, something virtually all of the participants did not list. This is what the student affairs professional said:

A lot of them chose this campus because it is a beautiful campus and it is Catholic. The small classrooms and they like the relationships with their professors. Someone suggested they applied here or they knew someone that attended. The Catholic aspect is consistent with their values. I have a student who came here since she got a full ride [good financial aid offer].

Figure 10. Summary of Responses to Question #10:

Now, describe how you made the decision to attend the school you are attending and your reasons for selecting this college.

Focus Group 1 Responses

***Maria-**I actually did not know about this campus until my high school counselor told me about it. I told her I wanted to experience something new and move away from Connecticut to Florida or California. She asked me if my mom would not mind, but I said my mom was not paying for college. And, anyways my mom told me I could go wherever made me happy. The main reason I selected this college was, because of the scholarships and financial aid I received to attend here. I basically do not have to pay anything, so this was an extremely important factor for choosing this school. Many of the schools I applied to gave me scholarships, but campus scholarships covered most of the tuition. I did not want to take out a lot of loans and I knew my mom could not help me pay for college, so I based my college decision on who gave me the most scholarships and financial aid to attend their institution. That is how I ended up 3,000 miles away from home, at this campus. Also, I always wanted to visit California and experience a new environment, so that was another factor that contributed to my decision. I had chosen UC Berkeley, but my counselor told me that it was really hard to get in, since they only accept Californians. I looked at this campus on the website and I said this is beautiful. I applied and of course my main factor in deciding where to go was finances and of course, the campus gave me a scholarship and financial aid to pay for it. All I have to do is work to pay for my personal expenses and I do that through work study. My mom told me I could go wherever I wanted. My mom saw how excited I was when I received my acceptance letter that she said she would help me as much as she could. She bought me a new laptop since my old one broke. When it was time to come, she came with me to visit the campus. It was hard for me, since she had to*

Figure 10 (cont'd)

leave back the same day we arrived to return to work. I remember we both cried. I didn't see her for six months. She would call me every day. It is different now when I go back home. I miss them. I got closer to her while I was here. It has been easier having a relationship with my mother."

Lorena-*My dream school since middle school had always been UCSD and it continued to be all throughout high school. I applied to it and got accepted, but surprisingly I was not so excited about it anymore. I was not even considering this school, but I was forced by my AVID teacher in high school to apply to a private university. Since I wanted to stay close to home, here in San Diego County, I decided to apply to it. Soon after applying I began to get excited about it and more interested in attending it. When acceptance letters were arriving, I could not wait to hear from this campus. I finally received the acceptance letter and discovered the scholarship that they were offering me. I knew it was very expensive and something I could not afford, but also knew that it was very prestigious and had aspects that I really liked. In the end, I decided to attend it because they later offered me more money that covered the rest of the expenses. I chose this campus because it is close to home, it has small classes which allow me to get more attention from professors, it is a beautiful campus, and most importantly it covered all expenses. I am very attached to my family, and I wanted to stay close to home, so I can see my family. I really didn't think about this campus until, my AVID teacher told me to apply to a private school. I said It is too expensive, I can't afford it. She told me that sometimes, private schools are the ones who give you more money and she encouraged me to apply to one private school and wait to see what happened. Since middle school, my goal was to go to UCSD. I got accepted to UCSD and this campus. Yet, when I received the acceptance letter, I was much more excited. This campus offered me the biggest financial aid package. My mom can't help me out at all with college. It ended up working for me, they pretty much pay for everything and I ended up going to a small school. I grew up Catholic, but knowing this campus was Catholic, it was not an issue for me to encourage or discourage me to come here. Since I have been here on campus, I have been able to learn more about that (Catholic) religion. I was taught Catholicism at home, but I really didn't practice it. I'm still learning about the things I believe in. Recently, I attended the Spring Break Program, I didn't know anyone in campus ministry, and I didn't feel like I knew people there. After the Spring Break Program experience, it has increased my interest in exploring Catholicity."*

Esperanza-*I wanted to stay in San Diego and I wanted a school that had classes of small size. In addition, I had been exposed to the campus when I was younger. I did not want to leave San Diego because I am very attached to my family and that is the reason I decided to live at home. This campus being Catholic didn't impact my decision. I have learned more about Catholicism. Our family sometimes goes to Church as a family, but not always. I had visited the campus when I was eight*

Figure 10 (cont'd)

years old and really liked it, because it seemed peaceful. I initially wanted to go to San Diego State University, when I was influenced by my friends. I really didn't want to go away from home; I had been accepted at UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, this campus and San Diego State University. I wanted to stay in San Diego, and I didn't want to live on-campus. I can't imagine my life without my parents. I decided to stay at home and attend this campus. When I was filling out my questionnaire to get my classes, I asked my mother for help, I always had the urgency to ask her for help. I wanted college to be an experience on my own, since my mother always did everything for me that was the last time I asked her for help."

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-*Picking where I wanted to go to college was very difficult for me. "I got into most of the schools I applied for, UC Davis, UC Berkley, UC Los Angeles, Pepperdine and this campus. My final two were this campus and UCLA, which are two extreme opposites. But the reason, why I ended up choosing this campus over UCLA, is mostly because I realize two things: I really enjoyed the small school atmosphere I got used to growing up and I would miss that if I went to UCLA. I like the student to teacher relationship here. The only reason I would consider going to UCLA, was because it was so hard to get into. I felt like I had to go since I was only of 500 applicants chosen. If I would have chosen UCLA, I would have gone due to a sense of obligation. I really wanted a small school atmosphere. I really liked the San Diego area better than Los Angeles. It helped I got a good scholarship here and UCLA was not as forthcoming with a good scholarship and didn't offer much of financial aid."*

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-*"Everyone would ask, Where are you going to go? I didn't know and I didn't have a clue. I really didn't know about colleges. I really didn't know what was going on. I tried to push it aside and move on. I play basketball and came here to play in a tournament. As soon as we got to the campus, I said jokingly, I think I am going here to college. But I already knew it would probably cost a lot more than I could afford. I finally told my coach about my campus choice since he was bothering me about which colleges I was interested in. I told him I am going here and he said It is expensive, too expensive. I said, Oh yeah, you are right. I told my sister and she said it had a good education program. I finally decided on Arizona State, UCSD and Cal State Fullerton, since I can be closer to home to commute, this campus was one of my choices. I thought I could not get in, I saw it as my dream school. To be honest I kept it as the last application to do, I did the others first. It wasn't until I got accepted that I really researched it and realized they had a good education program. My dad was adamant about visiting the campus to get*

Figure 10 (cont'd)

the campus feel for it. I didn't want to get my hopes up and encourage me to visit the campus. It wasn't until I got the acceptance later that I was excited but I knew I could not afford it. I got my first financial aid offer letter with the presidential scholarship. It was not a lot, but then my second offer gave me more scholarship and covered most of my expenses. Here, I got a nice scholarship and it helped me make my choice. Coming down to it, it was financial offers that made me make my decision. I am also Catholic but it was not the main reason. It wasn't until I get accepted that I realized they had mass on campus. I also noticed they had smaller classes too. I also really liked that through my program I could get a special education credential with my liberal studies bachelor. You should never lose hope, because you have to work hard for something and put your mind to it. When I got my letter, I had to hide it, and I could not tell anybody without crying. My family was not big criers. I had to find the right time to share it. It wasn't a big deal but I waited. Every day my dad would say did you get any college letters. When I got Arizona's letter we celebrated but I waited to share my letter from this campus. I had two schools in mind to pick. Everyday my dad would come home and say, have you heard about Arizona? It is really hot out there. I have guys working with me and they say It is really miserable out there with the heat. He really tried to have me be closer to home. San Diego is a lot closer than Arizona. He definitely pushed me that way. My mom would say I know you are growing up and tried to be a lot stronger about it. She really wanted us to pursue our dream. To see what is out there."

Veronica-*"I'm a small school kind of girl. My sister would say my biggest class has 32 students. I like that since I really liked to have a relationship with my professors. The relationship within student and professor is really intimate. That is what I am used to. Compared to larger campuses, most professors do not even know you. As well as that the school was family oriented. Being Catholic really didn't matter to me, maybe to my parents. I was more concerned about academics. I got introduced to this campus through my sister who was already attending here. At first, I said I do not want to go to the same school as my sister but I loved this school. Although, the environment is kind of exclusive, what made it awesome are the friends I have made. I felt really good after I made my friends. It wasn't a large culture shock.*

Focus Group 3 Responses

Esther-*"The students want that connection to home, the connection to family, the connection to your own identity, to not wanting to stray far from who you are. The people connection is vital to who they are."*

Yvonne-*"A lot of them chose this campus because it is a beautiful campus and It is Catholic. The small classrooms and they like the relationships with their professors. Someone suggested they apply here or they knew someone that*

Figure 10 (cont'd)

attended. The Catholic aspect is consistent with their values. I have a student who came here since she got a full ride."

Sol- "We have more first generation Latinas go here because of the financial aid they are given, even with the choices of going to UCLA, UC Berkeley. A concern many of them have is the universities commitment to continue providing their financial aid assistance to stay and persist. Most decided to come here due to smaller classes, more resources available and being closer to home."

Responses to Question about Describing The Participants' First Year Experience In College

The first year in college can be an important time of personal growth and adapting to a new environment for first year students. Question 11 asked students about participants' first year experiences, and their responses are included in Figure 11.

The Latina students described several factors that impacted their first year experience. These ranged from culture shock, making connections and fitting in with other students on campus, and developing their own ideas.

Culture Shock Related to Financial Disparity and Other Cultural Differences

All students described experiencing culture shock during their first year in college. For many, the affluence of many students on campus was quite evident and a source of discomfort for the study's participants, because they were on some form of financial aid and could not keep up with their roommates' spending habits. For example, one student who came from another state observed:

I can describe my first year experience here in two words: culture-shock! I do not know if it is just San Diego culture, or all of

California culture, but I was completely shocked my first year in San Diego. It was a whole different environment for me, where people were extremely concerned with looks and material possessions.

A student affair professional who works with first year students suggested that these issues are not limited to out of state students. She stated:

Many of them [i.e., Latinas on campus] refer to nice cars; they mention the White people on campus and [that] sometimes they [the White people] can't relate to how important their family [is] and going home is for them and helping their family.

Connecting to and Fitting in With Other Students on Campus

The Latina students in the study also identified that one of their challenges during the first year was learning to adapt to their new living arrangements. Some explicitly indicated that they experienced isolation, loneliness and discomfort. Ironically, although some of the Latinas indicated they were isolated because they wanted to maintain their close connection to their families and, consequently, spent many of their weekends at home, the Latina who came from out of state, for example, said the following:

The girls [non-Latina roommates] would go home a lot during the weekends. I would be the only one left there in the room by myself. That would kill me, and I thought about home, I thought several times about transferring, like I have no one here. I was thinking I can't do this anymore. This is getting to me, I was getting so depressed. I would tell myself, I can not be here anymore. Then, by meeting more and more people, I overcame the depression.

Another Latina described a conscious strategy of isolating herself during the first year in college to insure that she stayed within her comfort zone within a new and different social milieu:

I'm definitely that person that wanted to stay in their comfort zone, last year as a freshman. I would just kind of keep to myself, because I felt like that is all I knew. I can tell you that I have changed; now I feel like a lot more social. I am willing to try new things. I am not so scarred of risk taking. I was scared of failure.

Being one of the few Latinas on campus was the most difficult experience for all Latinas. As Figure 11 demonstrates, all of them indicated that it was quite noticeable that Latinas were heavily underrepresented. Their comments also indicate, however, that they took on the responsibility for being visible on campus. One Latina, for example, indicated that she knew that remaining on campus and being visible was key to supporting other Latinas:

I realized that if I transferred I would only be making this campus less diverse and making it harder for future students to relate to someone. I began to see my presence here as imperative to the community rather than insignificant.

Another student felt the challenges of fitting in as a Latina but also reinforced a theme that was seen in data presented earlier: She did want to worry her family. This student said:

One thing I knew and I would never forget is that I was and I am different and I am proud to be different. When I felt I didn't fit in, I didn't tell my parents. I really didn't want them to get worried and over-protective on what was going on and what went wrong.

Developing Their Own Ideas

The Latinas educational experience allowed them to experience new ideas and perspectives. Their minds began to expand, and some of them began to develop their own ideas and opinions that, at times, conflicted with those of their parents.

One student grappled with the notion of having her own opinion and how she addressed that with her mother:

Once I got here, I was taking different classes, I was learning about different things, and in different ways. So going home and having conversations with my mother, was like I had a different perspective now and sometimes was challenging my mom's ideas. It got to the point, that all you know is what you are taught in your house and now you have your own ideas and you are able to see things in different ways. At least you are more open-minded about subjects and sometimes is going to be different to say I do not agree with what you say, and it is like in our culture you shouldn't go against what the authority figure says, because you are being disrespectful and I do not want to disrespect you, but at the same time, I have my own beliefs and now and I do not really agree with what you are saying.

Another student shared a similar experience:

My parents are very traditional and when I came here I said 'wow', there is a bigger world there. I have the opinions my parents have taught me, but now I feel I have developed something completely different than they have. I feel very sad to say that my parents at time are completely closed minded, because they are so traditional. Here I am so much more. For example, I am for gay marriage and my parents are against it. I told them they should be happy and experience what everyone else is experiencing. I have my own opinions. I have developed the person I am today. I have a stronger identity.

Student affairs professional reinforced the notion that most students were challenged by new ideas in their first year and that embracing new ideas can be a source of familial conflict:

Most students do not know how they are changing and how that affects their relationships. Now they are challenged with how they are developing and growing and their parents are not. Who is talking to the parents and students? How do they process their change, and how do they talk to their parents about the change they are going thru? There are ways to communicate with the parents that their students are going to change and how they can support the

student in their development. You can give them your love but not your heart. You can give them your thoughts but not your mind. Ultimately their minds grow to whatever they experience. A mind once stretched can never return to its original size. That's what happens to these students.

In addition to being confronted with and even embracing new ideas at school, the Latinas in the study still maintained many pre-conceived notions of what is expected of them and what they need to do to please others. There are many responsibilities and expectations placed on Latinas. One Latina shared that she is expected to be a role model for her sister plus ensure she's on the right path to college success:

They [her parents] expect me to be a role model for my little sister. She always comes to meetings with me on-campus, she tells me I am already a student. That places more responsibility on me to do well in school, because she will follow my footsteps.

A Latina student affairs professional could relate to the student's comments given her experience in working with other Latinas who felt similar pressures:

They have a lot of responsibility at home and sometime they take everything on because they think that is what is expected of them. The parents sacrifice so much for them and they take so much on because they feel they are expected to succeed.

So, there was a tension between embracing new ideas and staying committed to old ideas that were reinforced by their culture. One student affairs professional seemed to express frustration that, more often than not, cultural ideas were trumping the new ideas that the students encountered at the university. She said:

More often than not, is the Latinas that...do not see the connection, how gender is such a big part of their culture, defined for them.

There are messages that are articulated for Latinas, expectations of them. How is it that Latinas start unpacking gender? There's a sense of obligation, a sense of responsibility on Latinas to stay at home and not leave.

This individual went on to note that the Women's Center on campus had engaged in outreach about gender issues specifically directed at supporting Latinas during their first year at the university. Interestingly, none of the Latinas in this study mentioned the Women's Center in their responses.

Even though the Latinas' culture often wins out in the battle for minds (and hearts) in the university setting, the support that culture and the traditional transmitters of culture normally provide often is missing according to one student affairs professional who was a part of Focus Group 3. She said:

Coming to college for Latinas is a totally new experience and their families can't support them. Their parents are not in a position to, personally, say, this is what you need to do, this is how it is going to be or even offer any form of emotional support. Parents have basically no idea of what the student is coming to. The parent knows the importance of the education, but they do not know how to be supportive.

Figure 11. Summary of Responses to Question #11

Please describe your first year experiences in college.

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-*I can describe my first year experience here in two words: culture-shock! I do not know if it is just San Diego culture, or all of California culture, but I was*

Figure 11 (cont'd)

completely shocked my first year in San Diego. It was a whole different environment for me, where people were extremely concerned with looks and material possessions. I mean, in CT [Connecticut] people have a lot of money too but I just do not feel like young people "rub it in your face," I guess, as much as they do here. I got really home-sick my first semester, and I think that was mainly due to the fact that I did not know a single person entering the university or had any family or friends nearby. I remember sometimes in the weekends I would be the only one of eight people in my dorm, and at those times I felt really depressed and sometimes called my boyfriend and started crying. Also, my boyfriend was back in CT so that just made things a lot worse. I would often get very lonely or just upset at having gone all the way to California where I did not have anyone to support me. I was really homesick for a semester. I had left my boyfriend back home. The girls (roommates) would go home a lot during the weekends. I would be the only one left there in the room by myself. That would kill me, and I thought about home, I thought several times about transferring, like I have no one here. I was thinking I can't do this anymore. This is getting to me, I was getting so depressed. I would tell myself, I can't be here anymore. Then, by meeting more and more people, I overcame the depression. I began to get closer to my Guatemalan friend and met another Colombian on campus. I met the Colombian friend during our Chinese class; it was great to talk to someone else who shared a common experience. The culture in California is so different. It is like culture-shock. I didn't realize how important physical appearance is; It is such a big deal here. Back home, I could get up, put my uniform on, brush my teeth and walk out the door. Here I have to make an effort to look descent to go to school. I was like, Oh My God! Are these really student's cars? I was shocked. Because back home, I went to a Catholic private school and they were rich kids, kids' that were really well off. I just felt that they didn't portray it as much, like it wasn't all in your face. You can definitely see there's wealth here. Over there, yeah, people have money, but its' not like always in your face. I wasn't able to buy a lot of the things I needed or able to go out every weekend like everyone else. I could not do that, I had to work."

Lorena-*"My first year in college was extremely challenging because I felt like I did not fit in and could not relate to anyone. I went home often because I was homesick all the time and could not find things to do on the weekends. It was difficult not having a kitchen, living with two strangers who were the complete opposite of me, and not having a car to get around. There were many times when I wanted to transfer to another university, but didn't because I could not financially afford to do so. I slowly began finding people who also felt like me and to whom I connected very strongly. The relationships that I began to build motivated me to stay and continue to develop them. My first year was definitely difficult, but it allowed me find myself as an individual and discover what I truly believe. In addition, I realized that if I transferred I would only be making this campus less diverse and making it harder for future students to relate to someone. 'I began to see my*

Figure 11 (cont'd)

presence here as imperative to the community rather than insignificant,' Once I got here, I was taking different classes, I was learning about different things, and in different ways. So going home and having conversations with my mother, was like I had a different perspective now and sometimes it was challenging my mom's ideas. It got to the point, that all you know is what you are taught in your house and now you have your own ideas and you are able to see things in different ways. At least you are more open-minded about subjects and sometimes is going to be different, to say I do not agree with what you say and It is like in our culture you shouldn't go against what the authority figure says, because you are being disrespectful and I do not want to disrespect you, but at the same time, I have my own beliefs and now and I do not really agree with what you are saying. I feel like my mom is a little more like, what do you have to say about this? A lot more open about me having my own opinions on things. Whereas before it was ouch! Where are you getting these ideas from? I attended the first year student workshops. I was required to attend by my professor. I attended, and I didn't feel like they were good."

Esperanza-*In the beginning of the year, I did not know where to start to get involved. I ran for freshman senator and did not get elected. One day, I walked into the EOP office and asked why other people were selected to be in EOP and I wasn't. I met Esther and she offered me a job at EOP. I then met Luis and became an "adopted" EOP student. It was great working at a place where there were students who shared the same experience as me and it was a great way for me to meet people since I did not live on campus. Esther and Luis are great people who have helped me in the process of becoming the person I am today. A couple days later I decided to join M.E.Ch.A. and A.Ch.A. and I met so many new people. One thing I knew and I would never forget is that I was and I am different and I am proud to be different. When I felt I didn't fit in, I didn't tell my parents. I really didn't want them to get worried and over-protective on what was going on and what went wrong. When you are younger, you only know what your parents have taught you. I have my own opinions. My parents do not disagree with me, because they know I am always right, Oh! No not really. But my dad always tells me, you think you are always right but, now we are able to share our different opinions. They expect me to be a role model for my little sister. She always comes to meetings with me on-campus, she tells me I am already a student. That places more responsibility on me to do well in school, because she will follow my footsteps. I participated in the first year student workshops. I was required to go by my teacher. The workshops used technical terms that are not appealing to students. If more students would present these who actually went through these things that could help."*

Figure 11 (cont'd)

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-*Living away from home was a big thing.*

"That was something I really wanted to experience, because most of my extended family lived where I lived. That was really the first time I got a taste of independence. My house is about two hours away. If I really wanted to go home during the weekend I could go home. It was like a safety thing, I knew my parents were that close. If anything did happened they could easily come over and see me. It was nice, since it really helped me, like I gave my first step toward independence. You know interacting with other people it s a bit more difficult. I mean, they do try to get you to get acquainted with other classmates during the orientation program. Like I do not know, I am more shy and reserved when it comes to first meeting other people. So, I didn't get lumped into a group and if you do not' get into a group of friends, during the first couple weeks of school, then It is a little harder to meet and find people. That is where SSS, helped a lot more."

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-*"I'm definitely that person that wanted to stay in their comfort zone, last year as a freshman. I would just kind of keep to myself, because I felt like that is all I knew. I can tell you that I have changed; now I feel like a lot more social. I am willing to try new things. I am not so scarred of risk taking. I was scared of failure. Not only that my sisters are going to college have a bigger impact, but it also places that expectation for you. Often times, they impact me a lot. I also wanted to be my own person. I was afraid not to meet their expectations. Part of me was like; I want to go to a different college they had gone to. I wanted to go away and become my own person and be me. I feared, I do not mean it literally, that people had the expectation that we all looked alike, and that people think you are all the same. I wanted to experience a new college, a Catholic school."*

Veronica-*"I could definitely relate to the home sickness. I definitely felt lonely even with my sister here. One other area I could relate to the other students was about having my opinions. My parents are very traditional and when I came here I said WOW, there is a bigger world there. I have the opinions my parents have taught me, but now I feel. I have developed something completely different than they have. I feel very sad to say that my parents at time are completely closed minded, because they are so traditional. Here I am so much more. For example, I am for gay marriage and my parents are against it. I told them, they should be happy and experience what everyone else is experiencing. I have my own opinions. I have developed the person I am today. I have a stronger identity."*

Figure 11 (cont'd)**Focus Group 3 Responses**

Esther- *“Coming to college for Latinas is a totally new experience and their families can’t support them. Their parents are not in a position to personally say, this is what you need to do, this is how is going to be or even offer any form of emotional support. Parent’s have basically no idea of what the student is coming to. The parent knows the importance of the education, but they do not know how to be supportive. The expectation is still that what the kids are able to do in high school, because It is their identity and that is what they understand. When you go to a university or college, the curriculum is more intense and nobody is watching you and you have to be more independent. Who is going to guide them and re-assure them , since they look up to their parents for their hard work, for them to do better, but they do not have the experience to coach them in their college experience. Its then, the university’s responsibility to somehow build that piece of information for the student. For the most part the students will do whatever they can to please the parents. As a whole the family is not educated, and there is no back up support for the student. The students are all in shock. The expectation is that everything will be fun. I am going to focus on my school work and I am going to get the whole college experience is definitely not true. Right of the bat they are challenged socially, then they began to develop small friendships and try to make they fit in. The connection with the parents is still the strongest. Now they are challenged with they are developing and growing and their parents are not. Who is talking to the parents and students how do they process their change, and how do they talk to their parents about the change they are going thru? There are ways to communicate with the parents that their students are going to change and how they can support the student in their development. You can give them your love but not your heart. You can give them your thoughts but not your mind. Ultimately their minds grow to whatever they experience. A mind once stretched can never return to its original size. That’s what happens to these students. They are challenged by social issues. Sometimes what we are preaching, It is not the same thing we are practicing. First generation programs that address the needs of these students are important. It is important to support them to understand the terminology and the various processes that are very simple, like drop and add, etc, that may be common to other students.”*

Yvonne- *“The students have felt that the organizations in the multicultural center are cliquish and they just do not fit in. What students like about our newest program targeting first year underrepresented students is that it is more multicultural.”*

Figure 11 (cont'd)

Luz- *“More often than not, is the Latinas that articulate, even if they do not see the connection, how gender is such a big part of their culture, defined for them. There are messages that are articulated for Latinas, expectations of them. How is it that Latinas start unpacking gender? There’s a sense of obligation, a senses of responsibility on Latinas to stay at and not leave.”*

Sol- *“Many of the students in the multicultural center describe their first year experience as culture shock. Many of them refer to nice cars, they mention the White people on campus and sometimes they can’t relate to how important their family and going home is for them and helping their family. The Latinas are required, sometimes is a burden, to help out their families. Do chores and other people do not understand that. They want to join clubs and participate in sororities. They have a lot of responsibility at home and sometime they take everything on because they think that is what is expected of them. The parents sacrifice so much for them and they take so much on because they feel they are expected to succeed. Those who have siblings and attend college tend to be more exclusive about their participation in college and what they choose to get involved with. They do not seem to need as much help in navigating the system or asking as many questions. They need help with financial aid matters. We have more first generation Latinas go here because of the financial aid they are given, even with the choices of going to UCLA, UC Berkeley. A concern many of them have is the universities commitment to continue providing their financial aid assistance to stay and persist. Most decided to come here due to smaller classes, more resources available and being closer to home.”*

Responses to Question about Responding to What Formal Programs Students’ Participated During or Immediately Prior to the Start of Their First Year in College

Figure 12 summarizes what the Latinas’ said about first year programs and activities. For some students, the academic offerings were as impactful as the student support services in their decision to persist from the first to second year. For other Latinas, getting involved in student organizations and giving back to the local community beyond the university via community service was helpful in providing balance to the academic world of the university and helped make their first year experience at the university meaningful.

As Figure 12 indicates, three Latinas discussed their participation in the first year workshops offered for first year students. (All students were required to attend at least some of the workshops.) In particular, the students commented on the workshops' utility. "The workshops for first year experience were very interesting. I went to the one on time management and another on diversity by Professor Jones," the student said. In another case, the information was not useful to the student: "I attended a couple of workshops from first year workshops, because it was required by my preceptorial class. I found them to be interesting but not meeting my individual needs." The third student who commented on the workshops suggested areas of improvement to make the workshops much more salient: "I participated in the first year workshop sessions two times, and I thought they were somewhat helpful, I wish they would have contained more relevant information from a not so formal perspective."

Several Latinas discussed their relationship to faculty and how that was impactful during their first year. For two Latinas, the faculty mentors had a huge impact in their decision to stay and get connected to the university community. One of these students said: "I appreciated that she [her faculty advisor] was always available to review papers or to talk. She has written me two letters of recommendation since I took her class." Another Latina said that finding her voice in the classroom made her voice on campus validated and real:

My preceptorial class (Ethnic Identity in the U.S.) was very helpful in motivating me to stay, because I related to the professor, my classmates, and, most specifically, the course material. Through this class I met similar people to me, who were going through the same feeling of not fitting in. It was the class that I needed and it helped me not to transfer out. I was able to voice issues that I was going

through and was not able to discuss anywhere else except for this class.

Some of the students directed their comments to specific services that supported their transition during their first year. One Latina discussed the things that made up her support system:

Another program that really helped me adapt to all the changes is SSS--Student Support Services [i.e., a federally funded program designed to support students who represent the first generation in their families to go to college]. I also met some of my closest friends through this program. They offered me academic, financial, and personal support. The office was a place where I could go to study, to talk, or just to relax in an environment in which I felt welcomed.

For some students, being in the SSS program was not an option, since they were not selected to participate in the program. Yet, sometimes they found their own “home” and their own support system. The commuting student who did not get into either SSS or a similar university-funded initiative, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), stated:

I was an ‘adopted’ EOP student... and I am very glad that I found EOP because I met people that will be part of my life forever. Esther and Luis [the administrators of EOP] were a great support for me during my first year, and they would advice me on what I could do to get involved and meet people, because it was very hard as a commuter.

The EOP program was phased out last year and replaced by a new program for first year underrepresented students. A student affairs professional discussed the difference in the services provided by the new and old programs:

SSS and EOP were very similar. The new first year underrepresented program has moved away from some of the academic-focus kind of things like tutoring, and moved toward more of a cohort model, to develop community to build a case that is more

to helping students that were admitted in a special type of category to succeed academically. It helps them connect with other students and administrators who are interested in their well-being and success in their transition to college. There is support thru mentorship, community building and leadership development. The program has had a significant impact on the students. We have a few on the Dean's List and only lost one student. The unofficial results seem very positive.

A student affairs professional went on to state those, from his perspective, academic performance issues were not the problem. The data from the admittedly small sample in this study would seem to support this, because only one student discussed having experienced academic problems during her first year on campus. However, all students discussed the importance of feeling connected to the campus community. Several of them mentioned the places on campus where they found connections to campus life that made them want to stay on campus and persist to graduation.

One place mentioned by several students was the university's multicultural center, the hub of student organization activities for culturally defined groups. Most students mentioned two groups, M.E.Ch.A. and A.Ch.A., the two Latino/a groups on campus. They are both housed in the center and dedicated to promoting the awareness of Latino culture.

One student, in particular, indicated that the multicultural center is the place she calls home on campus and the place where she has developed her leadership skills:

The most important center, however, is the multicultural center. Through the center I have had the opportunity to get involved in organizations such as M.E.Ch.A. and A.Ch.A, which have become my life this year. I have met so many people through these

organizations have taken on leadership positions. All which have shaped my identity and supported my beliefs. The multicultural center was a great place for me to meet new people. The multicultural center is like a new home for me. Since after this year, EOP will no longer exist. The center is my EOP.

In sum, there are a number of services, programs, and centers on campus to assist first year Latinas in making the transition to the strange new world of the university, at times by providing a bridge between their culture and the university culture. One student affairs professional, however, suggested that at least some student are not aware or, at the very least, do not become connected with any of them:

The services are all there, but if the students do not make a connection with someone, then the services do not do anything. The responses show that the most important service to the students is those people relationships. Even if it is only the one person who acknowledges when they come into the door and acknowledges who they are.

Clearly some of the students in this study fit in the lack-of-awareness or the lack-of-connections category during their first year on campus. This began to change for all of the students in the study during their second year on campus.

Indeed, a number of comments reported in Figure 12 indicated that getting involved in campus organizations and the activities they offered was exceedingly important. Two of the students who initially felt isolated, for example, began connecting with campus life and achieving a sense of purpose and presence both on and off campus through community service. "I was involved in service learning," one of these students said; "I tutored kids after school. I also joined the community service club, and that was a lot of fun. I did an orphanage trip to Mexico." Another

student, wanted to continue her service work she began in high school with students with developmental disabilities:

I did community service and joined Best Buddies and Cool Club. The clubs related to my high school experience where you build one on one friendship with students who have intellectual and development disabilities with students from the colleges. I wanted to make a difference.

It was amazing to hear the amount of items on the plates of these Latina students and how much they care for others, their campus and community. They had a lot of their own academic and, also, family-related work to do, yet they still found time to give to others in need.

Of course, giving to others and getting involved in other campus programs, initiatives, and centers also had a personal payoff in terms of beginning to feel connected to what, initially, was an unfamiliar world for some. And the benefit of involvement in the co-curricular aspects of campus life was not simply emotional support as one student's comments indicate:

I'm learning so much about myself, because I am challenged to take this decision or that decision. I can either go with what everybody thinks or in what I believe. I think I have been able to re-affirm more what I believe and really understand who I am, as a woman, as a Latina, and as a first year, first generation, just everything, all these things I have been able to learn so much about myself and I knew that that is one of the things I actually like.

Once again, however, one of the Student Affairs professionals who was a part of Focus Group 3 suggested that the sort of learning about self that Latinas engage in may not be as deep as it should be. This professional returned to the issue of gender and culture that she had raised earlier when commenting on students' responses to a prior question. The student affairs professional said:

The majority of Latinas who are self-identified do not necessarily connect their gender and identity as one. It is not until junior year, at least here, that they articulate, they can't separate the two, they are one, and it helps me understand who I am.

Figure 12. Summary of Responses to Question #12:

Please comment on the formal programs (First Year Workshops, First Year and Underrepresented Students Program, First Year Experience, Preceptorial Program, Orientation Days, Multicultural Center, EOP, Student Support Services) that you participated in during or immediately prior to the start of the first year?

Focus Group 1 Reponses

***Maria-**What I can remember from that first week at school are the preceptorial program and Orientation Days. I think the Orientation squad really did a good job trying to make us feel welcome. Also, I am still friends with my Orientation Squad leader, and it is because of her that I work at school where I do. The preceptorial program was also good because my preceptorial advisor answered many questions we had, and I remember she even had us over her place once to study for a midterm and bake us cookies! I am glad my teacher also made us go to first year workshop events because I learned things such as time managing and how the school was trying to be more diverse. I do not really remember partaking in the other programs listed above as much during my first year. Last year, I would have never, ever seen myself in a sorority, not even back home, no way. But my friend, who was Guatemalan, she rushed her first year. I asked her why she joined. She shared that being in a sorority helps you develop professional networks. I took a social networks class which re-affirmed the benefits of joining a sorority. It is really important to get to know people. You have to have those resources so you can be able to get a job later in life. For me, my first year was just work and school. I wanted to find something that was not just school and work, and I choose the sorority experience. My friend was in EOP and she would tell me to join her. I would tell her, Why I should join them, since they didn't even invite me. The*

Figure 12 (Cont'd)

workshops for first year experience were very interesting. I went to the one on time management and another on diversity by Professor Jones. I was like, Oh My God! This guy is amazing. My friend had him as a professor and she would tell me about him. I asked him to be my advisor, but he has left the university since then. The professors who offered these workshops were interesting. I loved my preceptorial class on world religions. My Professor, Ms. Saru, is a Buddhist nun. Her class was eye-opening. It was an honors class with a lot of work. I appreciated that she was always available to review papers or to talk. She has written me two letters of recommendation since I took her class. I didn't participate in the multicultural center last year, but my co-workers were involved with the Filipino student organization (FSO). I went to a few FSO events and I always heard about the multicultural center. I signed up to join them, then I had a conflict last semester with tutoring project and wasn't able to attend. This semester I attended a lunch meeting. I have begun to get involved with M.E.Ch.A. and A.Ch.A. I volunteered last week for a fundraiser. We were selling Tostilocos. I had never heard of Tostilocos. I was like, these are good. Yet, as a Latina, I do not identify with the Chicanos here, I do not know about this."

Lorena-I attended a couple of workshops from first year workshops, because it was required by my preceptorial class. I found them to be interesting but not meeting my individual needs. My preceptorial class (Ethnic Identity in the U.S.) was very helpful in motivating me to stay, because I related to the professor, my classmates, and most specifically the course material. Through this class I met similar people to me, who were going through the same feeling of not fitting in. Another program that really helped me adapt to all the changes is SSS- student support services. I also met some of my closest friends through this program. They offered me academic, financial, and personal support. The office was a place where I could go to study. To talk, or just to relax in an environment in which I felt welcomed. The most important center, however, is the multicultural center. Through the center I have had the opportunity to get involved in organizations such as M.E.Ch.A. and A.Ch.A, which have become my life this year. I have met so many people through these organizations as and have taken leadership positions. All which have shaped my identity and supported my beliefs. My favorite course was my preceptorial class which focused on Ethnicity in the U.S.A. It was the class that I needed and it helped me not to transfer out. I was able to voice issues that I was going thru and was not able to discuss anywhere else except for this class. There were other students who felt like me and were a safe space for me to say what I felt and to hear other student experiences. Sociology professors are welcoming and make me feel comfortable in talking with them. I still go to and speak with several of them and can have a conversation about anything with them. I'm learning so much about myself, because I am challenged to take this decision or that decision. I can either go with what everybody thinks or in what I believe. I think I have been able to re-affirm more what I believe and really understand who I am, as a woman, as a Latina and

Figure 12 (Cont'd)

as a first year, first generation, just everything, all these things, I have been able to learn so much about myself and I that that is one of the things I actually like. Because, last year it would have been so easy for me to transfer to a place where there's a lot of people like me, but I was like no, that I am learning more about myself here and now. I got more involved in the multicultural center this year than last year. It is a good place to relax, talk to people and get involved."

Esperanza-*I participated on the first year workshop sessions two times and I thought they were somewhat helpful, I wish they would have contained more relevant information from a not so formal perspective. I did not participate in first year underrepresented students program, because that program did not exist last year, however, I was and "adopted" EOP student like I mentioned in the previous question and I am very glad that I found EOP because I met people that will be part of my life forever. Esther and Luis were a great support for me during my first year and they would advice me on what I could do to get involved and meet people because it was very hard as a commuter. My preceptorial assistant was helpful whenever I had questions, but I did not really have questions for her since I found out the answer before I had the chance to speak to her. The multicultural center was a great place for me to meet new people. I now work there as well as in the center for student success. I was not part of TRIO or SSS. I went to EOP and they were very helpful. I spoke to them about my classes and career options. Esther and Luis had a major impact on me. They helped me with how to do things I needed help with. The multicultural center is like a new home for me. Since after this year, EOP will no longer exist. The center is my EOP."*

Individual Interviewee Reponses

Heather-*"I was involved in service learning. I tutored kids after school. I also joined the community service club and that was a lot of fun. I did an orphanage trip to Mexico. We spent a day with the orphan's there. I really want to go back again. I think I'm going to get my passport first. I need to do that, so I can go again. They also did trips to a senior center. I enjoyed that and their Christmas party. We went to tutor migrant workers in English through the community service office on campus. That was a really cool experience; the guys there were really cool. We would go there and tutor them in English. We would then, attend mass and then eat lunch with them. Just that even though It is a small campus, Oh My God, you feel like a little fish in a big pond. During my first year, I remember the newness of it all, It is what I remember. You do not' realize how life goes on without you , I was amazed to see how much things changed and how people move on in their relationships."*

Figure 12 (Cont'd)

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha-*Since I am used to being a member of a team, I joined crew my first year. Also, I did community service and joined Best Buddies and Cool Club. The clubs related to my high school experience where you build one on one friendship with students who have intellectual and development disabilities with students from the colleges. You share your experiences. You do events together, you go out to lunch, and you go to the movies together, attend holiday parties. It is that interaction and helping them feel welcome and included. I go to the local recreation center and play with them. I adored this program in high school and now Best Buddies in college. I am a busy person and I like staying busy. I do not realize where the days go and they are jammed pack. I also go to the Soup Kitchen at San Vincent de Paul. I wanted to make a difference.*

Veronica-*"I had some challenges. My extended family had health concerns and several deaths affected me personally. I attended the first year student workshops. It didn't really help me since my sister had taught me some test taking skills."*

Focus Group 3 Responses

John-*"My offices just merged with the Educational Opportunity Program and It is now known as lead in the Center for Student Success. It entails first year and underrepresented students program and a variety of first year programs targeted at first year students. The office reaches out to all freshman and sophomores who get mid-term referrals or an academic probation. Students meet with one on one with an advisor to improve their academic performance. The office also coordinates workshops from first year workshops for first year students. The first year underrepresented program is a co-hort of roughly forty students who are low income, first generation students of color. There's a new incoming commuter student experience with a program that allows them to use the lounge space we have. As the director, I co-chair the first year experience and second year experience committees. Last year, our office was charged for the university's comprehensive plan for undergraduate retention, to help improve retention rates of first year students which is at 85% and has been for about ten years. The goal is to increase it to 90% in the next three years. Our office is working aggressively on this goal to look at data, collect data, understand data, understand the student experience, and understand the student issues that contribute to students leaving the university. The retention plan focuses on understanding four concepts: who leaves the university, identifiable student groups that leave at higher rates, understanding the reasons for leaving as much as we can with balancing that with understanding student groups that persist at higher rates. Understanding who*

Figure 12 (Cont'd)

those students are and understanding the reasons they choose to come back. Developing and identifying challenges and barriers to persistence and developing innovative strategies. There have been a series of new initiatives implemented this semester. We still do not know the effects. Early warning assessment, outreach to students who are struggling at the third week. There's a new program for out of state students. The office offers a dinner to connect out of state student's with other out of state students. The Out of state student population is the largest identifiable group that struggles with returning. What I heard the Latina students say is consistent with what we already know. We are really learning and understanding the nature of the student experiences by talking and having conversation with students. The office has done student surveys and indirect methods. The office has done a few focus groups as well and identified the groups of need; one of the groups identified was out of state students. Most were from Oregon, Colorado and Hawaii. From the out of state students we heard the term "culture shock," which I heard many of the Latina students refer to in their responses. The students have identified barriers to student persistent that relate to the student culture, having a hard time fitting in, feeling connected. When we pursued the concept of culture shock, the students described this as astantatious displays of wealth, what people wear, and what students drive. The sense of exclusivity and cliquiness, all these things that they describe as culture shock. Some of the Latinas students that we talk to, I would say, I would not differentiate with them or other first generation , Out of State, or Latina or African-American, the things that they describe were similar to students who have a sense of feeling marginalized, they have a hard time connecting like they fit in. From all of the information we are looking at, we are not getting anything back, that's even on the radar, that academics are a concern that they are disappointed, frustrated with they are not enjoying the academic experience or they are not able to manage the academic demands. We know that is a challenge and those students who struggle academically are at greater risks of leaving. But usually, our philosophy we work on in our office, that academic performance is influenced by everything else going on in a student's life. An easy way to identify student challenges or adjustment or students having a positive experience, It is usually through academic performance. That is usually our primary issue and challenge. SSS and EOP were very similar, the new first year underrepresented program has moved away from some of the academic focus kind of things like tutoring, and moved toward more of cohort model, to develop community to build a case that is more to helping students that were admitted in a special type of category to succeed academically. It helps them connect with other students and administrators who are interested in their well-being and success in their transition to college. There is support thru mentorship, community building and leadership development. The program has had a significant impact on the students. We have a few on the Dean's List, only lost one student, the unofficial results seem very positive. Everything that I looked at reinforces what we heard; nothing stands out as unique or different. Some of the things as a first generation and what that is like, being Latina, kind of the adjustment and integration process

Figure 12 (Cont'd)

and feeling marginalized, sometimes it can be a sense of identity of being Latina or feeling disconnected to their perception as a main identity of culture on campus.”

Luz- *“The women’s center is primarily staffed by undergraduate students since the funding comes from the Associated Students. The center is guided by a leadership council that guides the center’s strategic plan. This year we have to first year students on the council and one identifies as Latina. The Women’s Center focuses on getting first year students involved with the women’s center that they have not connected with other groups. We target and are intentionally to do outreach to various populations on campus, including women of color. We have not had any formal relationships with A.Ch.A. and M.E.Ch.A. Since most Latinas are already involved their level of commitment is limited. Most students tend to get more involved their second year. They are drawn to particular groups. The majority of Latinas who are self-identified do not necessarily connect their gender and identity as one. It is not until junior year, at least here, that they articulate, can’t separate the two, they are one, and it helps me understand who I am. The affluence creates a divide with students who are trying to make connections with their ethnic background. The connections look different, with the more affluence a student is, the more acculturated they are. By the time they reach us, they already figured out how to find something to connect with. The concept of activism and advocacy is a stretch for Latinas who are more affluent. What students choose to get involved with feels much safer. Latinas are looking for community. What are ways from day one introduce communities people can join and structure them very intentionally on how they are operating.”*

Esther- *“The services are all there, but if the students do not make a connection with someone. Then the services do not do anything. The responses show that the most important service to the students is those people relationships. Even if It is only the one person who acknowledges when they come into the door and acknowledges who they are. They participate in the services and they share with the other students. There has to be a relationship there with the director, or an office member that develops a sense of community for the students when they gather, It is not just about getting more information. The knowledge comes from participating and being part of a group. The student’s identity comes to surface based on the relationships they form.”*

Sol- *“I was very happy that the multicultural center is considered a home and a place. It was great to hear how SSS is a home for students and is designed to support their needs.”*

Responses to Questions about Other Student Services Received During the First Year in College

The final question was intended to extend the discussion of programs and initiatives generated by Question 12 by asking about other sorts of services that the students' received and took advantage of during their first year in college. Figure 13 provides excerpts from their responses to this last question.

One thing should be immediately obvious when reviewing the contents of Figure 13: many students simply repeated what they had stated in responding to Question 12. Some students, however, did mention services and centers that were not mentioned previously.

One student, for example, mentioned that she had used the health center; another spoke about the counseling center. Other students mentioned student government. Interestingly, the student who talked about student government was quite positive about what the experience had given her, even though she indicated she did not get much help from the professionals who advised the student government organization. She stated:

I wish I would have gotten more support from the associated student's center, from someone other than students. I think this campus made me more of a leader, because I came in not knowing anybody. I had to build my own network of friends and take the initiative to get involved. I feel like I have learned more about myself.

Figure 13. Summary of Responses to Question #13:

Please discuss other student services that you received during your first year.

Focus Group 1 Responses

Maria-*Health services were important because I sprained my ankle second semester and that just really got me down. I sprained my ankle right before I had to do a big presentation in class. I had called public safety to get a ride so I would not have to walk on it across campus. They ignored me and thought I was joking. So with a sprained ankle I dashed across campus. I did my presentation. I then went to my second class. After the second class, I went to the health center and they said what you did to your foot. My ankle was swollen.”*

Lorena-*I can't think of any right now. I wish I would have gotten more support from the associated student's center, from someone other than students. I think this campus, made me more of a leader, because I came in not knowing anybody. I had to build my own network of friends and take the initiative to get involved. I feel like I have learned more about myself.”*

Esperanza-*I did not receive other student services during the first year.*

Individual Interviewee Response

Heather-*I certainly used student support services a lot.*

“Just because that was my first introduction to the college. It feels good to go back and touch base with everyone. That was really my grounding spot, which is where I would go when I would feel really stressed out due to classes. Sometimes even when I would feel lonely. That was really good for me. They would help me pick out classes even the ones I would take for fun. There were some classes I needed to take, because really needed them. They also sent me information about scholarships, which I did apply for. I didn't end up getting any of them. I will continue to apply and hopefully better luck next year. During summer bridge, we had help from professors. They talked to us and they taught a mock class. It helped me see how classes were going to be like. I really loved the professor I got, I really like Dr. Cruz, he's very active in SSS, and he's one of our number one supporters.”

Figure 13 (Cont'd)

The first year I tended to go talk more to him than my preceptorial advisor, because he was the first one I met and I liked him so much. Which is bad because their advisors were next to each other. I also went to my precept advisory, I really liked her a lot to, Dr. Soto, and both of them were communications professors. I used the counseling center once or twice during my first year. It was hard for me to know what was going on campus. We really do not have one place of what is going on campus. We have the flyers on the floor, especially if you are getting out of class and there are twenty people out of class, you want to make sure you do not get trampled. Besides my roommate issue I had towards the end of the year, my first year experience was a positive one. I was much more acclimated to the university and got into the routine and I can pretty much handle my classes. Social wise it was a little harder to connect with the vast majority of the student population since just because I come from a much different background than they do.”

Focus Group 2 Responses

Martha- *“I definitely attended the first year workshops. I attended more of them. A lot of times you may know the information but to hear it again helps that is from other than your parents. You tend to be more open to it. I went to one on balance, another on women that focused on depression and eating disorders. Overall it was really good. Even though I was welcomed into TRIO and SSS, I didn't do it. I went to one of their events with one of my friends. Very nice people. I made a decision not to do it based on all the things I wanted to do and based on my schedule. They offered a lot of services but I knew I wanted to do more and get more involved in community service. I place my community service in my schedule as community service as if they were my classes. If I do that, it is that important to me. I really didn't hear about the multicultural center until this year from a friend. She told me if I wanted to attend a leadership workshop. An all day leadership session in Balboa Park and it was amazing. It was really nice. I got more involved in M.E.Ch.A. and it has exposed me to all the cultural clubs. There are a lot of resources on campus. You just need to find the ones that work for you and take advantage of them. There are a lot of opportunities to seek help. To know that you are not alone and you are not the only one struggling. Be open to new things and do not shut yourself out. Go to your professors they are really there to help you. They really want to see you succeed.*

Veronica- *“My sister was the key for me to have a successful first year experience.”*

Figure 13 (Cont'd)

Focus Group 3 Reponses

Esther- *“services that are offered to student like food service, health center and others try really hard to be customer service oriented and sensitized to diversity. Yet where the university struggles the most is in Student Affairs. They try to operate their programs as a service instead of building a community for students. “*

Sol- *“Feedback from the students who participated in the study, they have learned so much about their family and asking them questions and learning so much about themselves and thinking about what is going on with them and their relationship to their family and their development and they really enjoyed the process.*

Conclusion

The summary of findings in Chapter 4 provided insights about Latina students' experiences during their first year attending one predominately White and upper-middle class university. Their comments also provide insight into the factors that contributed to their persistence to their second year in the institution. The Latina participants indicated that their parents supported them in their decision to go to college and, in most cases, that there had been a history of females attending (though not, in most cases, graduating from) college in their families. All Latinas noted that one of their major challenges was adapting to the campus culture and environment, a culture and environment that was very different from the culture and environment in which they grew up.

One of the more interesting—and rather unexpected—findings was that, for some of the participants, their Latina identity was a key component to their commitment to stay beyond their first year in college. They felt they needed to stay on campus not despite the fact that they were unlike most other students on campus but because they were unlike

others. If they left, they reasoned, the Latina presence on campus would be even more limited than it currently is.

The data also shed light on the kinds of support and services that the limited number of participants in this study, at least, found helpful. Organizations that are designed to support students from underrepresented groups were especially valued. Undoubtedly, they would have been even more valuable for some of the students if they had become more involved initially rather than waiting until their second year on campus.

The student affairs professionals who made up a third focus group that reacted to the student data generally concurred with the students' description of campus life and the challenges that the students indicated they faced while trying to fit into an environment that often was unfamiliar to them. One participant did note that the students' tendency to avoid cultural and gender-based critiques, while typical of other Latina students they had worked with, was also highly problematic.

There will be more about the aggregate findings in the first part of the next chapter. This chapter will look across the individual student responses in an effort to directly address the study's articulated research questions.

Chapter Five

Overview and Discussion of the Findings

This final chapter tackles a number of tasks. First, the purpose of the study and its methodology are briefly reviewed. Then the findings are summarized by looking across the responses to the responses to the different survey/interview questions discussed in Chapter 4 in an effort to provide succinct answers to the study's research questions. After the findings are summarized and the research questions are addressed directly, there will be a discussion of the findings. The general discussion is followed by a discussion of the study's implications for policy and practice and the implications that this study's findings hold for additional research.

A Brief Overview of the Study's Purpose and Methods

The purpose of the study was to learn about the perspectives and the perceived needs of first generation Latinas attending college by focusing on their descriptions of their experiences. The participants all had completed their first year at a private, predominantly White, Catholic institution. Emphasis was placed on understanding how university services and other support systems inside or outside the university aided Latinas and increased the likelihood that the Latina students in the study would return to the university after the first year and persist through graduation.

The methods used for this study consisted of a random selection of six Latinas who completed their first year at the university. The six participants participated in different focus groups or, in one case, an individual interview.

Focus Group 1 consisted of three Latinas who completed an online survey before they were expected to participate in a focus group interview in which they were asked to

react to all of the survey responses to particular survey questions. As it turned out, one of the three had a conflict when the focus group interview was scheduled, and she responded to the composite survey responses during an individual interview.

A second focus group consisted of Latinas who also had persisted beyond their first year in college but who had not filled out the survey. They were asked, during their focus group interview, to respond to the survey and interview responses of the first three participants. This group differed in one potentially important respect: They had siblings who either were currently attending college or who had attended college in the past.

Finally, the study incorporated a third focus group interview. In this case the participants were student affairs professionals at the university that was the site for the study. During their focus group interview, they were asked to respond to the responses of the six students who had participated in prior interviews.

Thus, the responses of the first three students mentioned became the centerpiece of the study. The responses of the three other Latina participants and the student affairs professionals who participated were used primarily for triangulation purposes.

In addition, the participants in the second focus group shed light on the role that having older siblings attend college played in adjusting and transitioning to the college environment, and the student affairs professional's comments provided some insight into the generalizability of the findings generated from a small group of Latinas, at least for the campus that was the study's research site. The participants' responses to all thirteen questionnaire/interview questions were listed in Chapter 4 in Figures 1 through Figure 13.

Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the findings from the study by looking across student's individual responses to the question they were asked. The summary will be structured around the study's four research questions: (a) What do the Latinas in the study say about their first year experience? (b) What do they say about the university's attempts to support and retain them at the university?, (c) What other sources of support do the Latinas' identify either inside or outside of the university? and (d) What impediments to their graduation do the Latinas identify?

Findings about Research Question # 1: What do the Latinas in the Study say About their First Year Experience?

The Latina students described several factors that negatively impacted their first year experience. These included culture shock, especially culture shock related to financial disparity, as well as other cultural differences.

Culture shock, in fact, was a common experience for all the Latinas in the study. Their underrepresentation on campus was quite apparent and made it challenging for them to fit in with the majority of campus. Cultural differences related to such things as drinking and sexual activity were not the only sources of difficulty. The Latinas also had to deal with the economic disparity and their frequently much more affluent peers. They felt uncomfortable accompanying White students on shopping trips to the local mall, and the White students seem to feel uncomfortable with the Latinas not buying anything on those occasions when the Latinas did "go along for the ride."

Difference created isolation and loneliness of many of the participants in the study during their first year. The Latinas, however, were fortunate to have strong supportive

systems at home that helped them psychologically maneuver the day-to-day challenges of their first year. Some of the participants, however, acknowledged that beyond psychological support, their families could not necessarily help them negotiate the college environment, either because the parents did not understand that environment or, in one case, because of fear that complaints about school would result in parents putting pressure on the student to leave school.

Other students gave other reasons for not talking about their frustrations with the first year experience with family members. Some indicated they preferred to keep home as a sanctuary. Another explanation for not relying on family members for anything but emotional/psychological support articulated by two students was a concern about being mocked and teased. One student, for example, indicated that family and community members told her that the only people she would be able to relate and talk to at the White institution she was attending would be the workers who, for the most part, were Latinos and Latinas.

Despite their frustrations during the first year—or possibly because of them—the first year experience for all the Latinas in the study resulted in tremendous personal growth. The data indicated that they were forced to grapple with issues that promoted their intellectual development. They embraced new opinions and beliefs, some of which conflicted with the opinions and beliefs of their families. One student affairs professional who was part of the study, however, complained that the Latinas' rethinking process did not go far enough because it did not give serious consideration to the role of a hegemonic culture in contributing to the difficulties they were experiencing on campus.

Even if the student affairs professional's assessment is correct—and the data does, indeed, give little indication that the Latinas in the study were inclined to engage in any sort of cultural or gender-based critique of their experiences—it is also the case that their experiences during the first year gave virtually all of the Latinas who participated in the study a renewed sense of ethnic identity.

Indeed, one of the study's more interesting and somewhat surprising findings was that the participants' definite under-represented status actually increased their commitment to remain not only in higher education but also at their particular campus, if only so the very limited Latina presence on campus did not become even more limited.

Findings about Research Question # 2: What do they say about the University's Attempts to Support and Retain them at the University?

As was implied in the discussion above, the first year experiences of many of the study's participants included loneliness and a sense of isolation. By their second year, however, these students discovered resources on campus that put them in touch with other Latinas and students who came from groups that are underrepresented on this and most other campuses. The students, even in the first year, also encountered other university initiatives and programs, some of which turned out to be helpful in the students' efforts to succeed academically and remain on campus through graduation.

According to many of the participants, their level of academic engagement with faculty was a key to ensuring their academic success during their first year. Many of the Latina students commented on the impact faculty had had in their academic, but also their personal development. For some, in fact, faculty members were a source of emotional support.

For other Latinas, the support they received from the university's student support services made a significant positive impact on their lives during the first year. The services provided by programs like EOP and SSS were tailored to meet the needs of first generation Latinas. Latinas who used these services shared their personal experiences with how they helped them in their first year. Some of the help was academic, but the help that really seemed to matter most for most of the students was in the social and emotional realms. Many of the study's participants indicated that the EOP and/or SSS offices and the staff members who worked in these offices mitigated the isolation and loneliness they felt from their peers. They also indicated that the offices became an on-campus sanctuary that had some of the characteristics of their other sanctuary, i.e., their homes. The offices were a place where they could receive support to meet their challenges. Staff members became their guides in the strange new land of higher education. They provided invaluable advice and support during their first year.

Findings about Research Question # 3: What Other Sources of Support do the Latinas' Identify either Inside or Outside of the University?

Some of the students identified the university's orientation program as somewhat useful, though this view was not shared by all of the participants, especially those who had siblings who attended college. Still, nearly all of the Latinas in the study mentioned that the orientation program provided them with opportunities to connect and develop relationships with other students.

For the most part, the services that were considered most useful were the services tailored to meet the specific needs of first generation Latinas. One additional area of support that students identified on campus, for example, was the multicultural center and

Latino-oriented student organizations that operated within it. The Latinas who talked about these organizations indicated that they validated their ethnic identity and signaled that they had a valued role to play on campus.

One major source of support for students outside the university was the level of influence their parents had in their decision to go and stay in college. It is important to note that, although the parents had limited knowledge about college, they still, without a doubt, supported their daughters by in achieving the dream of a acquiring a formal college education. Their work ethic and strong family values was a constant source of inspiration for all Latinas in the study, and the desire to not let their family down was a powerful motivator for all of the Latinas in the study.

Findings about Research Question # 4: What Impediments to their Graduation do the Latinas Identify?

All Latina students in the study identified financial aid assistance as the major challenge for them to overcome in attending a private (and very expensive) university. All of them come from families that have limited resources, and, for the most part, they depend on university scholarships and work-study arrangements to be able to pay for their college expenses. The importance of ongoing financial support also was reinforced by comments made by the student affairs professionals who participated in Focus Group 3.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study's findings have several implications for policy and practice in institutions of higher education that are concerned about attracting Latina students and retaining them beyond the first year experience. One major finding is the need for programs that focus on supporting the transition of Latinas during their first year as they

attempt to adjust to what is often a rather unfamiliar environment. Even with the students in this study who, in most cases were not the first generation in their families to at least attend college; the adjustment challenges could be quite dramatic. The drama undoubtedly was enhanced at this particular research site because of the relative affluence of the majority of students who attend the college. This, along with cultural differences, created a great divide between the Latinas and their peers, and programs clearly are needed to help Latinas negotiate and bridge the divide. Conceivably, adjustment issues would have been even more of problematic for students who came from families in which the mother had not attempted to pursue higher education. If that is the case, even campuses with less affluent student bodies may need programs that support the transition process for first-year Latina students.

One final comment on programs that support students during their transition to higher education: If the experiences recounted by the Latinas in the study are at all representative, social and emotional support is at least as important as academic support. Indeed, in this study, at least, only one of the six student participants had experienced serious academic difficulties during the first year. Furthermore, emotional distress undoubtedly is an intervening variable in creating academic difficulties. That certainly was the view of one of the student affairs professionals who worked with first year students and who was a participant in this study.

Another key area was the importance of faculty involvement and mentoring. The students noted that faculty involvement was important for their academic and emotional well being. It is vital for universities to develop initiatives that help first year students connect to faculty mentors. For some of the students in this study, the faculty became not

only their academic advisors but also their guide/counselor through the transition year. The faculty members were able to connect with the students in more than just a teacher-to-student way; students and faculty also became friends. Faculty members also helped students engage fully in the academic environment. Clearly, those who develop policies for campuses should do all they can to promote deep relationships between faculty and students who come from underrepresented groups. Presumably, the phrase “doing all they can” might mean giving credit for such work in the promotion and tenure process and, possibly, even financial incentives.

Of particular importance, according to the students, were the special classes the university offered that focused on the students’ personal struggles for identity on campus and, of course, the faculty members that taught them. Students found these classes to be a safe place to voice their challenges and learn from others who were having the same shared experience on campus. Undoubtedly similar sorts of classes should be offered on other campuses if that is not already being done.

Another area that student affairs professionals need to pay particular attention to is the level of impact ethnic-focused student organizations have on the retention of Latinas. For most of the Latinas in the study, having a group that relates to their culture provided a sense of validation, community and connection to the university campus. This type of resource early in the student’s experience will help in their adjustment to campus culture and address the challenges some students faced with feeling part of a community during their first year.

Most important, university decision makers need to pay more attention to parents. The one consistent area where students felt supported and had a base of balance was their

parents. The parents were a consistent source of pride, inspiration, and encouragement to persevere. The university needs to provide programs that support first generation parents and helps them understand what their children are experiencing during the first year. The programs, ideally, also would provide parents with the tools necessary for them to provide their daughters with the support they will need in adjusting to a new university environment.

Once again, parents, in one way or another, influenced the study's participants' decisions to stay and persist in college beyond their first year. University policy makers should find ways to support parents as they support their children.

All Latinas identified that their housing experience—and, in particular, their experiences with students who tended to be both culturally different and more economically advantaged than they were--was challenging in their transition to college. The Residence Life Office at this and similar institutions at which Latinas represent a very small proportion of the student body should consider providing options for Latina student groupings in housing, or a mix of students who want to learn and share from diversity. To a degree, of course, differences about such things as cleanliness, drinking, partying and spending habits that made the Latinas' first year experience challenging could be seen as learning opportunities. But it is difficult to learn when one feels alone and there is nobody around to facilitate a debriefing process.

In time, getting involved with Latino/organizations helped fill the void created by the students' living situations and their relationships with the other students who also lived in their dormitories. But many of the students did not learn about and/or get involved with these organizations until the end of their first or the beginning of their

second year. Especially if nothing can be done about the housing situations, student's services personnel should make a concerted effort to make students aware of the student organizations that could make them feel less alone and isolated on a campus on which they are a decided under-represented group.

One policy point that needs to be made is the kind of Latinas that are recruited and admitted to the sort of university that was studied in this dissertation. It was apparent that the university that was studied was shifting its recruitment strategies to increase the number of Latinas who were better prepared [i.e., had had higher grade point averages] than in the past with the government-funded EOP program that was no longer operating at the time of the study. Additionally, based on the number of students I received in the list provided by the university, it is evident the university is recruiting less working class students and more affluent Latinas to the campus.

In one sense, this shift in recruitment and admissions might solve some of the problems that appeared in this study. More affluent and acculturated Latina may not need services like EOP or SSS. However, they still may need student organizations that will help them in transitioning to the university environment via making a connection of their own culture to culture based organizations and students who are like them (ethnically). Even this is not certain, however, because more acculturated and economically well-off students usually socialize more and have more expendable income.

The real question is whether it is ethically defensible to lower the bar for a university by accepting only students who almost certainly will succeed. One of the most challenging findings in the study has been the dismantling of the EOP program. This program existed to help those most in need, including some of the students who may not

have had the highest grade point averages but due to economic circumstance may not have had schools that offered many AP courses. There is no longer a need for such a program, the student affairs professionals indicated, because most of the students (including, of course, most of the students in this study) were not experiencing academic difficulties. Of course, the academic difficulties experienced by students in the past had disappeared because the types of students the university had accepted in the past had disappeared.

This disappearing act was disheartening for me, especially since this was a Catholic university that preaches about the importance of helping those most in need and virtually indoctrinates students to support a social justice agenda. Despite its rhetoric the university now assumes that by providing a few relatively privileged Latinas with good financial aid packages, they have done their part to eradicate poverty in the Latina community. A few select Latinas graduating from this university undoubtedly will make an impact, but not one significant enough to support the largest growing population in the country. Furthermore, the fall enrollment data from 1990-2007 specifically notes that Latina enrollment figures have fluctuated from 4% to 8%. In the past decade, the enrollment figures have remained constant from 7-9%. Given that the Latina growth in the county where the university is located accounted for about 25% of the population, this percentage lacks equity and access to an institution that prides itself in promoting diversity and inclusion.

In short, it is difficult not to conclude that the campus eliminated the program that brought in students who were not only Latino/a but also from impoverished backgrounds and from less than adequate school systems to recruit higher achieving students with less

academic challenges. This almost certainly will increase the university's retention rates. The price that was paid, however, seems inconsistent with the university's espoused commitment to promoting social justice.

Implications for Future Research

This study demonstrated that Latinas, even Latinas whose mothers went to college and who, for the most part, did not experience academic difficulties during their first year in college, had significant adjustment problems during their first year in college. All of the Latinas in the study, for example, indicated that they had experienced culture shock and said that their housing experience, in particular, was challenging in their transition to college. Additional research is needed to determine whether the same problems are experienced by other types of Latinas and at other types of institutions.

This study also suggested that some of what the university did to support Latinas during the transition-to-college experience had been helpful. Again, it would be helpful to know whether the story is the same at other types of institutions and with other types of Latinas, especially those who come from more economically and/or academically impoverished backgrounds.

One thing that was not done in the university that was studied was efforts to help support parents as they supported their daughters. This study, however, did reveal how important parent support was to the Latinas who participated in the study. Future studies should explore how the universities can support first generation parents during their children's transformation into successful college students.

Furthermore, additional research needs to be done on what tools universities can provide to Latinas and their parents for grappling with some developmental changes in

their first year [i.e. forming their own opinions and how that may conflict with current value systems learned at home]. All of the students acknowledge their new found ideas and beliefs, at times, conflicted with those of their parents. A values study in relation to intellectual development for Latinas would be helpful in providing institutions more data on how to best support the needs of these students.

Further research also needs to be conducted on the impact on retention of ethnic focused student organizations. In this study, such organizations appeared to have played an important role in making the participants feel more comfortable in a somewhat unfamiliar environment and, presumably, in retention. For most of the Latinas in the study, having a group that related to their culture provided a sense of validation, community and connection to the university campus. These groups were helpful in providing a place where the Latinas in the study can connect with their home based culture and with other students who shared the same experience. Is the role equally important in colleges and universities where Latinas and Latinos are less of an under-represented group or even the majority of students on campus? This study, of course, could not answer this question, but subsequent studies in other types of institutional settings could provide answers.

Significance of the Study

This study provided an empirical basis for understanding the needs of Latinas during the first year by providing their unique experiences in narratives that address what contributes to their adjustment and persistence towards graduation. Donmoyer (1990) adds that case study research might be used to expand and enrich the repertoire of social constructions available to practitioners. This research was intended to presenting new insights about what inhibits or supports Latinas' persistence in university settings beyond the first year of the university experience. Practical implications are likely to include an

assessment of institutional effectiveness and also wider policy implications. This study should be of particular interest to college administrators who seek new insights in how to increase the retention and persistence of the largest growing ethnic group in higher education. Policy implications include, but are not limited to, the current need to address Latinas in higher education at the local, state and national levels.

Conclusion

This study emphasized the voices of Latinas who completed their first year and persisted to the second year in a college in which they were both an ethnic and an economic minority. Their experiences provided insightful stories about how they overcame the challenges they faced their first year. They also provided insight about what the university had done—or failed to do—to support them during their first year.

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Appendices

Appendix A-Letter Requesting Granting Permission

Appendix B-Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

Appendix C-Survey

Appendix D-Preparation Check List for Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Appendix E-Preparation Questions

Appendix A

Letter Requesting Granting Permission

Appendix A

July 15, 2009

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to consider the invitation to be a participant in my attempt as a researcher to do my dissertation on the Latina First Year Experience. This research is a key component of my fulfillment for a doctoral degree in Leadership Studies at the School of Education from the University of San Diego.

My research interest for this study is in what factors contribute or hinder the persistence of Latinas during their first year at the University of San Diego. In order to collect research for this study, I plan to have a total of sixteen self-identified Latina students from the University of San Diego. Each participant will be required to sign a consent form (see enclosed Consent Form). In order to compare data, I plan to have each participant respond to an online survey, which will be followed by a focus group meeting.

The Institutional Review Board of the University of San Diego has approved this study. At this time, I am requesting your formal written permission to conduct this research. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (619) 913-6117 or my chairperson, Dr. Robert Donmoyer at donmoyer@sandiego.edu or at (619) 260-7445. I thank you in advance for allowing me to conduct my research.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe R. Corona, Doctoral Student

University of San Diego

Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

Appendix B

Research Participant Consent Form

Latina First Year Experience: Factors that Contribute to Persistence from the First to the Second Year in Higher Education

Guadalupe R. Corona is a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies program in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) at the University of San Diego (USD). You are invited to participate in a research project she is conducting for the purpose of exploring the first year experience of Latina students at the University of San Diego. The title of the study is “Latina First Year Experience: Factors that Contribute to Persistence from the First to Second Year in Higher Education.”

You will be asked to participate in one of the three groups. Group 1 will participate in an online survey and a focus group which will ask questions about your experience at USD during your first year. Group 2 will be participate in a focus group. Group 3 will participate in a focus group.

For participation in group 1: The online survey should last no more than 30 minutes to an hour, depending on how you answer the open ended questions. In the second phase of the study, you will be invited to attend a focus group with follow up questions from the online survey, which should last from 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group will take place at a convenient place and time for all participants. The session will be audio-taped.

For participation in group 2. You will be invited to attend a focus group, which should last from 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group will take place at a convenient place and time for all participants. The session will be audio-taped.

For participation in group 3. You will be invited to attend a focus group, which should last from 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group will take place at a convenient place and time for all participants. The session will be audio-taped.

Participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question and/or quit at any time. Should you choose to quit, no one will be upset with you and your information will be destroyed right away. If you decide to quit, nothing will change about your experience at the university.

The information you give will be analyzed and studied in a manner that protects your identity. That means that a code number will be used and your real name will not appear on any of the study materials. All information you provide will remain confidential and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years before being destroyed.

There may be a risk that may make you feel tired. (psychological risks). Sometimes people feel anxious or sad when talking or reflecting on the things you will be asked about. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings, you can call the San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339. Remember, you can stop the interview at any time, if you feel tired for any other reason.

The benefit for participating will be in knowing that you helped higher education administrators learn about how to better help people with knowing what factors contribute to Latina persistence during the first year.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact Guadalupe R. Corona at 619-913-6117, lupecorona@live.com; or Dr. Robert Donmoyer at 619-260-7445, donmoyer@sandiego.edu.

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research that has been described to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Name of the Participant (Printed)

(_____)_____
Phone

Email

*Note: Two copies of this form will be provided, one for the researcher and one for the participant.

Appendix C-Survey

Appendix C

Latina First Year Experience:

Factors that Contribute to Persistence from the First to Second Year In Higher Education

Online Survey

Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Eligibility Criteria

The student is a female YES NO

The student self identifies as Latina YES NO

The student is the first in their family to attend college in the U.S.? YES NO

Are you Catholic? YES NO

Did you participate in any university new student orientation program? YES NO

Did you live on campus your first year? YES NO

The student completed her first year at the university being studied YES NO

Background Information

Home Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Email address: _____

Telephone Numbers Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____

Your parent's highest level of education: Father _____ Mother _____

Other Parent(s) _____

Experiences:

Can you describe what programs were helpful or detrimental during your first year as a Latina student at the university?

Can you tell me what was helpful or detrimental with your academic experiences?

From the following student services, describe your interaction with the staff and administration within the following departments, which were helpful or detrimental during your first year: Counseling Department, Academic Advising, Financial Aid Student Services (EOP, SSS, & Multicultural Center)

Can you tell me about any extra-curricular activities in which you were involved (member of a campus organization, performed volunteer work, worked on a project with a faculty member, sports, etc?)

Can you tell me how and in what ways these activities have impacted you in considering your stay beyond your first year?

Can you tell me about anyone who was helpful or detrimental (faculty, student, volunteer, staff member, etc.) who contributed to your college experience? Why?

Can you tell me about your family's values and culture and how they relate to your educational experience? Do you feel it supported or challenged your college experience?

Can you tell me about what your family taught you about education and its role for you?

Appendix D

Preparation Check List for Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Appendix D

Preparation Check List for Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

1. Set Up Room
2. Check Tape Recorders
3. Provide Hard Copies of Consent Forms
4. Provide Hard Copies of Data Analysis
5. Focus Group
 1. Welcome Group
 - a. Consent Form
 - b. Confidentiality
 - c. Name Changes
 - d. Small sample
 - e. Introduce process
 - i. Tape record session to get actual quotes
 - ii. Question by question
 - iii. Additional comments/reactions/feedback
 2. Do self introductions
 3. Introduce Self and Why study is important
 4. Start Process
 - a. Prompts
 - i. Reaction to each question/response

- ii. Do you agree/disagree-how many in favor/how many not in favor
- iii. Why and Why not?
- iv. Can you provide an example/story
- v. Anything that should be added?

Appendix E

Preparation Questions

Appendix E

Preparation Questions

1. Parents education impact your decision to go to college
2. Self-Identify as a Latina
3. Is there any pressure/expectations place on you, since you are the first in your family to attend college?
4. How did your involvement in Torero Day orientation support your decision to stay in school?
5. How did living on/off campus affect your first year experience?
6. Did your family value education, if so, how was that shared?
7. Social versus Cultural Capital?
8. Did you have a mentor? If so, how did they guide you to get to college? Who affected your decision to go?
9. During your first year how did you adjust your family roles, responsibilities, expectations, can you share a story?
10. Did financing your education affect your decision to go to college? If so how. Tell me about it.
11. How did you deal with being away from home and adjusting to the new environment?
12. How did your involvement on campus activities, etc. affect your first year experience?

ⁱⁱ The researcher entered the names of all 31 students and randomized them in groups of 8 at a time.