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LATINO/A STUDENTS AND FACULTY INTERACTION:
LAS VOCES DE PERSISTENCIA

A Dissertation Presented

by

Joyce L. Hampton

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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School of Education

Educational Policy and Leadership
LATINO/A STUDENTS AND FACULTY INTERACTION:
LAS VOCES DE PERSISTENCIA

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

~To Steve, Thomas and Michael~
You fill each day with an abundance of love and joy.
Thank you for your constant encouragement.

And

~To my parents, Richard and Evelyn King~
Two dedicated educators.
Thank you for always believing in me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the result of many years of work and the unwavering support of countless people.

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In conclusion, I want to thank my friends and family for their sustaining presence in my life. God has given me friends like you to know that I do not walk alone. My family has been the backbone of my support system. My mother-in-law and father-in-law have unquestioningly lent their support and presence in my family’s life to help out
in any and every way to make this journey possible. Their comforting words of “just give us a schedule” attest to their flexibility and love as they cared for Thomas and Michael during many of their frequent visits to help. In addition, my mother and father are both educators, and although my mother is not physically here to share in this moment, I know she would be proud of this work. And finally to Steve, Thomas and Michael, thank you for believing in the importance of this work and for lovingly allowing me to pursue it. May you follow the dreams God has written in your hearts.
ABSTRACT

LATINO/A STUDENTS AND FACULTY INTERACTION:
LAS VOCES DE PERSISTENCIA

MAY 2010

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Latinos consistently have the lowest degree completion rate throughout the United States (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). At the same time, Latinos are the fastest growing sector of the U.S. population. Taken together, these facts demonstrate an ongoing and growing inequity in educational opportunities and outcomes for a significant portion of the nation’s population. The findings of this study provide additional knowledge regarding how Latino students perceive interaction with faculty and how affirming relationships with faculty can develop Latino students’ sense of belonging. In addition, the study identifies three main support sources for Latino student persistence, which include family support, collegiate self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging to the campus. This study presents five recommendations for policy and practice based upon the findings of this study, for campus leaders to address the low number of Latino students persisting in their college journeys. Furthermore, it provides three suggested areas for future research.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Demographics: The Latino Population in the United States</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Diversity of Latinos</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Latino Population in New England</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipeline issues Affecting Latino Access to Higher Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Influences on Persistence for Latinos</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Terms/Definitions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Persistence</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Theory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment and Departure.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
Overview of the Participants..................................................................................58

Ricardo ...............................................................................................................59
Bianca .............................................................................................................60
Daniel .............................................................................................................61
Sylvia .............................................................................................................62
Isabel .............................................................................................................62
Luis ................................................................................................................63
Marisol .........................................................................................................64

Key Findings........................................................................................................65

Pre-college Educational Experiences Can Impact Latino Students’
Overall Perceptions of Affirming and Marginalizing
Interaction with Faculty in College.................................................................65

Concepts of Affirmation and Marginalization..............................................66

Affirmation/Afirmación .................................................................................67
Marginalization/Marginalización .................................................................68

Affirming Interaction in the Pre-college Environment ......................68

Provides Encouragement Through Personal Difficulties ...69
Provides Support to Cope with Discrimination .....................71
Provides Support for Learning English ........................................72

Marginalizing Interaction in the Pre-college Environment ..........73

Denies Support for Language .................................................................74
Denies Support for Culture .................................................................75

Both Affirming and Marginalizing Interactions May Occur
Concurrently .................................................................................................76
Summary .......................................................................................................78

College: Congruency Between How a Latino Student Views Self
and Perception of How a Professor Views the Student
Leads to Affirming Interaction .................................................................79

Relationship Between Concepts of Validation and Affirmation ...79
Examples of Perceived Congruency Leading to Affirmation ....81
Summary .......................................................................................................85
B. CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

BIBLIOGRAPHY
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overview of Participants</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How Students Perceive Themselves and Activities Involving Professors that Students Perceive as Affirming</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Overview of How Pre-college Educational Experiences Impact College Experience</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Congruency between a Latino Student’s Self Concept and Perception of how a Professor Views the Student Leads to Affirming Interaction in College</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lack of Congruency between a Latino Student’s Self Concept and Perception of how a Professor Views the Student Leads to Marginalizing Interaction in College</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging Develops Over Time and It has Two Dimensions: Perceptual and Tangible</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Model of Successful Persistence for Latino Students</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Sources of Support Influencing Latino Student Persistence</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Latinos consistently have the lowest degree completion rate of all 25-34 year-olds in every state except Florida and New York for both associate’s degrees and bachelor’s degrees, (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). While 32 percent of Whites and 40 percent of Asians earned a bachelor’s degree within six years of entry, only 19 percent of Latinos were able to do the same (Karen & Dougherty, 2005). As a result, Latinos, as the fastest growing sector of the U.S. population, are not being educated equitably. This inequity is not only a social justice issue of fairness, but also an economic concern because it negatively impacts the educational level of the future U.S. work force and society. There is a need for additional research to understand better why there is a low level of persistence toward degree completion for the Latino population, so that current efforts to address this critical problem are more effective.

Overview of the Problem

Current demographics, as well as the projected growth of the Latino population, highlight a number of areas to examine in detail with regard to Latino persistence in higher education. The first part of this section examines the changing demographics in the U.S., continues with a discussion of the diversity represented within the term Latino/a, and follows with a closer look at the demographics of New England. According to projections for New England, by 2020 half of the future workforce will be made up of young minority employees; however, their low college participation rates raise concern about the availability of an educated workforce (Coelen & Berger, 2006). Following the
discussion concerning an overview of Latino population demographics is a review of two important areas of literature: the pipeline issues affecting the Latino population’s ability to access higher education and the impact of the college experience on Latino students’ ability to persist toward degree completion.

**Changing Demographics: The Latino Population in the United States**

The United States has seen significant growth in its non-White population during the 20th century, and that strong growth in diversity continues today. In fact, in terms of the traditional college-eligible students, most of the growth during the next decade will consist of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (Price & Wohlford, 2005). In total, it is projected that about 41 percent of the 18-24 year-old population will be people of color by 2010 (Price & Wohlford).

Currently, Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (United States Census, 2000). Beginning with the 2000 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau began to use the terms Latino or Hispanic to refer “to an individual of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American or Central American descent, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001, p. 2). The U.S. Census Bureau uses the term Latino and Hispanic interchangeably in their reports. For the purposes of this study, the term Latino will also be used to identify all individuals to whom either the term Hispanic or Latino would apply, in recognition of the grass-roots led shift away from the original governmental label of Hispanic and toward the term Latino (Chong & Baez, 2005). However, when a particular identity is possible, such as Puerto Rican or Dominican, that term will be used.
In terms of all minority groups, demographers project that by 2020, 25 percent of the U.S. population, age 17 and under, will be of Latino heritage (Pallas, Natriello, and McDill, 1989). While these figures point toward strong potential growth in college attendance for Latinos, the reality of college access and degree attainment for this population is not as rosy as the figures might suggest due to the current low enrollment and persistence in higher education for Latinos (Berger, Smith & Coelen, 2004; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Price & Wohlford, 2005).

**Ethnic Diversity of Latinos**

With the rapid increase of Latinos in American society, it is common to think of the Latino population as a single entity (Entwisle & Astone, 1994). The U.S. Census Bureau currently uses five basic groups for ethnicity (Phinney, 1996). The ethnic categories are Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, Black, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander. However, Latinos are not a homogenous group. They represent a wide variety of ethnic origins and come from over 25 different Spanish-speaking countries (Hernandez and Lopez, 2007). While some may identify with the larger, more encompassing term of “Latino or Hispanic”, most identify themselves by their family’s place of origin such as Puerto Rico, Mexico or Cuba (Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996). In addition, there are variations in patterns of educational attainment for Latinos of differing origins. For example, on the U.S. mainland, Puerto Ricans tend to be concentrated in urban centers, live in economically disadvantaged areas, and experience poor educational conditions (Solorzano, Villalondo, & Oseguera, 2005). Also, Latinos of Cuban, Central American and South American origins persist at a higher rate than Mexican American or Puerto Rican Latinos (Suarez-Orozco and Paez, 2002). As these examples illustrate, it is helpful
to know more details concerning the ethnicity of the population most represented in the geographic area and the ethnicity of participants in educational research. Variations within the larger ethnic or racial group can be particularly instructive for institutions of higher education. As a result, this study will aim to be as precise as possible regarding the ethnic origins of the studies cited in the literature and the ethnic origins of the participants in this research study.

The Latino Population in New England

Demographics in New England are quickly shifting and the growth of Latinos in this region makes it an important area to examine in depth. Looking at figures covering the time period from 1990-2020, most New England states, including Massachusetts, are projected to have a declining working-age population defined as between 25-64 years of age (Coelen & Berger, 2006). Of particular note is that in Massachusetts, 28 percent of this age group will be made up of minority populations. According to the work of Coelen and Berger (2006), for the youngest portion of this population, the figures are even more striking. In fact for the workers in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island, almost half of the group from ages 25-29 will be comprised of minorities. This directly shows an impending increase in the minority population that would traditionally, by virtue of age, be attending college.

Within Massachusetts, the Latino population is the largest minority group. However, according to the 2000 Census, the Latino population is unevenly divided between suburban and urban areas. In the whole of Western Massachusetts, Hampden County has a Latino population of just over 15 percent (US Census, 2000). The two largest cities located in Western Massachusetts are Springfield and Holyoke. Springfield
has a population of about 140,000 residents, of which 31 percent are Latino. To be more precise, over 88 percent of Springfield’s Latino residents are Puerto Rican. The second largest city in Western Massachusetts is Holyoke. According to the U.S. Census taken in 2000, Holyoke’s population was just over 40,000, and 41 percent of the population is Latino. In addition, of Holyoke’s Latino population, 88 percent is Puerto Rican. In both of the major urban areas of Hampden County, over one-third of the population is Latino and nearly 90 percent of that Latino population is composed of Puerto Ricans.

**Pipeline Issues Affecting Latino Access to Higher Education**

There are a number of issues that affect the pipeline to Latinos entering and graduating from college. Latinos are the fastest growing population in Massachusetts (US Census, 2000); nevertheless, Latinos show the lowest rate of participation in four year colleges at only 29.8 percent (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). In order for Latinos to be able to persist in college, they must first be able to gain access to higher education. Therefore, it is important to understand how Latinos fare in terms of their educational preparation for higher education. The literature shows that there are inequities in how some students are prepared for and gain entry into higher education. Research supports that African American and Latino students do not perform as well as white students due to their over-representation in low-resource secondary schools (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Mather & Adams, 2006; Massachusetts Department of Education, 2009). Students from urban schools with fewer resources are at an educational, social, and economic disadvantage that impacts college preparation and college choice (Berger, Smith, and Coelen, 2004). As a result, while educational opportunity is the ticket to upward social and economic mobility, that ticket is not punched equally in all locations.
Where Latino high school students live is one key characteristic that has a tremendous impact on a number of decisions concerning their access to college. Location of residence affects the Latino students’ academic preparation level, which in turn influences students’ range of college choices (Orfield and Lee, 2005). Berger, Smith and Coelen (2004) looked at a sample of 29,742 postsecondary students who took the SAT between 1996 and 1999. All of the students came from the greater Boston metropolitan area. The researchers looked at the access outcomes of SAT scores, number of applications to colleges, and types of colleges applied to. The access outcomes were then examined based on the student’s race/ethnicity and where the student resided in the greater Boston metropolitan area. Berger et al (2004) found that being raised in a resource poor urban setting impacts a student’s beliefs about attending college, choices related to college preparation, including AP course enrollment, the number and types of colleges he/she will apply to, and whether he or she will apply to a two-year or four-year institution. In addition, the study shows that for a student from a poor area, it also impacts earned grade point average. These outcomes highlight critical access problems with the pipeline of Latino students accessing college.

For Latinos, a second key leak in the pipeline to higher education is unequal academic preparation, as research links unequal preparation for college with both lower levels of access and persistence (Price & Wohlford, 2005). For many Latino students, there is unequal preparation for college by those who attend low-performing elementary and secondary schools with fewer resources (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Teachers are one of the key resources for preparing students for college (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kozol, 2005). However, schools in urban areas, shown to have a higher concentration of Latinos
according to U.S Census figures, have fewer certified teachers (Kozol). In addition, the teachers’ salaries are considerably lower than in more suburban schools resulting in a higher turnover rate (Kozol). One large national study examined students from 28 elite colleges in the United States. It looked at the quality of the characteristics of the schools the students had attended (Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer, 2003). Findings from the national study indicate that there was a difference in how Black and Latino students in different schooling environments rated their teachers’ interest and ability. In racially integrated schools, 59 percent of Black and Latino students rated their teachers as excellent. However, only 33 percent of Blacks and Latinos, attending segregated schools populated with mostly students of color in urban centers, rated their teachers as excellent. While having students rate the quality of their teachers may not be the most reliable measure, it is another set of data to look at uneven preparation.

Furthermore, schools with large concentrations of students of color have other glaring inequities in addition to differences in teachers. The urban school systems educating the majority of Black and Latino students have a variety of characteristics that put the students at a severe disadvantage. In general, there are more economically disadvantaged children, non-native speakers of English, and special education students attending the schools with fewer economic resources available to address the special needs (Kozol, 1991). Overall, segregated urban school systems have schools with poorer infrastructure, as well as environments with a higher level of violence and social disorder (Massey, et al, 2003; Suskind, 1998). In addition, Latino students, who are situated primarily in urban schools, are receiving less college-level preparation, especially in the areas of math and science (Massey, et al). As a result, Latinos finish high school and
start the college process with less academic preparation than many of their White counterparts. A qualitative study conducted by Zurita (2004) supports these findings. In her study, she found that all of the students who did not persist in college had attended segregated high schools. She noted that “there are significant resource, preparation, and achievement disparities between non-segregated and segregated schools, which would impact students’ performances at the university” (p.143).

While some, including the Coleman Report (1996), might argue that school environments have relatively little influence on educational outcomes, other more focused studies, argue that the Coleman Report did not look at some areas of key data (Wenglinsky, 1997). For instance, in the Coleman Report, the amount spent per school was not divided into discrete spending categories. The Coleman Report did not examine how spending decisions could be used to impact the school and student achievement; instead, it simply looked at spending per pupil enrolled.

Critical pipeline issues show us significant reasons that influence why many Latino students do not enter college at the same rate as other racial and ethnic groups (Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005). Therefore with limited numbers of Latinos reaching higher education, institutions of higher education need to do all they can to support the access and persistence of the Latino students who do make it to college.

**Key Influences on Persistence for Latinos**

Latinos not only have the lowest enrollment rate in higher education of all minorities (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005), but they also have the lowest rate of persistence among all racial/ethnic groups in higher education. The focus of this study is to understand more fully why some Latino college students persist in college while
others depart prior to completing their degree, and specifically to consider the impact of faculty-student interaction in their persistence.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to persistence, including affordability, attachment to the institution, and interaction with faculty. Affordability is a critical issue that has been shown to create disparities in persistence (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora & Hengstler, 1992; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). However, affordability is a complex topic. A family’s income will affect whether or not a student chooses to attend college, which type of college to apply to, and specifically which institution to attend (Tierney, 1980; Berger, Smith, & Coelen, 2004). Affordability also influences behaviors that affect a student’s persistence once enrolled in a college. A shift in financial aid patterns, from grants to loans has also affected affordability (Heller, 2005, Orfield, 2005). As a result, financial need will dictate how much time a student needs to be employed in order to stay enrolled, which may impede time spent on campus interacting with faculty and peers (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992). Lack of funds for college can also cause a student to move to part-time rather than full-time enrollment (Mortenson, 1991). Such choices based on the affordability of higher education may ultimately lead a low-income, Latino student to depart college prematurely. When Heller (2005) examined the statistics for equally qualified students with high unmet need, a group made up of primarily Blacks, Native Americans and Latinos, they were only one third as likely to finish college as students with low unmet need. Affordability of higher education directly impacted the persistence of low-income students, such as many Latinos.

Coupled with the issue of affordability, how Latinos become part of the campus community also plays a role in their persistence. Tinto’s theory (1975) on attachment
and departure from higher education, which has been nearly seminal in retention research (Braxton, 2000) looks at the academic and social systems of college. Membership and integration into the two systems are interrelated (Stage, 1989) and important for persistence. However, Tinto’s theory has received much criticism suggesting that it does not fit well for minority populations who are ethnically diverse, represent high numbers of commuters, and may have different ties to their family and cultural community off-campus (Tierney, 1992). Specifically for Latino students, research must take into account the differences encountered by many Latinos entering a campus that fits the majority culture, but may be different from the Latino students’ home and community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Furthermore, campus racial climate plays a role in Latino students’ persistence. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen (1998) showed that an institution that is unsupportive of students from diverse backgrounds will negatively impact the satisfaction and persistence of all students on the campus, regardless of race and ethnicity. With regard to Latino student retention, Hurtado and Carter’s study (1997) also showed that a campus’ racial climate will affect Latino students’ attachment to the institution.

Faculty-Student interaction is a critical component of Latino student persistence. Learning, grade performance, and retention are all positively connected to interaction and involvement with faculty (Astin, 1993). In fact, Astin found that faculty is the second most important influence on student development next to the peer group. Contact with faculty is one of the methods that can influence student persistence through developing a student’s sense of belonging on a campus. Interpersonal interactions, particularly interaction with faculty, will expand Latino students’ cultural connections leading to this
sense of belonging or community membership at the college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000). Faculty interaction can also help validate students’ belief in their ability to be successful in college (Rendón, 1994).

Issues that influence Latino students’ access to college, as well as factors that impact their persistence are very complex. However, they are important to understand because they are pieces of the puzzle in how institutions support Latino students in their persistence toward attaining a college degree.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore persistence for Latino students in a four-year higher educational institution in the Northeast. While many things influence persistence and are parts of the students’ journey of persistence, this study will seek to capture in depth how Latino students perceive faculty-student interaction and how the interaction influences their persistence. This is an important area of study because current research supports that interaction between faculty and students can positively impact persistence (Astin, 1977, 1985, 1993, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1993). However, little research has explored this relationship with regard to the impact of faculty interaction with Latino students.

**Research Questions**

This study has one main research question:

- How do Latino/Latina students who are persisting at four-year institutions of higher education experience interaction with faculty?
Embedded in this main research question are three related sub-questions:

- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their sense of belonging?
- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their feelings of validation?
- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their persistence?

**Significance of the Study**

The research questions are important lines of inquiry because with changing demographics, success in higher education is an equity issue as well as a work-force development issue. The work of Berger, Smith, and Coelen (2004) supports the argument that there are educational inequities inherent in our stratified urban centers that contribute to the leaky pipeline for Latino students’ access to higher education. As a result, the pool of Latino students in college is lower than it should be. Institutions of higher education must address the inequity by looking at how it can support Latino students as they persist toward a college degree, both for the benefit of the individual and for the need of an educated workforce.

Faculty-student interaction clearly plays a role in Latino student persistence (Astin, 1993). However, we have few studies that focus on the impact of faculty-student interaction for Latinos. This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the nature of faculty-student interaction from the perspective of Latino college students. It focused on what types and qualities of interaction were perceived positively or negatively, and why.
It also examined how students were validated academically and personally, and how students perceived the faculty interactions as inhibiting or enabling their persistence.

A number of stakeholders can benefit from the knowledge generated in this study. First, higher education can gain insight from the findings of this study as to the best ways to support the Latino students who gain access to colleges since they have a responsibility to the Latino population, as well as to society in general, to educate equitably and to produce an educated workforce. Faculty in particular can benefit from knowing that their interactions, both inside and outside of the classroom, make a difference in Latino students’ persistence. Finally, the Latino population can benefit by knowing what types of interaction best support and validate Latinos in their pursuit of a college degree. This would enable Latino students to pursue those types of interaction when opportunities arise, and to advocate for institutions to focus on supportive faculty-student interaction.

**Assumptions**

Inherent in this study are some key assumptions, which include that it is important to hear the voices of the Latino students and to listen to their experiences in order to better understand the role of the institution when discussing issues of Latino persistence in higher education. The study also assumes that educational institutions have a moral and a civic obligation to enroll and support students from all cultures and ethnicities, and that Latino persistence in higher education is a concern as a social equity issue and a workforce training issue. Finally, it is an assumption that Latino students are willing to be sources of data concerning faculty student interaction.
Key Terms/Definitions

Ethnicity

In this study, guidelines for ethnicity will follow those set up by the Office of Management and Budget which guides the U.S. Census. A Hispanic or Latino is "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). The U.S. Census Bureau also notes that Hispanics or Latinos can be of any race because ethnic origin is to be considered a separate concept from race.

Latino/a

Beginning with the 2000 Census, the U.S. Census Bureau began to use the terms Latino or Hispanic to refer “to an individual of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American or Central American descent, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (Grieco and Cassidy, 2001, p. 2). In their reports, the U.S. Census Bureau uses the term Latino and Hispanic interchangeably. For the purposes of this study, the term Latino will be used to identify all individuals where either the term Hispanic or Latino would apply. However, when a particular identity is possible, such as Puerto Rican, that term will be used. In addition, the term “Latino” is used in this study to refer to the population as a whole, unless referring to a specific population of females only. In that case, the term “Latina” will be used.

Student Persistence

Persistence is the term used to describe students in higher education continuing toward completion of their degree. Students who choose to depart an institution and not continue with their studies; therefore, do not persist. Those students who do not persist
may be classified as drop-outs if they no longer choose to or are no longer able to stay and complete their degree (Tinto, 1993). Those who depart to attend another institution or those who completed a goal that did not include a degree may fit the term “stop out” (Zurita, 2004). Berger and Lyon (2005) trace the history of the term retention and make the case that a variety of terms have been used over time ranging from student mortality (McNeely, 1937) to student persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999; Berger, 2002).

Berger and Lyon (2005) highlight that while the terms retention and persistence are related, they are not identical. Student persistence “refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion” (p. 9). In contrast, retention refers to the organizational perspective of keeping students enrolled until degree completion. Building on Berger and Lyon’s definition (2005), in this study persistence will be used expressly to describe students’ desire and action to stay in a four-year college and their desire to continue full-time with their studies toward completion of an undergraduate degree.

**Sense of Belonging**

The term sense of belonging is applied by Hurtado and Carter (1997) to represent a student’s perception of connection or membership to the college. Kuh and Love (2002) distinguish this concept from Tinto’s (1993) idea of separation from home environment in order to integrate and assimilate into the institution. A sense of belonging is ultimately mediated through students’ interpersonal interactions with faculty and peers to build membership ties (Kuh & Love).
Validation

The term validation refers to external agents who take an interest in students and encourage them or affirm them as being capable of doing college level academic work (Rendón, 1994). The validating agent can either be someone from the campus such as a faculty member or another student, or an individual off-campus such as a parent. According to Rendón, validation has six main components: (a) Supportive validation promotes academic and interpersonal development; (b) When validation is present, students feel accepted, valuable, and capable of learning; (c) Validation is a prerequisite to student development; (d) Validating can happen both in and out of class by validating agents located both on and off-campus; (e) Validation is a developmental process that as students are more validated, the richer their academic and interpersonal experiences will be; (f) Validation is most effective when it occurs during the first year of college, especially early in the first weeks of classes.

Overview of the Study

Current research places Latino students at the heart of research on persistence as it is clear that there is a critical need for further knowledge concerning what colleges can do to increase Latino persistence at four-year undergraduate institutions. However, there is also a need to hear the individual Latino students’ voices to better understand their educational journeys and their persistence. In particular, this study examines the role of faculty-student interaction in Latino student persistence.

Chapter 2 examines the current literature in three key areas related to the faculty-student interaction and its role in Latino persistence. These areas include: 1) student retention theory, 2) the role of faculty-student interaction, and 3) Latino student
persistence. Chapter 3 introduces the methods of study used in this qualitative research. It includes the conceptual framework, research questions, research design, participants, coding and analysis. It also discusses the limitations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. It begins with an introduction of the participants and then presents five key findings that resulted through deep iterative analyses of the data. Chapter 5 puts forth the implications for policy and practice related to the findings for this study. These recommendations are offered so that college leaders can provide college communities that will welcome and support Latino students as they pursue a college degree. In addition, it is hoped that Latino students would be educated to seek out the types of faculty student interaction and sources of support that will best sustain them in their journeys of persistence.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of the literature is comprised of four main sections moving from a broad view to a more focused view of retention studies and faculty-student interaction. The first section gives an overview of key studies concerning retention theory in higher education. The second section examines the role of faculty-student interaction in persistence, including interaction both inside and outside of the classroom. The third section focuses on the current literature addressing Latino students and their persistence, along with the studies that explore the concepts of sense of belonging and validation.

Retention Theory

A large body of literature on retention is based on the seminal work of Tinto (1975, 1993, 1997), as well as Astin’s influential studies on student involvement (1977, 1993). In addition, it is important to review Astin’s work because he is one of the first to look at the role of faculty-student interaction in student persistence.

Attachment and Departure

The theoretical literature on dropout behavior and retention is strongly based on Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 1997) theory of individual departure from institutions. Tinto’s model draws upon two main sources of earlier work. It is rooted in Durkheim’s Theory of Suicide (1961), which posits that if a person is not integrated into society, suicide is more likely to occur. Tinto’s theory on student dropout states that if a student is not academically and socially attached and integrated into the institution, he or she will more readily choose to depart from the institution. Tinto also builds upon Spady’s work (1971)
that looked upon student departure as an interaction between the student’s attributes and the institution’s environment. Tinto argues that the ability to retain students corresponds to an institution’s ability to “establish a healthy, caring, educational environment which enables all students, not just some, to find a niche in one or more of the many social and intellectual communities of the institution” (Tinto, 1993, pp. 204-205).

Tinto’s theory (1993) on attachment and departure examines the interaction between the student and the institution on three levels for sources of possible dropout. An initial, interactional level involves separation from the student’s past community and environment as the student becomes acclimated to the social and academic environment of the new institution. It is assumed that students will leave behind the norms of their past communities such as high school friends and family. A second interactional level involves attachment, which includes developing congruence on both an academic and social level. For example, in terms of academic congruence, it might focus on the match between a student’s academic preparation and the level of courses being offered. In terms of social congruence, it might be affected by the match between a student’s beliefs, values or experiences and the culture of the institution. The third interactional level involves isolation or lack of integration, which can lead to dropout. Based on this theory, if a student is unable to form close ties with peers or faculty, the student is more likely to leave the institution and not to persist.

**Involvement**

In addition to Tinto’s theory on attachment and departure, another key piece in the understanding of retention focuses on Astin’s work (1977), which looks at the impact of student engagement, and how that in turn affects student persistence. Astin completed a
study that attempted to assess the impact of the college experience on undergraduate students. He used multi-institutional data, which provided a large and diverse sample, and longitudinal data, from the late 1960s to early 1970s, to gain information on the ways students change as a result of college. Using the I-E-O Model as his conceptual framework, to look at student characteristics when starting college (I = Input), college experiences (E = Experiences), and student characteristics after college (O = Outcomes), Astin came to the conclusion that involvement is what matters most in retention, and there are two dimensions to involvement, the behavioral and the perceptual. Active involvement refers to how much time a person spends on a behavior or activity, while the perceptual component, or psychological involvement examines how focused a person is on an activity.

Astin’s landmark study was updated in 1993, incorporating 192 environmental measures including characteristics of institution, student peer group, faculty, financial aid, first-year major choice, place of residence, student involvement, and number/types of courses taken. This study allowed outcomes to be linked to a set of environmental variables, either directly or indirectly. Some important findings from this study related to persistence were that “learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups” (p. 394).

Role of Faculty in Persistence

In particular, the work of Astin and others demonstrates that the faculty plays an integral role in the persistence of students. Time spent interacting with faculty is an important part of the educational process and can impact persistence (Astin, 1977, 1985,
1993, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Tinto (1993) states, “Involvement with one’s peers and with the faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, is itself positively related to student effort and in turn to both learning and persistence” (p. 71).

**Satisfaction with Faculty**

Astin (1997) examined the various factors that promote satisfaction with faculty. The orientation of faculty was found to be a key environmental factor. He established that student satisfaction with faculty is increased when institutionally; the faculty has a student orientation. Astin’s study defined this as faculty who are interested in student’s academic problems, easily accessible outside of class, interested in students’ personal problems, and committed to the institution. Astin found several types of activities were positively associated with satisfaction with faculty. These included measures such as hours per week spent talking with faculty outside of class, having a paper critiqued by a professor, and being a guest in a professor’s home. These listed activities, all of which included a student’s personal interaction with a faculty member outside of the traditional classroom setting, were cited positively by college students.

Institutionally, the orientation of the faculty, affects the students’ satisfaction with faculty (Astin, 1997). Institutions whose faculty was research-oriented rather than student-oriented were likely to have a lower level of student satisfaction with faculty. While this mirrors the traditional pull between teaching and research, the research-oriented faculty was likely to be less accessible to students and to rely more on teaching assistants for classroom instruction and assessment (Astin). Students cited that they were
more likely to be treated as a number. This may well be the case as having a research-oriented faculty was a more common trait of larger, public research universities.

Where a student resided also impacted student satisfaction with faculty (Astin, 1997). Students who lived on-campus, possibly because they had the most opportunity to access faculty, were more satisfied with their professors. Those who lived off-campus, either alone or with family had a lower level of faculty satisfaction. Financial aid also contributed to satisfaction with faculty (Astin). Students supported by institutional or state money, instead of providing their own funding, were much more likely to be satisfied with faculty. Students who do not need to worry about finances may be able to spend more time on campus focusing on college and less time off campus earning a paycheck.

In summary, Astin (1997) found that satisfaction with faculty was linked to student retention. It showed that satisfaction with faculty was positively linked with years of college completed, and negatively linked with dropping out or transferring colleges. While the study looked at a random sample of college students, without a particular emphasis on data for Latinos, Astin’s research shows that professors and their interaction with students play a large role in the complex issue of retention.

**Informal Faculty-Student Interaction**

While the majority of faculty contact with students is formal, such as in the classroom or the laboratory, there is an increasing awareness of the impact of informal faculty-student interaction outside of the traditional classroom setting as well. There is an emerging body of research that looks at the role of academic interaction, both formal and informal, with regard to institutional attachment and persistence (Hurtado & Carter,
In particular, the research suggests that faculty-student interaction has a positive effect on the students’ perception of belonging, their academic performance, and their persistence. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Hibel’s (1978) research looked at the particular type of interaction that was most meaningful in influencing students’ ties to the institution. More specifically, Pascarella et al wanted to test Spady’s (1971) assumptions that faculty influence students’ values and norms and that the influence is enhanced when there is significant interaction with students outside of the classroom. The study, done with a random sample of 498 students over the course of one year, showed that faculty-student interaction can influence a student’s academic performance. However, it was found that not all varieties of faculty-student interaction had the same effect. Informal interactions outside of the classroom that “focused on intellectual or course-related matters had the largest impact” and informal interaction “concerned with students’ future careers also made a significant contribution” (p. 459). Students who had frequent faculty-student interaction both inside and outside of the classroom also tended to perform better than expected from their pre-enrollment characteristics, while students who rarely met informally with faculty performed at a lower than expected level. While this study unfortunately did not break down the responses according to race or ethnicity, the study does add support to the assumption that certain types of interaction between faculty and student can have a significant effect on students’ academic performance and attachment to the institution.
Additional Empirical Studies on Faculty-Student Interaction

Pascarella (1980) examined the connections between faculty interaction and students. His research built on earlier studies showing that for the preponderance of students at the majority of institutions, informal contact with faculty did not frequently occur. Often professors set aside large segments of time as “off-limits” to students and had limited office-hours (Wallace, 1967; Milem, Berger and Dey, 2000); thus, limiting contact time with students.

Furthermore, earlier research conducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found that the quality of the informal interaction was as important as the frequency of the interaction between faculty and students. In addition, the frequency and quality mattered more to certain types of students such as those with parents who had little formal education, students who were unsure of their ability or commitment to graduate, and those struggling with social and academic integration. While these characteristics are not racially or ethnically based, they do fit some of the characteristics of many minority students including Latino students.

Pascarella’s (1980) research found that there were small, but significant links between the amounts of time students spend informally with faculty, and the students’ satisfaction with college. Informal interaction with faculty also positively affected the students’ persistence from the first year to the second year. Findings included that the most effective types of faculty contact with students were related to things explored in the classroom. Some examples were informal contact that focused on career mentoring, intellectual interests, or value issues. The contact extended the exploration of ideas and concepts associated with the more formal context.
Milem and Berger (1997) probed how both the students’ behaviors and students’ perceptions interact to influence persistence. In essence, the research linked Tinto’s and Astin’s work on persistence. In addition, the study found that the timing of faculty-student interaction can influence persistence as well. Milem and Berger’s research looked at first-year undergraduates at a highly selective, private research university, and they found that early involvement between faculty and students was significant in the persistence process. The study also looked at how the student’s behaviors and their perceptions are connected and influence persistence. While institutions typically stress the importance of interacting with peers in the opening weeks of the first year of college, less stress is placed on engagement with faculty during this time. While the population studied did not include Latinos, the findings of the study showed that early faculty interaction played a positive role in the student persistence model.

A follow-up study by Berger and Milem (1999) provided additional support for the importance of faculty-student interaction early in the fall semester for first-year students. It also cited the importance of early faculty interaction and support, particularly for students who may be having difficulty fitting in socially on campus. However, the Berger & Milem study did not fully support Tinto’s (1975, 1993) process of integration. Berger and Milem found that students did not transition in and leave behind the norms and values from past communities. Instead, those who came from communities with values and norms similar to the values and norms of the campus were likely to persist. However, those who came from home backgrounds that differed from the campus, such as those of a different racial/ethnic background or those with differing political views, were more likely not to persist. The group who fit the majority culture did not need to
abandon or leave behind their communities and cultural norms because they already matched the dominant culture of the institution. On the other hand, those who did not match the institutional culture were at a disadvantage. This is an important point because it may have an impact on the social and academic process Latinos experience, and their resulting rate of persistence.

**Latino Student Persistence**

**Overview of the Literature: Critiques of Tinto’s Theory**

While both Tinto’s model of student departure (1993) and Astin’s theory of involvement (1977) are foundational, there have been many who are critical of this theory. As stated earlier, Milem and Berger (1997) critiqued Tinto and Astin because they did not look at both behavior and perception, and how they interact when considering retention. In addition, several studies have disputed the relevancy of the theory to minority students (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tierney, 1992; Kuh & Love, 2002). Tinto’s model is built on a presupposition of assimilation/acculturation (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). The model assumes a separation from home backgrounds and communities in order to take on the institution’s cultural norms and values to become socially and academically integrated. In effect, it places the responsibility to adapt to the institution on the students from underrepresented populations such as Latinos. It distances the institution from having the responsibility to look at the changing population and to adapt policies and practices to meet the changing needs and characteristics of the population (Kuh & Love, 2002).

In addition, much of the early research on student persistence was done on samples with few minorities (Tierney, 1992). The concept of cultures, race and ethnicity
did not play an important role at that time due to low numbers of students of color (Hurtado, 2002). During the last forty years, the number of minority students enrolled in colleges has increased greatly, and many are not willing to give up their cultural membership and ties in order to integrate or assimilate into a college setting (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). In fact for many Latino cultures, “separation is not a viable option, as family is a source of rootedness and strength” (p. 139). Furthermore, Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that for all students, both minority and non-minority, parental encouragement positively affected their adjustment to college and their persistence.

Each of the previously discussed studies indicate a variety of academic and social factors that influence a student’s integration to a new college community, and these in turn affect the students’ choice to depart or to persist. Some have agreed with Tinto’s model and others have either suggested modifications or rejected it entirely (Tierney, 1992) due to its inadequacy to address the specific issues of minority students on a college campus. As a result of the many critiques to Tinto’s theory concerning persistence, there has been a call for additional studies that focus on students of color.

**Sense of Belonging**

Hurtado and Carter (1997) attempt to extend the knowledge around Tinto’s theory, specifically his 1993 revision which begins to take into account the experiences of diverse populations. Using Tinto’s broadened theory, along with Spady’s psychological model (1971), Hurtado and Carter sought to measure Latino students’ sense of connectedness or belonging to the institution. The concept of a “sense of belonging” is an important step away from Tinto’s (1993) idea of social and academic integration. Integration implies that students are socialized or absorbed into the institution through a
process of assimilation (Kuh & Love, 2002). Hurtado and Carter (1997) apply the term sense of belonging to describe a students’ perception of connection or membership especially in terms of minority students whose backgrounds may not share the institutions’ norms and values.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) conducted research with a sample of 227 Latino college students, including a mix of Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos such as Cubans and Latin Americans. Using a Student Descriptive Questionnaire, responses to a National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS) given in the students’ sophomore year and again in their junior year, the relationship between a student’s sense of belonging and participation in a range of academic activities, as well as the relationship between a student’s sense of belonging and participation in student organizations were examined. The focus was to look at the students’ background characteristics and college experiences during the first and second year and how they might contribute to a sense of belonging in the third year of college.

The study found that for Latinos, there were things related to academic activities that produced a higher sense of belonging for the students. For example, students who discussed coursework outside of class with other students, tutored other students, and frequently talked with professors outside of classes, reported a higher sense of belonging at an institution. There were also things that were hypothesized to have the same result; however, the study showed that they were not associated with a higher sense of belonging. Some behaviors involving interaction with faculty, such as working on an independent study, working on a research study or being a guest in a professor’s home, were not associated with a higher sense of belonging. While all of the academic activities
involving faculty engagement outside of the classroom was hypothesized to lead to an increased sense of belonging, that was not the case. Clearly more research is needed to shed light on why some academic activities increase a sense of integration and attachment for Latinos, while others do not. Since this was a quantitative study, it was not able to examine the characteristics and qualities of the interactions and how they were perceived by the Latino students.

Kuh and Love (2002) suggest that from a cultural perspective, the sense of belonging that Hurtado and Carter (1997) describe is “ultimately mediated through students’ interpersonal interactions with faculty, peers, and others” (Kuh & Love, 2002, p. 206). Therefore, they would agree that the academic integration would then be a subset of the social system (Kuh & Love, 2002). Furthermore, Hurtado and Carter found that for Latino students, academic performance, in terms of earning good grades, did not enhance their sense of belonging. Instead it was the interaction with faculty both inside and outside of class, discussions with peers about class-related content, and tutoring other students that gave a greater sense of belonging. These are all items that could be viewed as social integration or building social membership in the academic community (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). This research would support the importance of faculty-student interaction and the need to understand its role better in terms of persistence for Latino students.

Views on Campus Integration versus Membership

Tinto (1987) and Astin (1977) argue that it is the individual’s response to the problems surrounding separation and transition to college that determines if a student stays or leaves the institution (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora; 2000). Tinto also uses a theory of
individual behavior in his adaptation of Durkheim’s work on suicide. For Tinto and Astin, the focus is on how an individual, based on his or her personal attributes, will respond to the many challenges found in integrating to a new campus.

Tinto (1975, 1987) studied the process of integration into a campus community, and he saw the need for the student to separate from the old culture and move into the new culture of the college. De Anda (1984) challenged the idea of separation and instead proposed the concept of biculturation built upon the work of Valentine (1971). De Anda looked at the cultural environment of the student and the cultural environment of the campus. For minority students, the individual’s culture represented the minority culture while the campus climate represented the majority culture. She reasoned that the student’s ability to understand and adjust between the two environments is based on the shared values and norms of the two environments, as well as the presence of cultural translators to help build that understanding. As a result, biculturalism allows dual socialization to occur.

In addition to de Anda’s findings, Nora and Cabrera (1996) contend that Tinto’s (1975, 1987) theory does not account for differences among racial and ethnic groups and their cultural differences. They found that students of color do not need to break ties with family and outside community in order to establish membership ties with the college community. Research design on persistence must take into account differences in racial and ethnic groups, find ways to examine the concept of how students of different backgrounds, and for this study in particular, how Latino students become members both socially and academically in an institution.
Role of the Institution

The institution has a role to play in accommodating students from diverse backgrounds (Jalomo, 1995; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). As Latino students continue to live and learn in environments that include both the campus community and their Latino community, Jalomo (1995) describes the transition as challenging, where some things are lost and others are gained through the changes. Through this process of transition, Rendón (1994) strongly maintains that it is the campus’ responsibility to support students.

Rendón, Jalomo and Nora (2000) expand on the role of the institution to enable this dual socialization or convergence of the two cultures to occur. Colleges must provide cultural translators to “provide information and guidance that can help students decipher unfamiliar college customs and rituals, mediate problems that arise from disjunctions between students’ cultural traits and the prevailing campus culture, and model behaviors that are amenable with the norms, values and beliefs of the majority and minority cultures” (p. 138). They would argue that it is not enough to accept Latino students and then simply expect them to adapt to the campus culture. Instead it is incumbent on the college to provide better support for the enrolled Latino students.

Validation

The earlier theories of integration (Tinto, 1993) and involvement (Astin, 1997) were developed when culturally diverse students were not a part of the research studies conducted concerning these areas of interest (Rendón, 1994; Jalomo, 1995). However, more current research looks at the concept of validation as a vital part of the process of getting nontraditional students, such as Latinos, involved and becoming a member of a
campus community that differs from their home communities (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

According to Rendón, intertwined with the institutional responsibility to serve a diverse student body is the concept of validation (1994). Rendón’s study was based on Astin’s (1985) student involvement research and Pascarella’s and Terenzini’s (1991) in-depth inquiry into how college impacts students. Rendón (1994) conducted qualitative group interviews with over 130 first year, non-traditional students who represented a portion of the changing diversity of college students. The participants included commuters, African Americans, Latinos and those from low-income backgrounds. A focus of the study became how students, who expected to do poorly or to fail, came “to believe in their innate capacity to learn and to become successful college students” (p. 36).

Rendón’s study (1994) found that it was when a particular person took the initiative to validate a student, to believe that he or she was capable of being successful in college, that the student was transformed into “full members of the college academic and social community” (p. 51). Rendón found two main types of validation. Academic validation enabled students to trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being successful students, and interpersonal validation promoted personal and social adjustment to college. She found that validation occurred through agents both inside and outside of the classroom. In many cases faculty, students and family members were important in the validation process. If students received academic and interpersonal validation, especially early in their first year, it increased their involvement in the institution.
Rendón (1994) clearly states that the concept of validation is quite distinct from involvement. Involvement looks at the amount of time and effort students put into studying and other campus activities (Astin 1984, 1993). Tinto’s research (1987) supports that the greater the amount of time and energy spent on campus involvement, the greater the resulting satisfaction, achievement and persistence. Implicit in this theory of involvement is that it is the role of the student to become involved in the campus, on both academic and social levels (Rendón, 1994). Implicit in Astin’s theory is the understanding that it is the role of the institution to provide the various opportunities for involvement. Therefore, the institution provides the campus support centers, organizations, and many extra-curricular activities; however, it is primarily the students’ role to become involved and take advantage of the available opportunities.

In contrast, Rendón’s concept of validation (1994) contends that it is the institution’s role to have various agents take an active interest in the students and to design programs that will support the students in their academic efforts and social adjustment. Validation is having all levels of a campus intentionally reaching out to students “to design activities that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff” (p. 44).

**Campus Racial Climate**

As part of the changing demographics, colleges face urgent pressure to create campuses where Latino students will enroll, be a part of a positive learning environment, and persist through degree attainment. Unfortunately, campuses have a legacy of exclusion, prejudice or hostility (Stage & Hamrick, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (2002) provide
a framework for understanding and describing campus climate. They lay the groundwork for looking at the campus’ legacy of inclusion or exclusion, the structural diversity of the campus, the psychological dimension of the climate of the campus, and the behavioral dimension of the climate of the campus. All four of these dimensions of the campus racial climate are interconnected and one area can certainly impact another area.

The psychological dimension of campus climate involves a particular person’s view of the campus environment. The students’ racial or ethnic background can affect how they view the campus climate in terms of whether or not it is supportive of diversity. In one study, Loo and Rolison (1986) found that 68 percent of the White student population at a particular university thought that the school was supportive of students of color. However, only 28 percent of the Black and Chicano students felt the same was true. Loo and Rolison demonstrated that whether a student is a member of the majority or of the minority can play a role in one’s perceptions of campus racial climate (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Perceptions concerning the racial climate of a campus are important because research supports that the racial climate of a campus can also impact the persistence of students (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Stage & Hamrick, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado, 2002). For example, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that both overt and subtle forms of hostility affected Latino students’ feelings of belonging and attachment to the university. In particular, this study found that perceptions of a hostile campus climate in the second year negatively affected the students’ sense of belonging during the subsequent year. A resulting lack of social integration, or sense of belonging, can impact a student’s transition to college and resulting ability to persist (Hurtado, 2002).
Campus climate is worthy of attention because campus climate affects all enrolled students on a college campus. Two studies found that although White students may be less aware of acts of hostility toward minority students, White students were also affected by a negative campus climate (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In fact, White students’ persistence was impacted both directly and indirectly by discrimination against minorities and perceptions of a hostile campus climate (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). This is important for campus administrators who might view a poor campus climate as an issue that only affects minority students.

Nora and Cabrera’s (1996) study included over 800 participants attending a predominantly White institution. The sample was representative of the campus and looked at the direct and indirect effects of the perception of prejudice on persistence decisions. While this study did not focus on Latinos specifically, it does provide some insight with regard to the impact of racial conflict on both minority students and majority students attending a college. The study showed that both White and minority students were able to perceive racial prejudice or discrimination, but the minority students had a higher perception level of a hostile campus climate. One surprising factor is that it did not directly link the perception of a hostile campus climate to a lower rate of persistence for minority students. However, it did affect the White students’ persistence. The authors speculated that minority students may be accustomed to racial discrimination and have become so hardened, that it no longer exerted such a powerful influence on their persistence.

In summary, the campus climate plays a significant role in students’ experiences and adjustment to campus. For both White students and Latino students, the campus
climate appears to have an impact. While there is differing evidence concerning the
direct role of the campus climate concerning Latino persistence, it is clear that it
influences the social and academic experiences of Latino students. Therefore, a number
of unsupportive social and institutional factors may collectively sway a Latino student to
consider departure from the college (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

**Conclusion**

Research on Latinos in higher education is critical due to the changing
demographics in the United States. The major pieces of research on retention and
persistence (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Astin 1993) were done before large numbers of Latinos
were present in college populations. As a result, Latinos were not included in the studies
used to develop these key theories on attachment and departure, as well as college impact
on students.

In addition, various studies were completed that supported the importance of
faculty-student interaction; however, they looked at faculty-student interaction with the
total college population (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Pascarella, 1980; Milem &
Berger, 1997; Berger & Milem, 1999). These studies found that faculty-student
interaction, particularly early in the students’ first year was helpful in students becoming
a part of the campus community.

As the college population began to change and diversify, there were a number of
studies that looked at college students who differed from the majority culture of the
institution (Tierney, 1992; Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997; Hurtado, 1997; Berger &
Milem, 1999). These studies began to call into question the accuracy of the key theories
being applied to culturally diverse students. For example, Hurtado and Carter (1997)
looked at the idea of interactions that created a sense of belonging for Latinos rather than integration and leaving behind past communities. Rendón (1994, 2002) and Jalomo (1995) developed the idea of validation as a precursor to campus involvement. These studies cited the importance of the institutions taking an active role in Latino students becoming a part of the campus and engaged learners. Validation of Latino students by the faculty, through supportively encouraging students in their academic work, can bring about increased involvement.

In addition, the campus climate and how it is perceived by students play a role in Latino persistence. While research has begun to address Latinos and their transition as learners on a campus, clearly there is still much to be learned about how campuses, faculty in particular, can better welcome and support Latino students on their journey toward a baccalaureate degree.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Introduction

This study is designed to explore how Latino students perceive faculty-student interaction and how the interaction influences their persistence. This chapter on research design and procedures begins with an explanation of the conceptual framework that guided the methodology of the study. The second section of the chapter focuses on the main research question and the integral sub-questions. Section three follows with the detailed structure of the research design that was used for the collection of data. The fourth section discusses the methods used for data analysis and establishing trustworthiness for this study. The final section of the chapter presents the inherent limitations of the study.

Conceptual Framework

Research shows that the college persistence rate for Latino students from 1975 through 2000 was the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). As Latinos are the fastest growing segment of the American population, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of why persistence is so low, and how colleges can improve efforts to support Latino students in their academic journeys. The review of literature in Chapter 2 shaped the conceptual framework and provided focused direction for this study.

Tinto’s theory on attachment and departure (1975, 1993, 1997) supported that a student must be integrated into the new college environment in order to avoid a student dropping out. Astin’s research (1977, 1985, 1993, 1997) showed that student
involvement in terms of amount of time and amount of focus impacted persistence. In addition, existing research also reinforces that these theories may not be entirely appropriate for the Latino population (Tierney, 1992; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Kuh & Love, 2002). Tinto’s theory is based on the belief that in order for students to transition into the campus culture, they must be assimilated or acculturated into the values of the campus culture. However, other research strongly suggests that enabling students to sustain ties with family and pre-college community can be a positive source of encouragement (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

The research studies cited above focus on retention, which highlights the institution’s perspective of keeping students enrolled through graduation. However, this study focuses on persistence, which emphasizes the student’s perspective. The individual student’s desire to persevere, gathered from the voices of those Latino students who have persisted in their goal of a four-year college degree, can yield important data to understand how best to support Latino students in higher education. The journey of Latino students earning a college degree is complex and worthy of careful study.

Latino persistence is a multifaceted topic and previous research suggests that a number of different facets have an impact. In this study, while many aspects of the students’ journeys will also be explored, faculty-student interactions will be the primary focus as extant literature strongly indicates that this plays a critical role in student persistence. Faculty-student interaction can be a source of strength or obstacle for students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980, Pasacrella, 1980). For example, faculty can play a role in students’ persistence, as studies have shown that institutions with faculty who are student-oriented have higher
retention rates (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). In addition, early faculty involvement in the first few weeks of a student’s arrival on campus is shown to have a positive impact (Berger & Milem, 1999), and faculty-student interaction in the form of discussion around academic advising issues, course content, and intellectual interests can positively impact persistence (Pascarella, Pascarella & Terenzini). However, not all types of faculty-student interaction are positive. Some interactions can lead to Latino students’ developing a positive sense of belonging while other types of interaction are interpreted negatively by the student (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). While existing studies show positive and negative aspects of faculty-student interaction, they do not adequately capture the voices of Latino students speaking about their interactions with faculty and how Latino students perceive these interactions. As a result, the studies fail to portray the students’ perceptions about the interactions and the impact they have on Latino student persistence.

The current body of literature on Latino persistence leads to wider questions of how students perceive their place on a college campus. The conceptual framework for this study focuses on the voices of Latino students and how they perceive their journey of gaining a college education. Therefore, Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) concept of students feeling a sense of belonging or being connected to an institution will be explored. In addition, the study will also examine the concept of validation (Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Rendón found that two types of validation, academic and interpersonal, played a role in persistence of a diverse group of over 130 college students. While that study was conducted with first year college students, this study differs in two important ways. This study is limited to include only Latino students and seeks to
understand how validation is perceived by Latino students nearing the end of their college journey.

In order to understand more deeply how Latino students perceived this connection to the institution and the role of validation, interviews were conducted using an approach developed by Brown and Gilligan (1991, 1992). Brown and Gilligan use a voice-centered approach, which focuses on the participant’s voice and four critical questions that must be considered. The questions include: “Who is speaking? In what body? Telling what story about the relationship - from whose perspective or from what vantage point? In what societal and cultural framework?” (1991, p. 43). As a result, each participant’s story was carefully listened to and reflected on at least four times. This method enabled the researcher, also known as the listener in this method, to hear the different voices that run throughout the interviews and to hear distinct narratives relating to the Latino students’ persistence.

In analyzing the data for this study, the first listening focused on the participant’s story itself. The goal was a general understanding of the narrative in terms of the who, what, where, when and why. In addition, as the listener, I reflected on myself as the researcher, a person who is in the privileged position of interpreting another person’s story and life events (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). According to Rossman and Rallis, reflexivity is the process of “looking at yourself making sense of how someone else makes sense of her world” (2003, p. 49). Therefore, the reflective process acknowledged both the important concepts of identification with and distancing from the participant. The process called me as a researcher to be attentive to this in order to understand how it
may affect my understanding of, my interpretation, and my response to the participant’s narrative.

The second listening concentrated on the voice of “I” or “self” in terms of the participant (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). This listening focused on how the participant viewed herself. By listening for the voice of the other, it brought me into relationship with the participant. It also acknowledged that I as a researcher was no longer a detached listener, but instead an active dialogic participant in relationship with the participant. Brown, Debold, Tappan and Gilligan (1991) refer to this as being a “relational listener.”

The third and fourth listenings focused on how Latino students spoke about their experiences and relationships. The final two readings were based on the concept of being a “resistant listener,” (Brown & Gilligan, 1991) which is defined as one who listens to participants give voice to issues of race, class and gender. Relating this listening back to the conceptual framework for the study, the third reading concentrated on the voice of belonging (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2002), showing a sense of connection or membership to the campus community, and its impact on persistence for the Latino students. The fourth reading centered on the voice of validation (Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). While a sense of belonging and validation may come from a variety of sources, located both on and off-campus, the conceptual framework encouraged listening for voices expressing the role of faculty-student interaction and its impact on persistence for the Latino students. In addition, care was given to identify when Latino students’ voices expressed relational conflicts between being affirmed and being marginalized.
This research extends the current knowledge on Latino persistence through cultural research informed by ethnographic and phenomenological approaches to gain further insight into how faculty-student interactions are perceived by Latino students’ to affect engagement with an institution. The study also looked at how these faculty-student interactions validated and affirmed Latino students, and their sense of belonging on the college campus. Finally, this study examined how faculty-student interactions were perceived by Latino students and what role they played in inhibiting or enabling persistence.

The majority of the current studies that have explored the concept of validation have focused on community colleges (Rendón, 1994, 2002; Jalomo, 1995). In particular, Rendón’s landmark study (1994) on validation was done at the community college level and looked at non-traditional, culturally diverse students rather than Latino students. A follow-up study (2002), also based at a community college, focused on the Chicano population. In addition, Jalomo’s research (1995) also looked at Latinos enrolled at the community college level. While these studies are important because of the number of Latinos studying at community colleges and because they further our concept of validation and its role in persistence for students from diverse backgrounds, it is important to broaden our understanding of Latino persistence. Research on Latino persistence, particularly at four-year institutions, needs to be better understood. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge on Latino persistence for various ethnicities within the broad grouping of Latinos since the majority of the past studies which focused on Latinos have mainly examined the Chicano population.
Research Questions

This study had one main research question:

- How do Latino/Latina students who are persisting at four-year institutions of higher education experience interaction with faculty?

Embedded in this main research question were three related sub-questions:

- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their sense of belonging?
- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their feelings of validation?
- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their persistence?

Research Design

This cultural research study, informed by both ethnographic and phenomenological approaches, included seven participants. Phenomenology is the “study of participant’s lived experiences and world views” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p. 190). The interviews allowed me to explore a narrative that gave a deeper understanding of faculty-student interaction and also developed into a conversation about the meaning of that experience or phenomenon. I employed Seidman’s methodology (1998), which proposed that three iterative interviews be used in order to gain the important data in a thick form. The initial interview explored the participant’s life story and built a timeline. The second interview sought to build a thick description of faculty student interaction that occurred during the Latino student’s studies at college. As a result of the first
interview, I came to see that the Latino student’s interactions with the educational environment in a dominant culture school helped shape their perceptions of faculty interactions in college. Therefore, the second interview also explored interactions during school as well. The final interview involved having the participant reflect on the meaning of the experience. Each interview used material from the prior interviews to build on each other and to form significant connections to be explored.

The interviews were used to investigate how the students perceived their journey of persistence in college. In particular, they explored the various academic and social experiences that involved faculty-student interaction, what characteristics of the experiences made them more or less meaningful, and how those experiences contributed to or inhibited a sense of belonging, feelings of validation, and the journey toward persistence.

**Participants and Data Sources**

**The Research Site**

Research was conducted at a private, four-year institution located in a moderate-sized city in the northeast, known for its industrial history. The choice of a baccalaureate granting institution was made since Latinos have the lowest degree completion rate of all minority groups in four-year institutions (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005), and because faculty-student interaction is expected to be higher at a residential four-year campus as compared to a community college. For the purpose of this study, it was referred to as Northern City College (NCC). The college has an undergraduate enrollment of just under 2,000 students. In addition to undergraduate degrees, the college offers both master’s level and doctoral degrees to about an additional 1,500 graduate students. About 77
percent of the undergraduate population at NCC is traditional college age and about 23 percent is above age 24. Of bachelor’s degrees granted in 2008, Business, Health Professions, Criminal Justice and Psychology were the most common fields of study.

In terms of race and ethnicity at NCC, about 42 percent of the undergraduate student population is White, non-Hispanic, about 27 percent is Black, non-Hispanic, 10 percent is Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian. There is an overall graduation rate of 53 percent for students within a six-year time frame. When examined by race and ethnicity, institutional data suggest a 55 percent graduation rate for White non-Hispanics and a 53 percent graduation rate for Black non-Hispanics. A 43 percent graduation rate is recorded for Hispanics, but according to the U.S. Department of Education’s IPEDS data, there are insufficient numbers for the Latino student graduation rate to considered a reliable statistic.

The Participants

Seven participants were selected for this research study. The seven undergraduate Latino students were chosen using purposive sampling. This sampling method required that I make participant choices that would develop understanding about the phenomenon of faculty-student interaction and specific beliefs and experiences about the events. The seven students taking part in the phenomenological study were chosen “to give an understanding of the lived experiences of a small number of people” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 97). Since the study focused on the role of faculty-student interaction with regard to Latino student persistence, participants were chosen based on their frequency and quality of interaction with faculty members.
Since I am a faculty member at a neighboring institution to NCC, I contacted the Director of Multicultural Affairs for the campus and the Director of a federally-funded program for college students who are either first generation and/or those with limited financial means. They recommended students whom they knew have had substantial faculty-student interaction and that might fit the criteria outlined below. In addition, I posted bilingual flyers in common areas such as the student center, dining commons, and dormitories explaining the need for Latino participants for a research study on earning a college degree.

Once a pool of students was identified, Latino student participants were chosen in order to balance gender. Selected participants included four Latina students and three Latino students. Students chosen for this study were juniors and seniors because they have already made the transition to college, and therefore have some college experience on which to draw. Furthermore, they are well on their way to persisting and attaining a college degree. In addition, because the most common period of dropout occurs between the first and second year, junior and senior students would be able to recall some of those issues that played a role in their persistence during that key time (Tinto, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999), as well as other points in their journey.

In order to give an accurate representation of ethnicities and backgrounds in the geographic area of the college who are commonly combined under the term “Latino,” the study endeavored to include the specific Latino group each participant identified with (Hurtado, 2002, Phinney, 1996). This included specific self-identifiers of ethnicity, such as Puerto Rican, Dominican or Ecuadorian, and in-depth cultural information shared by the participants to give as rich a description as possible.
Multiple steps were taken to ensure the participants’ confidentiality as much as possible. Alternate names were given in order to keep the identities private, and all typed notes used the pseudonyms. In addition, all multiple copies of digital voice recordings were deleted. In terms of the informed consent, I discussed the steps taken toward maintaining confidentiality and the details concerning their voluntary participation with each participant. I asked the participants for their voluntary agreement and signatures, letting them know that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also received approval from the internal review boards both at the University of Massachusetts and also at the institution where the research was conducted.

**Data Collection**

The data collection methods that were implemented in this qualitative study consisted of preliminary observations of the site, meeting with the director of Multicultural Academic Services (MAS) Office, and phenomenological interviews.

**Preliminary Observations**

Observations are used to understand the context of a site and a situation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), so I conducted two days of preliminary observations at the campus, including time in the campus dining area, the student center, central areas near faculty offices, and the outdoor Quadrangle area. The purposes of the observations were multi-fold. First, they provided a way for me to gain familiarity with the overall campus, student gathering spots, and faculty offices. This was particularly important as this was a campus on which I had spent limited time before the study commenced. Second, the observations enabled me to gain a better sense of the campus in terms of the campus racial/ethnic interaction and climate. Overall, the observations helped to develop a better
understanding of the context in which the students live and learn on campus. Detailed field notes were taken on the two occasions, once during a weekday and once during a weekend evening. After reviewing the notes, I finished by generating thoughts about the observations and additional questions to inform and shape my interviews.

**Interviews**

I conducted three semi-structured individual, phenomenologic face-to-face interviews of approximately one hour each, with all seven participants during the course of a fall semester. The interviews built on each other to gain a student’s timeline of events and life history, to focus on a particular set of events or a particular time, with an emphasis on faculty-student interaction. The purpose was to gain a thorough description of the student’s journey, and to allow the participant to reflect upon the meaning of the time or event (Seidman, 1998). Each of the interviews were conducted in English, digitally recorded and then transcribed. Additional observer thoughts, feelings, and other visual cues not accounted for in the recording were added to the typed transcription.

The first interview focused on the student’s journey to higher education. Pictures of a graduation scene were used as a projective technique to encourage participants to express their beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about being a Latino and how they perceived the concept of attending college. Photo elicitation uses graphic probes to draw out a participant’s attitudes and experiences (Krathwohl, 1998). It was also useful in bridging the gap between a white privileged researcher and a Latino undergraduate, who may not share a common cultural background (Harper, 2002). The second interview examined the student’s interaction with faculty on the campus, and also related back to some earlier experiences with the Latino students’ interactions in a dominant culture school prior to
attending college. The third interview allowed for reflection concerning the effects of the interaction with faculty on campus and how that related to his or her persistence in college.

**Interview Questions**

**Interview #1 – The Early Years**

- Today, I want to hear your story and how you got to college. Tell me about your earliest memories of when you were a student.

- Walk the participant through his/her life story up until the point of entering college, focusing on how he or she experienced or perceived instances of being a Latino student.

- Show a picture of a Latino college student in a graduation gown. Ask what this means or represents to the student. Ask what this means or represents to the student’s family?

**Interview #2 – The College Years: Faculty/Student Interaction**

- Last time, we talked about your life and the journey that led to college. Today, I would like to hear more of how you came to be where you are today, a (junior/senior) in college. Please tell me about some of the things or people that have helped you continue to be a student here.

- Let’s focus on your professors. Can you tell me about your best interaction with a professor? How did you feel about the experience?

- Can you tell me about your worst interaction with a professor? How did you feel about the experience?

- I would like to hear about typical interactions with professors. Think about yesterday. Who, in terms of professors, did you interact with? Start with the morning and let’s walk through the day. [Continue to elicit details to create rich descriptions of the experiences.]

- How did that experience(s) help you feel like you could be a successful student here or maybe that you couldn’t be successful here?
Interview #3 – Reflection and Synthesis

• Today is our final interview and I want us to focus and reflect on the experiences you have described with faculty both inside and outside of classroom. Describe how you think those experiences have either helped or hurt you persist as a student here.

• As a Latino student here, how do you see yourself and how you belong to this campus? Have any of your professors helped or hindered that sense of belonging? Describe how.

• Have any of your interactions validated or not validated you as a student here? Have they made you feel as if you could be successful here or maybe caused you to feel you could not be successful here? Can you give some examples?

• What is the racial climate like on this campus? How does the racial climate of this campus affect the experience(s) you described?

• How do these experiences affect your wanting to stay here and finish your degree?

• Have you ever thought about not persisting as a student? Why?

• What advice would you give to professors working with Latino students to increase student persistence?

• As a junior/senior, what advice would you give to first year Latino students about interaction with professors?

Data Coding and Analysis

The process of data analysis involved multiple methods. In qualitative research the analysis of data is ongoing (Cresswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Intimately knowing and studying the data was one of the most important steps in this study, and it helped to move forward the analysis and reflection needed to understand more fully the Latino students’ perceptions concerning their persistence.
Listening for Voice

This study listened to the students’ narratives and used a voice-centered approach as developed by Brown and Gilligan (1991, 1992). Listening for voice entailed a progressive level of analysis. It moved from a direct factual understanding of the “Who? What? Where? When? and Why?” to the broader themes embedded in the research questions and in the participants’ answers. Each of the seven participants’ interviews were organized according to name, and were analyzed using the four separate readings for voice that focus on levels of analysis as set by the voice-centered approach and the conceptual framework. In particular, the first listening centered on capturing the details of the participant’s narrative. It focused on the directly articulated details of what was said, with particular attention paid to the details participants chose to reveal about themselves. The second listening sought to hear the voice or sense of self of the participant in the narrative. It examined which facts the participant led with and which facts were not addressed. Exploring areas such as family, goals, and identity provided rich sources of data. The third listening was aimed at the participant’s voice of belonging or connection to the campus community (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2002). The final listening examined the voice of validation, and its role in a student feeling like they could be successful as a student at the college (Rendón, 1994, Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). In particular, the first listening was used to develop detailed portraits of each of the participants. Data was coded to show passages from the transcripts that were particularly relevant to each of the four voices. Data analysis proceeded to identify common themes emerging from the voices of the participants. The third listening led to significant details about the nature of the concept of a sense of
belonging, specifically that it suggested both a perceptual and a tangible component. The fourth listening helped clarify the role of validation in Latino students building affirming relationships. Finally, as a result of the iterative analytical process, organized patterns were identified that clarified how the concepts identified in previous stages of analysis related to the stories of the students’ college experiences and journey’s toward persistence.

Cross-case Analysis

To find the organized patterns in the Latino students’ voices, a mini-portrait of each of the participants was developed based upon the coding completed through four readings in the voice-centered approach outlined above. These mini-portraits were about 10-12 pages in length and they consisted of a systematic narrative based on the coded transcripts. An example of this is shown in Appendix A based upon the interviews conducted with Daniel. Areas covered included cultural identity, views on education, affirming interactions with professors, marginalizing interactions with professors, sense of belonging on campus, and persistence. The narratives included actual quotes from the participant’s interview transcripts.

The mini-portraits were useful in developing models across cases to see themes emerge. Many models were developed and refined as participants’ voices were analyzed to see commonalities and differences. The initial focus was on the college experience, but it became clear from the participants that the pre-college environment had a notable impact on their college experience and therefore a model needed to include both the pre-college experience and the college experience. In addition, further study through the cross-case analysis showed that there were three main sources of support for Latino
student persistence, which included collegiate self-efficacy, a sense of belonging to campus and family support. The final model of successful persistence for Latino students incorporated the areas of the pre-college experience, the college experience and the three mains sources of support for Latino persistence.

**Trustworthiness**

The concept of trustworthiness is critical in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cresswell (2003) and Rossman and Rallis (2003) outline a number of methods that I incorporated into the research to build integrity into the study. Thick descriptions from the interviews and detailed observations of the site enabled a greater understanding of the Latino students’ voices. Building a trustworthy relationship with the participants enabled the participants to speak more openly and allowed an increased understanding of Latino students’ perceptions of belonging and validation. This was accomplished by having an initial meeting with each participant to talk about the study and to listen to the participant express any concerns that he or she had. Each meeting was held at a time and at a location of the Latino student’s choice to ensure that the participant felt comfortable to express his or her thoughts.

It is also important to clarify the bias or perspective I bring to the study (Cresswell; Rossman & Rallis). As the Director of an English as a Second Language program at a four-year college for the past 18 years, and a professor who works with Latino students on a daily basis, I am deeply committed to seeing Latino students be successful in their pursuit of a college degree. As both a faculty member and an administrator, I have a holistic perspective and appreciation of the college experience and the many challenges it can present to Latino students. However, I am a White woman
who needs to be open to hearing the Latino students as they voice their experiences from their own journeys. I also need to be systematic in documenting what I see and hear, and explicit about the resulting outcomes. In addition, while students at my own institution may be aware of my work and advocacy for Latinos/as on campus, participants at another institution would not have that same knowledge.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is qualitative in nature, and therefore, there are certain limitations inherent in its design. While quantitative research gives outcomes such as a number, amount or a score, qualitative is different by its very nature (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). For example, it is quite useful in interpreting meanings and perceptions about experiences, but it is not possible to be able statistically to tell how many of a particular population felt exactly that same way.

This study only involves seven participants and their responses. It is not a random sample that can be used to generalize to the larger population. In addition, this study only examines Latino students in a particular four-year, private undergraduate institution of less than 2,000 undergraduates located in the Northeast. Therefore, it may not be directly applicable to other types of institutions such as community colleges, larger research institutions, or colleges and universities located in other parts of the United States.

It is a challenge both to represent the voices of individuals and to analyze and interpret the meanings in those voices. In addition, the interviews were conducted in English with students whose first language was Spanish. While great care was taken to be
intentional and rigorous in the analysis and results were member-checked with participants; this is still the researcher’s renderings of those voices.

This study focuses on Latino students and their interactions with faculty. As a result, these findings may not directly relate to other minority populations such as African-American or Native-American students and their interaction with faculty. Also, the role of teaching in a college is distinctive and the assignment of grades as part of that role is quite unique. As a result, the impact of interactions with other campus staff and administrators may not be identical to that of faculty.

Finally, the participants are Latino students who are currently enrolled as juniors and seniors. Consequently, this study captures the perceptions and experiences of those students who were successful in their persistence and do not necessarily reflect the experiences and perspectives of other students, even those from similar backgrounds. It is limited in that it will not include the voices of those who chose to dropout and to leave college, nor those who are in different years of study as a college student other than the junior or senior year.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis in this study. Existing reports and studies clearly indicate the need for a better understanding of the lack of persistence of Latinos in higher education (Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). Hence, this study is designed to improve our understanding through a series of interviews with seven Latino participants attending NCC, which were read and analyzed using a voice-centered approach (Brown & Gilligan, 1991, 1992). Part one of this chapter provides an overview of the seven participants, while also describing how the readings were analyzed to provide a holistic mini-portrait of each participant. This section seeks to provide enough detail to enable the reader to appreciate each participant’s educational journey and to gain an awareness of its complexity.

Part two of this chapter focuses on the findings generated through iterative analyses of the transcripts. Major themes were derived from the in-depth analysis of the participants’ interview transcripts. The first section begins with the impact of the pre-college experience on non-native English speaking Latino students who attend predominantly White schools. Affirmation and marginalization begins even before college and influences not only who chooses to attend college, but also their perceptions of faculty at college. Those who choose to attend college are impacted by interaction with faculty throughout their studies. In turn, the Latino college students’ persistence is impacted by the congruence between how the Latino student views self and the perception of how a professor views the student. These interactions are either affirming
or marginalizing to the Latino student. Each of the steps is analyzed in detail and participant quotes are used to illustrate the students’ perspectives concerning each strand.

**Overview of the Participants**

All seven participants are Latino students at NCC. They are either in their junior or senior year and have been successful\(^1\) in their pursuit of an undergraduate college degree. The following mini-portraits give an overview of their journey to provide some context for the analysis which follows in the second part of chapter four. Table 1 presents descriptive information for each of the participants, including name, year of study, major, gender, ethnicity and home location. Four of the students were Latina females and three were Latino males. Three are currently in their junior year of study and four are seniors. While five of the students attended high school within a few miles of the NCC campus, two others are from the greater New York City area. All of them see their family or extended family on most weekends. A more in-depth portrait of each participant is provided below.

\(^1\) Success in this study is defined as a student in either the junior or senior year persisting toward attainment of a bachelor’s degree.
Table 1: Overview of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of Study</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Urban Center, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Criminal Justice/Psych</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Urban Center, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Urban Center, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Urban Center, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Urban Center, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Urban Center, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>Urban Center, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ricardo**

Ricardo was born in the Bronx to Puerto Rican parents, and raised there by his Spanish-speaking paternal grandfather until age six. His mother brought him to Massachusetts to start kindergarten. Neither Ricardo nor his mother knew much English, so Ricardo recalls that he was basically on his own with schoolwork as he progressed with his education. He struggled with learning English and to this day wrestles with the writing and analytical language skills needed in college. Ricardo went to school very close to NCC, and chose to attend college based on the encouragement of a high school counselor. He selected criminal justice as a major, but he finds that college classes are very difficult. His relationships with faculty are cursory and functional. His main goal is stay away from professors who might slow him down or present obstacles to his degree completion. Ricardo began to work while in college to cover his expenses and to purchase a car, so he would not need to walk to and from campus multiple times a day.
While he started working to pay his bills, he found great satisfaction in his employment. At one point he worked full-time off-campus in a factory and part-time in his on-campus position for the Admissions Office. He eventually gave up the full-time job, but he has remained working for the Admissions Office throughout his two and a half years at NCC. Ricardo divides his days between working, attending classes and helping to care for his mom, who has been suffering from depression. Looking ahead, the best part of graduation in two more years is simply “being done.” Each day is a struggle, but he knows he has to get through it, ultimately in order to work on the police force.

**Bianca**

Bianca was born and raised in Massachusetts; however, she considers herself to be “mostly Puerto Rican. We have some German, some French, some Indian, some African American, so we’re a big melting pot.” When reflecting on her Puerto Rican identity, Bianca speaks of her culture in a holistic manner giving both positive and negative traits. However, her overall view is overwhelmingly positive and it is something that she finds empowering. Bianca’s mother felt strongly that Bianca should be bilingual and so she bought her daughter books and tapes in English before Bianca even began school. Bianca loved school from the start and was very successful, except for some extremely difficult years when her parents were going through a divorce. Her mother always stressed education and she felt strongly that Bianca would definitely attend college. The two of them are very close, but Bianca chose to live only a few miles away at NCC. Bianca is currently a junior who is studying both criminal justice and psychology. She speaks enthusiastically about college overall, and particularly enjoys
her classes. Her goal is to continue on to graduate school and eventually to earn her Ph.D.

**Daniel**

Daniel is currently a junior at NCC who is studying psychology. Daniel has been nurtured by both of his Puerto Rican parents, and the love within his family has been a foundation of his identity. His parents met in a church in Massachusetts, but they made the decision to move back to Puerto Rico for Daniel’s birth, so that their son would know his family’s language and culture. His parents also believed that being bilingual was a priority. They lived in Puerto Rico until Daniel was starting fifth grade and his younger sister was about to start school, at which point they made the move back to Massachusetts. The following two years were a struggle as Daniel learned English and adjusted to the different cultural norms both in the classroom and the community. As he learned the language, he did well academically in his high school years, and particularly enjoyed the social side of things. He chose to go to a college where he could live at home and maintain ties with his family. Throughout his first two years of college, he appreciated all of the classes where there was a high degree of interaction, but found himself bored and unmotivated when his instructors’ methodology was strictly lecture-style. His biggest hurdle is that he does not have strong ties to campus either socially or academically. He drives to campus for his classes and then returns home as soon as possible. He feels like his advisor and professors are partially responsible for his absence of motivation and lack of involvement at NCC. With two years left to go, he is struggling, and he questions the value of persisting in college.
Sylvia

Sylvia’s parents are both from the Dominican Republic, and she fully embraces that identity. Her resonant, full voice proudly booms out:

I am Dominican, full blown Dominican [laughter], nothing in half. I come from New York. My family is real Spanish speaking. They know English, but it’s just to defend themselves.

She was born in the Washington Heights area of New York, surrounded by “mainly Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and African Americans,” especially in her elementary school years. Sylvia’s mother has been a constant voice of wisdom and support to her. Her parents did not complete high school, but they valued education for their daughter and fully expected her to go to college, especially after the death of her brother. Sylvia chose a college in Massachusetts and decided to study psychology. She became pregnant and had a baby at the start of her junior year, but only took one semester off before returning to college. Her mother will continue to care for her son until she finishes college, and she usually is able to get home for three-day weekends with him. Sylvia is currently in her last semester as a psychology major at NCC.

Isabel

Isabel was born in a manufacturing city in New York state. However, when she was just one year old, her mother took Isabel, her new-born sister, and her five year old sister to live with her maternal grandparents in Puerto Rico. Isabel remained there until she was in second grade, at which time, her mother returned to New York. Isabel’s early years were marked by constant upheaval. Her mother moved her daughters from New York to Massachusetts and back again many times. Isabel remembers her early years as a long period of instability due to domestic abuse in her family. In seventh grade she was
Isabel loved science and due to the impact of an Inroads program in high school, she decided to make nursing her goal. She lived at home during her first year at NCC, but then shifted into a dorm when her mother relocated to Florida. A very motivated student, Isabel did exceptionally well in her classes and is a senior ready to graduate in May.

Luis was born in the Dominican Republic and lived in its capitol, Santa Domingo until age four. For some of that time, his father had been away studying agriculture; however after his return, Luis and his father moved to the countryside where Luis began his schooling. He was a boy who loved to learn. Even as a young child, his friends would laugh because he always had a book in his hand. For him, education was a priority. Luis desired to attend college in the United States, so he asked his father if he could come to the United States in 2003. He was placed in 11th grade at a high school near where both sets of his grandparents lived. His school was located in Manhattan, in an area called Inwood, where he was surrounded by many Dominicans. Although he was living with his extended family, it still was not easy to leave his parents behind to pursue his educational dream. Luis chose to attend NCC because he felt it had a good business program. In his junior year he transferred to a college in Manhattan, where he thought he could live with his extended family and save some money. However, the new college did not give the same level of individual attention to the students, and after one semester, he returned back to NCC. As a business major, he is in his final semester. He looks forward to the payoff from his degree, the ability to work in business and use all of the things he
has learned. From his start in a small Dominican town, he knows he has come a long way on his journey.

**Marisol**

Marisol is originally from Ecuador. Her father came to the U.S. in 1996, and Marisol, along with her mother and brother, followed in 1998 when she was in fifth grade, so she could receive specialized health care. She had a health issue and Shriner’s Hospital in Massachusetts was able to help her. Due to the surgery, therapy and close medical follow-up, her family settled in the area. Marisol has been through many struggles in her life, and while the surgery and intensive therapy resolved her medical difficulties, she lost her brother in 2000 and her father in 2004. Now it is just Marisol and her mother, with whom she has a very close relationship. It is her mother who continues to give her the most support. Marisol finished her high school education and started college in the United States in a place close to home, so she would not need to live away from her mother. However, she was dissatisfied with her major and how she was progressing after her first year. Since she had been away from Ecuador for nine years, she decided to seek a connection with her past and to return to Ecuador to try and learn more about her country and culture. She came back to Massachusetts the following summer to attend a relative’s wedding, but after realizing how much she had missed her mother, she decided to stay. She changed her major multiple times and even now feels at a bit of a loss as far as advising is concerned. She wishes she had been given an advisor who took the time to know her, so that she could have received good advice concerning her major and classes. In the end, she decided to study psychology and will graduate this semester.
Key Findings

Five key findings were initially derived as a result of the interviews conducted for this study. The five initial findings are: 1) Pre-college educational experiences with teachers in a dominant culture setting can affect Latino students’ overall perceptions of affirming and marginalizing interaction with faculty in college; 2) Congruency between how a Latino student views self and the perception of how the student believes the professor views the student leads to affirming interaction in college; 3) Lack of congruency between how a Latino student views self and the perception of how a professor views the student leads to increased marginalization in college; 4) As perceived congruency increases, affirming interaction increases leading to a stronger sense of belonging in college; and 5) Persistence is impacted by the students’ sense of belonging, family support, and collegiate self-efficacy. Each one of the findings is detailed in the sections that follow. Further analysis was then conducted to explore the relationships among the themes. The results of the further analysis provide a deeper understanding of how these Latino students experience college and succeed in persisting, despite not always perceiving affirmation from faculty or sense of belonging on campus, through multiple potential sources of support.

Pre-college Educational Experiences Can Impact Latino Students’ Overall Perceptions of Affirming and Marginalizing Interaction with Faculty in College

Although the students interviewed in this study share many characteristics, their journeys that led to NCC have each been very different. The participants entered dominant American culture, English speaking schools at different points in their educational sojourn. Some entered dominant culture schools early in their pre-college experience, while others began much later. There were two major findings concerning
how early school experiences impacted interactions with college faculty. First, affirming experiences with teachers in school may have influenced an expectation of positive interactions with college faculty. Second, marginalizing experiences with teachers in school may have led to an increased level of distrust for faculty in college.

**Concepts of Affirmation and Marginalization**

The process of affirmation and marginalization begins before college as Latino students study at dominant culture schools. As shown in Figure 1, all of the Latino students have their own unique family background, in terms of the family’s cultural contexts and traditions, view of education, family history, language, and geographic origins. These characteristics and history play a role in shaping each of the participant’s experiences. In addition, personal characteristics play a role in shaping the students’ educational experience in a dominant culture school. These characteristics are comprised of things such as educational goals, identity, self-efficacy, language, and culture. Moreover, any educational experience the student may have participated in before entering the dominant culture school enters the mix. How the students perceive congruence between their experience and the school setting, which in this case will focus primarily on interactions with teachers, impacts the degree of affirmation and marginalization experienced by the Latino students.
Affirmation/Afirmación

Affirmation is a concept used in this study to refer to the perceived congruence between how a Latino Student sees himself and how he believes he is viewed by other teachers. When the students felt that a teacher knew them, was familiar with their struggles, and valued them for who they were as individuals, the perceived congruence led to affirming interactions. Although affirmation may naturally occur more frequently when the students’ educational environment and the individuals’ characteristics share similarities, affirmation through interactions between students and teachers helped mitigate the natural difficulties Latino students felt in a dominant culture environment. The affirming message perceived by the Latino student was one of, “I belong here.”
Marginalization/Marginalización

As Latino students enter a dominant culture school, their own individual characteristics are often different from the educational environment. Marginalization is a concept that describes when the Latino students perceived incongruence between how they viewed themselves and how they felt their teachers viewed them. In this study, Latino students experienced some interactions with teachers negatively. In conjunction with other negative messages concerning language, culture, and identity given to Latino students in a dominant culture educational setting, the marginalizing message being perceived by the Latino student through interactions with teachers was that “I do not belong here.”

Affirming Interaction in the Pre-college Environment

All of the participants in this study have attended school before college in a dominant culture environment. These schooling experiences vary for each person due to his or her family background, individual characteristics and school environment. Some participants have endured challenging life experiences of one type or another. However, through these adversities, they have perceived their education as an affirming place where interactions with teachers have been supportive, and students felt valued and appreciated for who they are. In some cases, school was viewed as a haven or safeguard from the difficulties and stresses around them. The Latino students who viewed education as a haven from their own difficult circumstances in life had a more positive view of education and a higher overall level of trust in educators. Even while struggling to learn the dominant language and culture, Latino students found that supportive
teachers can offset some of the negative marginalizing messages inherent in their school experience.

**Provides Encouragement Through Personal Difficulties**

In the following four examples, the students share their profound sense of affirmation as they reflect on their particular individual and family backgrounds and how they helped shape their perceptions of interactions with their teachers in a dominant school environment. Both Bianca and Marisol looked at teachers as providing a haven where they could focus on learning instead of the difficult issues occurring in their home life. For example, Bianca, remembers that she just loved to be in school. Her mother and father were having significant problems in their relationship as her father struggled with mental health issues. As a result, Bianca, especially as an only child, found home a difficult place to be. She describes school in the following manner:

> It was somewhere away from home. Home was kind of stressful, so I just loved to be at school because it was with other children. I had a lot of friends. The teachers were nice, so it was somewhere nice to be.

The teachers were described as “nice”, meaning they provided a positive place for Bianca to learn and to be nurtured. In addition, she was a learner. While her mother spoke to Bianca in Spanish, she saw to it that Bianca learned English early. In fact, it was Bianca who taught herself to read Spanish.

Bianca’s mother also felt strongly that Bianca should be bilingual.

> …she used to read to me when I was younger, like my mom had an accent so she couldn’t read to me that well. So she put a recorder so that it could read books to me, I could follow along. Because I learned how to read and comprehend really early.

Bianca perceived that her teachers saw her as a student who was bright and worthy of being valued.
Marisol is another student whose family was going through extreme difficulty, but
found her interactions with her teachers to be affirming. She and her family came to the
United States when she was in fifth grade to seek medical help for a critical orthopedic
problem she had. After major surgery and ongoing intense physical therapy, she began
school in the U.S. The same year she started school, her only brother died. Four years
later, her father died also, leaving only Marisol and her mother. Marisol recalled that her
teachers tried to help fill the void after the loss of her brother and father. In addition, her
English teachers taught her how to write essays and gave her encouraging advice, such as
to keep up with the work and not to consider dropping out.

So many barriers, because I didn’t have the language we need, but even
though I just try to do my best -- all my teachers used to like cheer me and
encourage me to keep doing good work and keep trying. Never let myself
down and I think --they held me to never fall down,… and just they
always encourage me and plus my mother, too.

Marisol saw herself as a survivor, and school was a form of therapy to help Marisol heal
from her pain. Her teachers understood her as an individual and chose to continue to
encourage her.

Even through all the personal things I was going through with the death of
my brother and death of my father and getting used to the social
environment. Even all those factors; I just keep on with my good
schoolwork.

It was kind of for me to, kind of like forget and just—get away from my
pain —kind of like just— state of mind just focus just on my schoolwork.
Do my homework, doing essays or whatever. To work on my assignments
so that way I didn’t have time to be thinking about what I was feeling,
what was going through my mind. So I think it was kind of therapy for
myself. I tried just to hide my feelings of sadness and loneliness and then
just kind of like decide to just put all my mind, my thoughts my feelings,
just on schoolwork and then I just kept it going. Keep going with life. At
times, it was really hard to just go through.
Marisol used the phrase, “like therapy” and “trying to heal my sadness” when describing how she concentrated on school work to get through the pain and survive the loss of her family. If she could focus on an academic task, she would not have to deal with any of the feelings. It provided a way for her just to “keep going with life.” For Marisol, she felt her teachers took the time to understand her circumstances as a Latino ESL student who wanted to continue her education. For both Bianca and Marisol, it was their teachers who provided constant support and encouragement to help them focus on their education in spite of extremely difficult issues at home.

**Provides Support to Cope with Discrimination**

Similarly, Sylvia also saw herself as a survivor who loved to beat the obstacles and stereotypes put in front of her. In addition, she has “always loved going to school.” As a talkative child, school was a place where she could interact with other children.

> Coming from a house where I speak to my pillow and my mother, I would love going to school. It would be my escape. I would be like, “Oh, finally I’m out! I’m seeing other kids!”

School allowed Sylvia to be social and to interact with others. It also gave her a place where she could find encouragement when life dealt her family a blow. In eighth grade, Sylvia’s brother died, and Sylvia experienced acute depression. However, her mother did not know how to help her, and Sylvia’s grades dropped. It was her math and homeroom teacher that encouraged Sylvia during that time. As a result of that affirming relationship, she also gained knowledge that helped her cope with attending a school where she was a minority. The teacher was an African American woman who had come of age during the Civil Rights movement. She shared with Sylvia nuggets of truth she had learned about getting through adversity:
She told me, “Sylvia, you have a very, very big thing going for you. You are very respectful. You listen and you have something about you that you are going to succeed.” She told me, “One thing I’m going to tell you right now. You are going into high school. There are going to be a lot of people who are going to try and put you down. They are going to try and tell you that you are no better, that you are never going to succeed, and that you are a minority. They are always going to look at you based on your color and your race. Don’t ever let that put you down. No matter what race. No matter what you are. No matter if you are a woman or a male. You are you. If you want to succeed, all you have to do is believe in what you want.” People, depending on how they are raised, it will affect how they will act. She said whenever you find that stump along the road, just go over it.

Sylvia believed the teacher was praising the way Sylvia had been raised and encouraged her not to let difficult times, including prejudiced people, stop her. Sylvia perceived words of encouragement and guidance which would help her overcome obstacles that she would face in the future as she entered a more dominant culture environment in high school. Sylvia remembers that this teacher knew about her family circumstances and cultural background. She was also aware of the cultural conflict inherent in being a minority in a dominant culture and directly spoke about those issues with Sylvia. The result was an affirming series of interactions with this teacher throughout the year that helped ease Sylvia out of her depression.

**Provides Support for Learning English**

All of the participants spoke Spanish as their native language, and since the dominant language of the schools was English, messages concerning their struggles with English were abundant. In seventh grade Isabel moved from her elementary school with predominantly Spanish-speaking Latinos into a middle school with more native English speakers and English-based classes.
I was scared out of my mind. I didn’t know what to expect. I thought I wasn’t going to understand anything. I was afraid to speak, that they would hear my accent. So it was scary.

In the midst of these marginalizing messages, teachers made a difference in how students perceived their educational experience. For example, some of Isabel’s teachers were aware of her apprehension and gave her extra help. She expressed:

So the fear of like failing really didn’t happen. It’s just the fear. To this day, I am very soft spoken. In class, everything, don’t talk unless I have to for participation.

The fear of being different or making a mistake due to the new language influenced students to stay quiet in their classes. For Isabel, it was teachers “who would notice” and then take the initiative to make things better for her that made a critical difference. Isabel recalls another teacher, who even though Isabel had straight A’s, observed that she “didn’t like to talk to other kids and kept to [herself].” The teacher found ways to encourage her to participate in class, which Isabel found helpful. In the midst of the marginalizing messages inherent in the dominant culture school experience and the resulting anxiety, affirming interactions with teachers who took the initiative to know her and to communicate positively helped Isabel feel affirmed.

**Marginalizing Interaction in the Pre-college Environment**

Not all of the students had positive educational experiences with teachers in their early years of schooling. Intertwined with affirming interactions were those relationships and communication that would result in the Latino student feeling marginalized in some way due to the perceived incongruence in how they viewed themselves and how they felt others, particularly the teachers in the school, viewed them.
Denies Support for Language

Ricardo’s story vividly illustrates the idea of incongruent perceptions that lead to a sense of marginalization for students; and in his case, likely led to future difficulties in finding affirmation within the academic setting of college. Ricardo struggled greatly in his early years of schooling due to the decisions made by his English language teachers concerning his placement. He was initially raised outside of New York City by his paternal Puerto Rican grandfather and was surrounded by Spanish speakers and Latino culture. When it was time to begin kindergarten, he moved to another state with his Puerto Rican mother. Beginning in kindergarten, Ricardo had three successful years of bilingual classes, then in third grade he was shifted to a mainstream classroom, but his performance was not encouraging. With lots of D’s on the report card, it was decided that he “wasn’t ready” and he was placed into ESL again. The ESL teachers countered by telling him, “You’re too good. You have to go back” and Ricardo was sent to the mainstream classroom. He was on a frustrating see-saw. The result was that it made Ricardo “hate English class and hate writing papers.” His relationship with many of his teachers developed into ones marked by distrust.

They made me try hard, but they wouldn’t give me the benefit of the doubt. They knew what was happening with me, but they’d still give me the bad grades. It put me in a worse situation. I was just stuck.

Ricardo felt betrayed by those put in place to help him. He believed that they knew he was capable of learning, but that he was struggling with the transition. He was placed into an ESL class and then perceived by the teachers that he was too advanced for that and that he did not belong there. When he was moved in to the mainstream class he was viewed as not fully proficient with the language and given failing grades. Although he
does not recall the words spoken by the teachers, he does remember the tangible grades that spoke just as loudly. He could not find a place where he felt like he belonged and was affirmed for who he was, including his language proficiency. Even though he was just a child, he felt as if none of his teachers perceived him as he viewed himself, a young Latino trying to master the English language and to fit into the culture of the school. His sense of marginalization grew as the negative interactions continued.

**Denies Support for Culture**

Marginalization in pre-college experiences also occurred for other students as a result of the perceived incongruence in how they were viewed by teachers in terms of culture. The results of this study indicate that the Latino students desired to fit in with the dominant culture, but sometimes experienced marginalization because they were Latino and their cultural values and norms differed from the dominant culture. In addition, being a non-native speaker of English added to the perceived incongruence. For example, Daniel needed not only to learn the language, but also to understand and to adapt to cultural differences inherent in the school environment. Daniel describes the confusion he experienced over the different classroom cultural norms that had to be mastered.

I couldn’t communicate with anybody. It was scary. I did get into a lot of trouble too. Because it’s different, the rules are very different. In whatever you do during the classroom, there is certain—it’s very different culture wise. Different schools and different rules, and I would do things that I assume were okay, and they weren’t. Or I would ask permission to do things that didn’t need to asked permission for.

The confusion and lack of understanding caused Daniel embarrassment. He found that he got into trouble as a result of not understanding both the spoken English and the implicit classroom norms. He remembers being unable to ask his teacher for the simplest things, such as if he could use the bathroom. There was no perceived shared congruence
between the teacher and Daniel. The isolation from being able to communicate in English and the negative responses from teachers and students caused frequent marginalizing experiences for Daniel. Even later, when Daniel did master and understand the language and culture better, he could see how cultural differences were sometimes interpreted by teachers in the dominant culture environment. He believes that his white teachers in school viewed him “definitely as a Latino.”

Comments that were made, ways that you were treated. It was different, like you could see the preference. In high school especially. Like if it came down to hall passes, like honestly I would get harassed all the time about hall passes. I don’t know why like or if a teacher--one time I had a teacher who was real cool with me and one day she was like, “Oh, you’re not white?” And I’m like, “No.” “What are you?” I’m like, “Puerto Rican.” She’s like, “Oh.” And she stayed quiet and she was like, “You don’t seem Puerto Rican.” And I’m like, “What do you mean?” And she’s like, “You don’t act it.” And I’m like, “What do you mean?” And I understood and I was like, “That’s messed up.”

I heard that a lot. I don’t know. I heard like people like saying stuff like, “Oh, ghetto Puerto Ricans” or “ghetto black kids.”

I don’t know. It’s weird. It was mostly teachers though.

Messages sent about others of his ethnic background and culture were marginalizing even if he was not included as part of that “different group.”

**Both Affirming and Marginalizing Interactions May Occur Concurrently**

As Latino students are educated in a dominant culture school, they interact with a variety of teachers and other educational agents, and every day they encounter a range of interactions that are both affirming and marginalizing. In Marisol’s case, she was initially placed into an ESL Program in the sixth grade. She recalled:

When I went to school, for my surprise, I just went to a classroom that mostly everyone speaks Spanish which was a good feeling at that point because it helped in getting used to the school system in the U.S. That was pretty much different from Ecuador, but I get used to because we
speak Spanish, so it helps assimilate the culture in that part. So that really helped me. Most of the classes were held in Spanish, even though they weren’t supposed to. They were supposed to talk to us in English and just help us in Spanish, so that way we could just develop the English. Maybe it was a good thing in the personal point of view that I started in the ESL Program because it was helpful for me to start to get used to... I don’t know in the learning process. It didn’t really help me to learn the language that fast.

Marisol believed the ESL Program helped her to transition into the new American school system; however, she felt it did not help her learn the English language as fast because the teachers and other students continued to speak Spanish. She remembered that “I didn’t have anyone to push me…to progress and learn the English better and faster.” In the middle of her sixth grade year, a teacher decided to move Marisol up to seventh grade “due to [her] good grades.” Still she remained in ESL until eighth grade when she divided her time between ESL and mainstream English classes. When Marisol began ninth grade at the high school, she “kind of insulated” herself.

I wasn’t that strong with my English language. I didn’t feel that strong, that confident to talk to people and I was afraid that somebody will laugh at me or make fun of me, so I just decided to just insulate from everyone and just do my homework, to study and just basically put all my time into my schoolwork. And then I have friends from ESL Program that were bilingual, speak Spanish. They were in some of my classes, but not all of them. So that was kind of like the social part. I didn’t have a real friend to have a support.

Marisol focused on her schoolwork, but socially she was very much alone.

Marisol’s example reinforces that many interactions of both an affirming nature and a marginalizing nature occur in a Latino student’s life within the dominant culture school. Affirming interactions initially occurred when Marisol was seen as someone who was best served by being placed into an environment where she could communicate in Spanish and could learn the new culture. However, these same relationships and
resulting interactions were perceived negatively as she felt comfortable in the school setting, yet considered herself as not being challenged to learn English as quickly as she believed she was capable. When Marisol was fully transitioned into the mainstream classes in ninth grade, she continued to experience a mix of affirming and marginalizing interactions with both students and teachers. As she was immersed more fully into the dominant culture school experience, she was happy and affirmed to be seen as someone who could learn and progress academically. However, she felt marginalization as she was sometimes seen socially and academically as someone who was different due to her individual characteristics.

Summary

The resulting levels of affirmation and marginalization experienced by the Latino students in college have their genesis in their pre-college schooling experiences. Affirmation and marginalization are two parts of the same continuum standing at opposite ends. The students’ voiced how various situations arose during their pre-college years due to their perceived level of congruence as a Latino student in a dominant culture school. Some experiences, especially those with teachers who were sensitive to the Latino students’ family background and personal characteristics, brought about feelings of affirmation and the idea that the student belonged in the academic setting. However, others led to a sense of marginalization and the idea that the student did not belong. The number of Latino students who feel marginalized rather than affirmed in a dominant culture setting may be connected to the low numbers who choose to go on and pursue college. For those Latino students who choose to continue on to college, this study found
that experiences in the pre-college environment can impact how they perceive interaction with faculty in particular and the college environment as a whole.

**College: Congruency Between How a Latino Student Views Self and Perception of How a Professor Views the Student Leads to Affirming Interaction**

How Latino students view themselves when they begin college is influenced by the students’ family support of their educational aspirations, the students’ individual characteristics, and their pre-college experience in dominant culture schools. The experience in a dominant culture school can result in a student having a variety of both affirming and marginalizing interactions. Overall, these experiences, in conjunction with the student’s individual characteristics, help influence decisions about whether or not to attend college. In addition, they can impact how the Latino perceives the interaction that occurs with faculty in college. Of course faculty interaction is not the only factor to influence persistence; however, it is one that research literature (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, Pascarella and Terenzini, 1977, 1980a; Pascarella, 1980) shows is vitally important.

**Relationship Between Concepts of Validation and Affirmation**

Rendón (1994) expresses that validation enables a student in college to believe that he or she can be successful. It is comprised of two elements: 1.) academic validation that enables students to trust and to develop confidence in their innate capacity to learn and 2.) interpersonal validation that promotes personal and social adjustment to college. The agents involved in validation can be located either off campus, such as a family member or be located on campus, such as a professor. Rendón’s concept of validation is one major input that can lead to affirmation. The results of this study demonstrate that affirmation in college is likely to occur when there is congruence between how students
view themselves and how they believe their professors view them. In fact, validation from professors can be one of the most frequent and important ways that students perceive there is congruence between how they view themselves and how they are viewed by their professors.

Figure 2 illustrates that during college, the congruency between how the Latino student views himself and how he believes a professor views him can lead to affirming interaction. The amount of overlap that the student perceives in how he is viewed by the professor and how he views himself increases the region of congruency. The more congruency that is felt by the student, the more the student feels affirmed by the interaction with faculty.
Figure 2: Congruency between a Latino Student’s Self Concept and Perception of how a Professor Views the Student Leads to Affirming Interaction in College

Examples of Perceived Congruency Leading to Affirmation

How students view themselves is an important part of their identity. Through careful listening and analysis of how the students describe themselves and what experiences they choose to disclose, one can gain a sense of who they believe themselves to be and how they present themselves to others. Table 2 provides an overview of how the Latino students perceived themselves and associated activities with their faculty that they perceived as affirming.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ricardo (Worker)</th>
<th>Bianca (Learner)</th>
<th>Daniel (Relationships)</th>
<th>Sylvia (Overcome Obstacles/ Stereotypes)</th>
<th>Isabel (Learner)</th>
<th>Luis (Learner/Future Businessman)</th>
<th>Marisol (Survivor)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internship Opportunity</td>
<td>Two other faculty unofficially advise her</td>
<td>Professor developed personal/mentoring relationship with him</td>
<td>&quot;Please see me&quot; notes are invitations to talk to professors</td>
<td>Words of encouragement to all students in a class</td>
<td>Professor developed personal/mentoring relationship with him</td>
<td>Given information about graduate school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor understands importance of work</td>
<td>Positive comments about papers</td>
<td>Offered work-study position</td>
<td>Professor invited students to stop by office</td>
<td>Advisor finally learned her name</td>
<td>Offered tutoring position</td>
<td>Written Comments about quality of work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grades</td>
<td>Good grades in classes with interactive atmosphere</td>
<td>Supportive response to pregnancy</td>
<td>Good grades</td>
<td>Conversations about business careers</td>
<td>Non-judgmental help with writing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asked to serve on faculty search committee</td>
<td>Professor answered email and set up time to explain material that wasn’t clear</td>
<td>Advisor often talks with her about class topics and personal issues</td>
<td>Clinical professor reassured students and invited them to talk anytime they were unsure about material</td>
<td>Advisor familiar with academic record</td>
<td>Positive spoken comments about improvement in work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraged to join club related to major</td>
<td>Comments about future success</td>
<td>Cat Dissection chosen as lab test model</td>
<td>Encouraged to join campus activities and a club – would look good on resume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offered tutoring position</td>
<td>Professor asked his opinion about topic in class</td>
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The Latino students shared examples of perceived congruency from their own experiences at NCC. The following Latino students identify themselves in a particular way, and when they are viewed in the same manner by a professor, a strong sense of affirmation occurs. Bianca provides an example of this concept. She prides herself on being a good student and setting academic goals. Bianca felt that her professors confirmed her inner belief that she could be a successful learner. Validating words from her professors meant a lot to her, and were usually quite positive:

I think Professor Webb and Professor Steward have been the ones that have [commented], “You’re going to do great.” Professor Webb’s always telling me, “You are so ahead of everyone else. You’re doing all the right things to get to where you need to be. I’m so proud of you.” They’re always telling me that. It’s great.
Professor Webb has always put great comments on all my papers. Professor Steward is the same. They’ve all commented on my writing skills and when I was a part of the Poetry Slam, and I helped out in it. I did a little poem that I read out loud. Everyone loved it. They were all like, “Wow, you’re an amazing writer.” So that experience also made me feel good.

These words of encouragement surrounded her academic performance such as writing or participating in a poetry contest. Grades have been another important source of validation for Bianca.

I got a 94 on my first exam so I was very happy. She always praises me on how well I do.

The good grade represented that she was a learner and she was successful at it. The fact that her professor noted it and commented on her academic performance produced an attitude of satisfaction within Bianca. The validation that her professors gave her through comments and grades was one way that she perceived congruence between her view of herself and how she believed her professors viewed her. The resulting affirmation gave her increasing confidence that she was seen as a serious student who enjoyed learning.

In Isabel’s case, she enjoyed the challenges of mastering a subject and she also hoped to be seen by her professors as a successful learner who had overcome many challenges. She shared about a math professor who was teaching a course specifically for nurses. As a sophomore, she remembers him as also being like a preacher “who always gave advice throughout the semester.”

It was like he was preaching to us. He told us never to give up. We were strong individuals because if we weren’t strong we wouldn’t be in the nursing profession. Just very encouraging words of wisdom.

Isabel “found his words encouraging and took them to heart, but other students didn’t feel it was appropriate.” The perceived congruence was that she believed the professor saw
her as a fighter who was strong and trying to accomplish her academic goals in a challenging environment. While others may have found his words inappropriate, Isabel did not since she saw herself as “very strong.” She was affirmed by his words because they were congruent with how she saw herself.

The same professor also called on Isabel to explain things if her classmates did not understand something or “to get the student perspective”. He also offered her a tutoring position after the class ended. Isabel felt great that he actually believed in her academic ability enough to teach other students. She felt validated by his attitude and his actions. She took pride in doing well academically, and Isabel believed he saw her in the same way.

Luis relates an example of an affirming interaction with a professor he met in his first semester at NCC.

It was in my MIS class. I thought he was very nice man. I talked to him my first day of classes. I told him about my concerns as far as like being a freshman and I want to do well and I had a lot of high expectations about college. I still have, but you know, I talked to him about what can I do to be a good student so I could get an A in the class and he was very supportive. He was there for me. He basically, if I have any papers to write about he would tell me where to go and who to see. He was very, very friendly with me.

This professor listened to Luis express his concerns about doing well academically and responded in such a way that Luis knew he had been acknowledged as someone who wanted to learn and to be a good student. The professor went on to offer his own services to Luis, as well as to recommend other campus resources to support Luis’ goal. Luis picked up on cues from the professor before even talking with him outside of class. He thought he was “a very nice man” and he “was very, very friendly.” These cues invited Luis to seek out the professor and to develop a relationship with him. The cues were
helpful as a first step and Luis did find congruence between how he saw himself as a learner and how the professor also viewed him as a learner eager to do well academically.

Marisol shares that her English professor and her ESL professor from her first year, have validated her in many ways. She trusts they truly care about the cultural and language issues she has faced.

The two of them have more sense of what a Latino student goes through. In the sense of the language barriers they have. Understands how hard we try to improve ourselves to do a good job, I think so. They might not really have sensed what we really go through personally or are aware of personal things, but at least they have a better sense of how hard it is for immigrants, for a minority student, for a Latina student to go to college and to be successful. To have a better sense and when the ESL professor, she has a better sense too since she’s transferred a lot of students from other countries, so she can have a better sense of how it’s hard for someone from China, someone from South America, someone from Asia. For anyone from the world to come to a different country to learn a new language and just get used to the culture, the traditions, I think they have a better sense and maybe that’s why they are more talking to you and more helpful to you.

The English professor Marisol referred to is an American; however, he is also married to a Mexican woman and has learned Spanish. She describes him as “not having stereotypes” since he “understands cultures and traditions.” Having an awareness of the student’s unique journey helps those professors to understand the importance of validation to a Latina student and to follow through on it. The end result is an affirming relationship that continues to help Marisol feel welcome at NCC.

**Summary**

Perceived congruence between how Latino students view themselves and how they perceive professors view them leads to increasingly affirming interactions. The cues a professor sends in the classroom can invite a student to initiate a contact or to be open to a professor’s interaction outside of the classroom. These cues can be through actual
words spoken, the tone of voice, or a friendly demeanor. The critical factor is that the actual communication imparts a sense that the student is seen in a way that is compatible with how the Latino student views self. A validating comment or another congruent action on the part of a professor is a powerful tool that can lead to such a perception. Once that perception is in place, the resulting interaction becomes meaningful and affirming to the student.

College: Lack of Congruency Between How a Latino Student Views Self and Perception of How a Professor Views the Student Can Lead to Marginalizing Interaction

Research supports that the quality and frequency of student interaction with professors impacts the students’ academic performance and their ties to the institution (Pascarella, Terenzini, and Hibel, 1978, Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979). However, early educational experiences surrounding learning English and adjusting to a predominantly White culture, can impact how Latinos perceive faculty-student interaction in college. Findings from this study demonstrate that some Latino students who have had negative experiences with teachers prior to college, may look at a particular interaction with a professor and make a negative judgment about what happened and the intention of the professor.

Figure 3 describes that during college, a lack of congruency between how the Latino student views self and how a professor views the student can lead to marginalizing interaction. The amount of overlap that the student perceives in how he is viewed by the professor is the congruency. The less congruency that is felt by the student, the more the student feels marginalized by the interaction with faculty.
Figure 3: Lack of Congruency between a Latino Student’s Self Concept and Perception of how a Professor Views the Student Leads to Marginalizing Interaction in College

Examples of Perceived Lack of Congruency Leading to Marginalization

Leads to Lack of Participation in Important Academic Opportunities

A perceived lack of congruence can lead to marginalizing interactions.

Unfortunately, marginalization can keep a student from developing a relationship or from taking advantage of important academic opportunities. In one example, Isabel describes a marginalizing interaction when she and her mother met the Director of Nursing at an orientation prior to the start of her first year at NCC:

[The Director] was wondering what my grades were in high school and I told her I did very well in high school, 4.2, graduated with honors. Her response was, “Don’t expect to do as well in college.”

Both Isabel and her mother were very upset by the comment.
I was angry that she would judge me like that. Why if I was capable of doing it in high school, I’m not capable of doing it in college? But I showed her.

At the end of Isabel’s sophomore year, the same Director of Nursing called Isabel into her office to ask her to be a tutor for the nursing program. Isabel responded:

Well I went in there and she was reviewing my transcript, she saw how well I did and she wanted to know what were my techniques used in class, my study methods, what did I do--how well I did on my exams, and if I saw a tutor, you know. What were my methods for getting those grades? And I told her what my study methods were, how I got the grades I got. She was interested in me being a tutor for the sophomores and the upcoming class for anatomy and physiology, for chemistry, for micro, since I did very well. And I declined—just because of her previous comment.

Isabel believed that “she [the Director] should have remembered what she said to me the first day she met me.” Isabel felt like she was being told that she would not do well in this college, and that she had to prove herself to the Director as being a capable student.

Even when the Director offered her a special privileged task, due to the lack of perceived congruence from Isabel’s perspective, there was little sense of affirmation from the offer. She quickly decided to turn it down “because of [the Director’s] previous comment.”

This lack of congruence that led to a feeling of marginalization kept Isabel from participating in important academic opportunities that would have benefitted her and others.

**Leads to Feeling Misunderstood and Unsupported**

Isabel’s experience is not an isolated one. Nearly all of the Latino students could remember incidents similar to Isabel’s that showed a perceived lack of congruence in how they were viewed. Marisol shared an example of a situation that has occurred on more than one occasion. Since English is not her first language, sometimes Marisol wanted
confirmation on whether or not she had fully understood something. She recalled the following interaction:

It’s just like I would say I have a question about an assignment or a question to just make sure I have the right information to do the assignment and then she would say that I have to do the essay a certain way. I would say a question about it or things like that. She’ll be like, "Yeah, that’s the way you have to do it.” Like, “Duh.” And I will just say, “Okay, thank you.”

Marisol was looking for reassurance that she understood the assignment because English was not her native language and she desired to do well. However, she felt like the professor’s response was an insult or an assumption that she was not paying attention to the class. As Marisol reflected on these experiences, she commented:

Sometimes we might not get some topic clear so that’s why we go to a professor’s office or to look for more help, so we expect a Latino student to receive that help from the professor. To receive that information that we was missing. It’s not because we weren’t paying attention to the class, it might be because we didn’t catch the whole idea and we want to make sure we got the right idea. We don’t want to get the wrong idea and then well, when the test comes, whenever you just stay with that wrong idea from knowledge and then later in life you realize that, oh, that wasn’t really what the professor meant with that. So I would say to take the time just to explain to us. Because sometimes we don’t know the things. They weren’t clear so we’re looking for help and then just to be more open to us.

Rather than being validated for seeking clarification, she believed she was viewed by some of her professors as being a less serious student or even a less intelligent individual because she had asked for confirmation.

Daniel, who is also a non-native English speaker, relates his feelings about an interaction that occurred when he entered a professor’s office:

For example, I have a couple professors, psychology professors, I feel so uncomfortable with them when I walk into their office. I just feel like--I feel like she doesn’t want me there. I feel like she just, “dude get your stuff together and then get out.”
Her facial--her facial expressions. Things that she asks you like, “Oh, so did you do the assignment?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I did it.” “Okay, when did you do it?” And I was like, “Ah, three days ago.” “Oh, I assigned it a week ago.” I’m like, “Yeah, how many days is there in a week?” Like it’s seven days and that’s three days ago. I think that is reasonable. So I don’t know. She starts questioning you and she’ll look at you funny and you’re like--I don’t know. I hate when people look at me and kind of like ask as if I am irresponsible for any certain like tiny reason.

Daniel’s original intent was to ask for clarification about an assignment; nevertheless, he felt that he was not given a chance even to articulate his questions. The professor’s cues turned what could have been a positive, affirming relationship into a marginalizing one. From this incident, based upon the professor’s initial body language and type of questions asked, Daniel felt that he was being judged by the professor as irresponsible. Rather than listening for the student’s concern, Daniel noted that the professor directed the questions to the timing of when he started the assignment. Daniel was left to question whether his uncomfortable feelings were legitimate.

I don’t know. It’s just weird to me. But I don’t know. It’s just weird. Like certain things that she does or maybe it is just her. I don’t know.

However, one thing is clear in his mind – he will not look to that professor for additional assistance in the future.

Daniel feels judged in the same way when an email for assistance elicits an unhelpful response.

Like sometimes they’ll just give me a page number. Something like that and just tell me to look it up. I don’t know why they feel the need to make me go back and read it when I just read it and didn’t understand it.

Daniel perceives the professor’s response to be a negative assumption that he has skipped the reading. There is a lack of congruence in how Daniel views himself as a learner who wants to understand something and how he believes the professor sees him as a slacker.
who does not do the assigned work. He contrasts that negative experience with another professor. In this instance, Daniel emailed a Biology professor to let him know he was having some difficulty.

Like I had a biology professor. He would always tell me to come in. Well it just made a difference because he wasn’t being a jerk. Like he told me to come into his office and he’ll stay there until I understood it.

In the first case, Daniel was told to read the textbook when he said he did not understand a concept, and Daniel felt as if the teacher assumed he had never read it in the first place. In the second case, the teacher who asked Daniel to come in to his office was felt by Daniel to have been more interested in him and in his understanding the material. He saw Daniel as a student who was struggling, but making every attempt to learn the material.

**Leads to Feeling that Advising Procedures are Neither Personal nor Supportive**

This study found that when Latino students entered college at NCC, they expected to receive guidance through a specific professor assigned to them as an advisor. The belief was that advisors would be the constant who would know the students throughout their academic journey in pursuit of a degree. However, when there is a perceived lack of congruence between the advisor and the Latino student, students reported that the advising procedures were neither personal nor supportive.

On numerous occasions Isabel felt she was not recognized for her academic ability, as she lacked a sense of validation from the Director of Nursing and her nursing professors. In addition, Isabel also felt discouraged after her interactions with her advisor during advising sessions. When she met face to face with her advisor to select courses for the spring semester of her first year, Isabel described the meeting:
Very straight-forward to the point. This is what you have to take. This is what’s available. We’re going to stick you here and with nursing it’s always a placeholder because it’s like you might not make it. And they do that for all the students. Because we don’t have her grades yet, we don’t know if to place her into the nursing class, so they just register you using a placeholder for the number of credits.

Just the idea of not being placed into the next group of nursing courses felt demeaning.

Her choice of words such as “stick you here” and “it’s like you might not make it” clearly give voice to what she is perceiving on the part of the professor. To Isabel, it spoke of a strong assumption of impending failure rather than a voice of validation concerning her academic ability.

Just her tone of voice. The way she talked to me it felt like she talked down to me instead of talking with me. I just kind of felt like I was in like the military or something. Getting told what to do. And not what I wanted to do. If it would have been that way, I think we would have had a better connection than we did.

Isabel felt that the attitude of her advisor was one of giving orders rather than the give and take of information in a relationship.

Isabel believed that if a professor did not even know her name after advising her for a year, it was a clear indicator that her advisor was also unaware of her academic ability. However, by her junior year, Isabel’s advisor began to treat her in a way that showed more of an awareness of her as an individual student.

It wasn’t until my junior year that she kind of loosened up to me and was like I know you, like just a very different tone of voice. The way she looked at me, she knew my name finally. The first two years of my career here and…Sofia, she would name me Sofia, she would name me Maria, but never Isabel. Or even call me by my last name instead of my first name.

Through the professor’s tone of voice, the way she looked at Isabel, and finally knowing Isabel’s name communicated a change in how her advisor perceived her. When Isabel
passed Med/Surg in her junior year, she remarked how that seemed to change her advisor’s attitude:

She finally gave into the fact that I’m going to make it, I’m doing great work, and I’m studying. She saw my transcript and she, how should I say it? Just commented on how well I’ve been doing, but it still wasn’t like encouraging.

Isabel expected an advisor to encourage her and to believe in her ability. She did not sense that her advisor saw her in the same manner; instead, she constantly felt the need to prove herself academically to her advisor so they would have a more congruent perspective and a more affirming relationship.

**Leads to Questions of Prejudice**

In some interactions, the Latino student was left questioning if the perceived lack of congruence might be due to a degree of prejudice on the part of the professor. In Sylvia’s case, she talked about a major turning point that occurred as she was set to begin the fall semester of her junior year when she found out that she was pregnant. She showed her doctor’s letter to her professors about two weeks after classes had started, since she began to feel very tired. Most of her professors said they understood and responded empathetically, but there was one who had a different reaction to Sylvia’s note:

But she was just like, “And so what are you saying?” She made it feel like, “I don’t care.”

At the mid-semester point, Sylvia knew she was doing badly in that class. After she had missed a few classes, she asked the professor if they could meet. The professor told her to check with another student about what she had missed during her absences. Sylvia felt the professor’s attitude was cold and unhelpful given her situation.
You see I have half a semester, I’m already doing bad, real, real bad and you don’t even ask me what’s going on. Are you feeling alright? Do you need extra time maybe for your work? You know, she didn’t show no sympathy towards anything of what’s going on.

Sylvia expected that the professor would be there to provide some emotional support for her.

That was my situation; I told you it was my first time. It was my first time. I don’t know what is going on with my body. Help me, ask me questions.

So she was just horrible. I was like well then I’m failing this class right? Thanks. So I lost interest in that class. I would come in whenever I could. I would come in late. I’d be like well, my mood isn’t good and you showed me already negativity towards the beginning.

I don’t know if she has some prejudice against me. I don’t know what I’ve done to her to make me her neglect me from other students like from how she acts to other students.

Sylvia strongly felt that the professor saw her in a negative way based on her words and actions toward Sylvia. She is well-aware that “stereotypes are real factors in our culture. You the babymakers. You the welfare line.” Sylvia questions whether the professor was prejudiced against her. As an outcome of the marginalizing interactions, Sylvia stopped going to the class. Sylvia failed this class and took the following semester off to have her baby.

**Pre-college Experiences Can Negatively Impact Perception of Congruence With College Professors**

Past marginalizing pre-college educational experiences can also influence a Latino student to perceive interactions with college faculty in a more negative manner. While all of the Latino students experienced marginalizing interactions, Ricardo’s perceptions were overwhelmingly negative. Ricardo’s pre-college experiences of distrust for his high school teachers and marginalization remained and affected his expectations
for interactions with professors at NCC. Ricardo’s wariness and distrust of faculty, influenced by earlier educational experiences, were on full display as his thoughts mirrored an ongoing mental dialog.

Yeah. I mean I don’t go to the professors unless I really have to. I don’t go to them. There’s nothing—I’m not going to sit there and suck up to you. That’s not me. You know, they want that attention, but I’m not going to give it to you. For what? I mean, I should, you know which would make me look a lot better, but I’m not going to do that. There is no reason why I should. There’s no reason why I should. I mean I should because I have to and it’s my grade, but I don’t do it because that thing in me. That’s just no, don’t do it.

I don’t ask questions. I don’t know. Just if I really need to know something I will, but other than that I won’t ask questions. Just let him teach. I get my notes. I don’t talk in class. Unless I’m going to answer something, but I never answer something in class. Too shy to do that.

Ricardo’s shyness to speak in class reflects his early pre-college embarrassment in not being able to master the English language in academic settings. His attitude towards professors borders on antagonistic. It is not just a matter of wanting to avoid them; he states that they want his attention and he refuses to give it.

The following interaction between Ricardo and a professor display a clear lack of perceived congruence between how the faculty member sees him and how he views himself. Ricardo is confronted by a teacher about the quality of his work. She is trying to figure out the best way to help him, including offering extra time on tests and allowing him to re-do a written assignment. Ricardo acknowledges her effort, but still feels less than affirmed when he believes the professor does not appreciate his situation:

Because usually she has just something negative to say about my work. She doesn’t know I have another job. She doesn’t know I have a full-time job and you know, work study job. She just thinks I’m kind of lazy. Sometimes I do miss class when I’m just tired. Sometimes I miss it. She doesn’t know why. She’s always seeing me walk around. It’s work related. It’s not just because I’m walking around. She just makes little
comments here and there, but I’m not going to sit there and say, ‘Hey, stop. You don’t know what you are talking about or anything.’ It might not look like I’m busy, but I am working. She shouldn’t hold that against me. She still has smart comments. She says negative things about me, but I don’t pay attention.

Ricardo feels validated and affirmed by those who value the fact that he is working and that he has a functional approach of “getting through”. However, the professor is approaching him in terms of his academics without assigning value to his additional work responsibilities. She is focused on how to help him improve his grades and learning, but he does not perceive her motive, and does not appreciate her efforts to help. He feels no sense of affirmation from the professor due to the lack of congruence. The professor has also given up time from her schedule and based upon Ricardo’s description may feel a bit angry at the student. In stark contrast to the affirming relationship he has with his supervisor at the admissions office, this is a marginalizing relationship that Ricardo mentions on a number of occasions during the interviews.

In conclusion, when asked whether faculty were more like an obstacle or a bridge, Ricardo had to consider this for a while.

An obstacle…. Okay, maybe a bridge--a bridge. [laughter] No, it’s a bridge. Just a bridge. Just got to get over the bridge.

In the end, Ricardo turned the notion of faculty being a bridge to guide and assist students toward their goals on its head. Rather than the obstacles being apart from the faculty and the faculty helping students to overcome those obstacles, he reframed it to mean that on some occasions professors were the obstacles, and in other instances professors were fairly irrelevant. It was the long, difficult journey ahead that Ricardo needed to focus on. He changed the focus from faculty and made it the path. “It’s a bridge.” He’s just “got to get over the bridge.” Ricardo’s eyes are drawn to the plodding path in front of him.
When a professor assigned “too much reading and writing” and expected him to attend the class regularly, he remarked:

I couldn’t do anything about it; basically just taking it. Because I can’t change the way the professor teaches. That’s just the way she is. Basically, I just had to get through it.

Avoidance of professors who may present obstacles is a good defensive measure in Ricardo’s book. Faculty members are perceived negatively as potential obstacles that could impede his progress on the already difficult path leading to graduation.

**Summary**

In college, students are encouraged to seek out faculty as important resources for student success, but interacting with professors can be perceived as intimidating. In addition, Latino students may be even more reluctant to seek out interaction with faculty based on the distinctly different cultural environment of the campus and their earlier pre-college educational experiences where they may have felt marginalized. Unfortunately, the fear and embarrassment felt by some Latino students during earlier cultural and linguistic transitions revisited some of the Latino students. The cases illustrate that in some faculty-student interactions, the Latino students perceived the interaction to be less than helpful. The students felt as if they had been judged negatively by a faculty member and the end result was that the interaction had a marginalizing effect for the student. For Latino students who did take the risk and sought out interaction with professors, their fears sometimes became a reality as shown by the interactions related by the Latino students. The result was that this type of interaction with a professor led a student to feel marginalized rather than affirmed.
A Sense of Belonging on Campus

It is well documented that Latino students are more likely to persist when they have a sense of belonging on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1991). In turn, sense of belonging is heavily influenced by the quantity and quality of interpersonal interactions and relationships with faculty (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980a; Pascarella, 1980). Building upon this knowledge, the results of the data analysis in this study affirms that sense of belonging stems from connections to key agents on the NCC campus. This finding contrasts with Tinto’s (1993) concept of integration, and provides further support for the importance of multiple associations for facilitating and enhancing student success (Kuh & Love, 2002). As the connections expand and grow, these Latino students do not necessarily leave behind the previously developed relationships with family and pre-college friends (as suggested in the work of Tinto and others) as they connect with the culture and values of the educational institution. Rather, Latino students in this study strived to develop a sense of belonging to the campus, even while they all maintained strong ties to their home and family.

As more affirming interactions occur with faculty and other institutional agents, these students report developing a stronger sense of belonging on campus. Figure 4 provides an overview of the process of developing a sense of belonging. The pre-college experience of marginalization and affirmation as a Latino student in a dominant culture school is the backdrop for entry in college. The family’s support of the student’s educational goal has a significant influence on the student as he begins and continues his education in college. Likewise, the student’s degree of collegiate self-efficacy influences
the student in college. In this study, collegiate self-efficacy is the student’s confidence that he is capable of completing a bachelor’s degree in college. These factors influence the development of affirming connections as a temporal process in which the students enter college with strong ties to pre-college communities and virtually no attachment to their new college community. However, as the students encounter other students, faculty and staff on campus – their connections grow and their sense of belonging is shaped over time as interactions occur and relationships are built. The concept of sense of belonging is comprised of two parts: the perceptual and the tangible. The perceptual aspects are composed of internalized feelings and interpretations of associated environmental stimuli and the tangible aspects are the concrete ways in which the students encounter and experience behavioral manifestations of affirmation. Perceptions of belonging from this study include feeling at home, valued, and a sense of community. Some examples of the tangible sense of belonging from this study include positive comments on written work, an offer of a tutoring position, and an invitation to join an academic club. Both the perceptual and the tangible components of a sense of belonging were expressed by the students in this study as they described the different ways they both experienced and responded to affirmation. In contrast, as students experience marginalizing interaction, their sense of belonging never increases beyond the initial low levels of belonging. They lack the essential connection to faculty and other key campus staff, so they continue to feel as outsiders who do not really belong to the academic community that seems to embrace others.
Figure 4: Sense of Belonging Develops Over Time and It has Two Dimensions: Perceptual and Tangible

It is worth noting that the students in this study are all persisting and can be viewed as succeeding in college; however, there is a continuum in which some have a highly developed sense of belonging and others feel marginalized as this connection has not materialized for them. It seems as if some students are persisting because of their campus experiences while others persist in spite of them. This finding is particularly significant since they are all experiencing the same environment. It is also interesting that some of these students have a great deal of support from home for attending college, while others do not. It may be that students require a support system – either outside of campus or on campus – that helps them persist. This finding complicates previous literature on retention (e.g. Astin, 1989; Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993) that emphasizes the importance of on-campus communities, with little attention to off-campus communities.
as sources of support for persistence and retention of students. It is also clear from an analysis of the data that these students have strong senses of collegiate self-efficacy.

The Latino students describe the process involved in the development of their sense of belonging to the campus, and they also provide an overview of the sources of this connection. Five of the Latino students clearly voiced that they had a strong membership to NCC. On the contrary, two students plainly stated that they did not feel a powerful connection to the campus. They describe how various interactions with faculty were marginalizing and did not provide opportunities for a sense of belonging to develop.

**Developing a Sense of Belonging on Campus: The Process**

**Initial Contact Between Faculty and Students**

In order to build a sense of belonging with faculty on campus, a number of steps occur in the process. When Latino students initially arrive on campus the study found that they had little sense of belonging. All of the participants are the first in their family to attend college. Sylvia speaks for many of the students when she says that attending college and graduating was viewed as the “ultimate.” Graduating from college would mean that she “was somebody.” However, no one else in the students’ families had attended college and many of their parents had never completed high school. The college campus was not viewed as a place where they felt they would belong. For some such as Daniel, “college was never, ever a choice. It was always understood from the get-go that [he] was going to college.” For him and others, the family’s support for college was very strong, but the familiarity with the culture of the college institution was practically non-existent. Unlike white upper middle-class students whose parents had attended college, these Latino students had little knowledge or familiarity with the campus culture.
According to Bourdieu (1971), access to a common level of cultural capital with others will develop a common or shared perspective. Those in the upper middle-class enter with an assumption that they already belong. However, the habitus of the shared view of campus culture was not a part of the Latino participants’ experience. Therefore, they began at NCC with no sense of entitlement or a feeling of belonging. As first generation Latino college students, they began as outsiders to the shared norms and culture of the campus community.

The initial point of contact is very important for the Latino students. Many times this occurs during orientation. At NCC, there is an orientation that is held during the summer for the students to select their courses. Marisol described her feelings as she anticipated the summer orientation day and her first meeting with a professor there. She knew she would be selecting classes, but in terms of her major, she really did not know what to pursue. For example, she took a psychology course in high school and liked it. She had met with a psychologist who was valuable in helping her deal with her grief, and she thought it might be a useful field to help others in the future; however, she wasn’t sure. She was expecting some guidance from an advisor during the new student orientation, but she shared a different story:

They divide us by last name, I think that’s how they did it with us. Met that day with a professor who was assigning us that day for the classes. He was a teacher, math or liberal arts? I’m not really sure.

He was, “Okay you like psychology, so take general psychology. And then English. What else was? Math class?” and told me just take a business class and that way you can just have a sense of what you want or what you like and so… So that’s how it works the first time. I expected to have someone from psychology to help choose classes.

That was the first time and the only time I saw him. Then it was a different professor for next semester to sign up for the classes.
For many of the students, it was the first time they had a conversation with a professor on a college campus. The initial contact with faculty was similar for many of the Latino students. While the professors accomplished the essential function of getting the first year students registered for classes, many of the Latino students expressed a bit of disappointment in the person they met and the fact that “they were not their real advisor.”

Although the orientation sessions may have been missed opportunities to build lasting, affirming relations with the Latino students, at NCC the first long-term contacts with faculty usually occur within a classroom. The students mentioned the distinctive atmosphere of a class that makes them feel most comfortable. These classroom qualities included being encouraged to contribute, being acknowledged as an individual, and having contributions valued.

Marisol cited a professor for a class that only met once a week. Although they did not meet often, this professor made her feel as if she belonged and was welcome to contribute. She shared:

The class is small and she is really friendly with all of us. She tried to make us feel special there or our opinion counts, so I think that counts too when you’re in a classroom and you feel comfortable. Especially that I’m shy and I’m really shy to speak aloud. But she kind of give me that comfort and make me feel confident in myself.

Daniel recalled another example with a psychology professor who knew her students and involved them in classroom discussion:

She [the professor] is always like getting groups involved and kind of talking to us individually. She calls us all by name, things like, “Daniel, what do you think about this?” In that class I’m pretty open.

The atmosphere of a classroom and the methods a teacher uses to build interaction between student and professor and between students are helpful in making a Latino
student more comfortable with interaction in a new environment. By calling on students individually by name she is making a statement that the student is valued as an individual. She is setting the tone and modeling for others that the student’s opinion is to be valued.

**Sustaining Out-Of-Classroom Interaction**

The atmosphere that a professor projects in the classroom can lead a student to consider making contact with the professor outside of class or responding to a professor’s initiative for additional interaction. The quality of interactions with faculty can make a significant difference in the students’ feeling of belonging. A deeper knowledge of the student can help shape a more affirming relationship.

Daniel was particularly drawn to professors who took an interest in him and who took the time to know him. One such connection was with his First Year Seminar professor. Daniel describes him as a “father figure type guy.”

I clicked with him right away and he always kept up with us. Every student in the classroom, he was always involved in their personal life. Like he’ll ask you how you are doing. Every week he would come up to you after class or like most of us, not all of us. But he will keep up with us through email or phone numbers. He’ll call us. Find out what was going on in our lives or whatever. So he was always very involved and once we finished the class I was really attached to him.

The professor chose to reach out to Daniel and to learn about him as a person. Through contact beyond the classroom, in conversation, emails and phone calls, his professor gained knowledge and understanding about Daniel, so that he could relate to Daniel in a way that was both authentic and congruent to how Daniel viewed himself.

In Sylvia’s case, she provides many examples of how the most affirming interactions occurred outside of the classroom. However for such affirming interactions
to happen, she found it most helpful when the professor set up the invitation ahead of time. She felt a note of, “Please see me.” written by an instructor on a graded paper is useful because even if the news is negative, it still means “he wants to know what’s going on.” In another example, one professor made a general announcement to the class that “If you happen to pass by my door; it’s open, just give it a little knock.” Sylvia said that some professors “don’t go that extra mile” and then students are less likely to seek them out.

That’s inviting when they tell you my door is open. You know when doors are closed, it'll be like oh, well, they are doing something, you know? So, should I pass?

Marisol recalled a situation with her freshman English teacher where she started out by getting D’s, but eventually earned an A for the class. She recalls that he told her, “You’re really improving your English skills. I’m really proud of you.” She was very happy about the comment, but even better, it made her feel welcome to go see him when she had a paper to write.

He has been really someone who I can go in and I am not be so ashamed if you’re commit any grammatical error and he will correct my writing in a good way, possibly to improve my style.

This has resulted in a trusting and lasting relationship. The validation has also made her feel like “[she] can think for [herself], and with time and education, [she] can do a good job just as others can do it.”

Sylvia uses a family analogy to refer to how professors can use their words to establish a comfortable authority and to be a guide. Sylvia also uses the analogy of a child being nurtured by her parents to describe how a professor can make her feel comfortable and like she belongs when she visits a professor’s office:
Well you know as a kid when you are very nurtured and your parents always say, “Come here. Give me a hug. Come here and talk to Mama. Come here.” You know it’s that come and let’s embrace.

With words you embrace and when someone that is your authority figure, higher than you tells you, “Come on.” it’s so relaxing. It’s like “Yeah sure, I’ll talk to you. Why not?” That’s very important to succeed anywhere when you feel welcomed into your environment. You understand if I’m listening to you as a professor and you’re inviting me to you know, be more close, you know, it’s more of a friendship which is real good to have with a professor. It’s a relationship of yeah, you’re my helper. You’re my guide, you know. So that’s where I’m more fluent with, the whole acceptance and nurturing and come in and sit.

In a step-by-step manner, Sylvia describes how a professor can diffuse the power differential between professor and student to establish a “nurturing” and supportive relationship.

And make sure you make them feel comfortable. So if there is a chair in your office and I come in and I’m like, “Hi, Professor, can we talk?” Don’t just turn around and listen to me standing. Be like, “Yeah sure, come Sylvia, sit down. We have coffee. We have water. Do you want a little bit of water? You want some candy?” Say a broad question. “So what’s on your mind?” Like you are listening to what I’m going to tell you. Don’t just be like, “Oh, I was doing something. You’re in my way”. If there is that case, you can always say, “Well, I don’t have time. I’m more than happy to listen to you. Can we schedule a time and date?” Make the student comfortable. Open the slot. “Is there any other time when me and you can meet, you know? When I don’t have so much work because I can’t right now. But I will be more than happy another day. Look at my schedule, what’s your schedule?”

Sylvia explains that it is important for a professor to make students feel “welcomed” into the professor’s environment and invited into a relationship. Sylvia knows that the words she hears and the body language of the professor can make all of the difference in whether or not she feels comfortable with her professors.
Establishing an Affirming Relationship

When affirming contact occurs through faculty member interactions with a Latino student, the Latino student senses congruency between his self-concept and the professor’s view of him. This congruency allows the professor to be able to have a more affirming relationship with the student. As a result, the professor can address academic and social concerns and the student will be more open to consider the advice or opportunity being shared.

After getting to know the Latino students, a number of professors noted the students’ skills and recommended them for tutoring positions on campus. One of Luis’ professors that he had spent time talking with outside of class recommended that Luis take a tutoring job.

In another case, Daniel recounted an earlier experience where a professor asked him if he would be interested in tutoring other students.

It’s just good that somebody notices that work is being done. Or my effort and it’s not just to boost my ego it’s just--you just kind of want to feel that my work is paying off.

Daniel felt affirmed that his effort and work were known and acknowledged by the professor. That was important to him. Daniel again contrasts the positive affirmation and negative marginalization he felt from interactions with his professors.

I’ve had professors that tell me that, oh, you’re going to go very far in life and you are going to be very successful and your character is strong -- they compliment you and then I have professors who look at you as if you were lazy and irresponsible and it’s all I guess, it’s all perspective. But yeah, I’ve had a lot of professors tell me--give me positive feedback. And make me feel like I’m going to go far. More of those, even if they don’t communicate with me a lot like they will let me know some way. Even if it’s just writing on the back of a paper I just got back like “It’s very good or …”
When a professor articulates that he/she views Daniel as a good student and takes the
time to know him as an individual who will be “very successful” or who has a “strong
character,” Daniel feels affirmed and ready to continue his studies. Daniel acknowledges
that perception plays a key role in the developing relational process. In terms of positive
feedback that makes him feel successful, he cites actual words spoken or written by the
professor and how they give him hope for his future accomplishments. Daniel also was
placed into a work-study position based upon his relationship with his First Year Seminar
professor.

I actually got my first work study job with him and ever since then we
kind of like kept cool. So now I’m still working in work study with him
and I visit his house. I know his wife, his kids, because he was just that
kind of guy. So that was the best, really good.

Through the professor taking time to get to know the Latino student and building an
affirming relationship, the professor is able to address concerns and to recommend
opportunities that will assist the Latino student.

Making Additional Campus Connections

When a professor is able to build affirming relationships with students, the
professor can provide positive feedback and additional opportunities that enable a Latino
student to be more successful. These occasions can be useful in building a level of
comfort and confidence. As a result, the students have the opportunity to make additional
connections on campus with other valuable faculty, staff and students.

In Luis’ case, the tutoring opportunity provided an important linkage. As a result,
Luis began to meet many other students, which gave him additional confidence to talk
with students as well as other faculty members. Luis shares how his interaction with
faculty members helped him to feel more confident and made him want to get involved
on campus. He recalls that as a freshman he “was very shy and not involved.” In addition to recommending him for a tutoring position, it was also his economics professor who encouraged Luis to get more involved on campus. Luis strongly feels that “faculty does have an influence on encouraging students to participate” in campus events. His professor told Luis that it would be helpful for his resume when he applied for jobs. Since Luis is strongly motivated by the promise of a future job in the business world, he followed his professor’s affirming advice. After Luis’ freshman year, he became a member of the Student Government Association, active in various clubs, and worked as a Resident Advisor. As a result of his growing visibility and increasing involvement, Luis believes that he is very connected to the campus socially.

**Increased Sense of Belonging**

A group of five of the Latino students, comprised of Ricardo, Bianca, Sylvia, Isabel, and Luis, reported having a strong sense of belonging. These Latino students have developed key affirming interactions and relationships with faculty. The professors have been able to give appropriate advice and to offer helpful opportunities that allow the Latino students to make important connections to others on the NCC campus. As a result, they feel a strong sense of belonging to NCC.

Bianca is an example of a student who feels a deep connection to NCC. In terms of belonging, Bianca found many affirming ties to the institution in multiple areas. As a senior in high school, Bianca realized that living on campus and having that “college experience” would make a big difference in her sense of belonging and membership to the campus.

I would hope, but honestly, I think the ones that are commuters, that travel back and forth, don’t feel that sense of belonging. I think that if you live
on campus, if you reside on campus, you feel like more of a community. You feel like more connected to your school because you live within it. You are here every day. You see people every day. You feel more comfortable, because I mean you live here so you feel more comfortable walking to the professor’s office and asking questions. Joining the programs because you live there, you know. I think that is a big--if I would have been a commuter, I don’t think I would have felt I belong as much as if I lived here.

While her mother lives only a short drive from campus, Bianca chose to reside in the college dormitory. She wanted to be a part of things and take advantage of “being close to her professors and to other students.” Bianca has forged personal affirming relationships with professors. She has a web of professors from her two majors whom she relies on for learning and advice. They have spent time together building strong relationships which have led her to join an academic club and to become an officer. They are also working with her on future plans for graduate school.

In addition, Bianca has made other strong connections on the campus through the MAS office, which is a place that offers support services to many first-generation college students, including numerous Latino students. The trained staff at MAS is very familiar with how to get to know and affirm the students they support. It is here that she “met so many people and created so many new friends.” Since Bianca worked off-campus and had difficulty being involved in other campus activities, this program had “come to the rescue with that. It has helped me to feel I belong to things.”

Isabel is an example of a Latina student who derives less of a sense of belonging from her professors, but feels most at home with a group of minority students in her major.

I mainly talk more to like the minorities, the Cambodian, African. There is like this group of minorities that are just us. And we kind of separate from the other students. They [Nursing faculty] always try to separate us.
They try to break up the cliques as much as possible, especially in class participation and for projects. They try to break us up. They don’t see that as a positive. Us working together is not seen as a positive.

While Isabel feels a strong connection with the minority students with whom she shares many collective values, the nursing professors interpret it negatively and use the term ‘clique’ to describe the groupings. The professors’ marginalizing views only serve to strengthen the ties of the students as they band together to succeed. In many cases they feel they are in an “us versus them environment.”

Isabel states that she wants to feel like she belongs in the nursing program and to be known by her professors; instead, she believes the following prevents that from happening:

They don’t encourage us, you know, as a group. Individually, it’s not at all. If they would take time to learn [about] their students-- I feel like we’re just numbers to them or just names on a piece of paper. That’s how I feel. They don’t take time to know us. Now that we are seniors, they can’t put a name to a face. They’ve had us that long. But as to know our capabilities, no. They don’t know that either.

Although she is a very successful student, she does not believe that her nursing professors, many of whom do not know her name let alone any personal details, contribute to an increased sense of belonging. She is left feeling “unknown” and “like a number.” Her main connection occurs through the strong relationships she has built with other minority and immigrant students with whom she shares many collective cultural values.

It is a different scenario for Ricardo. He found that his on-campus work was a place where he had a strong sense of belonging. When asked where he felt most comfortable, his reply was “not at home. Home is just always problems.” Instead, he felt
“most at home at the admissions office.” His on-campus employment gave him a sense of membership and was also an important tie to the campus.

Yeah, I’ve done everything, basically I’ve done everything. The tours. I’ve done extra jobs they asked me to do. They’ve even asked me to do some while I’m in school/classes.

His supervisor rewarded and affirmed him for the work he did in the admissions office, which led to a strong sense of belonging for Ricardo. He noted that he was willing to work even during his class time when they asked. There was a perception that at times they both viewed the work as a higher priority than his classes. He was able to work hard, “lose himself” in the job and be rewarded for it.

It makes me feel good, you know. Other people know it too. So it shows that I’m working hard. But I’m always working hard. Just what it is. I like working. That’s where I get lost at. That’s where I get lost at.

The tension is there between the validation he receives at work and the lack of validation he receives from his professors. Ricardo works hard at his job and receives words of praise and validation. It is work, but it seems to come easily to him. Nevertheless, a part of him wishes it might be the same with his academics.

Yeah, see and I can’t get lost with the school work and that’s what my problem is. That’s what I’m trying to figure out, but the only way I can do it is…I’m stuck at home and I have no job. I’m just going to get stuck at home. It’s my job that makes it. Oh, man, I can’t do that! I need to work. I have that in me. I have that from my father. School? No, I hate it, but I can work with it. Job—you give me a job and I’ll do it.

It’s mostly my job that does it every week you know. Everyone in my job tells me, you know. I could understand because I don’t think I don’t put that 100% into school work. If I did, I could get a better outcome but…”

Because classes have been such a struggle, Ricardo found that his real interest and attention is drawn to work because it is in the work that he receives the validation and has developed a feeling of belonging.
Lacking a Sense of Belonging on the Campus

The study found that all of the Latino students entered NCC without a sense of belonging to the campus. Over time, as some students developed affirming relationships with faculty, key campus staff and other students, it helped them to make additional important ties and connections to others on campus. These connections led to the development of a strong sense of belonging. However, if the Latino students did not successfully have opportunities to interact with faculty and other members of the campus, or if the interactions were marginalizing rather than affirming, the students’ sense of belonging to the campus did not grow. Overall, five of the Latino students in this study had a positive sense of belonging, while only two did not. To find that the majority felt a strong connection given to the campus is not surprising given that all seven are persisters.

Daniel and Marisol are the two participants who do not feel a sense of connection to NCC and they may give a glimpse into how other Latino students may risk being lost along the way. After attending the college for over two years, Daniel does not have a sense that he is a part of things on campus. He recognizes that being a commuter may play a part in that.

I feel like I’m just there. I don’t feel like I’m a part of any specific group. I just come in, you know, do what I have to do. Maybe it’s because I’m a commuter that I feel like I’m just like invisible, but that’s kind of how I feel.

Just feels like if you’re not staying on campus, you’re kind of like a phantom. You just move around. Nobody realizes that you’re there or you’re a student here. They just think you hang out here for some reason.

In terms of belonging, Daniel could name very few places on campus where he felt comfortable. He shared, “If there is a thirty minute break between classes, I’ll fly home.”
I just try and find any excuse to go home. I think that’s just my comfort zone.” Daniel clearly looks at home as an escape or a retreat from college that is just a car-ride away.

Daniel is not involved in any social groups; however, he is searching for a deeper sense of belonging with his professors and in the classroom. He often speaks of his desire for relationships and to be known by others. He wants to feel that he is no longer “invisible” or a “phantom.” He said that he wished his advisor could have been more of a help to him. He expected his advisor to know him well and to guide him into feeling more a part of things on campus. When asked what an advisor should know about him, he responded:

“Everything, he’s my advisor! He should know everything, my background, my personal life, everything. The same thing—actually I feel like what Warren does, that’s what an advisor should do.

Daniel feels as if his advisor has not done a very good job. He strongly thinks a better advisor, a person like his First Year Seminar professor, would have helped him to feel more a part of the campus socially by encouraging him to get involved in specific campus opportunities.

“What the hell!” I feel like [my advisor] should have been talking to me about tutoring, about getting involved in campus, about clubs, about the Psychology Club. Like, I just found out what that was!

Maybe, maybe socially. … because socially I could have went to Italy and studied over there and just learned more about different cultures and get to know people and make friends over there. I could have got more involved in campus. I could have got even that Psychology Club group. I don’t know if I would have got into that, but it was an opportunity that you know, that I lost.

Daniel verbalized a sense of anger and loss over the difference between what he hoped for and the reality of where he is at this point of his college journey. Unfortunately, the campus environment is currently an uncomfortable place for him to be. Without the
strong affirming relationships with faculty, and devoid of social relationships with peers, Daniel is left without a sense of belonging at NCC.

Marisol is another example of a student who feels she is without ties to the college. She had attended some social groups, such as the Latin American Student Organization, but she did not really connect there since most were from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In addition, they did not meet very often. Marisol’s expectations of what college would be like were very different from her experiences.

And I wasn’t that happy with NCC. Freshman year was really bad. Wasn’t really that motivating. It wasn’t really what I wanted I think from college. Because a lot of people told me that college is different that I was going to be able to make more friends, even more social. It was maybe different than high school or middle school, but I felt that it was kind of the same. Maybe it was me that I didn’t fit into NCC or I didn’t find the right people to get guidance in order to meet more people and then I tried to join clubs, but I felt that I didn’t fit. I just had that feeling that I was not really that happy.

Socially Marisol had hoped that she would fit in, but she believes being a commuter may have hindered her opportunities to have interactions with other students.

I don’t really spend that much time on campus. I’m pretty much—I just came to take my classes and pretty much I’m out of here. So I don’t really spend that much time and probably somebody who lives on campus probably have another sense or probably feel different, but since I’m a commuter I don’t really feel that way.

While Marisol acknowledges that she spent most of her time at NCC in classes, she still did not have significant affirming interactions with faculty. Marisol recalled, “I expected to have more support from my teachers, to have someone want to be my mentor, my guidance, and I didn’t find that here.” From the first day as a first generation Latina college student, she mentioned that she was left to make decisions that she felt totally unprepared to make without guidance. “It would be better if someone at least took
the time to explain more what is college life, to make better decisions [about] your classes.”

Marisol went through some periods of confusion about where she belonged culturally and what she ought to be studying. She decided to go back to Ecuador and study there. However, after one year she missed her mother greatly and returned to Massachusetts. Marisol contacted the college to see about returning. She thought International Business might be a good choice after her stay in Ecuador and due to some advice from her cousin. The Registrar sent her to see the chair of the Business Department to select classes. “There weren’t many options because it was so late, so [I] chose whatever was open.” It was mostly general education courses. In the spring of her sophomore year, she had enrolled in mainly business courses. It quickly became clear that they did not fit her interests.

I really am not into business. I’m more like a people person. More like working with people directly. And making business is not really what I want in my life. It could be like--it’s a good profession, a good career. Because I was bilingual, that’s why my cousin told me that it could be a good option for me because she is bilingual too and she told me that it help you a lot especially international business. But then I realized that, that’s not really for me so I don’t want that for my life. Just to have a good job and not be happy--no.

And then I went for the first week, for the first classes and I wasn’t really happy with the classes that I chose and that making me feel like, oh my gosh. I had to change all my classes because I wasn’t happy with it, and then I was like, oh my gosh. And then have this feeling like, “Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?”

Because she did not have any clear relationship with an advisor, she went directly to the Registrar to withdraw. The only person she spoke with about this was her mother, who “wasn’t really that happy” about the decision.
Marisol came back to campus the following fall. This time she knew she wanted psychology for sure. She checked online to see what was open and made a list of possible classes that fit around her schedule for work. With lots of night classes and early morning classes in mind, she went to the Registrar’s Office. They sent her to see the chair of the Psychology Department. When asked about that meeting, Marisol described it as follows:

It was pretty much to like introduce myself to her and just say that I was coming back and she was like, “Okay, they have your classes online.” And I’m like, “Yeah.” And then we go over it and then she’s like, “Okay, you are all set. I’ll see you in the fall.”

I tried to explain more to her like what happened, why I withdraw and she was like--kind of like, “Okay, you have your classes?” Like…Okay, I don’t care. So I was like, “Okay, then.”

Marisol remembers that she felt rushed and certainly not valued as an individual. In addition, at no point did anyone ask her whether she had transferred any of her credits from her year in Ecuador. It was only through her cousin’s recommendation that she give this any thought. “I didn’t know the credits could be transferred and accepted” said Marisol shaking her head sadly. With a bitter laugh, she recalled that she had taken even more classes to make up the credits that she thought she was missing.

Now that Marisol has had her advisor for a class last spring, Marisol is beginning to see a change in their relationship. Since Marisol had more contact with her, she is starting to give Marisol some information about graduate school. However, to Marisol it seems:

Just more like a list that she is giving you. Okay, you have to do this, this and that. This test you have to take to go to grad school or you have to apply, have references from your professors. Make a time, look for schools. There are early deadlines and blah, blah, blah.
That’s pretty much giving you the tips that every student needs to know. Pretty much, it’s not really about you.

Instead of a list, Marisol is looking for something more individual. Rather than “everything related to what you have to do,” she would prefer some dialogue such as:

“Okay, what do you want? Think about what you want to do in the future. Where do you want to work? What type of job would you like?”

The questions would indicate to Marisol that she is seen as an individual. The personal interest by her advisor would also show that she is valued and connected to the institution. She believes she would have felt more a part of the campus if a faculty member, especially her advisor could have:

Get more interested in your personal life, personal feelings, goals, and just try to help you in the way they can. Just to give you more advice since they have more experience, or if they don’t, send you to somebody else who can help you. Give you an idea what to do and then you will feel like you part of the NCC and it’s not just that you’re passing by, but you belong to NCC.

Summary

The seven Latino participants all voiced a hope of having a sense of belonging on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Five of the participants strongly believed they felt a part of things at NCC. All of the students, even those who felt they lacked a strong connection to the campus, are currently persisting toward their degree. Each of them speaks of the role faculty have played in their connection to campus. The Latino students who feel the strongest sense of belonging cite their significant ties to faculty and other campus members. Through the process outlined, Latino students are often given opportunities to develop other campus connections as a result of the affirming relationships with their professors. For those persisters who lack vital ties to faculty and still have a strong sense of belonging, the students can name other key ties and
relationships that have connected them to NCC. And finally, for the two Latino students who lack a sense of belonging, they can both describe in great detail the type of interaction and relationships, particularly with faculty, that they desired to have. While their sense of belonging to the campus has not developed, it is important to keep in mind that both of these students, as well as the other five, continue to pursue a college degree.

**Other Sources of Support for Latino Student Persistence**

While having a sense of belonging on campus is clearly important to the persistence of these students; the data from this study indicate that there are other sources of support that are also essential for persistence. Figure 5 illustrates the overall path of persistence for the Latino students. Their educational journey began even before they reached the college environment. The pre-college years were spent in varying amounts of dominant culture schools. The Latino students’ family background and personal characteristics played a role in determining whether the pre-college years yielded affirming or marginalizing interactions with teachers and others in the dominant culture school environment. These early pre-college years were shown to have an impact on how the students responded and perceived interaction with faculty when they entered college.

In particular, Rendón, (1994) speaks of the power of validation for nontraditional students such as Latinos. Validation occurs when a person takes an active interest in the student and encourages the student to believe that he is capable of doing academic work and supports his social and academic adjustment to the campus (Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora, 2000). While Rendón’s research focused on validation that occurs during the college experience, the findings in this study indicate that validation can take place in the pre-college environment as well. In Figure 5, the arrows marked with a “V” indicate
important opportunities for validation to occur. As students are in the pre-college environment of a school system that has a culture different from their own, validating agents can make a difference in the students’ belief in their abilities to learn and to be able to be successful. Validation can also occur through interactions with faculty and others on the college campus that facilitates students to trust in their own capacity to learn. The result is an affirming relationship where the students sense they are viewed in the same way as they see themselves.

While some interactions in the college environment have been affirming and have led to a growing sense of belonging, others have been of a marginalizing nature that has led to students lacking a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, all seven of the Latino students in this study are persisters. They are all continuing to be successful as college students and working toward their degree. It may be evident why the Latino students with a strongly developed sense of connection to their campus community persist since those students have robust ties to the college and benefit from a support system located on campus that helps them to navigate the new environment and build connections to help them persist. However, those with much weaker ties to the campus continue to persist as well. In addition, according to the data, the Latino students possess strong degrees of collegiate self-efficacy. Therefore, for those students without a sense of belonging to the institution, their support system may primarily be located in the home environment.
Figure 5: Model of Successful Persistence for Latino Students

Upon further analysis of the data from this study, the three main sources of persistence became clear. Figure 6 summarizes the sources of support for the persisting Latino students in this study. The three key sources found are family support, high degree of collegiate self-efficacy, and a strong sense of belonging to the campus. Five of the students, including all four female Latina students had strong family support. Five of the students had a strong sense of belonging on campus. The data show that all of the Latino students had a high degree of collegiate self-efficacy.
Sources of Persistence

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<th>Family</th>
<th>Collegiate Self-Efficacy</th>
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Figure 6: Sources of Support Influencing Latino Student Persistence

**Family Support System**

Over half of the participants in this study cited their family as the main source of strength in their persistence, and the majority felt that family was a significant support for them. Unlike Tinto’s theory (1993), which expressed the importance of separation from the student’s home environment, Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) explored the role of dual socialization or the convergence of two cultures. Based on their research, they believe that strong pre-college relationships are sources of strength that support minority students as they enter and learn in a cultural environment that is different from their own.

The following examples serve to illustrate the strong support the students reported receiving from their families. Daniel was the lone male to cite his family as the major reason for his persistence. As a student who feels he lacks strong ties to NCC, his family’s ongoing support is even more important to him. He will be the first to earn a
college degree and he takes that opportunity very seriously. In addition, Daniel recognizes that his younger sister is watching him. He says, “I know she’s always following in my steps, so I have to make sure I don’t mess up. She looks up to me.”

All of the female Latina students said that their mothers were their primary source of persistence. Latina mothers and daughters share a very strong bond. Sy (2006) found that Latina daughters defer to their mothers more frequently than non-Hispanic white daughters. This may be due to Latinos overall respect for elders and parental authority. In addition, “it is the mother’s responsibility to define and enforce the feminine roles and expected behavior of her daughter” (Roll & Irwin, 2008, p. 24). Mothers who support the educational goals of their daughters are a primary source of strength for their Latina daughters.

In the case of Marisol, after her brother and father died, her mother was the only family she had left. Marisol has a very close relationship with her mother. It is her mother who gives her the most emotional and physical support during her studies. Her mother saw it as her job to watch after Marisol to make “sure [she] was eating and getting enough sleep.” Marisol says, “Sometimes it’s good to at least get away from my assignments that I am doing and just go talk to my mom.” They take great comfort in each other’s presence.

Bianca’s mother was always very clear in her expectations concerning education and learning, even from a very young age.

Yeah, my mom was very, very like, “Education is very important. You need to do well in school.” That’s kind of what she has always told me, so even for responsibilities at home, as long as I got my homework done, chores could be put aside, as long as my homework…She always has said, “Education is the key. Education is so important.” She has always drilled that into my head since I was like two.
The significant bond between Bianca and her mother is readily apparent. The strong influence of her mother is evident when Bianca reflects on why she chose to pursue college when so many of her friends did not.

I think it’s mainly because of my mother. She was such a big part and it’s like no matter what I did, she would always push school forward. So I think she was the main like influence on me to keep pursuing school. To not get into drugs. To not drink. My mom doesn’t drink. She doesn’t smoke. She doesn’t do drugs. So I think that is a big influence on me because I hate the taste of alcohol. I do not like to drink. I hate smoking. I think it stinks. Drugs, heck no. Like I think that is a big part of what my mother did for me.

Bianca’s mother gave Bianca the expectation that college was in her future and that other things must be set aside to reach that goal.

Isabel’s mother also believed that education was very important. Even during times of trying to remain hidden from her father, Isabel’s mother always strived to make sure Isabel and her sisters made it to school. Through the frequent changes in schools, attendance was never an issue except in one circumstance. A teacher inquired about Isabel’s absences because it “stuck out like a sore thumb.” Isabel’s mother had to let the teacher know about the custody battle with her ex-husband, and that sometimes she needed to keep the girls home from school. Isabel said, “My mom felt guilty,” but she had to look out for what was best for us too.

Isabel’s mother was very supportive of Isabel’s pursuit of college; however, she did not feel like it was appropriate to require it of her daughters. In terms of college, Isabel says:

My mother she always stressed the importance of school to us, but she is not one to make us do things that we don’t want to do. But she knew that I was the one who was going to go to college. Because school was very important to me and I loved it.
In the end, Isabel is the only one of the three daughters who chose to attend college.

Sylvia’s experience was different from Isabel’s in that her mother expected her to attend college. Sylvia shared, “It’s funny because being that your parents don’t go to college, they have a real high standard for you.” Sylvia’s mother always held out college as the ultimate graduation. Throughout each of Sylvia’s graduations from pre-school on up, her mother would always have a huge smile and say, “I can’t wait until you are older and I see you with your big old cap and gown and they give you your diploma.”

Sylvia’s mother not only expected and encouraged her daughter to attend college, she went out of her way to support Sylvia when Sylvia found out she was expecting a baby in her junior year of college. Sylvia remembers her mother’s words of encouragement that pushed her to return to college after her son was born:

It goes back to my mom because she was like you never going to stop school. I will hold the baby. You only have two semesters left. I will hold this child till you finish and we’re going to do this, because I have my golden pin up on the wall ready for you. Oh, I was blessing her because without her I would still do it. But it would be so much harder. And I wouldn’t be graduating now. I would probably graduate like next year in September. You know, I wouldn’t take as many classes. I have to work to get a baby sitter for him. You know, but I was going to finish school. A child these days does not impair you of anything. If I would have had to have stopped school for a while, till he was a little bit older and then come back, I would have done it too. But thank God I have her there. And she just….Yeah, I love that lady. I love her so much.

The love and support of Sylvia’s mother was shown through her care and nurturing of Sylvia’s baby. While Sylvia attended college in Massachusetts, her son stayed with her mother in Manhattan. Sylvia tried to arrange her class schedule to be able to spend three-day weekends with her son before driving back to campus.

All four of these young women felt the continual love and support of their mothers for their educational goals. They did not leave behind their past community and
family ties to pursue a degree. These ties were integral to their success in persevering. Bianca lives on campus, just a few miles away from her mother. Marisol lives at home and connects with her mother every day. Sylvia makes the three hour drive every weekend to return home to her mother and son. Isabel lived with her mother the first year in college, and then her mother moved to Florida, but they continue to stay in very close contact. Unlike others who had to fight low expectations or cultural pressure to adhere to a more traditional Latino feminine role, these young women were given options to dream and pursue a college degree. Their mothers looked for ways to support their daughters’ educational dreams.

Collegiate Self-Efficacy

All of the students in this study spoke not only of the external support that has helped them succeed, but also spoke in varying ways about the inner sources of strength and support that have helped them persist thus far. The data clearly indicate that each of the Latino students in this study have strong self-efficacy (Bandura (1997). In this study, the term collegiate self-efficacy is used to refer to the student’s belief that he can accomplish the task of completing his bachelor’s degree in college. Although the Latino students in this study spoke of a high degree of collegiate self-efficacy, there was still a range in their beliefs. Luis, Bianca and Isabel defined themselves as learners and this identity helped move them forward to complete their degrees.

For Luis, his education was always a priority:

I always think that my education was very important. Really reflects who I am and what I want to be. I always make sure that my education is my first priority before anything else. When I look back, when I think of myself--you could basically call me a nickname. Name me “Education” because it was something that I always was worried about. It’s something that I always think about every single day. I have to make sure that this is
something that I have to work on and if there is anything that is going to stop me from getting my education, I’ll have to make sure I continue to do so, so that I can get [my education].

Succeeding in his education was always on Luis’ mind. It would occupy his thoughts every single day, and anything that might become an obstacle to that goal of learning had to be cast aside.

Even as a child, Luis loved to learn. He enjoyed understanding why things were a certain way, and his father noticed it too:

“I’m always curious. I think that’s what my dad said, “You’re too curious, Luis. You’re too curious for me. I’m always worried about you because you always want to know everything. You’re always curious about random things that I don’t even expect.”

Today Luis sees himself as a learner and a decision maker. His motivation in college has been all about learning to prepare himself for his future opportunities, and even though college will end, his curiosity will not.

“It’s just that I want to learn things and I want to experience things that I’ve never done before. And that’s the thing that keeps me very, very, encouraged— that’s what motivates.

Luis thinks that it is a pleasure to learn, he finds it motivating, and he has experienced success in that realm.

Similarly, Bianca also found her joy of learning as prime motivation to persist. It is clear that Bianca views herself as a learner. When she describes herself, she says, “I love to learn” and she adds that she “learned how to read and comprehend really early.”

While her mom spoke to her in Spanish and saw to it that she was educated in English, Bianca took it upon herself to learn to read in Spanish.

Yeah, because my grandma brought me books from Puerto Rico and I remember I think I was like in fifth grade and I started being curious and I picked them up and I tried sounding them out with like English terms and
I started realizing, oh this sounds like this and this sounds like this. So I went to my mom and I’m like, so I started reading a line and my mom started crying. She was happy.

Bianca’s love of learning continued through college as she seized opportunities to learn as much as she could. As a tutor at the MAS office, she continued to challenge herself by tutoring in areas that she has not yet taken classes for.

So I pretty much tutor whatever and I even tutor things that I don’t--I haven’t taken a class for, but I have familiarity with it. Like I tutored business statistics the other day and I had never taken it before. And I’m helping someone out with experimental psychology and I haven’t taken that yet. So I help out in ways that I can and it also helps me because I haven’t taken the classes, but now I know the material.

Bianca’s used these opportunities to challenge herself and to learn more. She is confident in her goals and has no doubts that success awaits her, for that has been her past experience. She is going to study abroad in Europe this spring, and she is excited to think about the many occasions to learn new things while she is there. Graduation is still nearly a year and half away; however for Bianca, the love of learning never ends.

Graduation from college will be a happy event, but only one of possibly many celebratory graduations.

It represents that I made it. I took another step towards more, you know. So it’s not—it might be the end, but it’s also the beginning…. More education. I pretty much now know that it will never stop, because I plan to get my masters right after, work a little bit, then get my Ph.D., so school never stops for me.

Isabel is another example of a student who believes in her ability to do well and earn her degree. Isabel felt as if she was constantly fighting against low expectations from those around her. She was certain that she would be able to do well and often found herself trying to prove that fact to her professors. Initially she was encouraged not to take too many difficult courses. This advice was common until she proved her academic
ability to her advisor. Later, in two separate community health projects Isabel was placed in a Latino community setting. She was upset because she felt she was not given the opportunity to learn cross-cultural competency, as the other non-minority students had. If she had been placed in a Vietnamese or African-American community health care setting, she would have benefitted more from the experiences. Isabel felt:

Community was a whole three credit course. And I was put into the Latino, I mean that was just easy, an easy A. But I don’t want things to be easy. The whole point of school is to learn.

Isabel believed the instructor felt she was doing Isabel a favor by placing her into a familiar cultural setting. However, Isabel saw this as lessening her learning opportunities. In her mind, there was no doubt that she would be successful, so her goal was to optimize every learning opportunity.

The desire to learn and high degree of collegiate self-efficacy impels Luis, Bianca and Isabel forward toward fulfilling their goals. They have a strong belief in their ability to earn their college degree. Even while others may or may not share that belief, they act in such a manner that encourages being open to additional learning situations in the academic community. Rather than looking for reassurance from their professors, these three students actively convince their faculty of their abilities and ask for ways to broaden the student learning experience.

While still having strong academic self-efficacy, Marisol is a Latino student who is less sure of her ability. She applied to college as a result of her ESL teacher’s encouragement. In addition, her high school ESL teacher encouraged her to go to college. The ESL teacher told her “was prepared to go to college, do good work in college and survive.” She also told Marisol that she would attend her college graduation.
For Marisol, graduation would mean:

All my effort I put in my studies through my whole years of being [a] student. It also means that I didn’t let myself down even through all the personal things that I went over. Even though I’m a Latina student. I’m a minority. When I came to this country, I didn’t know English. But it means that I was able to do it and I was able to manage to go over all those barriers and to do a good job, to do good work and just was able to make it.

Through Marisol’s years of study at NCC, she kept moving forward in pursuit of her degree, but the inner belief that she could do it required the encouragement of those along the way. Graduation meant that all of the people who supported and encouraged her were right – she was capable of earning a college degree.

I think so, that’s just important for me, for myself just to encouragement to get going and to say that nothing is impossible in this life. That if you put your effort into education, you can do it.

Kind of like a trophy for them. They also feel like they won the race. They also helped me to run the race, to keep me on track. They helped me to survive, to keep going, to encourage me to never let myself down. So will mean they also put a little bit of them, of themselves in that degree. So will mean a lot for them. Especially for my mother’s side, that I will be the first granddaughter and the first niece to get a degree since my father-my brother passed away.

Summary

The study provides ample evidence that these students, while all successful in persisting through college, have encountered many challenges in their quests to succeed. Yet, they have persisted with support from their families, their own self-efficacies, and the affirming actions of key faculty members and advisors. Five of the seven students cited support from their families as an important base of encouragement. In particular all of the female students spoke strongly of their mother’s role in encouraging them in both physical and emotional forms. The second source of persistence was the student’s
collegiate self-efficacy. The student’s perceptions about collegiate self-efficacy were also impacted by their experiences in the pre-college dominant culture school setting. All seven of the students had a belief that they could earn a college degree; however, the intensity of that belief was stronger for students such as Luis, Bianca and Isabel. The third source of persistence was the student’s sense of belonging on campus. As discussed in the previous section on a sense of belonging, this developed sense of connection to NCC was based on the affirming interactions experienced by the student within the college environment. The data clearly shows that there were no persisting Latino students with only one source of support from the three categories. All of them had at least two inputs of support for persistence. The data indicate that for the Latino students, there is often more than one type of support system in place that encourages persistence.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of the data in this study has identified five key findings. These findings include the impact of a Latino student’s pre-college experience in attending a dominant culture school, the impact of affirming and marginalizing interactions with faculty on a Latino student’s developing sense of belonging to the campus community, and finally the sources of persistence for the Latino students as they reach their goal of graduation. These sources were found to be the family’s support for the student’s educational goal, the student’s degree of collegiate self-efficacy, and the student’s sense of belonging to the campus. For the persisting Latino students in this study, all of the students had at least two sources of persistence, and in all cases one of the sources was a strong sense of collegiate self-efficacy. For the students who lacked family support, having a sense of belonging to the campus was a vital accompaniment to the students’
collegiate self-efficacy. For those students who lacked a sense of belonging to the campus, family support was a critical complement to the persisting students’ collegiate self-efficacy.

In conclusion, while the major focus of this study has been on the impact of faculty-student interaction on persistence, it is clear that other factors are significant as well. It must be noted that the Latino student’s family support and degree of collegiate self-efficacy are items that have their genesis off campus and exist before the student sets foot in the new campus environment. Rather than needing to cut ties with family and the pre-college culture in order to acculturate to and integrate into the college setting as earlier retention theorists such as Tinto had argued, these are clearly shown to be important sources of support for Latino students in the new college environment. As a result, these ties should be nurtured and encouraged to build stronger systems of support for persistence.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the area of persistence of Latino students at an undergraduate institution to gain a deeper understanding of the students’ experience concerning faculty-student interaction and what role it plays in the Latino students’ persistence. To accomplish the stated purpose, the actual voices of the students are critical in order to hear their educational journeys. To this end, I interviewed seven Latino students at an urban campus located in the Northeast. Using a voice-centered approach, I analyzed the data to hear and to gain an appreciation of their unique stories. Through coding, I developed models presented in Chapter 4 regarding the impact of interaction in the pre-college environment on the Latino students’ experience with faculty in the college environment and how that related to persistence.

The main research question for this study was:

- How do Latino/a students who are persisting at four-year institutions of higher education experience interaction with faculty?

In order to investigate that question, three related sub-questions were explored:

- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their sense of belonging?
- How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their feelings of validation?
• How do the ways in which these students experience faculty interaction relate to their persistence?

In response to the first sub-question, the results of the data analysis indicate that faculty interaction was an important part of the Latino students developing a sense of belonging. Through initial interactions and brief contacts with faculty, the Latino students felt an openness to have further discussions with faculty. Written comments on papers and general invitations to visit during professor’s office hours were examples that the Latino students reported as signals that a professor was open to interactions with students. As a result, sustained out of classroom interactions led the Latino students to feel valued by the faculty member, which eventually led to affirming relationships. Consequently, the Latino students developed a sense of belonging to the campus where initially they had none. The findings supported the research of Hurtado and Carter (1997) in that the Latino students felt a growing sense of membership to the campus through their interaction with faculty. This study provided further insight into why some interaction developed this sense of belonging and others did not. The degree of perceived congruence between how a Latino student views himself and how he believes he is viewed by his professor determines whether or not the interaction is seen as affirming or marginalizing. The affirming relationship developed the student’s connection to the campus, whereas interaction that was marginalizing did little to increase the student’s sense of belonging. In addition, through listening to the Latino students, it was possible to see that the concept of sense of belonging had both a perceptual aspect based on the internalized feelings surrounding the environment and a tangible aspect based on the concrete ways students experience affirmation in the campus setting.
The second sub-question concerned how Latino students’ faculty interaction related to feelings of validation. The results of the study point to validation as one key source that a Latino student uses to know that they are seen and valued by their professor as they see themselves. The validation increases the perceived congruence which brings about an affirming relationship. The Latino students described ways in which their professors’ validating actions were essential to creating an affirmative relationship. Actions such as being asked to participate in an academic club related to the student’s major, advice concerning future goals and being offered a tutoring position were examples of validating words and actions. The multiplying beauty of validation is that as a result of the affirming relationship with faculty, it then opens up various other opportunities for validation from a variety of campus agents. The affirming quality of the relationships increases the student’s connections and membership to the college environment. The findings from this study support Rendón’s (1994) concept of validation as a powerful tool to help students, especially minority students, fully believe in their ability to achieve and to be successful in college as learners. It also supports the idea that it is someone else who takes an active interest and role in validating the student. The Latino students related that they were not the ones who initiated the contact; instead, it was the faculty member through initial cues and contacts made both inside and outside of the classroom. This provides further impetus for faculty to take the time to get to know the students they teach.

The final sub-question addressed the relationship between the Latino students’ interaction with faculty and their persistence. Indeed, the results strongly demonstrate how affirming interaction with faculty increases Latino students’ sense of belonging,
which is a source of persistence for students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1977, 1980a; Pascarella, 1980). However, the data analysis further shows that while sense of belonging to the campus is incredibly important, student persistence is still possible without it, if the student has other strong support systems in place. The findings from this study indicate that there were three main sources of support for the Latino students’ persistence. These sources include the family’s support for the student’s educational goals, the student’s collegiate self-efficacy and the student’s sense of belonging. In this study, all of the Latino students had a high degree of collegiate self-efficacy, as they believed in their ability to earn a college degree.

Tinto’s theory addresses how the students’ commitments to educational goals and to specific institutions (1993) are impacted by the students’ academic and social integration. In this study, the Latino students had varying levels of institutional commitment, but all had high levels of goal commitment. The goal commitment did not change even when students did not develop a sense of belonging to the campus.

Some of the students had all three critical sources of support, while others only had two. For example, Daniel and Marisol had collegiate self-efficacy and strong family support, while Luis and Ricardo had collegiate self-efficacy and a sense of belonging on campus as major supports for their persistence. In all cases the Latino students had collegiate self-efficacy in combination with either strong on-campus support through their sense of belonging or through off-campus support in the form of their family and home community. The overall synthesis of this study’s findings is that faculty members play a key role in developing a student’s sense of belonging on a campus. However, unlike Tinto’s theory (1993) which focused on students separating from the past
community to form new connections and Astin’s focus (1993) on campus involvement, the study found that off-campus sources of persistence are very important and need to be nurtured as well.

**Policy**

The findings from this study have five main policy implications; these include: 1) Faculty contact matters; 2) Advising matters; 3) Institutional cultural competency matters; 4) Student ties to family and pre-college community matter; and 5) Early pre-college involvement matters. It is incumbent upon institutions of higher education to address the low percentages of Latino students who are persisting in their pursuit of a degree; therefore, current institutional policies need to be evaluated and realigned to establish learning environments that provide maximum support for Latino students.

**Faculty Contact Matters**

Research consistently supports the idea that student interactions and engagement with faculty matter in terms of persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1977, 1980a; Pascarella, 1980). Professors are the primary individuals that all college students encounter on a daily basis as they study on a college campus, and while interaction with faculty is important for all students, it is particularly vital for Latino students who are entering a campus environment that is new and different for them. As many Latino students are first generation college students, it is also a new environment that is unfamiliar to the students’ families. The findings from this study indicate that building connections to the new campus setting and culture is greatly enhanced when initiated by contact with faculty. However, this is often difficult for students from under-represented groups. For example, other studies indicate that it
can be difficult for Black students to establish meaningful relationships with White professors (Allen, 1992, Fries-Britt, 2000), and the same may hold true for other minority groups such as Latino students. Therefore, it is incumbent on college administrations, that campus policies should be developed that create opportunities for faculty to make connections with students. These occurrences can range from the first year, such as being involved in the initial student orientation or first year seminars, to ongoing events such as establishing an open atmosphere in the classroom and keeping regular office hours. Institutions need to be intentional in creating these opportunities and rewarding faculty for taking the initiative to establish affirming relationships with Latino students. Faculty will only be able to engage in this type of initiating behavior if they are both aware of and have incentive to reach out to Latino students, as well as other under-represented or marginalized students. As such, administrative leaders on campus should look for ways to incentive and reward faculty members to be available at orientation and to gain the knowledge and skill necessary to initiate effectively validating and affirming behavior at the very beginning of each student’s career.

Advising Matters

While professors are fundamental to the process of developing a sense of belonging for Latino students, faculty may change from semester to semester depending on the students’ courses. However, it is the academic advisor who is the anchor that provides both an initial academic contact and continuity for the student. In this study, the academic advisor was one of the primary sources of interaction with faculty that was frequently addressed by the Latino students. It is clear from the findings of this study that the Latino students desired a strong relationship with their advisor, and that they
desired for that relationship to commence at the onset of their college experience. Therefore, it is essential that Latino students have early and regular contact with an advisor who maintains an on-going affirming relationship with each student. This strategy requires that campuses structure academic advising in an intentional and purposeful manner. This approach requires great care in planning ways to structure advising in this manner and providing resources to ensure that high quality advising occurs in a manner that builds relationships as much as it provides technical assistance in the necessary tasks of developing a program of study and choosing appropriate courses each semester.

Despite the need for greater planning and coordination of advising services, the decentralized model of advising, embraced by 39 percent of private four-year institutions such as NCC, assign an academic advisor to the student based upon his declared major (Pardee, 2004). This advisor is chosen for the student by the department chair in order to equalize the load of advisees for each faculty member within a particular department. In addition, while advising for new students is frequently conducted prior to the beginning of the academic year, faculty often do not participate due to contract dates, and this leaves an institution with the function of advising and registration without a full cohort of advisors present. Since department chairs and other academic administrators are available and have knowledge of the academic requirements, they are commonly used at institutions such as NCC to fill in for the permanent advisor until the students register for their spring semester courses. While this model may work for the faculty and accommodate existing schedules, it does a disservice to the Latino students who are best served by a single faculty advisor from the outset of their academic experience with
whom they can develop an affirming relationship. Therefore, college administrators and faculty members must think of advising in terms of both function and relationship building. The function of getting first year students efficiently enrolled in their classes is important, but the Latino students voiced that it was the relationship that mattered most. Without the relationship, choosing classes was seen as at best perfunctory and at worst, the source of many marginalizing interactions. The Latino students voiced dissatisfaction over “not meeting with their real advisor” during orientation and having to “go on a goose-chase” to figure out who their advisor was when it was time to register for the spring semester. Academic advising matters to Latino students and institutions need to set policies that support the advising relationship. College administrators and department chairs can select a cohort of faculty advisors within each department who are trained to work with Latino students and are available to advise Latino students on orientation dates. College administrators and department chairs can do this by incentivizing faculty effort to be better and more active mentors and advisors. These should include being present for academic advising during orientation dates and by making advising part of the academic culture through including academic advising evaluations as part of faculty members’ tenure and promotion review process.

Institutional Cultural Competence Matters

Up until the last 40 years, the majority of students enrolled on American college campuses were fairly homogeneous and concepts such as culture, race and ethnicity played a very limited role in how teaching and learning were conducted (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). In addition, in terms of student services, most theoretical models (e.g. Tinto, 1975; Astin, 1977) that have guided administrators and staff were developed
around a predominantly white, male student body (Berger, 2000; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). However, the current profile of today’s college campuses is very different. From 1995-2005, minority college enrollment rose by 50 percent, while in the same ten year time frame, White students saw an increase of only 8 percent (Ryu, 2008). As of 2008, students of color make up 29 percent of the college campus. The current college experience is unlike the experience of the majority of faculty and staff when they attended college. In addition, many White students and students of color have had limited interaction with each other due to the demographics of suburban and urban school districts. Lack of awareness and a society with a racist history and on-going institutionalized racism make it doubly important that this current gap is narrowed.

The Latino students in this study cited many examples of marginalizing interaction, including those based on lack of information about Latino culture and negative assumptions concerning a Latino student’s learning ability, which indicated a lack of cultural competence. While this study focused primarily on faculty interaction, research supports the need for administrators in all areas of campus to communicate that institutional cultural competence is a necessity and to require training for all employees to best serve and educate a diverse body of students (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Initiated in the field of counseling and healthcare, cultural competency has its roots in understanding that cultural differences exist, being aware of one’s attitudes concerning difference, knowing specifics about the population one is serving and being able to deliver services cross-culturally in an effective manner (Pedersen, 1988). Starting at the top of the organizational structure, presidents and top level administration need to set the tone by being a part of the cultural competency initiative. In addition, institutional
strategic planning needs to incorporate cultural competence as a standard in all areas of planning as colleges need to be filled with faculty and staff trained and equipped to serve and teach a diverse student body. Indeed, campuses need to engage in on-going planning to strategically develop processes that improve the campus racial climate for all students (Hurtado et al, 1998; Williams et al, 2005).

**Ties to Family and Pre-College Community Matter**

This study found that the majority of the Latino students retained strong ties to their family and wider pre-college community, and they cited their family as either a primary or a significant source of support in their persistence. This finding was true whether the Latino students resided on or off campus. In an age where college administrators speak of the current “Millenials” attending college and their “helicopter parents” hovering (Strauss & Howe, 2000), college personnel need to recognize that keeping the family connection strong and maintaining family support for the Latino student’s goals truly matters for the persistence of Latino students. As Chapter 4 illustrated, there is often a disconnect between new Latino students and the college environment, and the barrier can be even more formidable for their parents. Unlike other White middle-class parents who have attended college, these Latino parents have not. Many of the Latino parents in this study had not completed high school, only one mother had taken some college courses, and none had graduated from college. As a result, there is a significant perceptual divide between them and the college experience. While the Latino parents may fully support their sons’ and daughters’ aspirations to attend college, college is not an environment they have themselves experienced. In addition, the Latino parents are fluent in Spanish; however, there is a wide range in terms of ability to
communicate in English. Educational agencies at all levels – federal, state, local school districts, and college campuses – need to provide better outreach that engages with students, particularly those who are first-generation college students, so that these families can be better equipped to provide the support that is so important for these students. In addition, leaders at college campuses need to seek out ways to establish welcoming connections with the Latino parents and to sustain healthy ties between the Latino students and their families before and throughout the students’ college career.

**Early Pre-College Involvement Matters**

The findings in this study indicate that all of the students in this study had a high degree of collegiate self-efficacy, which is defined as the belief that one is capable of earning a college degree. Only 25 percent of Latino students aged 18-24 enrolled in college in 2006 (Ryu, 2008), and this continues to be the lowest participation rate for all minority groups. However, the Latino students in this study firmly believed they were capable of earning a college degree. Unlike the other sources of support comprised of a sense of belonging on campus or of family support, collegiate self-efficacy was present for every Latino student in the study. This support resulted from influences in the pre-college environment, both in the home and the school.

While much research is still needed, it is clear from the analysis of the data in this study that the pre-college environment is the primary area where collegiate self-efficacy is formed. Tinto (1993) uses the term goal commitment to refer to the student’s personal education and occupational goals. The stronger the goal commitment, the harder the student is willing to work to achieve that goal. While Tinto’s theory is related, it does not provide insight as to how a student, especially a Latino student, develops the belief that
he can accomplish that goal. Determining effective ways to broaden the Latino students’ ideas about college is important. Many Latino students may not have even thought about attending college, let alone entertained the idea that they could successfully complete a college degree. Institutional efforts to present college as an achievable option are a vital step for developing collegiate self-efficacy, and the earlier the better. The Latino students who had the strongest degree of collegiate self-efficacy in this study spoke about the importance of education and the idea of college from an early age. Early awareness of the importance of education developed into collegiate self-efficacy, which led toward the Latino students’ college application process. In addition to efforts focused only on the Latino student, initiatives by colleges to integrate the Latino parents into the conversation are important as well.

**Practice**

The five areas identified as a result of this study are clearly important to the persistence of Latino students on college campuses today. Colleges have the responsibility to align their organizational structure and practices in accordance with these identified findings. In order to accomplish these initiatives, this section will identify action steps to implement the identified policies.

**Faculty Contact**

**Extended Orientation and First Year Seminars**

As noted earlier, it is imperative that colleges develop policies that promote early and on-going affirming engagement between faculty and Latino students. Orientations provide one way to welcome students to the campus and to introduce them to the history, traditions, educational programs and student life of the college (Dungy, 2003); while also
potentially providing initial interaction between students and faculty. New student programs also allow students to become familiar with other students and to begin navigating their surroundings. The presence and participation of First Year Seminar faculty at this initial stage of transition is imperative since this is a time when Latino students are making early connections to the campus. To accomplish this, First Year Seminar Faculty, made up of faculty members from a variety of departments, should be present for move-in day of the new student orientation and participate with the new students in a one-day off-site First Year trip. For Latino students who may have very little knowledge of the college environment, connections with faculty are valuable moments to initiate faculty interaction both inside and outside of the classroom. These early social interactions provide important opportunities for First Year Seminar faculty and students to learn about each other in a relaxed setting even before the classes begin. In addition, as part of extended orientation, the First Year professors and the Student Service Staff, should jointly develop sessions on the living and learning connection at the campus, which will focus on academic expectations and the opportunities available for student learning and engagement with faculty. These sessions should be held at regular intervals throughout the fall semester as part of the First Year Seminar Program.

A required First Year Seminar program that is developed and taught by full-time faculty and student service administrators around a particular college-wide umbrella theme is useful for developing the sought after faculty and student engagement. In First Year Seminars, “college knowledge” and academic integration is coupled with the idea that college students are individuals and want to be recognized as such (Porter & Swing, 2006). These seminars provide intentional movement from initial faculty contacts to
affirming relationships with Latino students through sustained faculty engagement (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

**Classroom Interaction**

Classroom settings provide natural opportunities for faculty to engage with Latino students. The data from this study demonstrate that some of the most affirming and some of the most marginalizing experiences reported by the Latino students in this study occurred in the classroom. Therefore, faculty need to build an atmosphere of openness in their classrooms and make an effort to get to know the backgrounds of their students. This open atmosphere leads to feelings of safety or trust for Latino students who may be nervous navigating the unfamiliar terrain of college classes or who may be embarrassed to speak due to an accent or lower level of English proficiency. Through supportive classroom exchanges about academic subject matter, professors can create additional opportunities for interaction outside of the classroom as well.

**Out of Classroom Interaction**

It is well documented that out-of-classroom interactions between faculty and students are essential to persistence (Astin, 1989; Tinto, 1993). Hence, faculty need to develop opportunities for out of classroom interaction with Latino students. In class, professors need to make all students know about their office location, office hours and best ways to contact them outside of class. Faculty invitations for students to take advantage of office hours and other feedback requesting to speak individually with students can create an expectation that communication with all students is expected and welcomed. These actions will enable a Latino student, who may be reticent to talk to a professor, to feel more comfortable in seeking out a professor. Professors are tasked with
multiple responsibilities and time is a precious commodity. However, it is vital for professors to think about how best to use their current forms of student contact to maximize affirming interactions with Latino students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Advising

Early Relationship Building

According to the National Academic Advising Association’s stated purpose of academic advising, “Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes” (NACADA, 2006). To accomplish even a small measure of the stated objectives, a supportive relationship with an individual faculty member is important. For Latino students, it is even more critical that this relationship begins early due to Latino students’ common unfamiliarity with the college academic requirements, campus environment, and availability of support services. Faculty advisors need to be available to meet with students during the new student orientation to establish a relationship with the advisee. The relationship establishes that the advisor is not only there for the student in terms of academics and course selection, but also as a portal to the campus. The long-term advising relationship will be most successful if the advisor thinks about ways to build structured opportunities to talk freely about both academic issues and life issues the students may be dealing with. In addition, advisors need to plan validating opportunities that will foster affirming relationships with Latino students and enable the Latino students to make additional connections with others.
on campus. These various connections will facilitate a stronger sense of belonging to the campus as a whole for the Latino students.

**Training**

Faculty advisors who work specifically with Latino students must receive adequate training to be aware of some of the cultural and linguistic issues facing their advisees. Knowledge of specific support services for this population, such as the multicultural office, the tutoring center, and specific Latino campus and community organizations, are useful in helping Latino students establish early cultural connections and academic assistance to maximize a strong start. While all college faculty and staff need a functional level of cultural competence, faculty advisors need to be skilled in cultural competence with a particular familiarity of Latino culture. The advisor also needs to have a level of competence that enables him to function as an advocate for the Latino students when needed in an unfamiliar and sometimes marginalizing campus environment.

**Institutional Cultural Competence**

**Faculty and Advisors**

As discussed earlier, cultural competency is based on the ideas of having cultural awareness about one’s own culture as well as other cultures, having cultural knowledge about specific populations, and being able to deliver services cross-culturally in an effective manner (Pedersen, 1988; Pope et al, 2004). Colleges need to be filled with faculty and staff trained and equipped to serve and teach a diverse student body because each interaction matters. In particular, since relationships with faculty and advisors play such an important role in developing a Latino student’s sense of belonging to the campus,
professors must be trained in having an awareness that Latino culture differs from mainstream dominant culture, a knowledge of Latino cultures, values and traditions, as well as the realization that diversity exists within cultural groups, and finally, the skills to teach and advise diverse students effectively. Cultural competence can help professors to select classroom materials and to integrate texts that reflect and embrace diversity as well. Competence in this area also helps to create an inclusive learning environment where difference is welcomed and valued, which will then lead to increased interaction outside of the classroom and the building of affirming relationships as Latino students come to know that the faculty and advisors are available to serve them well in their educational journeys.

**Staff and Administration**

As Latino students sometimes live on campus or simply have multiple interactions with any number of staff and administrators on campus through the course of the day, these college personnel need to participate in annual training of cultural competency so that the multitude of people who make up a campus, from the campus security guard to the assistant in the financial aid office, can interact in appropriate and supportive ways with students from a variety of backgrounds. Annual training should also incorporate setting up and annually reviewing action plans for each area of campus to establish benchmarks that campus offices can use to measure goals and to work together to provide best practices.

**Student Leaders**

Peer-to-peer interactions are essential to student persistence (Tinto, 1993). Student leaders also play an important role on campus as they negotiate between the level
of student and staff at an institution. Student leaders are campus agents that both protect and project the values of the campus. As such, campus leaders also require annual cultural competency training to be able to translate those competency skills into effective residence hall environments, campus programming and other student interactions that are supportive and inclusive to Latino students.

**Ties to Family and Pre-College Community**

**Bilingual Communication**

Since many Latino parents speak Spanish as their native language, institutional information in the form of letters and website information should be made available to parents in Spanish. Once a Latino student declares on the college interest card or on the application that Spanish is the family’s first language, the student’s record can be flagged to include bilingual copies of institutional communication, including communication from administrative offices such as admissions, financial aid and student accounts. Large events created through the student service offices, such as new student orientation and “Family Weekend” need to have bilingual flyers or invitations printed. In addition, these key offices need to have Spanish speaking staff available to adequately answer questions in such common areas as financial aid and student accounts. These bilingual contacts should be published widely in Spanish on the office websites and in introductory brochures and materials. These initiatives should not be the sole responsibility of the multicultural affairs office, but a joint effort by all college offices to integrate bilingual and bicultural information and activities that will foster strong ties with Latino families.
**Academic Connections**

In many Latino cultures, parents have great respect for teachers, and therefore, a Latino parent’s personal contact with professors will increase the likelihood of success as a result of the parent emphasizing the educator’s regard for the student as well as the educator’s authority (Roll & Irwin, 2008). However, this is difficult in an institutional environment that protects the rights of the individual students through the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act regulations (FERPA, 1974). As a result, information about the student’s academic progress cannot be disclosed to parents without a signed waiver from the student. Offices that work closely with Latino students need to set up FERPA waiver forms and provide bilingual information that ensures both Latino parent and student have knowledge of their rights and available options for decision-making. This communication will help facilitate additional culturally appropriate academic support for the Latino student.

**Early Pre-College Involvement**

**Bridge Programs**

Colleges need to develop innovative bridge programs along the lines of the Step Forward/Step Ahead/ and Quest initiatives created at Elms College. The programs offer long-term, year-round programming, including academic enrichment, fine arts, college-level courses and professional internships for nearly 200 middle and high school students from more than twenty urban and underserved schools in the Western Massachusetts region. The program focuses on developing the students’ inner belief that they have the potential to succeed and to graduate from college. According to the mission of the program, it is all about the student living up to the title of scholar. Students join the
programs thanks to external motivators such as college admissions incentives and scholarships, but eventually the desire to achieve becomes internalized. Innovative bridge programs like this, as well as the federally funded Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO programs, afford many middle school and high school Latino students early opportunities to learn about preparation for and success in college. The Gear Up program, funded through the U.S. Department of Education awards grants to the states to develop partnerships between low-resource schools and colleges. The TRIO program is an umbrella organization for eight federal programs that awards grants directly to colleges and other community organizations. Quality bridge programs provide disadvantaged middle through high school students with college preparation training that can lead to more Latino students entering the pipeline to be successful in college.

**Senior Year Enrollment in College Course**

Another way to build college awareness and collegiate self-efficacy is through college programs that give urban area high school seniors the opportunity to enroll in a college level course, which effectively provides many Latino students with a small taste of the college academic experience. Free of tuition cost, this program provides ways for Latino students to get dual credit because the course counts toward high school graduation and is also applicable toward a college degree. Most importantly, seniors taking a free introductory college course facilitate Latino students gaining the confidence to succeed in college and provide the added incentive to apply to the college that offered the free course. While there is limited research on this type of program at present, other related research has examined programs where low-income students enroll in specially
designed hybrid high school and college programs (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). These programs, like the senior year enrollment in a college course, help to build the students’ confidence in their ability to be successful handling college-level work.

**Faculty and Campus Staff Partnerships with Urban Middle and High Schools**

Colleges need to create programs that will engage middle school and high school students in interesting topics associated around college faculty members’ areas of expertise. By partnering with an area urban school, college faculty can provide special speakers and lessons for diverse students that can be integrated into the classroom. The presence of college professors in the school or the presence of middle school and high school students on the college campus provide engaging opportunities where students can be successful learners which increases their awareness of college possibilities, raises their confidence in being able to succeed academically, and begins their thinking about career aspirations.

In addition to faculty, bilingual college admission counselors and financial aid staff need to meet Latino students and parents early in the college search process. By providing oral and written information in Spanish, Latino families begin to view college as more accessible both in terms of knowledge about the application process and in terms of the perception of a welcoming campus environment. The results of this study inform both policy at the institutional level and the practical steps needed to be carried out to implement the policy. The findings of this study resulted in five areas college administrators may find helpful as they consider how best to support Latino students in their persistence of a college degree.
Suggestions for Future Research

While there are many related areas to address in terms of future research, including the possibility of listening for other voices such as gendered voices, personally there are three main areas that I suggest would be helpful for future research based on the results of this study. The targeted areas are: 1) Determine if the findings from this study hold true with a larger sample and in different contexts; 2) Learn more about how collegiate self-efficacy forms in Latino students and how educators can impact that development; and 3) Understand better how campuses can strengthen family support for Latino students.

Additional Studies with Larger Sample Sizes

This study, informed by both an ethnographic and phenomenological approach, was conducted at a small, urban public college located in the Northeast. Since it was designed as a qualitative study to give an in-depth understanding of the Latino participants’ journeys of their persistence in college, the study had only seven participants and it was limited to one institution. Further research is necessary to see if the findings from this study would hold true if conducted with a larger sample of Latino students. Additional studies that should be pursued in the future include multi-institutional studies to see if similar findings hold true over more than one institution or institution type. In addition, it would be useful to know if the findings hold true in other types of colleges such as large research institutions, selective liberal arts colleges or community college. Moreover, there is great diversity in the term Latino, and this study’s participants were primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican, which is representative of the population near NCC. By conducting the study in a different geographical area of
the United States, the racial and ethnic composition of localized Latino populations may differ, which could help in our understanding of the transferability of the findings across the larger Latino population. The resulting additional information gained through a wider range of institution types and Latino populations would help campus leaders better tailor effective support programs for Latino students. Using the findings from this study to create a survey for use in quantitative studies would enable us to broaden the body of literature concerning sources of persistence for Latino students in college.

**Studying Collegiate Self-Efficacy**

All of the Latino students in this study possessed collegiate self-efficacy – a belief that they could persevere and overcome obstacles in the face of challenges that might otherwise deter their goal of earning a college degree. This concept extends Tinto’s notions of goal and institutional commitment, because it focuses on the student’s belief in themselves and their abilities to act in ways that will help them to achieve the goal, above and beyond merely aspiring to do so. However, major questions remain over how that belief in one’s ability to persist to degree completion is formed. This study along with previous related scholarship, such as the various studies (e.g. Berger & Milem, 1999; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979) that use Tinto’s (1993) concepts of goal and institutional commitment do not shed light on how the students develop these types of internalized beliefs, commitments and goals. With additional understanding of the developmental process of collegiate self-efficacy, it would enable educators to know how to impact the development of this important source of persistence for Latino students.
Studying How Colleges Can Encourage Latino Parent Support for Students

One of the three main sources of support for persisting Latino students was their families. Therefore an important part of supporting Latino students in their pursuit of a college degree is to create ways for the students to maintain ties with their families and pre-college environment even after they begin their college career. For the majority of Latino students in the study, their families were a major source of support for them as they persisted. Through phone calls, frequent visits home, or even living at home, the Latino students talked about their strong ties with families. However, never did the Latino students in this study mention their families attending campus events or feeling welcomed on campus. Opportunities for Latino family involvement need to be established. Rather than college administrators creating one-time token or marketing events, a bilingual needs assessment survey will help in understanding the interests of Latino parents and best ways to maintain connections between home and student.

Conclusion

As noted in Chapter One, the findings of this study clearly provide additional knowledge regarding how Latino students perceive interaction with faculty and how affirming relationships with faculty can develop Latino students’ sense of belonging. In addition, the study identified three main support sources for Latino student persistence, which included family support, collegiate self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging to the campus. While not all three sources were present for each student, all of the persisting Latino students had collegiate self-efficacy and either strong ties to the campus or strong family support. This study has presented five recommendations for policy and practice based upon the findings of this study, for campus leaders to address.
the low number of Latino students persisting in their college journeys. While there is still much to learn from additional research, this we do know – campus policy and practice matters and can play a critical role in helping to develop and maintain these sources of support for Latino students.
CULTURAL IDENTITY

Daniel has been nurtured by both of his Puerto Rican parents, and that love within his family has been a foundation of his identity. His parents met in a church in Massachusetts, but they made the decision to move back to Puerto Rico for Daniel’s birth. Having their son know his language and culture was very important to them.

Well they wanted me to born in Puerto Rico. It’s like it’s a big deal to them. (D-1, 1:29)

And they wanted my first language to be Spanish and grow up and learn the culture before I learned coming back over here. (D-1, 1:36)

His parents also believed that being bilingual was important. His family lived in Puerto Rico until Daniel was starting fifth grade and his younger sister was about to start school. At that point they made the move to Massachusetts.

I was pretty good writing and reading in Spanish, they just wanted like for us to learn a new language, learn a new culture. That was always their thing. They were like, “Once you master Spanish, then I’m going to take you to learn in the United States so you can learn the language.” (D-1, 10:23)

VIEWS ON EDUCATION

Daniel’s parents both completed high school in Puerto Rico, but family obligations took over. His father finished high school in Puerto Rico and came to New England to work.

[He] started working at tobacco fields and stuff. He finished high school and he had like one year of college, I think, and then he dropped out to keep working so… (D-1, 2:59)

Daniel’s mother finished high school in Puerto Rico, met her husband and started a family. She is currently beginning a college degree part-time at a local community college, while she works full-time at a local non-profit agency.

From the start, Daniel did not like going to school because it meant separation from his family. With a smile, Daniel recalls:
I remember hating going to school. I hated it so much that my mom would have to buy little stars and make happy faces for every day on the calendar. If I went a whole week without crying when I went to school, she would buy me a toy every weekend. *(D-1, 3:46)*

I would run after the car when they would drop me off. I would run home. *(D-1, 4:06)*

I was a mama’s boy. I was so close to her. I still am, but I am still very close to my parents, but back then I was so attached *(D-1, 4:28)*

He did well in school, but he felt the separation acutely.

I just felt lonely. Yeah, I just felt lonely in school. I was always with my dad. Like watching TV, or hanging out, or he would just take me out to the beach or whatever. And I go to school I didn’t really care for anybody there. I just felt homesick. And it [school] wasn’t hard. I was pretty good at it always. *(D-1, 6:38)*

In third grade, Daniel was skinny and had visions of wanting to change that. He wanted to be like Popeye, so in his mind, spinach was the key. His parents caught on and used that to motivate him in his school work.

Oh, it [education] was a priority. My dad would always bug me and they still do. They—I wanted to be like Popeye when I was little so my dad bought spinach and he said I could eat it after I did my homework. I hated it. 
[Laughter] *(D-1, 8:27)*

And so he always like set little goals for me so I can just keep doing whatever I needed to do. Spinach...yuck! *(D-1, 8:43)*

When Daniel moved to Massachusetts in fifth grade, he faced new challenges.

I was terrified. And I really wasn’t like the type of kid to like talk or have a lot of friends in school. I was interested in learning English so I would actually want to go to school. *(D-1, 11:18)*

The different classroom cultural norms also had to be mastered.

I couldn’t communicate with anybody. But it was scary. I did get into a lot of trouble too. Because it’s different, the rules are very different. *(D-1, 11:59)*

In whatever you do during the classroom, there is certain—it’s very different culture wise. Different schools and different rules, and I would do things that I
The confusion and lack of understanding were an issue. Daniel found that he got into trouble as a result of not understanding both the spoken English and the implicit classroom norms. He came to count on one particular teacher during that time. Although she was a substitute teacher, as a Spanish speaker, she was integral to helping him make the transition.

... it was the Spanish teacher that was actually--she was a substitute teacher. And she was always around so we would just ask her if you know we can't understand. (D-1, 13:36)

Because the Spanish speaking substitute was the one who helped him, and he could count on her for direction, he began to think of her as his teacher rather than the classroom teacher. Referring to the substitute working with him and another Latino, Daniel relates:

She did a lot of things. I would have her usually for in the classroom and she would come and tell us what to do and we would kind of get different assignments. (D-1, 14:42)

When asked about his relationship with the regular teacher, Daniel makes it clear that his real teacher was the one who had a relationship with him. His value for the teacher was based on his relationship with her. Speaking about the regular classroom teacher, Daniel stated, “I didn’t really look at her as a teacher. Because she wasn’t the one teaching me” (D-1, 15:05).

Daniel developed socially as his language skills grew. He described his high school experience in extremely positive terms.

It was so fun and everything. I always did my work, so I wasn’t slacking but it was always so much to do and so much life at all times. I was always pretty popular in high school, so I went from being the kid who like nobody talked to, to being real popular. (D-1, 19:31)

It was cool. I had a hot girlfriend in high school, so that was a plus. (D-1, 20:07)

Daniel did well as he balanced the social and the academic realms, and his parents had confidence in his ability to be successful with his schoolwork.

I felt like I was mature for my age and I was always on top of things. I remember like I never got an F in high school and I was always, always--I graduated--my last report card was a 4.0. So they knew that I went out and I had fun, but I would always get my stuff done. (D-1, 21:44)
Academically, relationships with teachers and other students continued to be important to Daniel. The best classes were the ones in which he formed a social bond with those around him. For example, his Social Studies teacher had the class join a community walk to fundraise for cancer research. He described another of his favorite teachers as: “being like an older brother” (D-1, 23:13). When speaking of a psychology teacher who was also his advisor, he recalled how he would “talk to us so you always felt like there was somebody who cared about how you were doing” (D-1, 27:30).

The interaction with teachers, as shown in the terms referencing his concept of family, was important for Daniel. It helped him to do better in the classes and to enjoy them more.

During classes, certain teachers that actually made a difference or people like that. I had a teacher who would always start out the class talking about whatever world events happened during the week. And that just made a closer bond. Everybody starts talking and everybody gets to know each other. So it was more like a family oriented type class. (D-1, 43:30)

It brings people together and you realize that you have more in common than you thought, so that was cool. (D-1, 43:53)

In contrast, there were teachers who “just talked about whatever they were teaching and as soon as that bell rings, ‘Bye. I don’t want to see you again’” (D-1, 43:53).

Teachers who simply wanted to present the academic material without building a relationship with the students were viewed negatively by Daniel.

**EXPECTATIONS TO ATTEND COLLEGE**

Daniel will be the first in his family to earn a college degree. His parents always told him from when he was very young that he “needed to do high school and then four years of ‘extra school’”. (D-1, 29:12) “It was never, ever a choice,” recalled Daniel (D-1, 29:27). “I was going to do four years minimum and then I could do whatever I want.” (D-1, 29:27) “My dad always made it very clear, ‘You’re going to do it!’” (D-1, 29:55) It was “always understood from the get-go that I was going to college.” (D-1, 44:52)

Even while Daniel’s family moved back to Puerto Rico for his junior year of high school, his mother was busy educating herself about the college application process. When they returned to Massachusetts during his senior year, his mother pushed him to complete the process.

It’s always my mom. Always, I remember ever since I started high school, before I even heard about it from any teachers, like my mom was talking about filling out financial aid and all that crazy stuff ... trying to figure it out for
herself before the time came so when my junior year hit, she started helping me fill out applications. I was still in Puerto Rico in my junior year, but I took my SAT very early and she was always on top of things. *(D-1, 35:05)*

Even if it required taking out loans or attending part-time, the expectation for college never wavered.

*Once I came over here, ... my parents were just like “We got to do it no matter what. So even if you have to take out loans and stuff or do it little by little, somehow you are going to have to do it.”* *(D-1, 40:22)*

Daniel decided to apply to colleges where he could live at home. When he came to campus on a tour, he met a professor who would later come to mean a great deal to him, and so he chose this campus.

**INTERACTIONS WITH COLLEGE PROFESSORS**

Daniel expected his college professors “to be like high school teachers, but they weren’t” *(D-2, 0:49).*

*High school teachers were always after you to get stuff done and always reminding you. “Oh, you need this and I haven’t got this from you, blah, blah.” College, you just kind of do what you got to do or fall behind. They don’t keep up with you at all. Unless you ask them, like unless you go to their office and ask them what you are missing and what not. Then they will tell you, but you are kind of on your own.* *(D-2, 0:56)*

College professors expected students to be much more responsible in terms of keeping up with their assignments. For a first-generation college student, this was a whole new expectation.

**Validation - Positive Experiences:**

Similar to high school, in college Daniel was particularly drawn to professors who knew him and took an interest in him. One of the earliest was his First Year Seminar professor. Daniel describes him as a “father figure type guy” *(D-2, 1:45).*

*I clicked with him right away and he always kept up with us. Every student in the classroom, he was always involved in their personal life. Like he’ll ask you how you are doing. Every week he would come up to you after class or like most of us, not all of us. But he will keep up with us through email or phone numbers. He’ll call us. Find out what was going on in our lives or whatever. So he was always very involved and once we finished the class I was really attached to him.* *(D-2, 2:00)*
That professor has maintained a relationship with Daniel to this day, even though Daniel is now a junior.

I actually got my first work study job with him and ever since then we kind of like kept cool. So now I’m still working in work study with him and I visit his house. I know his wife, his kids, because he was just that kind of guy. So that was the best, really good. (D-2, 2:00)

Daniel realized that the relationship with this professor was very unusual, but he still divides up professors into two categories:

Like there are teachers that are there because they want to get a paycheck, and there are professors who actually care. And go out of their way to make you kind of succeed in the class. (D-2, 3:02)

The way you are treated--you feel like a family environment in the classroom when they act that way. And when they just throw the work at you and they’re like, “Here this is what you got to do. Figure it out.” Then you know, that’s not the same kind of relationship. (D-2, 3:42)

Those who actually know the students are perceived by Daniel to be the better professors. Daniel also found that he usually did better in those classes.

Definitely, I mean every class that I had for professors like that I would always like do very good, like always A’s or A minus. I never really got anything lower than that and all the classes that were just you know, just regular, then I would kind of get lower grades. Not low, but you know it was lower than the usual. (D-2, 4:06)

He not only earned better grades in the more interactive classes, but also he felt like he was learning more in that type of classroom environment.

I wouldn’t say easier because in those courses I found we did more work. We were just motivated a lot stronger, but we did a lot more work. We would go out of our way to go to speeches and you know, the auditorium and stuff that we didn’t have to go to. But we would do to it just so we would have something to talk about in class and kind of figure everything out. But we would have a lot of things to do. Most of our work came from those classes. (D-2, 4:44)

Daniel recalled another example with a psychology professor who knew her students and involved them in classroom discussion:
She [the professor] is always like getting groups involved and kind of talking to us individually. She calls us all by name, things like, “Daniel, what do you think about this?” In that class I’m pretty open. *(D-2, 33:20)*

And it kind of helps attendance wise-- I want to go to class. Even if I am sick I’ll try to get up and go to that class. If I just feel like skipping I’ll just go. I don’t know. I like that class. *(D-2, 34:09)*

When Daniel feels like he has a relationship with the professor, he makes the effort to attend and to be prepared. Daniel also feels like it is the professors’ role to be encouraging and to try and motivate the students.

They are supposed to kind of keep you going. They are teachers and professors. But they kind of do the opposite a lot of times. *(D-3, 10:49)*

Daniel recounted an earlier experience where a professor asked him if he would be interested in tutoring other students.

It’s just good that somebody notices that work is being done. Or my effort and it’s not just to boost my ego it’s just--you just kind of want to feel that my work is paying off. *(D-3, 13:55)*

He felt good that his effort and work were acknowledged by the professor. That was important to him.

As a result of knowing how much more Daniel enjoyed the classes with extensive interaction, he sought out professors who were more interactive and more interested in their students when it was time to select classes.

*My English teacher I took I think two courses with her. Two courses with the professor from the first year seminar. I ended up taking computer classes with him.* *(D-2, 7:17)*

Daniel has learned that communication with faculty members is a two-way street. He will email if he knows he will be missing a class, and he will also email “if [he is] confused about an assignment” or “falling behind for any reason” *(D-2, 14:25)*. He will also walk into their office “if [he] couldn’t email them or get a hold of them” *(D-2, 14:25)*.

*Validation - Negative Experiences:*

However, not all interactions with faculty members have been positive. He also had a couple of professors in his major with whom he did not feel comfortable talking. He recounted his feelings when he entered one professor’s office.
For example, I have a couple professors, psychology professors, I feel so uncomfortable with them when I walk into their office. I just feel like--I feel like she doesn’t want me there. I feel like she just, “duke get your stuff together and then get out” (D-2, 12:34).

Her facial--her facial expressions. Things that she asks you like she’ll ask, “Oh, so did you do the assignment?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I did it.” “Okay, when did you do it?” And I was like, “Ah, three days ago.” “Oh, I assigned it a week ago.” I’m like, “Yeah, how many days is there in a week.” Like it’s seven days and that’s three days ago. I think that is reasonable. So I don’t know. She starts questioning you and she’ll look at you funny and you’re like--I don’t know. I hate when people look at me and kind of like ask as if I am irresponsible for any certain like tiny reason. I don’t know. It’s just weird to me. But I don’t know. It’s just weird. Like certain things that she does or maybe it is just her. I don’t know. (D-2, 12:54)

From this incident, Daniel felt that he was being judged by the professor as irresponsible. Daniel tried to figure out if his uncomfortable feelings were legitimate.

Daniel feels judged in the same way when an email for help elicits an unhelpful response, and what he perceives to be a negative assumption that he has skipped the reading.

Like sometimes they’ll just give me like a page number. Something like that and just tell me to look it up or some teachers just explain it. Like it’s very basic to explain things. I don’t know why they feel the need to make me go back and read it when I just read it and didn’t understand it. (D-2, 16:36)

He contrasts that negative experience with another professor. In this instance, Daniel emailed a Biology professor to let him know he was having some difficulty.

Like I had a biology professor. He would always tell me to come in. (D-2, 16:36)

Well it just made a difference because he wasn’t being a jerk. Like he told me to come into his office and he’ll stay there until I understood it. (D-2, 17:20)

In the first case, Daniel was told to read the textbook when he said he didn’t understand a concept, and Daniel felt as if the teacher assumed he had never read it in the first place. In the second case, the teacher who asked Daniel to come in to his office was felt by Daniel to have been more interested in him and in his understanding the material.

Daniel again contrasts the positive and negative validation given by professors.
I’ve had professors that tell me that, oh, you’re gonna go very far in life and you are going to be very successful and your character is strong -- they compliment you and then I have professors who look at you as if you were lazy and irresponsible and it’s all I guess, it’s all perspective. But yeah, I’ve had a lot of professors tell me-- give me positive feedback. And make me feel like I’m gonna go far. More of those, even if they don’t communicate with me a lot like they will let me know some way. Even if it’s just writing on the back of a paper I just got back like “It’s very good or …” (D-2, 37:55)

Daniel acknowledges that perception plays a part. In terms of positive feedback that makes him feel successful, he cites actual words spoken or written by the professor and how they give him hope for his future accomplishments. In terms of negative feedback, it often involves an interpretation of a professor’s actions or words. The student feels misunderstood by the professor. The personal relationship, which is so desired by Daniel, is absent and the perceived negative judgment builds a wall which keeps that from changing.

In another negative instance, Daniel relates how a professor gave an assignment to the class to write about their study habits. The professor followed up with verbal criticism about how “everybody did horrible” (D-3, 16:04). In the examples the professor cited as she addressed the class, Daniel felt that he was being targeted.

I knew it [the professor’s comments] was aimed at me like certain papers, I wrote like one class two weeks ago. I turned in a paper. The teacher asked us for this whole explanation of our study habits and stuff, right? So I explained all my study habits and I was brutally honest. I told everything, like I’m just being honest. So anyways she goes in front of the classroom, “Everybody did horrible.” Like she’s just going on about like how nobody answered her question. You know, everybody kind of did. It’s just they articulated on their bad habits and how they want to improve them more than their positive habits. But anyways, she starts talking. She’s like, “I don’t want to hear about how you get distracted and start searching the web and blah, blah” and I was like, “Okay.” (D-3, 16:04)

Like she always does that and I don’t know what she has against me. I personally don’t think she has anything against me but it’s just weird how she always picks on my work. It’s usually her class, like I don’t have a problem like any problems in any other classes. I always get great grades in English when it comes to writing. I was in AP classes and stuff. Why is she picking on me? (D-3, 17:29)

While these examples given by the professor could very easily have applied to many students in the class, Daniel took them personally. Unless Daniel feels known by the
professor and believes he has a relationship with him or her, it is more prevalent for Daniel to perceive that he is being singled out for criticism or in his words, “picked on.” It is clear that Daniel thrives on relationships in a classroom. In classes where the professor does not build a personal relationship with students, not only is Daniel more likely to feel criticized, he is also more likely to disengage from the class itself. In a three-hour class where the instructor has them listen to a full musical and then “just talks out into the room”, Daniel spends his time texting (D-2, 30:47). He shares that, “I just sit there and let time pass” (D-2, 31:21). This disengagement within the classroom leads to a lack of motivation to attend and to give his best effort.

The consequences of Daniel being in classes where the professors do not have an interactive style are quite negative for Daniel both in terms of grades and motivation to continue. Daniel has begun to recognize his need for a certain type of professor.

“I’ve always been the kind of student to like pay attention to every single detail. But I kind of need a professor that kind of talks as--like this professors that kind of like go around the class and look at you in your eyes while they are talking to you and then go on to the next person. That’s cool because you got to pay attention because if not, you get caught. (D-2, 32:21)

Daniel has had quite a few professors lately who do not build interaction into the class, and he is feeling a great lack of motivation for continuing his studies. Daniel shares his feelings in the following:

Every single class I have this semester is just kind of like just speaking to like open and whoever is listening catch that you know. I don’t like that. Honestly that’s why I feel kind of disappointed with school right now. (D-2, 32:21)

The dissatisfaction then leads to his lack of interest and motivation in classes.

It makes it so boring and like un--it makes me unmotivated. Like very, very unmotivated. (D-2, 32:00)

BELONGING

After attending the college for over two years, Daniel does not have a sense that he is a part of things on campus. He recognizes that being a commuter may play a part in that.

I feel like I’m just there. I don’t feel like I’m a part of any specific group. I just come in, you know, do what I have to do. Maybe it’s because I’m a commuter that I feel like I’m just like invisible, but that’s kind of how I feel. (D-3, 3:29)

Just feels like if you’re not staying on campus, you’re kind of like a phantom. You just move around. Nobody realizes that you’re there or you’re a student here. They just think you hang out here for some reason. (D-3, 4:25)
In terms of belonging, Daniel could name very few places where he felt comfortable. He shared, “If there is a thirty minute break between classes, I’ll fly home” (D-2, 18:21). “I just try and find any excuse to go home” (D-2, 18:30) “I think that’s just my comfort zone” (D-2, 19:01).

Daniel clearly looks at home as an escape or a retreat from college. He is not involved in any social groups; however, Daniel is searching for a deeper sense of belonging with his professors and in the classroom. He wants to feel that he is no longer “invisible.” The campus environment is an uncomfortable place to be unless he receives ongoing support from relationships within faculty.

Most of my positive experiences with this school have came from Warren, my First Year Seminar professor, and the other teachers I’ve mentioned in the past. And they just--they kind of like motivate you and keep telling you that life goes on and if you stumble, you mess up, you got to pick yourself back up and just keep doing it. Like it’s gonna suck at times. And that just kind of motivates you I mean, reality of their conversations like they are just a slap in the face. And just wakes you up. (D-3, 9:27)

It all goes back to those kind of teachers that just follow along with whatever you are doing. And even though--like professors that are not your teachers anymore, but they still ask about you. They still want to find out what is going on in your life and stuff. (D-2, 37:55)

When Daniel feels that connection with his professors, he is motivated and feels a part of things even though he lives off campus. He believes professors should be more open to students, so that they feel at home and comfortable in their classes.

You can’t just assume this is what they [students] need. Kind of got to go out and figure out, “What is that you guys want to get out of thi?” The comfort, that feeling that you could be open and talk. It all comes down to comfort and being able to communicate without feeling like I don’t know. I just feel like a hostile environment in most of the classes from professors. (D-3, 32:28)

Daniel also expects to be known very well by his advisor. When asked what an advisor should know about him, he responded:

Everything, he’s my advisor! He should know everything, my background, my personal life, everything. The same thing--actually I feel like what Warren does, that’s what an advisor should do. (D-2, 45:34)

Daniel feels as if his advisor has not done a very good job. He strongly thinks a better advisor would have helped him to feel more a part of the campus socially by encouraging him to get involved in specific campus opportunities.
“What the hell!” I feel like [my advisor] should have been talking to me about tutoring, about getting involved in campus, about clubs, about Psi Chi. Like I just found out what that was! *(D-2, 49:07)*

Maybe, maybe socially. ... because socially I could have went to Italy and studied over there and just learned more about different cultures and get to know people and make friends over there. I could have got more involved in campus. I could have got even that Psi Chi group. I don’t know if I would have got into that, but it was an opportunity that you know, that I lost. *(D-2, 50:09)*

Daniel still has nearly two years yet until graduation. He speaks with a sense of anger and sadness about his advisor, and the professors he has had lately. In a sense, Daniel is still seeking the personal connections to professors that will make him feel more connected to campus.

**PERSISTENCE**

Daniel faces a choice these days. He is struggling and questioning the value of continuing college. In his own words, he is “stumbling a little bit right now” *(D-2, 52:06)*. Some evenings are spent arguing with his mother about why he should continue. He knows that his younger sister is watching him. He says, “I know she’s always following in my steps, so I have to make sure I don’t mess up. She looks up to me.” *(D-1, 33:52)*. In this realm, Daniel is not “invisible.”
Cultural Identity:

| 1:29 | D | Well they wanted me to be born in Puerto Rico. It’s like it’s a big deal to them. |
| 1:34 | JH | Yeah, so they wanted to start their family there. |
| 1:36 | D | And they wanted me to be Spanish and grow up and learn the culture before I learned coming back over here. |

| 10:23 | D | After I was like pretty much ahead in school and I knew like—I was pretty good writing and reading in Spanish, they just wanted like for us to learn a new language, learn a new culture. That was always their thing. They were like, “Once you guys master Spanish, then I’m going to take you guys to learn in the United States so you guys can learn the language.” So that’s what happened. We—my sister was five years old. She was about to start school. So we came over here and I was in the bilingual program for like two years and I just picked it up. I mean I picked it up pretty much the first year, but I wasn’t too confident. I didn’t talk. I was scared. I don’t know. |

Views on Education:

| 2:59 | D | My dad, he finished high school and came straight over here. Started working at like tobacco fields and stuff. He finished high school and he had like one year of college, I think and then he dropped out to keep working so… |
| 3:46 | D | I remember hating going to school. I hated it so much that my mom would have to like buy little stars and make happy faces for every day on the calendar. If I went a whole week without crying when I went to school, she would buy me a toy every weekend. |
| 4:06 | D | I would run after the car when they would drop me off. I would run home. |
| 4:28 | D | I was a mama’s boy. I was so close to her. I still am, but I am still very close to my parents, but back then I was so attached. And my dad had a soft heart so if I kept crying he wouldn’t send me to school. It was easier on him. |
| 6:38 | D | Not really, I just felt lonely. Yeah, I was just felt lonely in school. I was always with my dad. Like watching TV or hanging out or he would just take me out to the beach or whatever. And I go to school I didn’t really care for anybody there. I just felt homesick. And it wasn’t hard. I was pretty good at it always. |
| 8:27 | D | Oh, it [education] was a priority. My dad would always bug me and they still do. They—I wanted to be like Popeye when I was little so my dad bought spinach and he said I could eat it after I did my homework. I hated it. [Laughter] |
| 8:43 | D | And so he always like set little goals for me so I can just keep doing whatever I needed to do. Spinach…yuck! |
I was terrified. And I really wasn’t like the type of kid to like talk or have a lot of friends in school. I was real shy so I would kind of just hang out with like certain people like every once in a while and then coming over here, not knowing anybody and not being able to communicate. It felt--I mean--I don’t know. I was interested in learning English so I would actually want to go to school. It was a different experience. No uniforms. I was happy. I used to hate wearing uniforms.

I feel it is. I was--I couldn’t communicate with anybody. No teachers, nobody. There was a substitute teacher who would always help me out whenever I needed to go to the bathroom she’ll like ask for me and help. Or I will ask her. But it was scary. I did get into a lot of trouble too. Cuz it’s different, like the rules are very different.

In what way?

In like whatever you do during the classroom, like there is certain--it’s very different culture wise. Different schools and different rules and I would do things that I assume were okay and they weren’t. Or I would ask permission to do things that didn’t need to asked permission for. I don’t know. It was weird.

Yeah, it was the Spanish teacher that was actually--she was a substitute teacher. And she was always around so we would just ask her if you know we can’t understand. It was pretty funny because when I was moved to that school, um the same year my friend Christian from the school in Puerto Rico moved.

Oh yeah, that was-- had the substitute teacher lady. Well she was like the teacher helper/substitute. She did a lot of things. I would have her usually for in the classroom and she would come and tell us what to do and we would kind of sort of get different assignments.

Um, I don’t know. I didn’t really look at her as a teacher. Because she wasn’t the one teaching me.

It was so fun and everything. I always did my work so I wasn’t slacking but it was always so much to do and so much life at all times. That’s when you start making like social groups and stuff. I don’t know. It was cool. I was always like--I was always pretty popular in high school, so I went from being the kid who like nobody talked to, to being real popular. My girlfriend was like the head of the--what was it--she was the vice president or something like that of the class.

Like student council of her class, okay.

And I don’t know. She was doing not the cheerleading but pep rallies and all that stuff. It was cool. I had a hot girlfriend in high school, so that was a plus.

They were pretty comfortable. They were pretty comfortable because they knew at that point I was--I felt like I was mature for my
age and I was always on top of things. I remember like I never got an F in high school and I was always, always--I graduated--my last report card was a 4.0. So they knew that I went out and I had fun but I would always get my stuff done. It was college that messed me up.  

(Laughter)

(D-1)23:13 D Yeah. There was actually, oh man, what was his name? Mr. Niolary [ph]. He works at Sci Tech. He was my history teacher. My first history teacher in high school and he was just like--he was like an older brother. And he was always joking around. Like he would always do everything we needed to do in class when it came like MCAS stuff or any testing. When it came to history we had it all down pat. And everybody got good grades because he was just a fun teacher.

(D-1)27:30 D Right, right. Like student advisors, stuff like that. Like they would always make--they call us down for no reason during class and just talk to us so you always felt like there was somebody who cared about how you were doing. That’s always worked so…

(D-1)43:30 CC During classes, like certain teachers that actually like made a difference or like people like that. Like they would just--I had a teacher who would always start out the class talking about whatever world events happened during the week. And that just made like a closer bond. Everybody starts talking and everybody gets to know each other. So it was more like a family oriented type class. And that was always cool.

(D-1)43:53 CC Yeah, it was cool because it brings people together and you realize that you have more in common than you thought so that was cool. But the teachers that always--most of them were like that--they just talked about whatever they were teaching and as soon as that bell rings, “Bye. I don’t want to see you again.” It kind of sucked.  

[Laughter]

Expectations to Attend College:

(D-1)29:12 D Yeah, I didn’t even know what college was. But my parents would always tell me that I needed to do high school and then four years of “extra school”.

(D-1)29:27 D I didn’t understand what college was. I was still a kid, but they were, “You had better get used to it. You still got this much to do.” [Unintelligible] Once I was like a little older and they could explain it to me, they made me realize like, oh, you have to do college. There is no choice. Like it was never, ever a choice. I was going to do four years minimum and then I could do whatever I want.

(D-1)29:55 D Right. But my dad always made it very clear. “You’re going to do it.”
Not really. Like I always understood from the get-go that I was going to college.

It’s always my mom. Always, I remember ever since I started high school, before I even heard about it from any teachers, like my mom was talking about filling out financial aid and all that crazy stuff like just trying to figure it out for herself before the time came so when my junior year hit, she started like helping me fill out applications and I was already like—I think I took my SAT, no I’m lying. I’m lying. I was still in Puerto Rico in my junior year but like I took my SAT very early and like she was always on top of things. Even now she’s out of control with the financial aid.

So it was kind of like if the government can’t even afford school, so I’m probably not going to go to college. And I was upset a little bit because I was like, what am I going to do with my life? I’m not ready to go out and work right now and blah, blah. So I mean, it became a worry back then and that was one of the reasons why I moved back to finish. Financial Aid is a lot easier over here and stuff. Once I came over here, it was kind of like my parents were just like “We got to do it no matter what. So even if you have to take out loans and stuff or do it little by little, somehow you are going to have to do it.” I was going to end up going to STCC and I got a cool scholarship thanks to my mom.

Interactions with College Professors:

I expected them to be like high school teachers, but they weren’t…

Like high school teachers were always after you to get stuff done and always reminding you. Oh, you need this and I haven’t got this from you, blah, blah. College, you just kind of do what you got to do or fall behind. Like they don’t keep up with you at all. Unless you ask them, like unless you go to their office and ask them what you are missing and what not. Then they will tell you, but you are kind of on your own.

Um, well there is this guy. He was my like professor for first year seminar. His name was Warren. And he is awesome, like he was just like he was kind of like a father figure type guy.

So you know, I clicked with him right away and he always kept up with us. Like every student in the classroom he was always involved in their personal life. Like he’ll ask you how you are doing. Every week he would like come up to you after class or like most of us, not all of us. But like he will keep up with us through email or phone numbers. Like he’ll call us. Find out what was going on in our lives or whatever. So he was always very involved and once we finished the class I was really attached to him. Like he was a very cool guy. So I actually got my first work study job with him and ever since then we kind of like kept cool. So now I’m still working in work...
study with him and I visit his house. I know his wife, his kids, because he was just that kind of guy. So that was the best, really good.

Like there is teachers that--there’s professors that are there because they want to get a paycheck and there are professors who actually care. And go out of their way to make you like kind of succeed in the class or whatever.

The way you are treated--you feel like a family environment in the classroom when they act that way. And when they just like throw the work at you and they’re like, “Here this is what you got to do. Figure it out.” Then you know, that’s not the same kind of relationship.

Definitely, I mean every class that I had for professors like that I would always like do very good like always A’s or A minus. I never really got anything lower than that and all the classes that were just you know, just regular, then I would kind of get lower grades. Not low but you know it was lower than the usual.

I wouldn’t say easier because in those courses I found we did more work. We were just motivated a lot stronger, but we did a lot more work. We would go out of our way to go to speeches and you know, the auditorium and stuff that we didn’t have to go to. But we would do to it just so we would have something to talk about in class and kind of figure everything out. But we would have a lot of things to do. Most of our work came from those classes.

There’s one professor that still does that. That’s my Adolescent Psych. She is always like getting groups involved and kind of talking to us individually. She calls us all by name, things like, “Daniel, what do you think about this?” In that class I’m pretty like open. Funny guy there. (Person wearing school mascot costume walks by)

Yeah. And it kind of helps to like attendance wise--like I want to go to class even if I am sick I’ll try to get up and go to that class. If I just feel like skipping I’ll just go. I don’t know. I like that class.

I was really upset. I was like man, what kind of motivation is that? They are supposed to kind of keep you going. They are teachers and professors. But they kind of do the opposite a lot of times.

And it’s just like it’s not just about like self gratitude or I’m trying to like make myself feel better, but it’s just good that somebody notices that work is being done. Or my effort and it’s not just to boost my ego it’s just--you just kind of want to feel that my work is paying off.

My English teacher I took I think two courses with her. Two courses with the professor from the first year seminar. I ended up taking
computer classes with him. Sociology, I only needed one course so I didn’t really get too involved with that, but, yeah. It helps a lot.

**Validation**

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>(D-2)14:25</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>If I feel like I’m falling behind for any reason. If I feel like I’m confused about an assignment or anything I’ll approach a professor. Most likely, I’ll email them, but if I haven’t found--like for some reason I couldn’t email them or get a hold of them I’ll walk into their office at any time.</td>
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<td>(D-2)12:34</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>For example, well like I have a couple professors, psychology professors, I feel so uncomfortable with them when I walk into their office. I just feel like--I feel like she doesn’t want me there. I feel like she just, dude get your stuff together and then get out.</td>
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<td>12:50</td>
<td>JH</td>
<td>What’s she doing? What’s the body language that [Crosstalk].</td>
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<td>12:54</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Her facial--her facial expressions. Things that she asks you like she’ll ask, “Oh, so did you do the assignment?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I did it.” “Okay, when did you do it?” And I was like, “Ah, three days ago.” “Oh, I assigned it a week ago.” I’m like, “Yeah, how many days is there in a week.” Like it’s seven days and that’s three days ago. I think that is reasonable. So I don’t know. She starts questioning you and she’ll look at you funny and you’re like--I don’t know. I hate when people look at me and kind of like ask as if I am irresponsible for any certain like tiny reason. I don’t know. It’s just weird to me. But I don’t know. It’s just weird. Like certain things that she does or maybe it is just her. I don’t know. Maybe that’s [Crosstalk].</td>
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<td>(D-2)16:36</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Like sometimes they’ll just give me like a page number. Something like that and just tell me to look it up or some teachers just explain it. Like it’s very basic to explain things. I don’t know why they feel the need to make me go back and read it when I just read it and didn’t understand it. So it depends on the teacher, but they hardly ever tell me come in. Like I had a biology professor. He would always tell me to come in. So I would always come into his classroom.</td>
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<td>(D-2)17:20</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Well it just made a difference because he wasn’t being a jerk. Like he told me to come into his office and he’ll stay there until I understood it.</td>
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| (D-2)37:55 | D       | It all goes back to those kind of teachers that just follow along with whatever you are doing. And even though--like professors that are not your teachers anymore, but they still ask about you. They still want to find out what is going on in your life and stuff. That kind of stuff helps you out and people that tell you like I’ve had professors that tell me that, oh, you’re gonna go very far in life and you are going to be very successful and your character is strong characters--like they compliment you and then I have professors who look at you as if you were lazy and irresponsible and it’s all I guess it’s all perspective. But yeah, I’ve had a lot of professors tell me--give me positive feedback. And make me feel like I’m gonna go far. More of
those, even if they don’t communicate with me a lot like they will let me know some way. Even if it’s just writing on the back of a paper I just got back like “It’s very good or …”

| (D-3)16:04 | D | But in college it was more like very indirect but I knew it was aimed at me like certain papers if I wrote like one class two weeks ago. I turned in a paper. The teacher asked us for this whole like explanation of our study habits and stuff, right? So I explained all my study habits and I was brutally honest. It’s like I told everything, like I’m just being honest. So anyways she goes in front of the classroom, “Everybody did horrible.” She’s like, “I don’t want to hear about how you get distracted and start searching the web and blah, blah and I was like okay. Like…” |

| (D-3)17:29 | D | Like she always does that and I don’t know what she has against me like I personally don’t think she has anything against me but it’s just weird how she always picks on my work. But I don’t know. It’s usually her class, like I don’t have a problem like any problems in any other classes. I always get great grades in English when it comes to writing. I was in AP classes and stuff. Why is she picking on my? |

| (D-2)30:47 | D | No. He doesn’t really interact with the class like as individuals. He kind of just talks out into the room and … |

| (D-2)31:21 | D | I just sit there and let time pass. Like those classes like my music class where I usually turn off my brain and just listen to music. That’s all we do, we listen to music. We don’t even get exams or anything like that so… |

| (D-2)32:21 | D | I’ve always been the kind of student to like pay attention to every single detail. But I kind of need a professor that like kind of talks as--like this professors that kind of like go around the class and like look at you in your eyes while they are talking to you and then go on to the next person. That’s cool because it keeps you like you got to pay attention cuz if not, you get caught.. Like every single class I have this semester is just kind of like just speaking to like open and whoever is listening catch that you know. I don’t like that. Honestly that’s why I feel like kind of disappointed with school right now. |

| (D-2)32:00 | D | It makes it so boring and like un--it makes me unmotivated. Like very, very unmotivated. |

**Belonging:**

| (D-3)3:29 | D | I feel like I’m just there. I don’t feel like I’m a part of any specific group. I just come in, you know, do what I have to do. Maybe it’s because I’m a commuter that I feel like I’m just like invisible, but that’s kind of how I feel. |

| (D-3)4:25 | D | Just feels like if you’re not staying on campus, you’re kind of like a phantom. |
You just move around. Nobody like realizes that you’re there or you’re a student here. They just think you hang out here for some reason.

Driving I would say about 5 minutes. So as soon as I get the chance to go home, if there’s a 30 minute break between classes I’ll fly home.

So you always drive to campus?

Yes. I don’t know if I’m just bored here, but I just kind of when it comes to like lunchtime or whatever, sometimes I’ll come in and hide sometimes, I don’t know. I just go straight home and try to get a snack or something, just come back. Or get some rest. Change my clothes. I just try and find any excuse to go home.

Why do you think you do that?

I don’t know. I think that’s just my comfort zone. Like, I don’t know.

Most of my positive experiences with this school have came from Warren, my first Year Seminar teacher, the other teachers I’ve mentioned in the past. And they just—they kind of like motivate you and keep telling you that life goes on and if you stumble, you mess up, you got to pick yourself back up and just keep doing it. Like it’s gonna suck at times, but that’s like. And that just kind of motivates you I mean, reality of their conversations like they are just a slap in the face. And just wakes you up.

It all goes back to those kind of teachers that just follow along with whatever you are doing. And even though—like professors that are not your teachers anymore, but they still ask about you. They still want to find out what is going on in your life and stuff.

Yeah, like how are they trying to meet their needs? Like how do they know what their needs are? The first thing they need to find out, then try to meet them. Like it doesn’t just work like—you can’t just assume this is what they need. Kind of got to go out and figure out, “What is that you guys want to get out of this?” And not just academically, cuz I hate it when a professor asks that. “Oh, what do you want out of this class?” The comfort, that feeling that you could be open and talk. It all comes down to comfort and being able to communicate without feeling like, I don’t know. I just feel like a hostile environment in most of the classes from professors.

Everything, he’s my advisor! He should know everything, my background, my personal life, everything. The same thing—actually I feel like what Warren does, that’s what an advisor should do.

I’m like, “What the hell.” I feel like he should have been talking to me about tutoring, about getting involved in campus, about clubs, about Psi Chi. Like I just found out what that was!

Maybe, maybe socially. Because socially I could have went to Italy and studied over there and just learned more about different cultures.
and get to know people and make friends over there. I could have got more involved in campus. I could have got even that Psi Chi group. I don’t know if I would have got into that, but it was an opportunity that you know, that I lost.

Persistence:

| (D-2)952:06 | D | I feel like I’m kinda sort of like stumbling a little bit right now. |
| (D-2)33:52 | D | Cuz I know she’s always following in my steps so I have to make sure I don’t mess up. She looks up to me. Or at least not catch her, I mean not let her catch me messing up. |
Dear __________________________

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts School of Education. My doctoral program requires that I conduct a research project. I am asking that you participate in this project. The focus of the study is to learn about the relationship between faculty-student interaction and persistence towards a degree for Latino/a college students. It is my intent to use the results of this study for my doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.

Your participation will entail up to three interviews of about one hour each. The topics I will want to explore are the path that led you to college and your experiences as a college student with particular attention given to faculty-student interaction. With your permission, I will record the interviews; all copies will be erased and the files deleted after transcription.

In any of my writings, the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Joseph Berger, and the other two members of my dissertation committee will be the only persons, other than me, who will read the transcripts. I will do my utmost to protect your identity and that of your institution by giving you pseudonyms; however, there is a small risk that you may be identified as a participant in this study. I will use direct quotes from our interviews, but I will not use your name in any part of the dissertation or other publication. You have the right to review material prior to the oral exam for my dissertation.

I do not know of any other risk or personal discomfort from being in this study. It is my hope that you may personally benefit from the reflection process inherent in the interview process. This study will enable future researchers and educators to learn more about persistence toward a degree for Latino/a college students.

I appreciate your willingness to give your time to this project. If at any time during your participation in the study you wish to withdraw, you may do so with no negative consequences. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 413-265-2423 or to call my supervising professor at 413-545-3610.

Thank you,

Joyce Hampton
Doctoral Candidate, UMASS

The study has been explained to me, and I understand the conditions described above. I freely agree to participate.

__________________________  ____________________________
Participant’s Signature      Researcher’s Signature

__________________________  ____________________________
Date                        Date
BIBLIOGRAPHY


182


