

DISSERTATION

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE EXCEL PRE-COLLEGIATE PROGRAM AS AN
AVENUE OF SUCCESSFUL POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT FOR LATINA/O
STUDENTS

Submitted by

Cynthia Núñez Armendariz

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2017

Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Antonette Aragon

Sharon Anderson

Louise Jennings

Malcolm Scott

Copyright by Cynthia Núñez Armendariz 2017

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE EXCEL PRE-COLLEGIATE PROGRAM AS AN AVENUE OF SUCCESSFUL POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT FOR LATINA/O STUDENTS

College access and college enrollment rates are significantly lower for students of color, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation students (Reese, 2008). High schools, universities, and state and federal agencies have all recognized that the gap in college enrollment between students of color and their white counterparts is a major issue (Loza, 2003). High schools have implemented college prep classes and dual enrollment programs, universities have built bridge and precollege programs, and the federal government has implemented legislation and provided funding geared at closing the enrollment gap between students of color and white students (Reese, 2008). Even with the various forms of interventions, the issue of low postsecondary enrollment specific to students of color continues.

This study examines the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program, a precollege program offered through Metropolitan State University of Denver. In addition, the study explored how the participants' culture and background influenced their college-going and general educational experience. The study found that precollege programs are an important and needed opportunity for students to gain the skills and knowledge to successfully navigate the college application process and enroll in college. Precollege programs address many of the barriers and challenges that deter Latina/o students and students of color in general from attending higher education institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reach the end of this long journey of learning and growth, there are many people who I need to acknowledge and thank for the support and guidance they provided along the way. I could not have done it without you! A very special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Antonette Aragon; you believed in me and you encouraged me every step of the way, I appreciated your guidance and support. Also, thank you to my committee members, Dr. Sharon Anderson, Dr. Louis Jennings, and Dr. Malcom Scott, I appreciated your time and expertise.

This study would not have been possible without the support of Tan Bui and Luis Sandoval with the Office of Admission at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Thank you both; I appreciate the support and the time you gave to this study. Also, a very special thank you to the students who participated in this study; I appreciated your trust and openness to share your personal experiences as well as the barriers and challenges you encountered on your path to college.

To my cohort member and friend Dr. Angela Marquez, I am honored to have shared this journey with you! Thank you for being there for me through many years of laughter, tears, and frustration. I am honored to walk across the stage with you. Also, to my friend and colleague Michelle Pacheco, you encouraged me to apply to the program, you were there when I learned I was accepted to the program, and you have continued to support me every step of the way. I hope others are as blessed as I am to have friends like you!

DEDICATION

I would not be where I am today without the constant support, encouragement, and unconditional love of my family. This final stage of my educational journey is dedicated to my husband, Alex. Thank you for loving me through this, you are my rock. My parents, Catarino and Gloria, thank you for instilling in me the work ethic and determination to succeed. To David, Amanda, and Adriana: thank you for believing in me and putting up with me over the last few years. I appreciate your support...I'm done, we can all breathe now!

And to my loves: my children Julian and Ria, and my nephews and nieces who hold a very special place in my heart: David, Gabriela, Matthew, Sofia, Marco, Viviana, and Catalina. May your dreams reach further than you can see and may you have the courage to follow them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	III
DEDICATION.....	IV
DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	VIII
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Legislation.....	2
Precollege Programs	3
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	8
Delimitations.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Significance of Study.....	11
Researcher’s Perspective	12
Summary.....	14
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
Introduction.....	15
Precollege Program Research	17
Academic Preparation.....	21
College Awareness.....	23
Financial Support	28
Parental Encouragement and Involvement	29
Summary.....	33
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	35
Introduction.....	35
Purpose and Research Questions	35
Research Design	36
Participants	37
Precollege Program and University Setting.....	38
Data Collection	39
Participant Sample	39

Call for Participants	40
Introductory Meeting	42
Interviews.....	42
Data Analysis.....	44
Theoretical Framework.....	44
Latina/o Critical Race Theory in Education	46
Thematic Analysis	47
Trustworthiness.....	50
Summary.....	52
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	53
Introduction.....	53
The Participants	54
Cattleya	55
Enrique.....	56
Erick.....	58
Perla	59
Teresa.....	60
Ximena.....	62
Themes.....	63
College-going Experience.....	64
Program Support.....	71
School Experience	76
Summary.....	83
CHAPTER V: DISCCUSION	86
Introduction.....	86
Research Questions.....	86
Methodology and Theoretical Framework.....	87
Participants.....	889
Discussion of Findings	90
Findings in Relation to the Research Questions	91
Implications for Practice.....	104
Family	104
Diversity.....	105

Sharing of Knowledge	106
Recommendations for Future Research.....	108
Parents and Families	108
Transitioning from High School to College.....	1099
Researcher’s Perspective	110
Conclusion	111
REFERENCES	114
APPENDIX A: CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS LETTER	121
APPENDIX B: ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SHEET QUESTIONS	122
APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY	123
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	126

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms and definitions were used for the purpose of this study:

Barrier: The Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) defines barrier as “a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress” (para. 1.3). This study used barrier(s) to define obstacles or circumstances that diverted the students’ progression toward successful enrollment at a postsecondary institution.

College-going, College-going Information, and College-going Process: The steps students and families follow to enroll at a postsecondary institution. Such actions as: college entrance exams, college applications, financial aid/paying for college, and enrollment (i.e. orientation, placement tests, and registration).

First Generation Students: Students whose parents did not attend college are referred to as first generation students (Shelton, 2011). For the purpose of this study, students whose parents attended college, but did not complete as well as students whose parents completed an associate’s degree or higher are also referred to as first-generation students.

Latina/o: The 2010 Census Brief of the Hispanic population defined Hispanic or Latina/o as a “person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Minoritized: Individuals who identify with communities seen by society as “minority.” Such examples may include communities of race, religion, and sexual orientation. (Stewart, 2013; Verner, Chappell, & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013).

Precollege & Pre-Collegiate Programs: These types of programs are also referred to as early intervention programs. They are designed to assist in improving the academic and college readiness of underrepresented groups of students (Swail & Perna, 2002). Programs are provided

by several entities including federal and state government, higher education intuitions, and non-profit organizations (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Success: The Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) defined success as “the accomplishment of an aim or purpose” (para. 1). For the purpose of this study, success is defined as the accomplishment of a student enrolling at a postsecondary institution. For this study, success is specifically defined as enrolling at a four-year higher education institution.

Undocumented Students: Undocumented refers to individuals who are born outside of the U.S., not a legal citizen or legal resident, and do not possess a valid visa. Undocumented individuals are also referred to as someone who has no visa, no papers, illegal, and illegal alien. The term *undocumented students* is used throughout the study unless it is a direct reference to the literature. In addition, undocumented individuals cannot legally work in the U.S., they cannot obtain a social security card or a driver’s license, are not eligible to vote, and cannot receive state or federal financial aid (United We Dream, 2015a).

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

College access and college enrollment rates are significantly lower for students of color, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation students (Reese, 2008). High schools, universities, and state and federal agencies have all recognized that the gap in college enrollment between students of color and their white counterparts is a major issue (Loza, 2003). High schools have implemented college prep classes and dual enrollment programs; universities built bridge and precollege programs and the federal government implemented legislation and provided funding geared at closing the enrollment gap between students of color and white students (Reese, 2008).

Even with the various forms of interventions, the issue of low post-secondary enrollment specific to students of color continues. The 2012 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012), Digest of Education Statistics report found 37.5% of Hispanic students and 42.1% of white students aged 18-24 years enrolled in postsecondary institutions. These numbers are up from 2000 during which 21.7% of Hispanic students and 38.7% of white students enrolled (NCES, 2012). Latina/o students high school completion and post-secondary enrollment rates were not tracked till the 1970s. Since then, the opportunity gap in post-secondary enrollment rates of Latina/o students has continuously fell short (NCES, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

The enrollment rate for students of color—specifically Latina/o students—is not the only issue. The fact that more Latina/o students are enrolling at two-year community colleges may give us an idea of the under-preparedness of students and their lack of college-going information and knowledge. College-going Latina/o students enroll and graduate from two-year schools more than four-year schools. In 1999-2000, 9.3% of Latina/o students graduated from a two-

year school and 6.3% from a four-year institution (NCES, 2012). In the 2009-2010 academic year, 13.5% graduated from a two-year school and 8.8% from a four-year school (NCES, 2012). Although two-year schools are a great jumping off point for Latina/o students, the difference in the number of enrollment graduation rates of Latina/o and white students is in part due to Latina/o students not being properly prepared for college level courses and not understanding the college-going process (Broton, 2009). Politically, the ramifications from legislation also have an influence on Latina/o students' access and retention in higher education.

Legislation

Gaining access and transitioning to college can be a challenge for historically underserved students (Green, 2006). In recognition of these challenges federal, state, and local governing bodies instituted policies, practices, and programs to increase the number of underserved populations that pursue higher education (Green, 2006). In the 1960s, education was considered the domain of the local and state government; the federal government became involved due to the widespread issue of poverty and the connection between poverty and level of education (Grout, 2003).

One of the first major movements to combat poverty was the implementation of The Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, which also established the Office of Economic Opportunity (Grout, 2003). The Office of Economic Opportunity was charged with coordinating and administering programs to combat poverty and implement programs that specifically focused on students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Grout). The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided students financial assistance based on need; this bill was developed to increase resources to higher education institutions and provide financial assistance to students in the form of grants, low-interest loans, and federal work-study (Gelber, 2007). The Economic Opportunity

Act of 1964 provided the legislation and funding to open access to higher education and the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided financial support to assist students in paying for college (Gelber, 2007; Grout, 2003).

Much legislation throughout the years sought to increase access to postsecondary education for low-income underrepresented students. This study is focused on a specific section of that legislation, precollege programming. Since 1964, the number and types of precollege programs has increased dramatically (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997). Precollege programs are offered by the federal and state government; nonprofits and universities are also developing and implementing precollege programs (Fenske et al., 1997).

Precollege Programs

Precollege programs were developed with the goal of creating “opportunities for equal educational achievement and attainment for all citizens, regardless of race, sex, and socio-economic status...” (Fenske et al., 1997, p. 13). The low number of Latinas/os who enroll in college continues and the question of whether or not the precollege programs are meeting the needs of Latina/o students remains (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Research has shown pre-college outreach programs improve college access for underrepresented groups, including low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The most effective programs do this by promoting college awareness and attendance, improving academic skills, building student self-esteem, and providing role models (Perna, 2002). One study found such programs can nearly double the odds of college enrollment for moderate- to high-risk students (Borton, 2009).

There are various programs that provide college preparation and college-going services to students; included in this section is a description of a few programs including The Upward

Bound, Talent Search, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.a). Each of these examples are precollege, federally developed and funded programs designed specifically to address the enrollment opportunity gap of students of color and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (the focus of this study), was developed and funded by Metropolitan State University of Denver; its main goal was also embedded in closing the enrollment opportunity gap of underrepresented students of color.

Upward Bound Program. Upward Bound was the first precollege program developed through the Office of Economic Opportunity in the 1960s. Its first site was operational in 1965 (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). At that time, seventeen sites were offering the program and served 2,061 students (Groutt, 2003). Higher education institutions, public/private agencies, and community-based organizations with experience in serving disadvantaged youth are eligible to apply for funding and serve as an Upward Bound site (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.c).

By 2014, the number of Upward Bound programs had grown to 814 and served over 61,000 participants (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.c). The program was designed for low-income ninth through twelfth graders whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). The program was designed to engage "...participating students in an extensive, multi-year program designed to provide academic, counseling, and tutoring services along with a cultural enrichment component, all of which enhance their regular school program prior to entering college" (McElroy & Armesto, 1998, p. 375). The program's main goal was to "identify secondary school students from low-

income backgrounds who were underachieving, and to motivate and prepare them to pursue postsecondary education” (Groutt, 2003, p. 3).

Talent Search Program. The Talent Search Program was the second precollege program implemented under TRIO (Groutt, 2003). The program provides services that prepare low-income and first-generation students for college (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). It specifically targets students who display the potential for postsecondary success but need guidance through the college and financial aid process (Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, & Myers, 2006). The program serves students at their home school and provides programming in such areas as academic support, career development, and financial aid. Services are flexible and developed specifically to meet the needs of students (Constantin et al., 2006).

Higher education institutions, public/private agencies, and community-based organizations with experience in serving youth are eligible to apply for funding and provide Talent Search programming (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. n.d.b). In 2004, the program served approximately 382,000 students at 469 different locations (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. n.d.b). Over the past ten years, the number of students served and programs offered have remained rather consistent. In 2014, 410 programs in operation served a little over 310,000 students (United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. n.d.b).

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP). GEAR UP was created in 1998 to increase postsecondary access and completion (Muraskin, 2003). Students receive services in such areas as college-going information for students and parents, academic and social support for students, parent involvement, and creating a college-going culture at the schools (Muraskin, 2003). The GEAR UP grant provides services starting in

seventh grade through high school graduation (Muraskin, 2003). GEAR UP is unique in comparison to other federally funded programs in that it must serve schools in which at least 50% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch (Muraskin, 2003). Upward Bound and Talent Search do not have this type of requirement; Upward Bound may be offered at an affluent high school, but only serves students of color or first-generation students. GEAR UP is not selective in the students it serves and is open to any student who attends the school receiving services (Muraskin, 2003).

The first GEAR UP grants were awarded in 1999 to school districts, colleges, and state agencies (Muraskin, 2003). At that time, 164 sites were offering GEAR UP and were servicing approximately 100,000 students (Muraskin, 2003; United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.a). Since its inception, the number of sites has varied each year but the funding has remained relatively consistent at approximately \$300,000,000 each year. By 2004, the number of sites had increased to 317 serving approximately 1,483,763 students; in 2014, the number of sites had decreased due to a lack of funding, with 128 sites serving 551,000 students (Muraskin, 2003; United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, n.d.a).

Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. This study focused on the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (EPCP), which is rooted in the mission and goals of such programs as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and GEAR UP. In addition, being that the program primarily serves Latina/o a student, programming was implemented that specifically addressed this population's diverse needs.

The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program was developed to create a pipeline of diverse high school students to MSU Denver by building long-term relationships and offering admission

services on site at diverse high schools (Excel Programs, 2012). The mission of the program is to expand and enhance the pool of academically qualified diverse students for higher education by providing support and guidance to students who aspire to enter higher education and demonstrate the potential to succeed (Excel Programs).

The program was launched in spring 2010 in schools in Adams and Brighton Colorado school districts (Excel Programs, 2012). These districts were specifically selected due to the diversity in population, especially in terms of the growth of Latina/o students and due to the lack of pre-collegiate programs (Excel Programs, 2012). The high schools served: Adams City High School, Brighton High School, Northglenn High School, Prairie View High School, Thornton High School, and Westminster High School (Excel Programs, 2012).

The programming, structure, and goals were focused to reach and serve students, parents, and the high school staff and faculty members. The specific goals of the program were to:

- Assist **students** in reaching their higher education goals by providing assistance with college applications, financial aid, and scholarships,
- Increase **parent** awareness of higher education options and encourage involvement in their student's education. Parents and/or guardians are provided general information regarding higher education, how they can support their students through the college process, and resources on how to pay for college, and
- Enhance the **school's** college-going culture. Support staff and high school to increase opportunities for students to gain knowledge of college-going processes and options (Excel Programs, 2012).

The EPCP is not targeted. This means the program is not limited in whom it serves; all seniors at the high schools served were eligible to participate. The program services were

focused on high school seniors; the participants did not have to apply or enroll at MSU Denver to participate. The goal was to support the student to apply and enroll at a higher education institution, even if MSU Denver was not their institution of choice. In program year 2013-2014, over 1,100 students participated in the program (Excel Programs, 2014).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The study examined the students' perspective of the barriers they encountered on their path to college, and how their experiences supported them to overcome those barriers and successfully enroll in college. In addition, the study also explored how the participants' diverse cultural backgrounds influenced their college-going and general PK-12 experiences. I interviewed Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program and used Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to analyze the experiences of the students in this program. The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program and its services are of particular interest to me because not only was I closely involved in the program, but also because I personally experienced similar struggles and challenges of the Latina/o participants pursuing higher education.

Throughout this study, "college-going," "college-going information," and "college-going process" are defined as: the steps students and families follow in order to enroll at a postsecondary institution. Such actions as: college entrance exams, college applications, financial aid/paying for college, and enrollment (i.e. orientation, placement tests, and registration). The study was guided by the following central research and sub-research questions.

The central research questions are:

1. What were the college-going experiences of the Latina/o students that participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program?
2. Did the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program contribute to the Latina/o students' successful enrollment in college?

Sub-questions:

3. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their school experience?
4. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their college-going experience?

Delimitations

The participants in this study were male and female Latina/o students who participated in the EPCP during their senior year at one of the participating high schools in Adams County and are currently enrolled at MSU Denver. MSU Denver was founded in 1965 and educates over 23,000 students (About MSU Denver, n.d.). The school is an urban comprehensive university offering bachelor's and master's degrees on the Auraria Campus in downtown Denver (About MSU Denver, n.d.). MSU Denver provides an array of majors, minors, certificate programs, and custom-degree options to meet the needs and interests of its students (About MSU Denver, n.d.).

I utilized the following delimitations to guide in the selection of participants:

- Focused on participants who are currently enrolled at MSU Denver.
- Participant must have participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program his/her senior year of high school.

- Participant self-identified on the MSU Denver admissions application as Hispanic, Latina/o, or Spanish Origin (as defined in the MSU application).
- Participant self-identified as a first-generation college student.
- Participant attended and graduated from a high school that participates in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program.
- Participant has completed at least 24 credits of their postsecondary education.

Students who met these guidelines were sent an introductory email with information on the study, why he/she was selected as a potential participant, and included further guidance on participation. This served as a first level screening of participants; second level screening dove deeper into the student’s background, focusing on such areas as first generation, language, and residency. Completing a first and second screening will provide for a diverse group of participants.

Limitations

The study focused on the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The results were limited to the participants’ experiences in the precollege program and interpretation of their experience. Each participant is an expert in his/her own experience, the participant provided the researcher an understanding of how he/she experienced the phenomenon through his/her words and stories (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The experiences of the students selected were theirs alone. Although students may have commonalities with other participants, this study did not attempt to generalize to the greater population (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

Time and memory of the participants experience is a limitation, as the participants selected were in their second, third, or fourth year of postsecondary education. The participants

may have not recalled specific or important issues or events. Another limitation that was considered was the nature of the campus. MSU Denver is a commuter campus; students do not often hang out on campus. As a result, all efforts were made by the researcher to ensure the interview and meeting times were in the best interest of the student both in terms of time and location.

It is important to be aware of the limitation that may be researcher bias. At the time of the study, I worked in the field of higher education; I also led the development and implementation of the precollege program that was the focus of this study. I am also a Latina, first generation student who may have encountered many of the same struggles and challenges as the participants. As someone who has faced these barriers first hand, I wanted to help this program be successful and to positively support students on their path to higher education.

Significance of Study

Precollege programs are a mechanism to develop the connection, transition, and partnership between postsecondary and secondary schools (Swail & Perna, 2002). These partnerships are crucial in beginning to close the opportunity gaps between Latina/o and white students' enrollment rates at higher education institutions (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Research by Volle and Federico (1997) and Turner, Garcia, Nora, and Rendon (1996) suggest poverty, welfare participation/low SES, poor quality of elementary and secondary education, first-generation status, parental divorce/single parent home, absence of college-educated role models, and lack of commitment to educational goals are all factors that hinder student postsecondary enrollment and completion of a college degree.

Specific to Latina/o students, Rodriguez (2002) found family income, parents' involvement in their child's education, and parents' own educational backgrounds are indicators

of academic achievement and aspirations. For Latina/o students', familial responsibilities play a large part in their success. If students receive support and encouragement from family members, they are likely to continue in their educational pursuits (Nora, 2004). A rigorous high school curriculum is one of the most important predictors of college matriculation (Adelman, 1999) and it is also an indicator of college retention and completion. At-risk students are oftentimes not as prepared and may require remedial courses, which in turn delays graduation, and is a predictor for attrition (Chen & Carroll, 2005).

Precollege programs address many of the noted barriers that deter Latina/o students and students of color in general from attending higher education institutions. The question remains: if the services and programming offered through the EPCP specifically to Latina/o students is meeting their needs and providing them the skills and knowledge to successfully enroll in college. In addition, how did the students' backgrounds and cultures influence their college-going and general education process? This study focused on this issue and expanded the research regarding Latina/o students and precollege programming. The hope was this research would provide best practices, provide practitioners information on what is/is not working, and aid in the development of precollege programs that support Latina/o participants.

Researcher's Perspective

My father migrated to this county over 35 years ago; he worked in the fields and traveled to different parts of the country for work. He has worked hard all his life to provide for his wife, children, and his family in Mexico. My father never had the opportunity to carry out his dream of being a teacher. From a young age, I can remember my father telling us "in this country education is everything, without it you will end up like me." My parents have always been

supportive of me in every decision I have made to further my education. I am the first in my family to earn a bachelor's degree, a master's, and soon a doctorate.

I know how fortunate I am to be at this point in my life, and just like the students I serve through the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (EPCP) I had to figure it out on my own. Not because my parents did not support me, but because they did not know how to help me. I still remember a high school educator telling me I would not be accepted to any four-year schools; telling me I was only good enough for a community college. Since that day more than twenty years ago, I have made it my top priority to go as far as possible with my education and not to let that individual or anyone else stand in my way. As I reflect on this educator's deficit educational perspective, my feelings of hurt and anger have dissipated and I have silently thanked myself for pushing to prove him and my own self-doubts wrong. I often wonder how many other students he may have deterred from their goals and dreams. Because of the struggles and challenges I had to overcome, I have made it my life's work to support students through the college-going process in hopes of making their path to higher education not only a reality, but to make their path less challenging.

I believe that the base of precollege work is in educating students and parents on education and the college-going process. I am Latina, a first-generation college student, Spanish is my first language, my parents were not knowledgeable on the college-going process and were not able to provide support, my family did not have the financial resources for college, and I did not receive support from my secondary school or counselor. I did these things on my own. I grew up in a small farming town with little resources toward postsecondary advancement; there were no precollege programs or college advisors. I did the research and I was able to navigate

the system. I discovered I am similar to the students I work with; I identified with their struggle and determination to succeed.

Throughout the study, I was honest and upfront and I accurately represented the participants' experiences. My relatability was twofold; I believe I built connections with the participants of my study and fostered trust and openness because of our similarities. I also recognized I must monitor my subjectivity as this is a study of "their" experiences and although they may be similar in some forms to my own, there are likely differences as well. Therefore, I took extra effort to ensure I provided participants the space to openly share their story and experiences.

Summary

Low college enrollment is an issue for underserved students, and although there has been a push at the federal, state, and institution level to address this issue, it persists (Reese, 2008; Loza, 2003). The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program is only one of many precollege programs developed to increase post-secondary enrollment rates of students of color, in particular Latina/o students. This study provided the Latina/o program participants an opportunity to share their experiences in the program, and provided insight into how the program supported them in successfully navigating the college-going process and ultimately enrolling at MSU Denver. In addition, the study focused on the students' diverse background and how it influenced their college-going and general education experience.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Accessing higher education for many students is often a long confusing path; pre-college programs aim to support students through this process. Chapter Two begins by providing a brief overview of the Latina/o population, followed by an overview of the two major precollege studies conducted in 2000 & 2010. These studies sought to first determine how many and the types of precollege programs that were operating at the time and also the components and/or programming of these programs that supported their success in increasing the enrollment numbers of low-income, underrepresented, and underprepared students.

In order to understand the issues Latina/os face in accessing postsecondary education, it is important to understand who this population is and how these individuals may identify. Latina/os are the fastest growing minority group in the United States and 16.3% of the population identified as Latina/o in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). There are a vast number of ethnicities grouped under the term Latina/o and/or Hispanic, some of which include individuals who identify as: Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, Costa Rican, Argentinean, and Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). “The Hispanic population accounted for over half the growth of the total population in the United States between 2000 to 2010” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, p. 15). These growth rates are not slowing down, and the importance of having an educated Latina/o population increases. Reports related to occupations suggested the majority of new jobs available will require some type of higher education; the higher earning positions will require the most education (Hecker, 2005).

Approximately 50,000 to 60,000 undocumented students graduate high school each year in the U.S. (Passel, 2006). The undocumented status carries additional issues and barriers in

pursuing higher education. Being that Latina/os comprise a large majority of the undocumented population in the U.S., it is important to include discussion of this population. Undocumented students are a growing population in the U.S., and attending a higher education institution becomes even more complicated due to their status (Muñoz, 2013).

Educators are struggling to provide the proper services and resources for this population of students as they are unfamiliar in terms of the students' rights and resources available. In the education sector, the undocumented student is entitled access to a free public PK-12 education due to the ruling in the 1982 Supreme Court case of Plyler vs. Doe (1982). It is not required by immigration law to verify a student's status; PK-12 schools cannot ask the question of status and most of the staff and teachers are not aware of a student's status unless the student self-discloses (Plyler v. Doe, 1982). Every child in a public PK-12 school must be educated despite their immigration status.

Eighteen states have moved forward state legislation in support of offering instate tuition to undocumented students who meet specific criteria (DEEP, 2015). There are many states that currently have some type of legislation in support of in-state tuition for undocumented students, but there are also states that have legislation barring instate tuition and access to post-secondary education for these students (Martinez, Unterreiner, Aragon, & Kellerman, 2014; Muñoz, 2013). The lack of financial resources is a continued issue for undocumented students (Martinez et al., 2014; Muñoz, 2013). Undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid, although there are currently six states (Washington, California, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Minnesota) which provide state aid to undocumented students (DEEP).

Precollege Program Research

Precollege programs are "...educational interventions designed to smooth the path to higher education for students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education, including poor students, minority students, and first-generation college-goers" (Domina, 2009, p. 127). "By encouraging students to set their sights on higher education, these programs attempt to engage students in their high school educations and improve their chances of enrolling and graduating from college" (Domina, 2009, p. 127). Gaining access and transitioning to college can be a challenge for historically underserved students. In recognition of these challenges federal, state, and local governing bodies instituted policies, practices, and programs to increase the number of underserved populations that pursue higher education (Green, 2006).

Precollege programs were developed in the 1960s with the goal of closing college enrollment gaps and increasing academic preparation of underserved students (Contreras, 2011; Grout, 2003; Loza, 2003). High schools, universities, and state and federal agencies have all recognized the gap in college enrollment between students of color and their white counterparts is a major issue (Loza, 2003). High schools have implemented college prep classes and dual enrollment programs; universities built bridge and precollege programs and the federal government implemented legislation and provided funding geared at closing the enrollment gap between students of color and white students (Reese, 2008).

Yosso and Solórzano (2006) illustrated the disparity in enrollment and completion rates of Latina/o students by providing the following graphic which was developed from data gathered from the U. S. Census Bureau, National center for Educational Statistics, and the National Survey on Earned Doctorates.

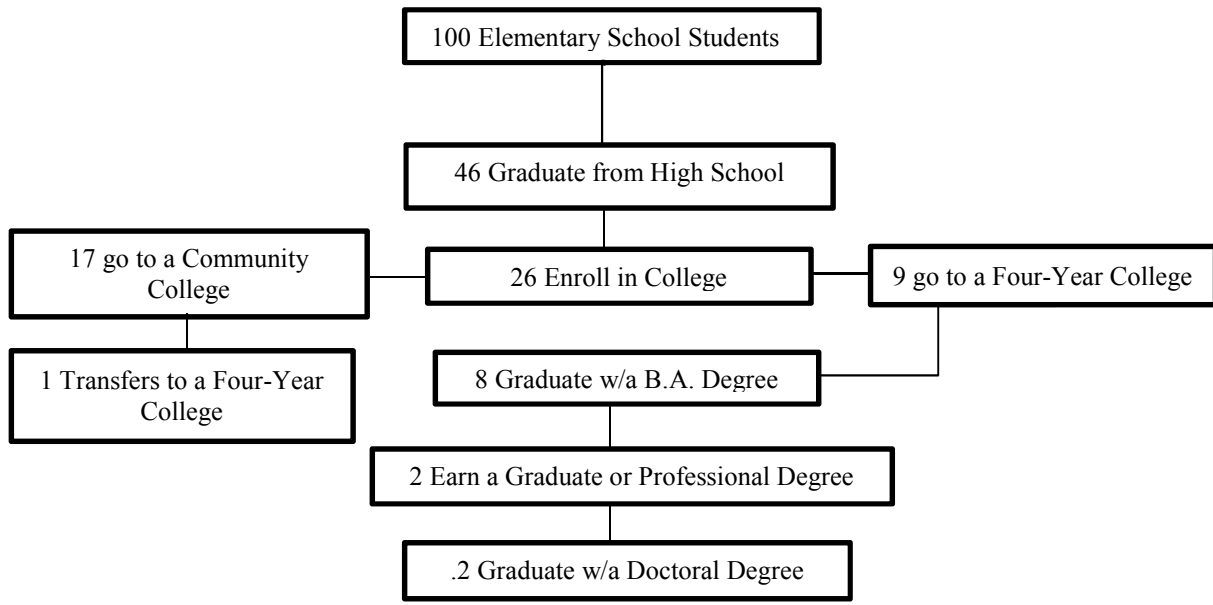


Figure 1: Latino Educational Pipeline

Figure 1 begins by taking a group of 100 Latino/a elementary school students and mapping their higher education outcomes. Of the 100 elementary students, only 46 will graduate from high school. Of the 46 high school graduates, 17 will enroll at a community college and nine at a four-year institution. Of the 17 who enroll at a community college, only one will transfer to a four-year college to pursue a bachelor's degree. Of the nine who enrolled at a four-year institution, eight will graduate with a bachelor's degree. Of the eight who graduate, only two will go on to pursue and earn a graduate degree and only .2 of those students will complete a doctorate. From this figure, we can see persistence and completion issues are not only at the college level, but beginning in PK-12. The availability of precollege programming whether academic or non-academic based will provide students an opportunity to see themselves in college and begin to shape their goals and dreams.

There are few studies focused on precollege programs, even fewer focused on programs designed specifically for Latina/o students. At the time of this study, there had been three major

national surveys of college outreach programs conducted. The first survey was developed by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 1995 and was used to gather information from colleges and universities that offered precollege programs designed to increase access for educationally and economically disadvantaged students (Chaney, Lewis, & Farris, 1995). Data was collected from both two and four-year institutions; the following provides highlights from the study.

- One-third of all institutions offered at least one program for pre-collegiate students.
- The goal most institutions identified for their program was to increase the likelihood that students will attend college.
- The majority of precollege programs served high school students.
- Over half of the programs reported funding from the federal government
- The services provided included social skills development, information about college admissions and/or financial aid, supplemental courses, and career counseling.
- The majority of programs were focused on serving low income, first generation students of color.

Precollege programs offered by higher education institutions not only provided support that economically disadvantaged students needed to successfully enroll in college, but they also helped to increase enrollment numbers at institutions (Chaney et. al. 1995).

The 2000 national survey expanded on the 1994 survey; it was developed by Dr. Watson Swail, and supported by the College Board (Perna, 2002). This particular survey went beyond colleges and universities to include any entity providing precollege services, approximately 1,100 programs responded to the survey (Perna, 2002). In 2010, a third survey based on the 2000 survey was administered, 347 programs responded (Fung & Swail, 2011). Both surveys

yielded the same core goals and characteristics of programs that targeted low-income, underrepresented, first generation students (Fung & Swail, 2011; Perna, 2002).

From the 2000 survey, Perna (2002) identified eleven important components for precollege programs to successfully increase college enrollment for low-income, underrepresented students of color, first generation, and underprepared students. Only 6% of the programs surveyed in 2000 offered all eleven components. The components were:

1. Goal of college attendance
2. Goal of college awareness or college exposure
3. College tours, visits, and fairs
4. Goal of promoting academic skills
5. Goal of promoting rigorous course taking
6. Parental involvement
7. Parent college awareness
8. Parent assistance with financial aid forms and involvement in student activities
9. SAT and ACT training
10. Tuition reimbursement or scholarship
11. Intervention by 8th grade

In addition to these components, the 2010 survey found the following components were added to curriculums of programs that focused on low-income students of color (Fung & Swail, 2011):

12. Programming focused on increasing the likelihood of completing college
13. Social skills development/confidence
14. Career counseling

The following section breaks down the fourteen components from the 2000 and 2010 surveys that were found to be curriculum areas that improved enrollment rates for low-income, underrepresented, underprepared students. Academic preparation, college awareness, financial support, and parental encouragement and involvement were the four major categories of focus.

Academic Preparation

This overarching category encompasses the components of: rigorous course taking, improved academic skills, SAT/ACT training, college attendance, and increasing the likelihood of completing college. For programs that focused on academic achievement, improving academic preparation was their top priority. In contrast, programs whose targeted population was low-income, underrepresented students of color and first-generation students' academic skills was the third or fourth goal (Perna, 2002). This contrast may be in part why the number of students attending non-selective institutions like community colleges is higher than more selective institutions. This is a major issue for this population as a rigorous high school curriculum and the availability of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses is an indicator of college enrollment (Adelman, 1999; Perna, 2002).

In 2012, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), reported a high school dropout rate of 12.7% among Latina/os aged 16 to 24 in comparison to white students of the same age who had a dropout rate of 4.3%. Also in 2012 NCES, the Digest of Education Statistics report found for 18 to 24 years old, 37.5% of Hispanic students and 42.1% of white students enrolled in postsecondary institutions. This disparity in dropout and enrollment rates for Latina/o students compared to white students is in large part due to the students' secondary education. The majority of Latina/os attend urban high schools which traditionally serve low income underrepresented students. These high schools lack resources in terms of funding, staff,

and extra-curricular activities which engage and promote learning for students. In order to increase the number of college-going Latinas/os, high schools need to evaluate and adjust their curriculum, college-going culture, and educator and counseling services (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004)

A rigorous high school curriculum is one of the most important predictors of college matriculation; unfortunately, there are many schools that are unable to offer opportunities for students to participate in a college preparatory curriculum (Adelman, 1999). Many states in the U.S. have evaluated their practices and instituting changes, particularly in the area of college preparatory services (Ewell, Jones, & Kelly, 2003; Green, 2006). There are major challenges for underserved students, due to the misalignment of high school curriculum with the requirements of post-secondary institutions (Ewell et al., 2003). To assist with the alignment, many schools offer dual enrollment opportunities such as college preparatory classes, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculums (Ewell et al., 2003).

One type of college preparation class is many times referred to as a senior seminar. Garcia's (2010) study suggested senior seminar type classes is beneficial in supporting Latina/o students entering college with a lack of knowledge in the admissions and enrollment process. It was suggested the class be offered as a semester long elective course in college preparation during the students' junior and senior year of high school. The class would focus on such areas as college preparation, college applications, finding the right fit and financial resources. The researchers also suggested including staff from local universities and community colleges to serve as presenters and direct contacts for students.

In addition to the curriculum and rigor, well prepared and culturally sensitive teachers play a major role in the students' academic preparation (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

“...Chicana/os are often enrolled in classes where undertrained faculty attempt to teach with minimal resources. Given the high teacher turnover rate in predominantly Chicana/o schools, many classrooms contain year-round, long-term substitute teachers” (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006, p. 2). Latina/o and/or bilingual teaching staff, and teachers who received training in multicultural education are few and far between (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Instead of encouraging the cultural and language Latina/o students bring to the classroom, teachers often viewed these as deficits and place students in groups and classrooms that label the students as inadequate (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

College Awareness

Most programs noted their goals as increasing college awareness and providing exposure to college (Perna, 2002). These goals helped to increase interest, exposure, and raise students’ educational aspirations (Perna, 2002). The following components are grouped under college awareness: college tours, visits, and fairs; career counseling; creating college awareness and college exposure; interventions by 8th grade; and social skills and confidence. Over 40% of the responding programs reported their programming was offered on college campuses, this makes the college search easier as the students have a frame of reference (Perna, 2002). Campus visits/tours, meeting with college faculty and college students, and attending college fairs also supported students in the information gathering stage.

Completing some form of higher education is critical if Latina/o students are to be successful contributing members of society. Unfortunately, “educational inequities and disparate accessibility to a college-preparatory curriculum are problems at many K-12 schools with a high concentration of Latinas/os, making higher education an elusive goal” (Perez Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006, p. 3).

Secondary school staff. Guidance counselors and educators are the students' primary resource for college preparatory information and services (Corwin et al., 2004). Students who attend schools that are overcrowded, have a large population of students of color, and students with lower socioeconomic status (SES) do not receive the services necessary to gain access to college (Fallon, 1997). These students are less likely to be seen as college material and are less often encouraged by counselors and teachers to pursue higher education (Fallon, 1997). Each counselor may interpret a student's college aspirations differently, which in turn affects how often and the types of college information provided to the students (Corwin et al., 2004). Reese's (2008) research suggested "disparities exist because educators expect less from students of color and those from lower SES, and underestimate the issues associated with being a first-generation college-bound student" (p. 54).

In a study conducted by Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy (2011), the researchers examined the role of school-based social capital theory in the relationship between school counselors and students. They specifically examined how positive social capital from school counselors, will in turn increase college application rates. In this study, social capital was in reference to resources and information.

Social capital can play out in personal relationships with family, teachers, counselors, and social networks, such as churches, schools, and community organizations (Bryan et al., 2011). School-based social capital refers to the social relations and social networks within schools that can provide the support needed to improve outcomes (Bryan et al., 2011). The study found "...student-counselor contact for college information by tenth grade gave students a positive advantage in the college application process overall" and "...school counselors may serve as an important source of social capital for these student (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 194). "That is, school

counselors may serve as a significant or sole source of college-related information, norms, or social support for students from lower SES backgrounds” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 196).

Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, Gilliam, and Patton (2005) conducted a study in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), specifically targeting twelve metro area high schools, and the students experience regarding the transition from high school to college. They found,

College plans and behaviors of Latina/o students in CPS are particularly shaped by the expectations of their teachers and counselors and by connections with teachers. This suggests that Latina/o students may be much more reliant than other students on teachers and their school for guidance and information and that their college plans are more dependent on their connections to school. (Roderick, et. al., 2005, p. 4)

Across the country, counselors and teachers in low income schools are working with limited resources and heavy student loads; this is especially true in high schools in which there are a large percentage of students of color (Corwin et al., 2004). When counseling departments do not receive adequate resources, it sends a message that administrators are not committed to their work, and the services they provide are not valued (Corwin et al., 2004). Resource issues also affect the responsibilities and duties of counselors as they are not able to focus solely on advising students. They must split their time between “...academic, college, and career guidance; evaluation and assessment; management and coordination of class scheduling; and substitution and surveillance duties.” (Corwin et al., 2004, p. 447).

Counseling programs are a critical element in ensuring successful transition from secondary to post-secondary institutions. Effective counseling programs and guidance counselors are a students’ life line to determine academic, career, and personal goals. Guidance counselors help to provide information and shape a students’ future academic plan and career goals (Cooper & Liou, 2007, p. 46). “Academic help, good guidance about school programs, and school counselor assistance with the college admissions process can provide the strong

network and social capital that can compensate for family networks when students' parents have limited resources” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 191).

Teaching staff also play an important role in students’ college aspirations:

The classroom experience plays a key role in student achievement in all segments of the educational pipeline. Cultural deficit frameworks, which suggest that the families are at fault for the poor academic performance of minority children, reinforce teacher practices that negatively affect student-teacher relations and produce low expectations for Students of Color. (Perez Huber, et. al, 2006, p. 3)

Two-year versus four-year. Many Latina/o students attend community colleges instead of four-year institutions and there are additional issues and barriers that surround this issue. The data specific to enrollment and completion rates are increasingly depressing. The 2013 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported enrollment rates of Hispanic students at 12% at four-year institutions and 20.5% at two-year institutions. When compared to their white counterparts at 63.7% enrollment at four-year institutions and 54.3% at two-year institutions, there continued to be a huge disparity between the groups. Some of the issues surrounding Latina/os attending two-year versus four-year institutions include students take longer to complete four-year degrees, may not transfer on to four-year institutions, and may be pursuing certificates instead of degrees at two-year institutions.

O’Conner, Hammack, and Scott (2010), researched social capital and how it related to the over representation of Latina/os in community college. They specifically studied how social capital and geographical differences may influence this issue.

The concept of social capital can help us understand the relationship between the Hispanic community and the important factor of information about college. Less access to desirable social capital may result in a lack of adequate information about higher education finances, and that, in turn, may result in college-qualified Hispanic high school graduates applying to community colleges instead of 4-year schools. This study supports the argument that improving access to college information, especially information about financial aid, will pay dividends in improving 4-year college access for Hispanic students, and that access will improve their levels of educational attainment. Hispanic

students and parents may rely on community information resources, not realizing that these resources are limited. (O’Conner et al., 2010, p. 215)

The connection, transition, and partnership between postsecondary and secondary schools is crucial in beginning to close the gap between Latina/o and white students, not only in terms of their enrollment in postsecondary institutions but also the lower enrollment rates in four-year compared to two year institutions (Swail & Perna, 2002). Smith (2004) stated how well an institution assists students in making the transition, acclimation to the college environment, and the rigor of classes were also important indicators of success. The student’s social integration and his/her ability to develop new relationships with peers and faculty play a very important role in student success and attrition (Strage, 1999).

College-going cultures. Creating a school wide college-going culture will help to decrease the opportunity gaps found within schools. The social capital gap refers to the “extent to which students have access to norms for college enrollment, information on how to prepare and effectively participate in college search and selection, and effective guidance and support in making decisions about college” (Roderick et. al, 2008, p. 6). Perez Huber et al. (2006) suggested a secondary college-going culture should encourage teachers, parents, and students to have high college expectations and to prepare for college. Providing school staff training and resources that positively reinforce the strengths of students of color in turn help to foster the higher teacher expectations (Perez Huber et al., 2006).

In order to truly shift the culture of an entire school system from the superintendent level to student support staff, the constant blaming the student and families has to stop (Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) suggested educators need to:

...denounce the ahistorical remnant of U.S. culture that suggests that poor children, children of color, English learners, immigrant students, undocumented students, and

others are more likely to fail than succeed, which then informs the policies, practices, and procedures that Latina/o student end up facing in schools and higher education systems. (p. 130)

“A college-going culture comprises a school environment in which teachers, parents, and student peers have high expectations and encourage students to prepare for college” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 4). Believing every student has the potential to be successful and to support all students in achieving their goals is extremely important and will create a culture shift within schools.

Financial Support

The tuition reimbursement and scholarship component falls under financial support. The 2000 survey determined only one fifth of programs offer tuition or fee reimbursement and one third offer scholarships (Perna, 2002). The 2010 study found only 37.4% of programs offered a scholarship and 12.3% offered tuition/fees reimbursement (Fung & Swail, 2010). Research indicated “socioeconomic status is the greatest determinant of enrollment and persistence in college for all students” (Oesterreich, 2000, p. 4). Further, “As college tuition increases and family income remains the same, an affordable college education is not a reality for many Latina/o students” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 9). Knowing financial support affects persistence, there are still not enough precollege programs that offer financial incentives to its students.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided students financial assistance based on need; it was developed to increase resources to higher education institutions and provide financial assistance to students in the form of grants, low-interest loans, and federal work-study (Gelber, 2007). “To receive most types of financial aid, students must first complete and file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the standard application used by the federal government, state governments and most postsecondary institutions to determine

students' aid eligibility and award financial aid" (Novak & McKinney, 2011, p.6). The importance of this application is not only to determine federal financial support, but institutions also use the application to determine state and institutional monies available to the student (McKinney & Novak, 2013).

Completing the FAFSA and receiving financial aid is determining factor in the enrollment and persistence of Latina/o college students (McKinney & Novak, 2013; Perez Huber et al., 2006). To meet the financial needs of this growing population it will be important for institutions to redefine how financial aid is distributed. In addition, institutions and states need to allocate enough funding to provide for students. "Financial aid in the form of grants, loans, work-study, and tax credits has helped make attending and graduating from college a reality for millions of college students" (Novak & McKinney, 2011, p. 5).

Parental Encouragement and Involvement

The components addressed under this section include: parent involvement, parent college awareness, and supporting parents with financial aid forms and involvement in student activities. Programs that provided parents opportunities for parental involvement described this as a motivational tool to increase parents' expectation of their students' education (Perna, 2002). Research by Volle and Federico (1997) and Turner et al. (1996) suggested poverty, welfare participation/low SES, poor quality of elementary and secondary education, first-generation status, parental divorce/single parent home, absence of college-educated role models, and lack of commitment to educational goals may be factors which hinder student attrition and completion of degree.

Specific to Latina/o students, Rodriguez (2002) found family income, parents' involvement in their child's education, and parents' own educational backgrounds are indicators

of academic achievement and aspirations. For Latina/o students, family plays a major role in the students' success; if students are receiving support and encouragement from family members they are more likely to continue in their educational pursuits (Nora, 2004).

There is a major misconception that Latina/o parents do not care about their child's education, when in actuality "schools should engage and support parents in their child's educational goals" (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 5). "Setting high expectations for the completion of school and expressing the desire for children to further their education, or become more educated than the parents, appear to be powerful and pervasive beliefs and attitudes among Mexican American families" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 95). Providing school and college information in English and Spanish and taking the time to explain the college-going process will help parents to feel confident in supporting and motivating their student through the process (Perez Huber et al., 2006).

Chen and Carroll's (2005) report was specific to first generation students and the issues and barriers surrounding their higher education success. The researchers found "growing up in a family in which neither parent has gone to college may have long-term consequences on students' success in postsecondary education" (p. iii).

Chen and Carroll's (2005), research also found:

...compared with students whose parents attended college; first-generation students consistently remained at a disadvantage after entering postsecondary education: they completed fewer credits, took fewer academic courses, earned lower grades, needed more remedial assistance, and were more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses they attempted. As a result, the likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree was lower for first-generation students compared to their peers whose parents attended college. This finding also held after taking into account variables related to degree completion including postsecondary credit production, performance, high school academic preparation, and student background characteristics. Even for students who attended a 4-year institution with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree, first-generation students were less likely to earn a bachelor's degree than were their counterparts whose parents held a bachelor's or higher degree. (p. ix)

Research has shown first generation students have a more difficult time in navigating the college-going system (Chen & Carroll, 2005), but to assume this also means first-generation students do not have the determination or will not be successful is incorrectly blaming the family and student for their lack of knowledge. Instead, institutions—whether secondary or post-secondary—need to have educational leaders take the time to reflect on how their internal practices or lack of information sharing negatively impacts these students’ knowledge and progress (Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2002). Due to the lack of information sharing by secondary and post-secondary institutions, many families use their social and familial networks to assist with the college process, specifically looking to those who have personal experience in attempting college (Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Institutions can assist with these efforts by offering programming that expands the students’ and parents’ social networks to include “...educators, college students and alumni, and other families, which would provide the opportunity for families to share college information” (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006. p. 8).

Rios-Aguilar (2010) used the theoretical framework of funds of knowledge to explain the variation in Latina/o student’s academic and non-academic outcomes. Funds of knowledge involve the type of knowledge and skills within the family as well as the social, cultural, and linguistic interactions between family members. Rios-Aguilar (2010) provided the following more detailed definition of funds of knowledge and how it is developed and accessed within families:

First, funds of knowledge are comprised of all those skills and knowledge that household members have acquired through their involvement in many activities, such as labor markets and diverse social interactions. Second, members of a household, including children and youth, have access to these various funds of knowledge by engaging in household activities, and by observing how members within their household interact with members of other households. More specifically, the household works as a hub of activities, resources, and patterns of interaction that are available to children and youth

and that, I argue, may be directly and indirectly associated with children's learning in general, and specifically with academic and reading achievement and literacy outcomes. (p. 2222)

It is common practice to focus on the issues facing Latina/o students and families and to develop and implement services to overcome those barriers, but funds of knowledge instead suggests a bigger impact can be made if the focus were to shift from issues and barriers to building on the family's current life experiences, knowledge and skills (Rios-Aguilar, 2010).

In addition to funds of knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth is an approach that shifts the deficit framework from family and students to the assets of the community and how the community has strengths that can support families and students to reach their goals (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant and stated, "These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77).

To have aspiration capital is to have high expectations, to stay focused on one's goals and remain resilient regardless of perceived barriers and real hardships. Familial capital and social capital refer to the knowledge and understanding that are nurtured and passed on through relationship with networks of family and friends, respectively. Linguistic capital highlights the skills and tools developed through communication experiences in more than one language. Resistant capital includes the values, knowledge, and tools used to nurture oppositional behavior that challenges and stand in opposition to equity. Finally, navigational capital is concerned with the skills needed to navigate through unfamiliar or noninclusive environments (intentional or unintentional) in diverse communities. (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011, p. 76)

Community Cultural Wealth is an important lens to utilize when examining "...current educational policies that stem from deeply embedded assimilationist practices that continue to place Latina/o students at an educational disadvantage and view students and their families as intellectually and culturally inferior" (Luna & Martinez, 2013, p. 2). The goal of community "...cultural wealth is to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets

already abundant in their communities” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). Infusing the strengths and college-going knowledge of families and communities in the services the pre-college programs are providing will help to build a community of individuals that understand the college-going process and can help to support each other long after the program has provided its services.

Summary

The variety of precollege programs and funding allotted to support these programs would lead one to believe the programs are impacting students and making a difference in the enrollment of low-income students of color. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as noted in the continued low enrollment numbers of Latina/o students (NCES, 2012). Swail and Perna’s (2002) work shed light on the issue. Perna (2002) provided critical components that programs need to provide in order to increase students’ knowledge of the college-going process and to increase the level students are academically prepared for higher education. Gaps in research remain as the research conducted was seldom targeted to a specific population and their successful enrollment in college.

Throughout the research, there is a continued issue of blaming the students and families for their lack of knowledge of the college-going process and academic preparation (Valencia & Black, 2002). There is currently a deficit thinking mindset toward parents that runs rampant in schools. Instead of schools taking the time to reflect on how their processes and systems are oppressive and inequitable, the blame is placed on the parents and family members at home (Valencia & Black, 2002). The school system—whether secondary or post-secondary—is not taking appropriate responsibility for their hand in helping to create huge disparities in college enrollment rates (Valencia & Black, 2002). Without all the players (students, families, and

educational institutions) reflecting on what they can do differently and working together to combat the issue of low enrollment rates, the needle will continue to remain low.

In addition, this research recognized that prior research takes stalk in the deficit perspective of students and families carrying the blame for their lack of success in education and enrollment. Deficit thinking is identified as:

Deficit theories assume that some children, because of genetic, cultural, or experiential differences, are inferior to other children-that is, that they have deficits that must be overcome if they are to learn. There are many obvious problems with such hypotheses, one being that they place complete responsibility for children's failure on their homes and families, effectively absolving schools and society from responsibility. Whether the focus is on the individual or the community, the result remains largely the same: blaming the victims of poor schooling rather than looking in a more systematic way at the role played by the schools in which they learn (or fail to learn) and by the society at large. (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 16)

However, this dominant deficit perspective is one that may be countered by identifying the programs that support students in the college-going process by acknowledging the assets, funds of knowledge, and cultural wealth brought by the students, parents and communities.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study and research questions. An overview of qualitative, thematic analysis, and the theoretical framework is provided, followed by an overview of the precollege program of focus, participants, and research site. The chapter ends with a description of data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (EPCP). The study focused on barriers students reported encountering on their path to college and how their experience in the precollege program supported them (and did not support them) to overcome those barriers to successfully enroll in college. Throughout this study “college-going,” “college-going information,” and “college-going process” is defined as: the steps students and families follow in order to enroll at a postsecondary institution. Such actions as: college entrance exams, college applications, financial aid/paying for college, and enrollment (i.e. orientation, placement tests, and registration). The study was guided by the following central research question and sub-questions.

Central research questions:

1. What were the college-going experiences of the Latina/o students that participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program?
2. Did the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program contribute to the Latina/o students’ successful enrollment in college?

Sub-questions:

3. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their school experience?
4. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their college-going experience?

Research Design

The study utilized qualitative inquiry and specifically thematic analysis to examine the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program.

Qualitative inquiry is utilized when a problem or issue needs to be explored; it is focused on words not numbers (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data is

“...organized into incidents or stories, has a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader...” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). Qualitative research provides “...a complex detailed understanding of the issue,” which can only be “established by talking directly with people, going to their home or places of work, and allowing them to tell their stories...” (Creswell, 2012, p. 40). The use of qualitative research will allow me to “...empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices...” and to “...be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences” (Creswell, 2012, p. 40).

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This method “aims to explore the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in the analysis of data, provides a structure for organization of themes, and assists in interpreting the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis

along with Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) allowed me to capture and organize the data into patterns that provided meaning and answered to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants

Qualitative research requires the selection of participants is purposeful; this is required because only those selected can offer insight into the experience (Creswell, 2012). Latina/o Critical Race Theory called for sample size that would allow me the opportunity for an in-depth focus on the lived experiences of participants.

To meet the guidelines of sampling, I utilized the following criteria in inviting and selecting participants.

- Participant must be enrolled at MSU Denver.
- Participants must have participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program his/her senior year of high school.
- Participant must self-identify as Hispanic, Latina, or Spanish Origin. This is determined by the students' response on the MSU Denver admissions application.
- Participant must self- identify as a first-generation college student.
- Participant attended and graduated from a high school that participates in the precollege program.
- Participant completed at least 24 credits of postsecondary education.

To ensure the study was meaningful and provided a detailed account of the participants' experiences, I maintained a participant size of six participants (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews took place at a time and location that was most convenient for participants. In person interviews took approximately 90 minutes depending on conversations with participants.

Precollege Program and University Setting

I selected the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program as the program of focus for this study due to ease of access. I was involved in the development and implementation of the program. The program was developed to create a pipeline of diverse high school students to Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) by building long-term relationships, and offering enrollment services on site at diverse high schools (Excel Program Report, 2012). The mission of the program was to expand and enhance the pool of academically qualified diverse students for higher education, by providing support and guidance to students who aspire to enter higher education and demonstrate the potential to succeed (Excel Program Report, 2012).

The program was launched in spring 2010 in high schools in Adams and Brighton Colorado school districts (Excel Program Report, 2012). These districts were specifically selected due to the diversity in population, especially in terms of the growth of Latina/o students, and also due to the lack of pre-collegiate programs. The high schools served included: Adams City High School, Brighton High School, Northglenn High School, Prairie View High School, Thornton High School, and Westminster High School (Excel Program Report, 2012).

The programming, structure, and goals are focused in three areas: students, parents, and school. The specific goals of the program are to:

- Assist *students* in reaching their higher education goals by providing assistance with college applications, financial aid, and scholarships,
- Increase *parent* awareness of higher education options and encourage involvement in their student's education. Parents and/or guardians are provided general information regarding higher education, how they can support their students through the college process, and resources on how to pay for college,

- Enhance the *school's* college-going culture. Support staff and schools to increase opportunities for students to gain knowledge of college-going process and options (Excel Program Report, 2012).

Metropolitan State University of Denver provided monetary and staffing resources for the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. MSU Denver was founded in 1965 and serves over 23,000 students (About MSU Denver, n.d.). It is an urban comprehensive university offering bachelors and master's degrees on the Auraria Campus in downtown Denver (About MSU Denver, n.d.). MSU Denver provides an array of majors, minors, certificate programs and custom-degree options to meet the needs and interests of its students (About MSU Denver, n.d.).

Data Collection

Participant Sample

To gain access to and maintain the confidentiality of potential participants, I worked with the Associate Director of Admissions Data Management and the Associate Director of Excel; both individuals work in the Office of Admissions at MSU Denver. They served as my liaisons at the institution and aided in the recruitment of participants. The Associate Director of Admissions' focus was in creating a report that provided a list of potential participants including only students with the parameters listed below. To ensure confidentiality of potential participants, I did not have access to the report at any point throughout or after the study.

There were approximately 150 potential participants who were enrolled (at the time the report was pulled) at MSU Denver and met the following parameters:

- Student had a contact code of MEP; this contact code was added to a student's file to identify that the student participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program while he/she was in high school.

- Students who self-identified on the MSU Denver admissions application as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. This was determined by the students' response to the admission question "Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin?" If the student answered yes, they were self-identifying as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin.
- First-time to college student. This information was determined by the admission application and "student type" provided on the institution database.
- Student had completed at least 24 credit hours.
- Student was enrolled full-time at MSU Denver.

Call for Participants

Once the report was completed, it was handed off to the Associate Director of Excel. He focused on emailing the Call for Participants letter via electronic communication to the list of potential participants. The electronic letter was sent to the 150 potential participants identified in the list provided by the Associate Director of Admissions. The letter was sent to the participants four times over the course of two weeks. The Call for Participants electronic letter provided an overview and purpose of the study, explanation of requirements for participation, time commitment, type of data collection, and a link to the Electronic Information Sheet.

If the student was interested in participating they were instructed to click on the link which took them to the Electronic Information Sheet. The information sheet provided me with participant contact information; this was the only point at which I had knowledge of participant names and contact information. In addition, the information sheet provided data to further determine if the student met the participant criteria and to ensure a diverse selection of participants. The participant information sheet asked the following questions of potential participants:

- Demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, and age.
- Country of birth-a large number of Latina/o students that participate in the program are permanent residents or undocumented students.
- High school attended and graduation year. Student must have attended and graduated from one of the EPCP schools served.
- Participation in Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. Student must have participated in the EPCP program their senior year, EPCP is not offered to underclassmen.
- In addition, the student had to self-identify as a first-generation college student, meaning that neither of their parents has earned a bachelor's degree.

The students were asked to complete the form by a specific deadline to ensure timely completion and participant selection. Of the 150 potential participants, 10 completed the Electronic Information sheet. Once the deadline had passed, the final selection of participants was based on their responses to the electronic information sheet. In order to continue to the next step, the participants had to meet the following requirements.

- First-Generation: All students must have self-identified as first-generation college students.
- High School Attended/Graduated: All students must have attended and graduated from one of the EPCP high schools (Adams City, Northglenn, Prairie View, Thornton, and Westminster).
- EPCP Participation: All students must have indicated they participated in EPCP their senior year of high school.

Of the 10 respondents, one did not meet the “High School Attended/Graduated” requirement and one did not meet the “EPCP Participation” requirement. These respondents did not proceed to the next phase of selection.

Introductory Meeting

Upon final selection, participants were contacted to schedule an individual initial ten to 15-minute introduction meeting. Of the eight participants contacted, six responded and set up an introductory meeting. During this time, a detailed overview of the study was provided to ensure the participant understood the study and his/her responsibilities and time commitment. If the student agreed to continue as a participant in the study, he/she was provided an Informed Consent Form which was reviewed and signed by the participant. At that point, date, time, and location for interview were determined. The interviews were conducted within two weeks of initial contact and at a time and location that was best suited to the participant.

Interviews

The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of Latina/o students and their participation in the pre-college program. In addition, the participant’s cultural background and its influence on their college-going process and education in general was explored. Qualitative research was centered on the gathering of rich and meaningful data; in order to reach this goal, the interview process had to allow for the participants to “...tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length” (Smith et. al, 2009, p. 56). Each individual’s experience was their own and their story to tell. To fully provide participants an opportunity to tell their story and to build trust and comfort, I began the interview process with an informal interview of approximately 30 minutes, followed by an in-depth, 60-minute interview.

I began by developing an outline for a semi-structured interview. “The aim of developing a schedule is to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant which will, in turn, enable them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 59). The questions were phrased in a manner that was open and allowed for the participant to talk at length (Smith et al., 2009). I took great detail to ensure the questions would not make “...assumptions about the participant’s experiences or concerns, or lead them towards particular answers” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 60). The interview began with a straightforward question that allowed the participant to provide a detailed account of an experience; this allowed the participant to become comfortable talking (Smith et al., 2009). Questions which may have been sensitive and/or introduced issues or concerns were addressed later in the interview when the participant had gained confidence and felt more comfortable (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants were asked questions which focused on knowledge of college-going processes, barriers on the road to postsecondary education, parental involvement through the college process, counselor and teacher support in the college-going process, and participation and experience in the precollege program. In addition, questions focused on the participants diverse cultural background and early educational through college career were included. Questions were open-ended; I also asked follow-up questions to delve further into particular areas which were beneficial to the study and analysis.

I allowed interviews to develop naturally; there was no specific time constraint. Participants were informed that the interview would last between 45-90 minutes, but may be longer, if needed. The interviews took place at a location that was familiar, comfortable, and convenient for the participant. Participants were informed at several points during confirmation of participation that all interviews will be audiotaped and those tapes would be kept in a secure

location for future educational purposes. I transcribed all interviews which were used for analysis. Participants were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy, all participants approved the transcription. The participants' audio taped interviews and transcripts were kept secure and confidential in a locked file cabinet at my home and this information was clarified on the consent form.

Data Analysis

To conduct a complete, in-depth analysis of the data, the study drew from Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) to guide the thematic analysis of the experiences of Latina/o students that participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program and successfully enrolled in college.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT), specifically Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), is an appropriate theoretical framework to utilize in conceptualizing access to postsecondary education for Latina/o students. To provide a foundation for LatCrit, an overview of CRT is provided followed by a discussion focused specially on Latina/o Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Race Theory. Brown v. Board of Education of 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Acts of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 are key pieces of legislation that addressed the issue of racism in the United States (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Although these major pieces of legislation were implemented to eradicate racism, they were not enough. Critical Race Theory (CRT) origins are found in law, specifically within the realm of Critical Legal Studies, which questioned the objectivity and neutrality of the law (Bell, 1995; Brown, 2003). Critical race theorists are primarily scholars of color, with disciplines in law schools, their "...writing and lecturing is characterized by frequent use of the first person,

storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary treatment of the law, and the unapologetic use of creativity” (Bell, 1995, p. 4). The work is often disruptive because its commitment to anti-racism goes well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal measures. (Bell, 1995)

These theorists challenge and are committed to the struggle against racism, race and racial power specifically in the areas of American legal culture (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995).

At its core, CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins- for those who hold ‘minority’ status. It directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in our society. It spotlights the form and function of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and discrimination across a range of social institutions, and then seeks to give voice to those who are victimized and displaced. CRT, therefore, seeks not only to name, but to be a tool for rooting out inequality and injustice. (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 8)

Initially, CRT focused primarily on the African American population; due to the changing landscape of our society, CRT has moved beyond focusing only on the African American population and including other population of color (Trevino et al., 2008). The development of Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) was influenced by Critical Race Theory but it is unique in that it focuses specifically on the experiences and realities of Latina/os (Hernandez-Truyol et al., 2006; Valdes, 1997). “LatCrit helps to analyze issues that CRT cannot or does not, like language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (Villapando, 2004, p. 43). Broadening the scope of inquiry outside of race/ethnicity allows for a more holistic approach to understanding the inequities specific to Latina/os (Villapando, 2004).

Latina/o Critical Theory is based on four main functions, the first being the production of knowledge. This function includes critiques of historical and modern experiences and is an “...interdisciplinary and critical approach to the study of social and legal conditions that beset Latina/o communities” (Valdes, 1997, p. 1093). The second function is the advancement of

social transformation emphasis practicality as well as insightfulness. This function focuses on creating social change that improves the lives of Latina/os (Valdes, 1997).

The third function is the expansion and connection of anti-subordination struggle. This function focuses on elevating the Latina/o condition, it is a "...struggle on behalf of Latina/os, but also toward a material transformation that fosters social justice for all" (Valdes, 1997, p. 1094). The last function is the cultivation of community and coalition is a formation of scholars. This function is focused on other approaches and theoretical theories that are also focused on analyzing the Latina/o situation (Valdes, 1997).

Latina/o Critical Race Theory in Education

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), outlined five themes that provide the "...basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of a CRT and LatCrit framework in education" (p. 312):

1. "The centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination" (p. 312). Race and racism are at the core of CRT and LatCrit analysis, but it is important to take into account the intersections of other forms of subordination such as gender, class discrimination, immigration status, and language (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001).
2. "The challenge to dominant ideology" (p. 313). CRT and LatCrit challenge the traditional structures of the educational system and the dominate frameworks used to explain educational inequality (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001).
3. "The commitment to social justice" (p. 313). CRT and LatCrit is committed to "... a social justice research agenda that leads toward (a) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and (b) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups" (p. 313).

In using this theory researchers understand that educational institutions may oppress and marginalize students while also emancipating and empowering them (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

4. “The centrality of experiential knowledge” (p. 314). The use of this framework acknowledges that students hold experiential knowledge and it is critical to allow the student to share their story in order to provide the researcher an understanding of their lived experiences (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).
5. “The interdisciplinary perspective” (p. 314). CRT and LatCrit draws from historical, contemporary, and other disciplines in its analysis of race and racism in education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The use of CRT and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks in education research allowed me to examine how “...educational structures, processes and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109). The use of this framework allowed me to examine how the participants’ experiences of marginalization, oppression, and racism played a role their college-going process, and their general educational process as well. In addition, it provided me the opportunity to analyze the role of the precollege program in supporting and empowering the participants to overcome the barriers and challenges they encountered on their path to college.

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a six-phase guide I used in my study as a foundation in conducting thematic analysis.

Phase one: “Familiarizing yourself with your data, is focused on reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). To ensure I completed this

phase of analysis and immersed myself in the data, I transcribed the interview sessions of each participant, I reread the transcripts at least twice to begin to identify patterns and meaning, taking notes as I went along (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, I utilized the NVivo 10 software as a tool of analysis. The transcripts were uploaded to the program and an analysis was conducted to pull out the significant language, patterns, and themes that were discovered throughout the participants' interview transcripts.

Phase two: "Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This phase was focused on reducing the data and the production of initial codes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was coded into "meaningful and manageable chunks of text, such as passages, quotations, single words..." (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 391). This phase was focused on the development of themes; it is the first and most basic level of analysis that is used as an organizational tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial codes were:

- Family
- First-generation
- College knowledge
- Language
- Parental knowledge
- Parental involvement
- Diverse staff
- Individual support

- Lack of confidence
- Encouragement and motivation

Phase three: “Searching for themes, collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In this phase, I analyzed and sorted the codes to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase was used as the draft of theme development and code placement.

Phase four: “Reviewing themes, checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This phase was focused on refining the draft themes identified in phase three using a two-level analysis of the codes. The first level involved reading through the codes for each theme and determining if a coherent pattern has developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). If a coherent pattern was identified, I moved on to the second level of analysis, if codes did not fit, I had to determine if the theme itself was the issue or the codes and information for that specific theme. To complete the second level analysis, I read through the entire data set to ensure the themes fit in relation to the data. This also gave me the opportunity to check if I missed any additional data that needed to be coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phase five: “Defining and naming themes, ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definition and names for each theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The goal of this phase was to be able to “...clearly define what your themes are and what they are not” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). To meet this goal, I focused on defining each theme, identifying the essence of the theme and determining what aspect of the data and research questions the theme fits under (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase six: “Producing the report: the final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, completing extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This is the final phase which focused on analyzing the data and writing a narrative about the data that “...goes beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to your research questions”; while it also “...provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell-within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity are terms focused in quantitative research. To fully examine if a qualitative study meets rigorous standards, it is important to think of qualitative studies along the lines of establishing credibility and accuracy of representation (Krefting, 1991). For my study, I utilized Guba’s (1981) model of trustworthiness specific to qualitative studies. Guba (1981) outlined four aspects to consider in a naturalistic paradigm when your goal is to establish trustworthiness in your study.

The first aspect is *credibility*. As a researcher, I did not want to break down the participants lived experiences into a perfect line. Each participant’s life is varied and rich and I did not want to lose the essence of their experiences when analyzing the data (Guba, 1981). To establish credibility in a less invasive manner, I looked to my advisor, committee, peers, and colleagues for debriefings and member checks throughout the study (Guba, 1981). In addition, the participants were sent an emailed copy of his/her interview transcript for review. I wanted to ensure I had told their story and unique experience; if there were any discrepancies my plan was

to follow-up with a face-to-face meeting, to ensure accuracy. Each participant reviewed their transcript and none found any discrepancies that required a follow-up meeting.

In terms of *transferability*, it was important to keep in mind that a person's experiences are theirs alone and are not generalizable to the population. There may be some transferability, being that the participants were purposefully selected. Meaning the participants share some commonalities such as identifying as Latina/o and first generation, this type of selection may have provided for duplication of study (Guba, 1981).

Dependability refers to the stability of data and *confirmability* to the interpretation of data (Guba, 1981). Leaving a clearly-defined audit trail so an external auditor can clearly determine how participants were selected, data collected, analyzed, and interpreted also assists in ensuring all concepts of trustworthiness are met (Guba, 1981). During the data collection, I maintained the basic structure of the interview to ensure consistency with each participant, but the process and the line of questions may have changed depending on the conversation with the participant (Guba, 1981).

In terms of conformability, I provided a clearly-defined map of data interpretation and I was upfront in terms of my biases and assumptions (Guba, 1981). My ability to identify with the participants, my personal path to college, and my precollege program experience were experiences that may have led to researcher bias. It is not realistic to say I was completely unbiased, but I can ensure that throughout the study I was honest and upfront and most importantly I accurately represented the participants' experiences. My involvement in the development of the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program led me to want this study to positively reflect my efforts in developing the program. Keeping this at the forefront was important as I wanted to

utilize my knowledge of the program, but also allow the participants to openly express their experiences with the program.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed summary of the methodology for this specific study. Thematic analysis and the use of Latino Critical Race Theory as approaches in analyzing the data will allow for rich, deep conversations with the participants and provide them an open opportunity to share their experiences and path to college. This chapter also restated the research questions that guided the study and it further provided an outline of how participants were selected and how data was collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this thematic study is to explore the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (a precollege program), supported by Metropolitan State University of Denver. Chapter four begins by providing a restatement of the central and sub research questions. The chapter then focuses on the participants by providing background information for each participant. A narrative of the findings follows, the chapter then ends with an overall summary. For this study, I used thematic analysis to code the data and identify the emergent themes of the study. I completed in-depth interviews with each participant to focus on their lived experiences and analyzed the data through the LatCrit theoretical framework lens and in relation to the research questions.

Figure 2 restates the central and sub research questions of this study.

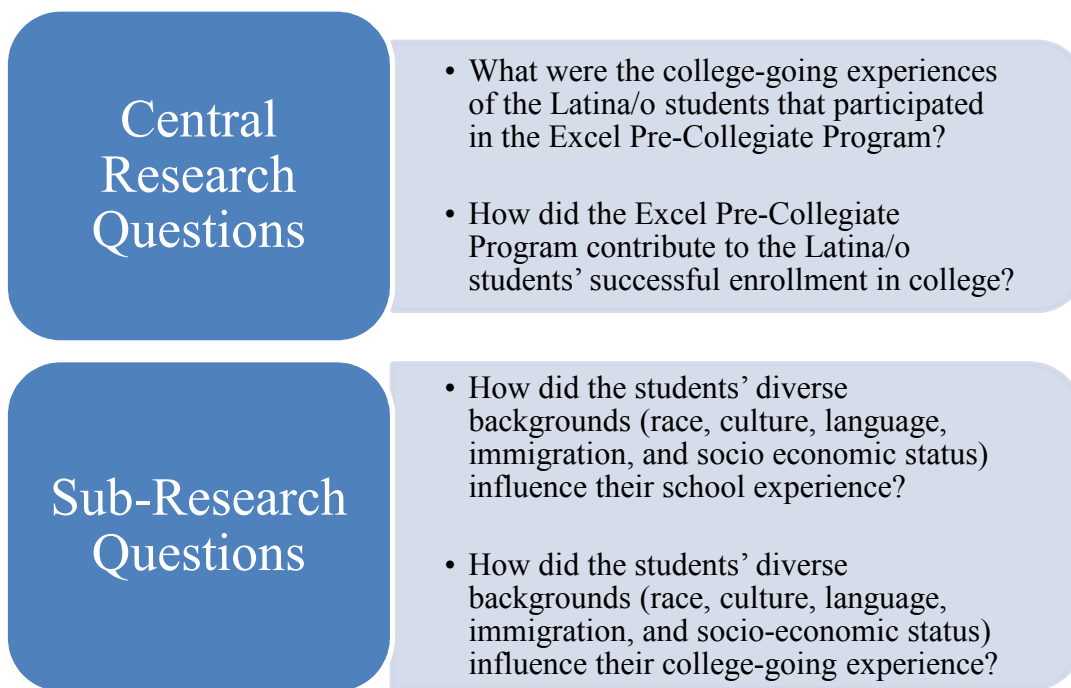


Figure 2: Research Questions

The Participants

Six students agreed to participate in the study and share their lived experiences with me. Each participant provided general background information such as family composition, cultural, language, and educational background. The one-on-one interviews provided participants an opportunity to openly share their backgrounds, educational experiences, and college-going process. Table 1 outlines commonalities discovered through the participant interviews.

Table 1
Participant Backgrounds-Commonalities

Commonalities	Participants
Identify as Latina/o	All participants
Identify as Male	Enrique and Erick
Identify as Female	Cattleya, Perla, Teresa, & Ximena
Native Spanish Speaker	All participants, except Teresa
Parents-native Spanish speakers	All participants
English as a Second Language Classes throughout Elementary school	Cattleya, Perla, Ximena, Enrique
Identify as first-generation college students	All participants
Participants identify as U.S. Citizens	All participants
Parents born in Mexico	All participants, except Teresa's mother
Sophomore in College	Cattleya
Junior in College	Enrique, Erick, Perla, & Ximena
Senior in College	Teresa

The following is an overview of each participant's background. Each participant self-selected a pseudonym to use throughout the study. In writing each participants' backgrounds, I felt it was important to keep true to the participants' style and not take away meaning from the participants' stories. Throughout the section, when highlighting participant quotes, there may be grammatical and sentence structure errors.

Cattleya

Cattleya was a 20-year-old female student. She was a sophomore studying political science. Her father and mother were both born in Mexico and have lived in the U.S. for most of their lives; both parents are documented. She has an older brother and younger sister; her siblings and she were all born in the U.S. Her father was brought to the U.S. when he was nine and he completed high school in the U.S.; her mother came to the U.S. at the age of 18. Cattleya will be the first in her family to graduate college. Her parents did not attend any higher education institutions; her brother attended college for two years and dropped out.

Cattleya stated Spanish is her native language and is primarily spoken at home, although, both of her parents are fluent in English. Cattleya was placed in English as a second language (ESL) classes in elementary school through fifth grade. She was not “mixed in” with English speakers and classes until sixth grade. She shared that transitioning to middle school was difficult because of this. She stated she did well in middle school, but was involved with “bad influences” and violence which led her mother to change the school Cattleya attended. She went from a school where her race/ethnicity was the majority to being a minority. This was difficult for her and she stated, “You could tell that they looked at me differently and I became a really shy person; I didn't really talk to anyone, I just stay in my own little corner.”

Cattleya completed middle school at the “new” school and continued to its partner high school. She stayed there for two years until it was too much to take. She stated:

I let people walk all over me, like being a minority. I would do people's homework, [and] they would do whatever they want with me; they would take advantage of me and I got tired of it. I started standing up for myself and it went back to how it was at the middle school, and I was like I can't do this anymore.

Cattleya went back to the high school that was in the area in which she grew up, and it was like being home.

While in high school, Cattleya knew she wanted to go to college: “I knew that I had to go to college, that was not an option for me. I want to make my parents proud.” Her family is a “military family” with immediate and extended family serving in the Marines. Although her first choice was to follow in their footsteps, she decided to go against it. In high school, she felt one of her teachers assumed this would be her path, and the statements were not in a positive light but in “that’s all you can do” type of statement. At that point, she wanted to break the mold and do something different. Her parents have always been supportive of her college path. She stated, “They’ve always said that they want me to go to college and that they don’t want me to struggle as much as they did.” Cattleya planned to go to law school after she completed her bachelor’s degree; her ultimate goal was to become a criminal defense attorney, specifically serving one of the military branches.

Enrique

Enrique was a 21-year-old male. He was a junior majoring in mathematics with a concentration in secondary education and an endorsement in second language acquisition. Enrique was not only the first in his family to attend college, but to graduate from high school. Enrique’s family is from Mexico, he had two younger brothers and one younger sister. He was born in the U.S., but moved to Mexico at a very young age. His mother lived in Mexico and his father lived in Colorado. At the age of fifteen he “came out” as a gay man, he did not have any contact with his parents or siblings. He stated, “My family is not too close to me because I’m gay.” Their religion doesn’t let them get too close to me, they’re Jehovah Witnesses.” After he shared his sexual orientation with his parents, they disowned him and his grandmother (paternal) adopted him at the age of fifteen. His father lived close to him, and his younger brother attended the same high school he attended, yet they did not have any contact. Enrique was very close to

his grandmother; she had been involved and supportive of him every step of the way. He shared, “My grandma looks up to me, she's proud that I'm in college especially after all of the hate from my family.”

Spanish was his native language and speaking English was always a major barrier throughout his education. Throughout Enrique’s elementary and middle school experience, he was still close to his parents and his mother was primarily involved in his education. Enrique stated, “My parents were very unstable, so they probably crossed the border at least seven times back and forth. I just live here [a] little bit and back there, and I do a grade here, grade there.” He shared, “Going back and forth, that was mainly the most difficult part, changing schools every year and languages. I'm not the best at reading English, and not the best at reading Spanish.”

Enrique completed his freshman year in the U.S., and his sophomore in Mexico. At that point, he began living with his grandmother full-time and his life became more stable. He was actively involved in extracurricular activities at his high school. Language continued to be a barrier for him, as well as for his grandmother, as she is Spanish speaking only. He stated she tried to be involved in his school experience by attending parent-teacher conferences and such, but it was difficult for her. Although high school was a difficult point in his life and brought on many life changes, Enrique shared his high school was supportive and open to the LGBTQ community and he felt accepted there. In high school, Enrique did not have college goals; he thought he would end up working a typical “Latino” job like “construction or cutting grass.”

Enrique’s goal now is to help people, he shared the following regarding his call to education:

I had a volunteer job as a teacher assistant and I would translate every paper, and when I explain to a kid who just arrived from Mexico, who didn't speak any English, as soon as

he would get it, it was like a little spark that I would see in his eyes, [that] would inspire me, and help me to decide to get a degree in education.

Erick

Erick was a 20-year-old male. He was a junior and is majoring in nursing. Erick was born in the U.S. and has lived in Colorado since he was three years old. His parents were both born in Mexico. He stated:

Both of my parents are documented, they've been citizens for over 20 years now. My mom got citizenship because her father was actually born in California, born and raised. Then he [grandfather] came over to El Paso and did a little bit of traveling, and he met grandma and tried to bring her over, but she didn't really like the United States too much so they stayed the remainder of their old age in Juarez.

Erick had a younger sister who was a junior in high school. Spanish was Erick's native language and was primarily spoken at home. His parents spoke some English, but they were not very comfortable with it.

Erick had a "pretty solid foundation" in terms of his education. In elementary school, Erick's grandmother was primarily involved in his day to day life, he shared, "My parents were as involved as they could be at that time. At that time, we weren't making a lot of money, so they spent most of their time working." In middle school, Erick began to follow a problematic path and was suspended from school. At that point, his mother decided to leave her pursuit of a certificate as a nursing assistant to stay home full time. He stated, "That's the time my mom decided to leave nursing behind and she stayed home, and she paid more attention." Erick shared the elementary and middle school he attended was comprised of primarily Latina/o and low-income students. He never felt out of place; he felt he was "just like everyone else."

Erick attended the local high school in his area. It was a diverse high school and was accepting of different cultures and people. Although he was very involved in both athletics and other extra-curricular activities, he did not feel like he was a great student. He hoped his

involvement in extra-curricular would help with his college applications. Erick is the first in his family to attend college. In high school, Erick's college goal was to move out of state. He was not sure of his degree path or career choice, but he knew he wanted to move. Once he realized the cost of tuition and such, he decided to stay in state and explore different career paths. Erick is unsure of his goals and career path after graduation; he plans on working in his field for a few years and "perfecting his craft." His ultimate goal was to become a doctor:

Part of me does want to take the MCAT, to see what happens, but there's always that little fear. You can only take it so many times, and I don't want to discourage myself. I want to keep on a good plan, and I'm sure if I would be ready for an MCAT. I think it's just a little beyond my reach right now, but it won't be out of my reach forever, but right now I think it is.

Erick's family supported his college path, although it took them a little time to get on board. His father was unsure whether Erick would attend college, but later told Erick, "You're this far; you can't quit now."

Perla

Perla was a 21-year-old female. She was junior majoring in business management. She was the first in her family to attend college. Her younger sister and brother were also in college, following in her footsteps. Perla had four younger siblings, ranging in age from 20 to 14.

Perla's parents and two youngest siblings were born in Mexico and are undocumented (not U.S. legal citizens). Perla and her sister were born in the U.S., before her family moved back to Mexico. When she turned 21 years old, Perla could apply for residency for her family; she stated, "I am planning on applying to help them for residency, we actually started doing it two months ago, [and] they're in the process."

Perla's native language was Spanish and it was a difficult process for her to learn English. Her parents speak very little English and her siblings are all fluent in English. She and

her family moved to the U.S. when she was 13 years old; she finished eighth grade at the local middle school. At that point, she did not speak any English and was very scared:

I remember that my first class was a science class, the teacher assigned a student to sit with me and she would translate everything for me. I just had no idea that there were other students like me, that didn't speak English, but I met them like a month after I started.

In high school, language continued to be an issue for her. Perla was primarily in ESL classes throughout her high school years. Finally, in her senior year, she was told she no longer needed the classes. She worked very hard to learn to speak, read, and write English. Although speaking was a continued issue for her, she stated:

I feel like I really wanted to learn so I feel like I paid a lot of attention in my English classes. But I didn't practice much speaking because I was just really shy, and the people that I hung out with spoke Spanish so I didn't really need to speak English.

Her hard work paid off; by her senior year she was taking a college English composition class.

Perla stated her mom has always been really involved in her education. She attended parent-teacher conferences regularly, and was a member of the parent association. The idea of college came naturally to her as Perla's parents expected it of her. She had not yet decided what she wanted to do after she graduates college. Options included continuing to earn her master's degree or taking time to gain some work experience and eventually open her own business.

Perla was very interested in merging her love of fashion and her business sense. She knew that finishing college was a priority and a necessity for her:

My parents think it's very necessary if you want to have a successful future, if you don't want to have a really difficult job. My dad tells us he doesn't want us to be truck drivers, and tells us to work jobs that earn more money.

Teresa

Teresa was a 22-year-old female. She was a senior majoring in aviation and aerospace science with a concentration in space oriented operations. Her father is from Mexico, and her

mother was born in the U.S.; both are documented. Teresa had three older brothers; she and her siblings were all born in the U.S. All of her brothers attended college; two graduated and one dropped out. English is her native language, although both Spanish and English were spoken at home. Teresa understands Spanish but was uncomfortable to speak it:

They [her parents] taught my older two brothers how to speak Spanish, but not much [to] me and my younger brother. So it was kind of divided, my dad speaks English with us sometimes, like when he's mad he will speak Spanish and we will understand.

Teresa's elementary and middle school experience was stable. She felt her experience was much the same as others, due to the fact that the majority of students were Latina/o. She also shared her mother was more involved during her elementary education but began to disconnect when Teresa reached middle school. High school was an interesting time for Teresa. Although she did well academically, she had a difficult time socially. She did not fit in with the "Spanish" or the "White" cliques of students.

Teresa's parents were not involved at all during her high school years; she stated:

They knew I was a good kid, so they never really came to conferences or anything like that. I actually volunteered and took parents [escorted parents to meet with teachers] who came without their daughter or son, but they never really came.

Teresa's parents' non-involvement continues: "They don't know anything that's going on, I don't even think they know I'm going to graduate this spring, that's how involved they are." Although there was a lack of involvement from her parents, she shared there was still an expectation that she attend college. In part, this was due to her brothers having attended, but also because she was not involved in sports or any extra-curricular activities in high school.

In high school, Teresa was interested in astronomy; she stated, "Since I was a kid I liked space stuff, [and] I wanted to be an astronaut." She shared, "My parents don't understand my major; I don't think they even know what it is. They wish I would have done something more practical, like a nurse or something." At the time of the interview, she was graduating that spring

and had begun organizing herself for life after college. She was planning on continuing to work at the small airport at which she was currently employed. She stated, “It’s a really good network connection” and it was also providing her free flight hours. Her major has provided her training to work on satellite systems, but she shared her ultimate goal was to work as a corporate or private pilot.

Ximena

Ximena was a 20-year-old female. She was a junior majoring in criminal justice with a minor in criminalistics (forensics). Her parents and her older brother were born in Mexico and she and her younger sister were born in the U.S. Her parents are undocumented and her brother currently is eligible to receive the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Spanish is her native language. She stated, “My parents understand very little and they don't really speak it. I had to translate for my mom.”

Ximena’s elementary and middle school education was somewhat unstable because her family moved around often. Although they stayed primarily in the Denver Metro Area, constant moving caused her to attend several different elementary and middle schools. The first elementary school she attended was ideal. This was because the school supported Spanish speakers very well and they had many different opportunities for her mother to be involved as the activities were provided in Spanish. During her stay at that school, her mother was very involved in her education. Once they moved to other schools, her mother was not as involved due to the language barrier.

By high school, Ximena’s family had established in one area. She stated, “I really enjoyed being there [at the same high school] all four years because I didn't have to keep adapting to different schools.” She excelled at this high school, and felt supported by teachers

and counselors. She was involved in sports, theater, and was enrolled in college level classes. College has always been Ximena's goal; she stated, "Ever since I was little, I've always known I wanted to go to college, [even] when I was very very little."

Ximena's college goals were becoming clearer as she progressed through her classes. When she began to apply to colleges, she was unsure if her path was to be in the medical or legal field. She stated, "I was kind of all over the place but I always knew I want to go to college." She is planning on taking the LSAT courses this summer to begin preparing for the exam, but she is still leaving her path open to the medical field and plans on taking the MCAT exam as well. Her parents were very supportive; "My parents are actually very proud of me, being the first one. They had no background of someone going [to college], they were shocked kind of when I told them, but they were very happy."

This section summarized the participant's background and provided a glimpse into the participants' life. It focused on the participants' familiar background and upbringing, barriers and challenges they and/or their family encountered through the educational system and in the college process and the participants' goals for the future.

Themes

This portion provides a narrative of the themes I constructed from the analysis of data to answer the central and sub research questions. The themes were grouped into three main sections specific to the research questions: College-going Experience, Program Support, and School Experience.

Figure 3 provides a brief description of the themes; a detailed discussion of the themes follows the figure.

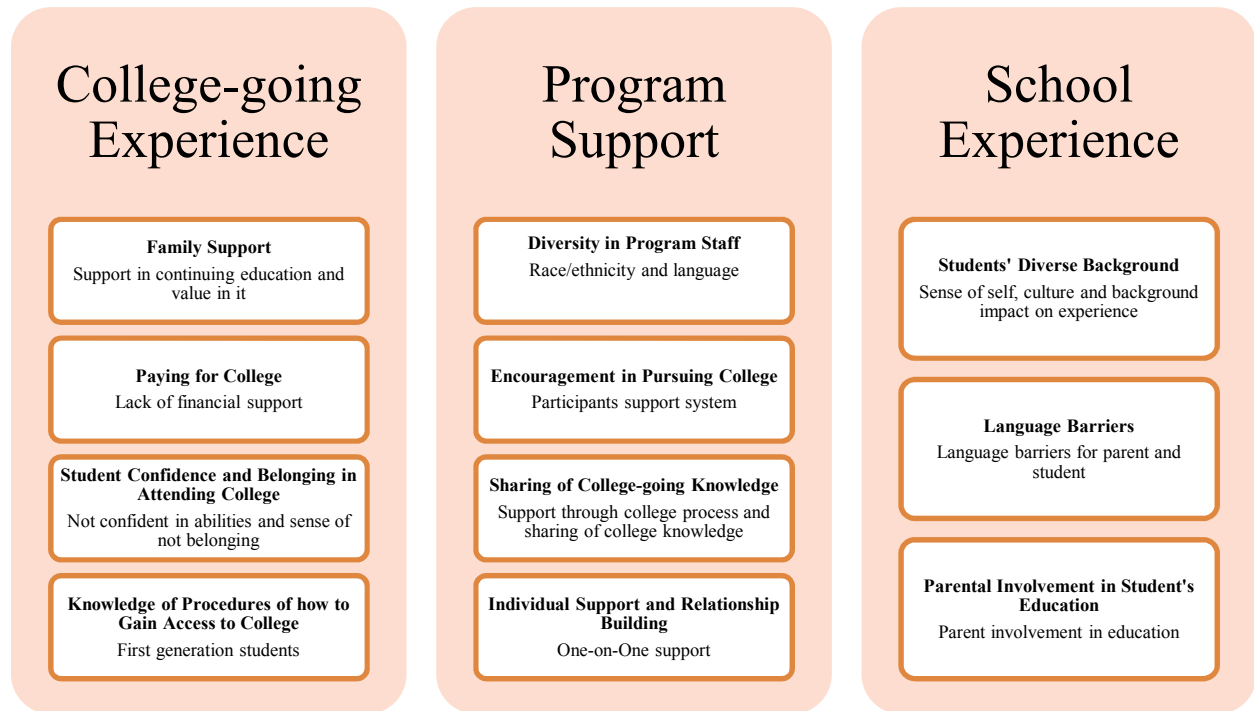


Figure 3: Themes

College-going Experience

The themes under College-going Experience answered the research questions that centered on the common experiences of students as they progressed through the college-going process, and how the students' diverse backgrounds influenced their college-going experience. In analyzing the data, I found these two research questions were intertwined, and the students could not detail their college-going experience without also detailing how their diverse backgrounds influenced those experiences. As Villapando (2006) asserted, it was more than race/ethnicity that created the intersections of student identities. These students linked their college experience with such issues as: their parents' legal status and their families' socioeconomic status, language barriers, and familial responsibilities due to their culture. I

found these questions were connected to issues relevant to the participants' culture, ethnicity, language, and familial background. In particular, family support, paying for college, student confidence and belonging in attending college, and knowledge of procedures of how to gain access to college are the themes that represent the students' college-going experience.

Family support. Family can be a major support or deterrent from a student's progression from high school to college. Nora (2004) stated, for Latina/o students, family plays a major role in the students' success. If students are receiving support and encouragement from family members, they are likely to continue their educational pursuits. All participants stated they felt supported and encouraged by their parents or grandparent as they navigated the college-going process; although it was not always in the form of support in completing college-going steps, but more in general encouragement of attending and staying in college.

Teresa shared, "[my parents] going with me to certain events [was] really to see what it was about. But there wasn't really support [in terms of the college process] from them; it was like you better go to college." Enrique shared the following regarding the support he received from his grandmother:

She's very supportive, and making sure I sleep and eat, and she supports me in different ways. It's not like she can sit down and helps me with my calculus, but she supports me in the way that she can. My grandma [doesn't] quite understand, but she was just proud that I made it that far [to college].

Ximena stated:

My parents are actually very proud of being the first one; they had no background of someone going. They were shocked kind of when I told them, but they were very happy. My dad's always been really, really supportive of it with money wise, as well as my mom. She wakes up super early, and makes me something to eat. They were both very happy when I told them.

While Latino parents have been characterized as not valuing higher education (Aragon, 2016; Ceja, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2000), this is not the case for many of the students with

whom I have worked, in particular the students who participated in this study. “Setting high expectations for the completion of school and expressing the desire for children to further their education, or become more educated than the parents, appear to be powerful and pervasive beliefs and attitudes among Mexican American families” (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 95). Cattleya’s parents desired for their children to have opportunities they did not have. They provided continued encouragement and set an expectation for college. Cattleya shared:

They’ve always said that they want me to go to college, and that they don’t want me to struggle as much as they did. My dad grew up in the sixties, when it was really discriminatory. He says he doesn’t want me to go in his footsteps, in the struggle that he’s gone through. My mom [said the] same thing, she says she didn’t just come over here for me to not do anything. So it’s always been a big thing since I was younger; it was in my head that I have to go to college [and] you can’t just back out. They were always there when I had like big news, and I would come home and tell them. They’ve always wanted me since I started high school to go to college. Since my freshman year they’ve always been on me to make sure that my grades were good for college. My senior year when I was applying to college and would get letters, sometimes they would open it [the letters] before I open [opened them] it, they were excited. I knew that I had to go to college that was not an option for me. I want to make my parents proud.

Perla’s parents set an expectation of college; it was part of their familial culture. Her family expressed the need for education to not only to reach her college goals, but to provide for her future economic security. Perla shared the following:

It just came to me naturally, what was going to be the next step after high school. My mom, she didn’t even ask us if we wanted to go, she just said you’re going [and] there was no other option. My parents think it’s very necessary if you want to have a successful future, if you don’t want to have a really difficult job. My dad tells us he doesn’t want us to be truck drivers, and tells us to work jobs that earn more money. My mom says that we should do whatever makes us happy. They didn’t go to college, so that’s why it was the main thing for us to go. They were always telling me, you can do it.

Paying for college. Research indicated “socioeconomic status is the greatest determinant of enrollment and persistence in college for all students” (Oesterreich, 2000, p. 4). “As college tuition increases and family income remains the same, an affordable college education is not a reality for many Latina/o students” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 9). Many students shared they

had applied to various colleges, but once they realized the cost of attendance and the addition of room and board, they felt it was out of their reach and selected an institution that was less expensive. Although these same students expressed their decision of attending their current college ended up being the right decision, there was a sentiment of missed opportunities and experiences.

Enrique shared his inability to see college as reachable due to his family's socioeconomic status. He said, "I thought college was just something that you had to pay completely on your own, and coming from a low-income family, my grandma [was] on disability [and] it wasn't reachable for me, it wasn't possible." Other participants also connected their socioeconomic status with college tuition, and seeing it as inaccessible. Teresa stated, "I got accepted to CU Boulder [University of Colorado Boulder], and then I got introduced to tuition and thought, MSU Denver it is." Perla's experience was along the same lines; she shared, "I wanted to go to Colorado State University first, because I knew that it had a really good program. It was a lot more expensive and I understood that after a while, so I decided to come to Metro." Erick had a desire to go out of state, to have new experiences in another part of the country and experience campus life, he shared the following regarding his experience:

I did get accepted to Montana State University and I had plans to go there. I was going to take out student loans, but I realized I don't even know what I'm going to do. If I do this, it just rack up a bunch of debt, and it was all for nothing. So I decided to stay home and go to school here [MSU Denver]. I just wanted to you know, I've been in Colorado my whole life. Like you want to see a little bit more of [what] the rest of the world looks like. It's more of a curiosity, you want to live on campus, and you want to have friends and have your little adventures and stuff like that.

Ximena's experience was in line with the others:

I didn't understand the difference, it's because everyone was saying that I need to apply there [University of Colorado Boulder]. I started more digging on my own and doing research and looked at their tuition and dorms. I started looking at UCD and tuition was a little bit higher than here [MSU Denver] and why is it so different, if it's the same

campus. Then we started talking in one of my classes about prestige, and that's when I started understanding why the difference in the tuition.

Student confidence and belonging in attending college. It is evident families are encouraging and pushing students to go to college, but there continues to be a growing gap between Latino students and their White counterparts (Loza, 2003). Unfortunately, “educational inequities and disparate accessibility to a college-preparatory curriculum are problems at many K-12 schools with a high concentration of Latinas/os, making higher education an elusive goal” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 3).

Reese’s (2008) research suggested “disparities exist because educators expect less from students of color and those from lower SES, and underestimate the issues associated with being a first-generation college-bound student” (p. 54). Ximena explained it perfectly: “I feared it; I was scared.” Enrique shared the following regarding how his level of confidence affected his college goals:

I didn't have any goals, I didn't have any. I'm the first one to graduate from high school. My plan was to get a job. I didn't have any college goals. Coming from a Hispanic family, I guess construction or cutting grass. I thought I was just going to be a typical Latino person, you know, the usual stereotype working something [in] construction.

Cattleya stated:

Being scared was like mostly my feelings. I was scared of like not being able to get into college, because of who I am. I would be looking at all these other people that they got into big schools.

Erick was very reflective in how he presented the idea of self-confidence, and provided thoughtful advice on how to overcome the fear of college. He shared:

They've already decided you're going to be discriminated against; basically, you can look at it that way, but the truth is, there's more than enough opportunities for anyone who's looking for it, no matter what they are. The truth is sometimes it's hard to self-reflect, and it's hard to admit that we're just not living up to our full potential. It's easier to blame someone else for our own shortcomings. You know, you should be accepting them, moving on in a positive way, and learning from them. So [what] if you don't get a scholarship. It's not like I didn't get it because I wasn't smart enough to get, or because of

my skin color. It doesn't matter why, you just didn't get it. You just gotta look for the next best thing. If you're always looking to improve, [and] you keep a positive attitude, how could people not support you. Sometimes it feels like the worlds against you, but you will find support and there are people that will help you.

All participants expressed fear of the college-going experience and college in general.

They shared a feeling of not belonging and not being good enough. These thoughts are ingrained in students from many different levels. There was a lack of role models in their world, individuals with positions of authority who look like them and speak like them. Schooling in the U.S. often produces stagnant curriculum and pedagogies barren of critical inquiry or recognition of racial context (Aragon, 2016). Thus, the importance of Latinas/os racial identity, language, ethnicity, and culture is often disregarded or irrelevant (Aragon, 2016). PK-12 schools continue to feed students' fears and set up an environment of oppression by not providing students the college-going opportunities that may build their confidence and sense of belonging. Latina/o students of color must find alternative educational structures to assist them in their higher education endeavors.

Knowledge of procedures of how to gain access to college. Research has found “growing up in a family in which neither parent has gone to college may have long-term consequences on students’ success in postsecondary education” (Chen & Carroll, 2005. p. iii). Due to the lack of information sharing by secondary and post-secondary institutions, many families use their social and familial networks to assist with the college process (Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Families look to those who have personal experience in going through the college process (Marquez Kiyama, 2010). All participants in this study identified as first-generation students. Students whose parents did not attend college are referred to as first generation students (Shelton, 2011). The secondary and post-secondary education systems are

too often not set up to support first generation students and this structure results in parents and students having to navigate through an unfamiliar system on their own.

Erick shared how his family's lack of knowledge of opportunities available to advance his college career negatively affected his college-going process:

I missed out on a lot of opportunities; I see most white kids graduate [high schools] and go straight to college. They already had like a couple college classes underneath their belt; because at a very early age their parents are telling them the importance of education in their life. Telling them that if you do well now, later you'll have an easier time. That's kind of a hard concept to get across to a child, if you get it across that means for a successful adult.

Educators struggle to provide the proper services and resources for undocumented students and are often unfamiliar with students' rights and the resources available to them. Ximena's parents were undocumented. She was eligible to receive federal and state aid, but it can be a difficult process of applying and verifying financial aid due to her parents' status in this country. As Ximena progressed through the college-going process, financial aid was a major issue for her family; they were at a loss as to steps and information to provide. Ximena shared, "With the FAFSA I was very scared, being that my parents don't have a Social Security [number]. The counselor helped me understand and explain [the process of applying for financial aid] it to my parents."

Family support, paying for college, student confidence, sense of belonging in attending college, and knowledge of procedures on how to gain access to college were the themes grouped under College-going Experience. This section focused on the research questions centered on the common experiences of students as they progressed through the college-going experience, and how the students' diverse backgrounds influenced their college-going experiences.

Program Support

The precollege program supplements the work of high school/career counselors and provides time and support to students. Counseling/career programs are critical elements in ensuring successful transition from secondary to post-secondary institutions. Effective counseling programs and guidance counselors are a students' lifeline to determine academic, career, and personal goals (Cooper & Liou, 2007).

The themes under Program Support answered the research questions which focused on the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (precollege program) and how it contributed to the participants' successful enrollment in college. The questions asked provided participants an opportunity to share how (or if) the program supported them to successfully enroll in college. Diversity in program staff, encouragement in pursuing college, sharing of college-going knowledge, and individual support and relationship building emerged as the four main themes within this section.

Diversity in program staff. All participants in the study self-identified as Mexican, Latina/o, or Hispanic. Of the six participants interviewed, five indicated that Spanish was their native language. All program staff from the work-study students to the director of the program were bilingual (English/Spanish). In addition to the staff being bilingual, they also self-identified as Mexican and/or Latina/o and were first-generation students as well as first-generation college graduates.

The staff identified with and well understood the barriers and challenges students faced on their path to college. Participants shared how the diversity of the staff added another layer to the support the program provided. Ximena shared how comfortable the diversity made her feel: "I love that the Excel team is diverse background. I can relate to them, and they don't assume

things, they just kind of like talk to you, make you feel comfortable.” Cattleya felt comfortable with the staff and was easily able to build a trusting relationship due to the similarities in background, she shared:

I feel like that because they spoke Spanish, I felt more comfortable talking to them about stuff. We [the high school] would have other pre-collegiate programs go that really weren't diverse, and I would feel intimidated. But with this program, all of them [program staff] look like me, and you know they [program staff] could do it, so I can do it too. I knew that I could trust them, and let them actually help me.

Enrique felt that because his background was similar to the program staff, he could relate to the them and they were role models for what he aspired to be. He stated:

Having someone of your own background, someone being Hispanic as well was very helpful. [They were] People you could talk with openly about stuff, and someone who has stuff in common, and their [program staff] examples of success as well. I wanted Jesus's [program staff member] job so bad.

Encouragement in pursuing college. Often students from diverse backgrounds are not seen as college material and not encouraged by counselors and teachers to pursue higher education (Fallon, 1997). The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program continually worked to create a college-going culture, in which, the program and staff believed every student could be successful in college. How success was defined for each student was different. The program served a student with a G.P.A. of 1.0 the same as a student with a 4.0. The types of colleges or scholarships applied to may differ, but the basics of the college-going process were the same: “A college-going culture comprises a school environment in which teachers, parents, and student peers have high expectations and encourage students to prepare for college” (Perez et al., 2006, p. 4).

Enrique shared, “With Excel everything changed, the idea of coming to higher education was never even thought about before [participating the precollege program].” He also stated:

The program was there for me, they were always pushing me to apply and keep going with the college process, they were my little support group. The Excel program is

probably the greatest thing that happened to me, or else I wouldn't be here today. I mean, I don't know where I would be right now. I'm just really thankful that I got that pass to get out of class. That's what I thought it was, a get out of class pass, and then here I am three years later still in class.

Teresa shared, “They just kind of motivated me to get better; they just motivated me to see a better picture and a better future for myself, to see what everybody else is seeing.” Cattleya’s statement was along the same lines; she stated:

They made me realize a lot, what I'm capable of doing. They [program staff] really believed in me. and I feel like they really helped me. Like they gave me hope that I could actually go to college, like just the program, without them I don't think I would be here.

Sharing of college-going knowledge. Guidance counselors and educators are students’ primary resource for college preparatory information and services (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004). “Latina/o students may be much more reliant than other students on teachers and their school for guidance and information and their college plans are more dependent on their connections to school” (Roderick et al., 2005, p. 4). “That is, school counselors may serve as a significant or sole source of college-related information, norms, or social support for students from lower SES backgrounds” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 196).

The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program was rooted in college access, educating students and families on the college-going process. Precollege staff was well trained on the college-going process and could easily assist in completing a FAFSA application but that defeated the “teaching” purpose. Participants in this study shared their experiences in the guiding and sharing of knowledge they received from the program staff.

Teresa shared, “The program helped open my eyes to opportunities, and really helped with guiding me that I was on the right path, not the wrong path.” Cattleya felt she would not have completed the college-going process without the support of the program, they were her guides and provided the college-going knowledge that she needed to enroll. She stated:

I feel like they [program staff] just picked me up and they guided me with any questions I had. All the colleges I apply to it was because of them. They help me get like waivers [and helped with] my essays, [just] everything. It was just through them. It's just without them, I probably still be there [home town]. This program actually guided me through it. This program showed me step by step how to do stuff. In the program, we were actually doing it, not just telling me, it was more working through things together.

Enrique felt the program introduced him to college and provided him the knowledge to successfully enroll:

I didn't know about anything, that's when [he began working with the program] I got introduced to everything. I didn't know anything about the COF [College Opportunity Fund] or scholarships. They helped me with FAFSA, and they help me with my essay and MSU Denver application. They explain things to me, or else I would have never applied.

Erick shared the following regarding his experience: "I think the program gave me just about everything I needed to really get through. I needed help and they were there to give it."

Erick felt his experience in with the program made the college process less scary and provided him the knowledge and support he needed to complete the college process. He stated:

In high school, well, I feel like it was just a little less scary. You're an 18- or 17-year-old high school kid signing up for college and you're making like big life-changing commitments. Like you're just scared because everything has to be by the book. Everything has to be this and this and that [college process requirements] and you have to keep up. You have to pay everything on time for your scholarship; we have to write like a 2000-page essay. With the programs help, I thought like okay maybe I can do this, and it's not so difficult. It was easier and approachable.

Perla stated:

The FAFSA workshops they were super helpful; it's also something that parents don't know about, like my parents had no idea about that. The Excel Pre-Collegiate they took me everywhere and they help me ask for the things that I needed. That really helps because I don't think I would really know where to go. I don't think that like anyone else would have taken me around like that, because I didn't even know what to ask for.

Ximena's experience with the program was similar:

I was coming in [starting college] with one of my friends, and we were both confused and we were scared. It was really helpful and made it less intimidating; we had some workshops so that we could prepare ourselves. We talked a little bit about FAFSA, and we received support early. I feel like now that I know more, I can tell them [her parents]

myself, because my senior year he [father] was like for what, and he was very questioning. I'm able to explain it more to him, and I tell him more about it. I like to help other students, and I want to help them like they [the precollege program] helped me.

The program staff sought to educate and teach students and families, to empower them with college going information for the student/family to support themselves and others through the process. The participants shared how the program provided them the support and knowledge they needed to successfully enroll in college.

Individual support and relationship building. One-on-one support and giving the time to building relationships with students provided for an environment that built connection, trust, and comfortability for the participants. Participants felt the individual, personal support and communication allowed the counselor to share his or her knowledge, learn about the participant and his/her particular needs, and meet the student where he/she is at instead of providing a general curriculum. As cited in The Center for Promise Report (2015), “Peers and adults who are not a child’s parents can provide a safe and secure base to which a person can return, as needed, and from which the person can explore other experiences and opportunities in the world” (p. 5). The report also stated, “Researchers have found that young people who have supportive relationships with parents, friends and teachers have better school outcomes and fewer behavior problems than youth who have relationships with fewer sources of support” (p. 6).

Enrique stated, “The one-on-one, in-person meeting was the best part of the program.” Once he built a relationship with the counselor; he stated, “literally met with them every week.”

Perla stated, “they genuinely care for the students.” Ximena’s experience was along the same lines in terms of the initial relationship building, and the continued support. She shared the following:

I did some research online, but I wasn't like sure how it all [college-going process] works. I went to the Excel program and then I just kept going; and I was always there, I think I went pretty much [there] every Wednesday.

Erick stated, “I really like the one-on-one, and they really took the time, and it was like personal. He [program staff] was really good with emails, replying back to me when I have any questions.

Diverse staff, encouragement and motivation, guidance and knowledge, and individual support were the themes of focus in this section. These themes directly addressed the research question which centered on the aspects of the precollege program that supported the students to successfully enroll in college.

School Experience

The majority of Latina/os attend urban high schools, which traditionally serve low income underrepresented students (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004). The high schools lack resources in terms of funding, staff, and extra-curricular activities which engage and promote learning for students (Corwin et al., 2004). Well-prepared, culturally sensitive teaching staff play a major role in the students’ academic preparation (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Ximena shared, “I’ve always felt like I was at a disadvantage, the teacher was being more lenient with some students, and I felt like they had an advocate that we didn't have.”

Teaching staff play an important role in students’ college aspirations. The classroom experience plays a key role in student achievement in all segments of the educational pipeline. Cultural deficit frameworks, which suggest families are at fault for the poor academic performance of minority children, “reinforce teacher practices that negatively affect student-teacher relations and produce low expectations for Students of Color” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 3)

The themes under School Experience answered the research question that is centered in the participants educational experience as a whole (PK-12), and how the educational experience

and students' diverse backgrounds influenced their experiences. The three themes that emerged from the analysis of data and that support the research question are: students' diverse backgrounds, language barriers, and parental involvement in students' education.

Students' diverse background. A student's unique background can positively and/or negatively affect how they progress through their educational experience. In addition to the student's own perception of how their background may affect their abilities parents, teachers and school staff add another layer of possible assumptions and stereotypes, which may disillusion the student very early on. Ximena shared, "There's some of those teachers at the high school that pointed out if you need extra time. Stuff like that kind of bugs me, so I just kinda proved them wrong cause I would finish it beforehand and turn it in."

Cattleya shared her experiences with racism throughout middle and high school, she not only "felt different," but also heard off-hand comments from teachers regarding her background. The differences affected her personality and she became shy and reclusive from others. She shared:

You can easily tell when people look at you different, or when they have something to say, or just like that bad vibe. Especially when I was younger, I don't really get it, but I would like to have these comments from teachers like my gym teacher in particular, and they would tell me like are *you really trying to play that*. I wouldn't understand that, and then like Middle School, where [it] is more easy to tell, it was just different. Somebody like you, like me [easy to tell that she was different from others at her school]. Like you could tell like who has more privileged, and who doesn't really. It was kind of more easy to tell, and I think that kind of affected me when I got to high school. When I moved to my new middle school, you could tell that they looked at me differently, and I became a really shy person. I didn't really talk to anyone; I just stay in my own little corner. At my old middle school the Latinos were the majority, but at my new middle school we were the minority. Like a Latina to be an honors class, that was different, and they would look at me different.

Cattleya further shared:

I let people walk all over me, like being a minority. I would do people's homework, it was bad. They would do whatever they want with me, they would take advantage of me, and I got tired of it. I started standing up for myself, and it went back to how it was at the

middle school, and I was like I can't do this anymore. So I bug my Mom to move schools, so I went back to the high school in my area. I grew up with these kids, so it was easier for me to go back there, and I liked it there more.

Some of the participants stated they could not express how their experiences may have been different from others as they attended elementary, middle, and high school in areas and schools in which they (Latina/os) were the majority. Teresa shared, "I feel like my experience wasn't different because I felt like my ethnicity was the majority of students at my school."

Along the same lines, but more focused on socio-economic status, Erick stated:

I don't think my experience was different, because I feel like most kids that went to my elementary and middle school were lower income. So we were all experiencing the same. I think if I would have been a white student, it would have been totally different. Most of my friends were Spanish speaking. If I would have been like white or Asian it would have been really different. Hispanics or Latinos were the majority at our school. Had I gone somewhere like Pomona or Ralston Valley I think things would have been a little bit different, a little bit more weird.

Participants also expressed divides between students "like them" at their schools. One participant was not seen as "brown enough" and one was seen as different because she did not fit into the group of "Chicanas," and not seen as Mexican. Teresa shared:

I had social issues it would be hard to find the click of friends that would take you in. I look brown but I didn't speak Spanish so it was hard to find where to hang out. The white kids don't except me because I'm not white and the Spanish kids didn't because I didn't speak Spanish so I just kind of bounced around.

Cattleya also expressed issues around fitting in due to her diverse background. She shared the following regarding her middle school experience:

In Middle School, the community where I grew up, there was a lot of [what I call] gang violence, especially in the middle school. There it was typical groups, like if you were a Caucasian or African American you had your own little group. So we never really mixed over. It was really hard cuz I couldn't be friends with someone outside of my culture because I would have to get in a fight.

She also shared regarding her high school experience:

So it was a big transition. My freshman and sophomore year were hard; girls were mean to me, even those like Latinas, but they're not Latinas there Chicanas. That school had a

lot of Chicanas, and they would look at me like *you do what I tell you to do* and then I would not do it. I couldn't do it, and I was getting really bad influences. I was ditching classes to go and fight, or whatever. My freshman or sophomore year were more difficult, I knew that I was a minority at my school that I would be bashed on. So I knew that, but I couldn't do that, and so like my mom moved me schools.

Enrique had many barriers throughout his educational experience and identifies with many of the same issues that other participants expressed. Enrique has an additional “diverse” layer in that he identifies as a gay Latino man. This revelation to his partners was not taken well and he was no longer in contact with his parents or siblings. He shared, “The other difficulty during high school is when I came out. My parents kind of already don't like me so they basically disowned me.” Luckily for Enrique, he had a strong support person in his grandmother, to whom he refers as “mom.” He also shared how his high school was open and accepting, and he felt safe there. He stated, “Teachers were very supportive, my peers supported me and my grandma was supportive. I became GSA president and the school was really good, they had a no place for hate training every year so that was helpful as well.”

Language barriers. Latina/o and/or bilingual teaching staff and teachers who received training in multicultural education are few and far between (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Instead of encouraging the culture and language Latina/o students bring to the classroom, teaching staff often view these as deficits and place students in groups and classrooms that labeled the students as inadequate (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Five of the six participants' native language was Spanish, some of the participants were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) most of their elementary and some into high school career. Cattleya shared:

I didn't get my first English class until like sixth grade, so like I didn't know English in elementary school, because [all] of my classes were all in Spanish. I did math in Spanish, I read in Spanish. So like it was kind of weird going to middle school [and] having an actual English teacher.

Perla stated:

Language was an issue for me, I did take ESL. She [ESL teacher] was the only teacher I had for four years. I don't think I had to take it for my senior year because they said that I was ok by then. The only problem was mostly the speaking part because I was [self-conscious] in general.

Enrique's experience was different as his family was continually alternating between Mexico and the U.S. This caused major issues for Enrique, especially in terms of his English and Spanish language development. He shared:

I was born here in Colorado, but I was taken to Mexico at a very young age and I was raised over there. When I came here language was a super huge barrier. The difficult part was going back and forth. That was mainly the most difficult part, changing schools every year, and [alternating between] languages. I'm not the best at reading English, and not the best at reading Spanish. So it was difficult going back and forth. Not the best writer in English, and I'm not the best writer in Spanish. I have a lot of grammar problems, so that was difficult. My experience was different because of my ethnicity to begin with, but not everyone would have to change countries back and forth. The only thing I did well [in] was mathematics, because it was only thing I can understand [in both languages].

Perla's story was similar to Enrique's as she was born in the U.S. as well, and her family moved back to Mexico a short while after she was born. Although Perla did not have to adjust to the additional issues of living between countries because her family immigrated to the U.S. when she was 13 years old, and they have lived in the U.S. since then. Perla began learning English at an older age. At first, it was difficult and she was very shy, but she soon decided that in order to learn she had to immerse herself and become involved at her school. In a short time, she began to feel proficient in the English language. Perla shared the following regarding her experience:

I only did high school here I actually did part of my 8th grade year. It was kind of scary because I thought nobody was going to speak Spanish, so I remember just sitting in the classroom and I was really scared. I didn't practice much speaking because I was just really shy, and the people that I hung out with spoke Spanish, so I didn't really need to speak English. The speaking part I feel like I could have done more things, because when I started the first two years of high school I just wasn't feeling too immersed. I just didn't feel like I belong that much, but my last two years I decided that I have to go and be involved. I started making more of an effort just talking more, and trying harder so that's when I started.

Language is a major barrier for parents as well. Not only in the college-going process, but also the school experience in general. There is currently a deficit thinking mind set toward parents that runs rampant in schools, instead of the schools taking the time to reflect on how their processes and systems are oppressive and inequitable (Valencia & Black, 2002). Providing school and college information in both English and Spanish and taking the time to explain the college-going process will help parents to feel confident in supporting and motivating their student through the process (Perez Huber et al., 2006).

Spanish-speaking parents want to learn and support their students and they want to be involved, but they are limited by language barriers. Some of the participants shared some of the issues their parents have experienced with the school system due to language barriers. Perla shared, “The thing that she didn't like so much was that there were no translators [when her parent needed to speak with school staff], and she didn't like that the children would have to translate.” Ximena stated, “I had to translate for my mom, now my sister just comes to me help her with it but it was a little bit harder for me.” Cattleya shared the following regarding her mother's experience:

There was a little bit of a language barrier for my mom in high school. She understands English pretty good, but not everything, and when she tries to say things in English and she don't know how to say it [she becomes embarrassed]. So I was kind of the interpreter, I be talking to her and then I'll be talking to my teachers.

Parental involvement in students' education. Specific to Latina/o students, Rodriguez (2002) found family income, parents' involvement in their child's education, and parents' own educational backgrounds were indicators of academic achievement and aspirations. There is a major misconception that parents do not care about their child's education, when in actuality schools should engage and support parents in their child's educational goals (Aragon, 2016; Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 5; Valencia & Black, 2002).

The level of parental involvement can be tied back to language as well; all participants indicated Spanish was their parents/primary caregiver's native language. Ximena shared the following regarding the language barrier regarding her parents' involvement: "My mom was involved when I was at the Spanish school. She did like PTA and stuff, but at the English school it was harder because of the communication [language barrier]."

Language barriers can also be related to the family's socio-economic status. In Erick's case; he stated, "My parents were as involved as they could be at that time. At that time, we weren't making a lot of money, so they spent most of their time working."

All of the participants indicated their mother and/or mother figure was primarily involved in their education. This is common within Latino households as there is high value on "roles" within the family. An additional core value within the Latino culture is the maintenance of traditional gender roles (Cauce & Domenech-Ramirez, 2000). Cattleya stated, "My mom was really involved, my dad wasn't really involved." Perla shared, "My mom would always go to the meetings, the conferences, and my dad didn't go that often." Erick also related to this issue, he also shared his father—although not involved—still "showed up" when he needed to. He stated:

My dad rarely attended [school events], but when he had to show up he was there. He wasn't there every game, every parent teacher conference, the person that was there was Mom, but when it was time for him to show up he showed up.

It was also noted that as the student progressed from elementary to high school the level of parental involvement decreased. Teresa shared, "My mom was a little bit more involved in elementary, but not in middle school." Along the same lines, Ximena stated, "In high school my parents weren't really involved in my education, so whenever I registered I went alone."

Students' diverse backgrounds, language barriers, and parental involvement in students' educations were themes under School Experience. This section focused on the research question that sought to gain an understanding of the participants' educational experiences as a

whole (PK-12), and how those experiences and the participants' diverse backgrounds influenced their experiences. CRT and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominate discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). By utilizing this framework, school policies and practices can be seen in a different light, one that highlights how such policies and practices negatively affect students of color and specifically Latina/o students.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of the approach and framework used to analyze the data, participant backgrounds, and a report of the groups and themes analyzed through the theoretical framework, the literature, and participant data to answer the central and sub research questions. The themes were grouped under three mains sections: College-going Experience, Program Support, and School Experience.

Under College-going Experience: family support, paying for college, student confidence and sense of belonging in attending college, and knowledge of procedures of how to gain access to college either positively or negatively influenced the participant's progression through the college process. Participants expressed that although their family (parents/parental guardian) did not have the knowledge to support them in navigating the college process, the support in terms of encouragement and a "you can do it" attitude was expressed and provided the participants the support they needed to continue their education. Although participants felt they made a good choice in terms of attending their current institution, some had other dreams that were not actualized due to financial constraints. In general, participants were well adjusted and were

excelling in their classes, but they shared a feeling of “not belonging” and “not being good enough” when they were first exploring and/or navigating the college process.

Diversity in program staff, encouragement in pursuing college, sharing of college-going knowledge, and individual support and relationship building emerged as the themes grouped under Program Support. The program support section specifically related to how—or if—the program supported the participant to successfully enroll in college. Participants put a high value on diverse staff, and specifically indicated valuing staff being of Latina/o background and speaking Spanish. This made participants feel comfortable, and that they could more easily trust the staff. The staff was similar to the participant in terms of background, and provided an “example of success” for the participants. In addition, language was a major issue for the majority of participants and knowing they could speak with the staff in their language of choice was an added value.

Participants shared they felt their college process started when they began meeting with the program. The one-on-one guidance and support and the encouragement and motivation helped the participants feel they could be successful in college. In addition, the knowledge the program staff provided was invaluable. All students were first generation, and lacked the knowledge and “know how” to progress through the college-going process. Excel staff provided the knowledge and education to support them in their college-going path.

Students diverse backgrounds, language barriers, and parental involvement in students’ educations were the main themes under School Experience. School experience referred to the students’ progression through their education and how their diverse backgrounds influenced their progression. The participants’ backgrounds and language played a major role in their progression through their PK-12 education.

The majority of participants discussed language barriers—both for themselves and their parents. Separation from other classmates while learning English and lack of parental involvement due to language barriers was prevalent in the participant data. All participants shared their mother or mother figure was primarily involved in their education, their fathers (if present) were minimally involved. This reflected back on their cultural backgrounds and the roles within the family.

It is evident from the participant data that precollege programs can make a positive impact on the participants' college goals. It is also evident that the current educational system is not set up to provide parents and students the time, guidance, encouragement, and sharing of knowledge needed to successfully navigate the college-going process. With the main goal of supporting students and their families through the college-going process, precollege programs are a necessary addition to schools throughout the country.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of Latina/o students who participated in a precollege program offered by Metropolitan State University of Denver: The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The study focused on the participants' paths to college as well as their diverse backgrounds and cultures. The study sought to examine the barriers, challenges, and opportunities the students encountered on their college-going path, and how—or if—the program supported them in successfully enrolling at MSU Denver. In addition, the study aimed to explore how students' diverse backgrounds influenced and/or affected their college-going experiences and their school experiences in general. Chapter five, the final chapter, provides a discussion of findings, implications for practice, and researcher's implications. The chapter ends with recommendation for further research and conclusions.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following central and sub research questions.

Central research questions:

1. What were the college-going experiences of the Latina/o students that participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program?
2. Did the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program contribute to the Latina/o students' successful enrollment in college?

Sub-questions:

3. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their school experience?

4. How did the students' diverse backgrounds (race, culture, language, immigration, and socio-economic status) influence their college-going experience?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study utilized qualitative inquiry—specifically thematic analysis to examine the lived experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The use of qualitative research allowed me to “...empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices...” and to “...be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40).

“Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in the analysis of data, provides a structure for organization of themes, and assists in interpreting the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A quick view of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase guide in completing thematic analysis is provided in the figure below.



Figure 4: Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Six-Phase Guide to Thematic Analysis

The study drew from the Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) to guide the analysis of the lived experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program and

successfully enrolled in college. LatCrit provided me an opportunity to add a deep cultural lens to the analysis of data, in that LatCrit analyzes such issues as language, ethnicity, culture, and identity (Villapando, 2004).

The use of LatCrit in educational research allowed me to examine how “...educational structures, processes and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109). The use of this theoretical framework provided me the opportunity to examine the Latina/o student precollege lived experience in a holistic manner, taking into accounts the differences, intersections, and uniqueness of each Latina/o student. The figure below provides a summary of the analysis through a LatCrit lens for each of the major sections.



Figure 5: Analysis Through the LatCrit Lens

Participants

The study included six diverse participants who received support from the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program and were enrolled at the time of the interview at Metropolitan State College of Denver. Additional information regarding the participants is provided below.

- Four females and two males participated in the study.
- One participant was a sophomore in college, four were juniors, and one was a senior.
- All participants had completed at least 24 credit hours at the institution.
- All participants self-identified as first-generation students.
- All participants self-identified as Latina/o.
- Five of the six participants stated Spanish was their native language.
- All participants stated Spanish was the primary language spoken at home.
- All participants are U.S. citizens.
- All participants' parents, except one, were born in Mexico.

The six participants selected their own pseudonym to use throughout the study: Cattleya, Enrique, Erick, Perla, Teresa, and Ximena. A detailed overview is provided for each participant in chapter four, and below is a summary of the participants.

- Cattleya was a 20-year-old female student. She was a sophomore and is studying political science.
- Enrique was a 21-year-old male. He was a junior majoring in mathematics with a concentration in secondary education and an endorsement in second language acquisition.
- Erick was a 20-year-old male. He was a junior and is majoring in nursing.

- Perla was a 21-year-old female. She was a junior majoring in business management.
- Teresa was a 22-year-old female. She was senior majoring in aviation and aerospace science with a concentration in space oriented operations.
- Ximena was a 20-year-old female. She was a junior majoring in criminal justice with a minor in criminalistics.

The participants provided rich data regarding their college-going experiences and backgrounds. Each participant provided general background information such as family composition, cultural, language, and educational background. The one-on-one interviews provided participants an opportunity to openly share their backgrounds, educational experiences, and college-going process.

Discussion of Findings

The study found the participants' diverse backgrounds played a major role in their college-going experience. In addition, the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program positively impacted and provided participants the support they needed to successfully navigate the college-going process. The themes were grouped into three main sections specific to the research questions: College-going Experience, Program Support, and School Experience. Under College-going Experience, family support, paying for college, student confidence and belonging in attending college and knowledge of procedures of how to gain access to college emerged as the major themes. Diversity in program staff, encouragement in pursuing college, sharing of college-going knowledge and individual support and relationship building emerged as the major themes under Program Support. The major themes under School Experience were students' diverse backgrounds, language barriers, and parental involvement in students' educations.

Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The study was centered on the participants' college-going experiences. I designed the study to explore the participants' college-going experiences, how their diverse backgrounds influenced those experiences, and how the precollege program supported each student to college enrollment. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the barriers, challenges, and opportunities the students encountered on their college-going path, and how/or if the program supported them in successfully enrolling at MSU Denver. In addition, I wanted to explore how or if the participants' diverse backgrounds influenced and/or affected their college-going experiences and their school experiences in general. Below are summaries of the thematic patterns constructed from the data.

Theme 1: College-going experience. The themes under College-going Experience answered the central research question that sought to explore the common experiences of students as they progressed through the college-going process as well as the sub-research question that focused on the student's diverse background and how or if it influenced their college-going experience. In analyzing the data, I found the patterns continually overlapped and the data was leading me to combine the questions. The students' cultures and backgrounds had a major influence on their college-going experiences. As such, the students could not detail their college-going experiences without also detailing how their diverse background influenced those experiences.

Theme 1a: Family support. Family plays a major role in Latina/os college-going aspirations, enrollment, and completion. The participants expressed although their family (parents/parental guardian) did not have the knowledge to support them in navigating the college

process, the encouragement and pride in the participants' accomplishments was the push and support they needed to continue their education.

There is often an assumption that Latino parents do not support education, but a lack of knowledge and understanding often is the issue (Aragon, 2016; Ceja, 2004; Valencia & Black, 2001). "Schools should engage and support parents in their child's educational goals" (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 5). Instead of making assumptions about the parents' stances on higher education, secondary and post-secondary institutions ought to reflect on their own practices and policies and how they may negatively impact the parent and his/her participation in their student's education. "Setting high expectations for the completion of school and expressing the desire for children to further their education, or become more educated than the parents, appear to be powerful and pervasive beliefs and attitudes among Mexican American families" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 95).

All participants expressed their parents were supportive and encouraged them to attend college, and provided support in their own capacity. Although their parents "had no background of someone going [to college]" or in navigating the college process they provided their support in other ways. Enrique shared, "She's [his grandmother] very supportive, and making sure I sleep and eat, and she supports me in different ways." The participants also shared how important college was to their parents and the value they placed on it. They shared their parents were proud of them, Cattleya stated, "they [her parents] don't want me to struggle as much as they did."

Theme 1b: Paying for college. Paying for college was an issue for all participants. "As college tuition increases and family income remains the same, an affordable college education is not a reality for many Latina/o students" (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 9). All participants

identified as low-income and qualified to receive federal and/or state financial aid. Completing the FAFSA and receiving financial aid is a determining factor in the enrollment and persistence of Latina/o college students (McKinney & Novak, 2013; Perez Huber et al., 2006). Without the financial support the participants received from the institution, they would not have been able to attend college. This was an interesting theme. All participants expressed they had applied and were accepted to more prominent institutions, but were not able to attend due to tuition, room/board and other costs associated with attending the institution. All participants also noted they are happy with the outcome and cannot imagine attending those other institutions. They are doing well, and have not accrued the debt they would have taken on had they decided to attend other institutions.

Theme 1c: Student confidence and belonging in attending college. Confidence and sense of belonging are serious issues participants encountered on their college-going path. All participants expressed they feared the college-going experience—and college in general—prior to their involvement with the pre-collegiate program. They reflected on their high school experiences and how they felt they did not belong or feel “good enough” to attend college.

These thoughts of inadequacy are engrained in students from so many different levels. For instance, there is a lack of role models in their world, and their PK-12 schools may not be setting them up for success. The participants expressed the lack of “attention” and “information” from counselors and teachers, specific to college-going matters. Some participants attributed this issue to race; Cattleya said, “I realize that it was happening to every Latina or Latino at that school.”

It is evident that families are encouraging and pushing students, but there continues to be a growing gap between Latino students and their white counterparts (Loza, 2003).

Unfortunately, “educational inequities and disparate accessibility to a college-preparatory curriculum are problems at many K-12 schools with a high concentration of Latinas/os, making higher education an elusive goal” (Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 3).

Theme 1d: Knowledge of procedures of how to gain access to college. All participants in this study identified as first-generation students, meaning neither of their parents completed a four-year college education. In identifying as a first-generation student, the participant also stated they nor their parents had the knowledge or background in how to navigate the college-going process. This lack of information creates barriers and deters the students’ paths to success. One of the cornerstones of LatCrit is focused in the production of knowledge and the current conditions that are impacting the Latina/o community (Valdes, 1997). Without programs or institutional guidance in the college-going procedures, there is a lack of knowledge around the college-going process. This lack of knowledge and guidance is negatively impacting the Latina/o population and their ability to progress toward success.

The college-going process was very difficult at times, for many participants, such as Enrique, “[It was] like trying to walk without shoes on through needles.” Participants felt as though they missed out on a lot of opportunities and as though they were at a disadvantage and underprepared due to the lack of information from counselors and school staff.

Reese’s (2008) research suggested “disparities exist because educators expect less from students of color and those from lower SES, and underestimate the issues associated with being a first-generation college-bound student” (p. 54). It is common knowledge that first-generation students have a more difficult time in navigating the college-going system, but to assume this also means they do not have the determination or will to be successful is blaming the family and student for their lack of knowledge. Instead, institutions, whether secondary or post-secondary,

need to have educational leaders take the time to reflect on how their internal practices or lack of information sharing negatively impacts these students' knowledge and progress (Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2001). LatCrit requires the examination of the Latina/o experiences as it relates to the critique of the racist and discriminatory and exclusionary institutional practices (Valdes, 1997). Such experiences must be highlighted and transformed for social justice and educational opportunities of Latina/o students.

Due to the lack of information by secondary and post-secondary institutions, many families use their social and familial networks to assist with the college process, specifically looking to those who have personal experience in attending college (Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Institutions can assist with these efforts by offering programming that expands the students' and parents' social networks to include "...educators, college students and alumni, and other families, which would provide the opportunity for families to share college information" (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006, p. 8).

This above section answered the research questions centered on the common experiences of the participants as they progressed through the college-going experience and how the participants' diverse backgrounds influenced their college-going experiences. The themes that emerged to answer these questions were: family support, paying for college, student confidence and sense of belonging in attending college, and knowledge of procedures in how to gain access to college.

Theme 2: Program support. The next group of themes fall under Program Support, which answered the research question focusing on the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program (precollege program), and how/or if it contributed to the participants' enrollment in college. Diversity in program staff, encouragement in pursuing college, sharing of college-going knowledge, and

individual support and relationship building were the themes that emerged to answer this question.

Theme 2a: Diversity in program staff. The participants put a high value on the diversity of the staff, specifically that the staff shared a Latina/o background and spoke Spanish. This made participants feel comfortable and like they could easily trust the staff. The staff members were similar to the participants in terms of background, and they provided an example of success. The participants in this study self-identified as Mexican, Latina/o, or Hispanic; of the six participants interviewed, five indicated Spanish was their native language.

Correspondingly, all pre-collegiate program staff from the work-study students to the director of the program were bilingual (Spanish and English). In addition to the staff being bilingual, they also self-identified as Mexican and/or Latina/o and were first-generation students. The staff identified with and understood well the many barriers and challenges the students faced on their paths to college. This was an important aspect of the program for the participants as the similarity in race/ethnicity, background, and language created a safe, comfortable space for participants. They felt they “could talk openly” with program staff and that they understood the challenges and barriers they encountered on their path to college.

Theme 2b: Encouragement in pursuing college. The participants shared they felt their college process began when they became involved with the program. The participants felt the program, and ultimately its staff, was an invaluable asset in their pursuit of higher education. Participants gained not only the skills and knowledge but the motivation and confidence they did not receive from their secondary school staff. The program and its staff helped participants visualize how college could change their lives by painting a better picture and better future; staff members believed in the participants and supported them to accomplish their college goals.

Often students from diverse backgrounds are not seen as college material and not encouraged by counselors and teachers to pursue higher education (Fallon, 1997). The Excel program continually worked to create a college-going culture in which the program and staff believed every student was college material and could be successful; how success was defined for each student was different and dependent on the student. “A college-going culture comprises a school environment in which teachers, parents, and student peers have high expectations and encourage students to prepare for college” (Perez et al., 2006, p. 4).

Theme 2c: Sharing of college-going knowledge. All participants indicated they felt the precollege program staff provided them the knowledge and shared important information they needed to successfully enroll in college. Latina/o students often rely on school staff for guidance through the college-going process, and unfortunately for the participants of this study—like many other Latina/o students—there was a major lack of information sharing from their secondary school staff which created an unequal playing field (Roderick et al., 2005).

This program offset the lack of college-going information from the secondary schools; the participants shared how the program supported them through the college-going process by sharing their knowledge. Cattleya shared how the program “showed me step by step how to do stuff [college-going preparation].” Additionally, the program helped students by guiding them and ensuring they were on the right path and completing the necessary steps to successfully enroll in college. This was support they were not receiving from their secondary school.

In contrast to the institutional barriers to the college-going process, the precollege program was rooted in college access, and educating students and families on the college-going process. The team sought to educate and teach students and families to empower them with information and to support themselves and others through the process. Precollege programs that

serve underrepresented students and specifically Latina/o students are essentially working to “...elevate the Latina/o condition” (Valdes, 1997, p. 1094) by supporting students on their paths to education and providing them the necessary tools to be successful, the program is helping to improve and began to close the continued postsecondary enrollment and completion gaps (Loza, 2003).

Theme 2d: Individual support and relationship building. One-on-one support and giving the time to building relationships built connection, trust, ease, and support for the participants. Five of the six participants expressed the individual, personal support the precollege program staff provided was an important piece of the program. Enrique stated, “The one-on-one, in-person meeting was the best part of the program.” Erick stated, “I really like the one-on-one, and they really took the time, and it was like personal.”

This type of communication allowed the precollege staff to share their knowledge and personal experience on a more personal level, and provided the precollege staff the opportunity to learn about the participant and his/her specific needs. The program staff sought to meet the student where he/she is in the college-going process, instead of providing a general curriculum. As cited in The Center for Promise Report (2015), “Peers and adults who are not a child’s parent can provide a safe and secure base to which a person can return, as needed, and from which the person can explore other experiences and opportunities in the world” (p. 5). The report also stated, “Researchers have found that young people who have supportive relationships with parents, friends and teachers have better school outcomes and fewer behavior problems than youth who have relationships with fewer sources of support” (p. 6).

The supportive and trusting relationships the participants built with the program staff were very important. Perla stated, “they genuinely care for the students.” Ximena’s shared, “I

went to the Excel program and then I just kept going; and I was always there, I think I went pretty much [there] every Wednesday.” Enrique stated once he built the relationship with the program staff, he “literally met with them every week.”

This section addressed the research question which focused on the precollege program. This central research question sought to determine how, or if, the program supported the participants to successfully enroll in college. Diversity in program staff, encouragement in pursuing college, sharing of college knowledge, individual support and relationship building were the themes of focus in this section.

Theme 3: School experience. The themes under School Experience answered the research question that sought to explore the participants educational experience as a whole (PK-12) and how their diverse background influenced their experience. The three themes that emerged from the analysis of data, and that support the research question were: students’ diverse background, language barriers, and parental involvement in students’ education.

Theme 3a: Students’ diverse backgrounds. A student’s unique background can positively and/or negatively affect how they progress through their educational experience. In addition to the student’s own perception of how their background may affect their abilities, parents, teachers, and school staff add another layer of possible assumptions and stereotypes which may disillusion the student from all levels of the PK-12 experience. “CRT and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 110). By utilizing this framework, school policies and practices can be seen in a different light, one that highlights how such policies and practices negatively affect students of color and specifically Latina/o students.

At what point is enough, enough? At what point are we going to put our students of color and underserved students first? This study over and over again provided the data that demonstrates the low number of students of color who are enrolling in college, yet is it possible for educators to deconstruct the systemic racist nature of schooling that is ineffectual with students of color? How are educators trained so that they create culturally relevant connections with their students? Are educators examining the deficit nature of schooling? Do educators understand the deeply political nature of schooling and how policies such as No Child Left Behind create a testing environment that often leave more students of color behind (Aragon, 2016)? Are educators unlearning their own deficit perspectives of students of color? Educators with a passion for education and advocacy for students need to support students of color through the systemic racism that is devoid of diverse student cultural history. Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) suggested that in order for students to be successful, educators need to move against the historic perception “.... suggests that poor children, children of color, English learners, immigrant students, undocumented students, and others are more likely to fail than succeed...” (p. 130).

Racism, oppression, and lack of opportunity are continued issues that students of color are navigating every day in their fight to do right, and get ahead for themselves and their families. I personally have felt oppressed and devalued by an educator, I have been made to feel as though I didn't belong in higher education, that I wasn't good enough and I wouldn't be successful. I often wonder how many students with big dreams he deterred from higher education, from the opportunity to do better for themselves and their families. Teachers, school administrators, educators at any level need to be required to do more for their students, give more, and genuinely care and learn about the culture and race/ethnicity that he/she is working with. Unfortunately, these are oftentimes the same individuals who have influence of school

policies, practices, and procedures that Latina/o students encounter on their path through secondary and post-secondary institutions (Rodrigues & Oseguera, 2015). In order to transform and decrease the educational attainment gap of Latina/o students, we need for educators to believe in students and provide resources, support, and information to be successful. Well-prepared, culturally sensitive teaching staff play a major role in the students' positive academic preparation (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

Theme 3b: Language barriers. The majority of participants expressed issues around language barriers, for themselves and their parents. Separation from other classmates while learning English and lack of parental involvement due to language barriers was prevalent in the participant data. Five of the six participants' native language is Spanish; some of which were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to help increase their English proficiency. The participants who were in these classes expressed the support they received from them, but there seemed to be an issue of isolation with some of the students spending elementary into middle school and some into high school in these types of classes "I didn't get my first English class until like sixth grade" and "She [ESL teacher] was the only teacher I had for four years [8th grade-11th grade]."

Parents want to know and they want to be involved, but are often limited by language barriers. Some of the participants shared some of the issues their parents have experienced with the school system due to language barriers. Perla shared, "The thing that she didn't like so much was that there were no translators [when her parent needed to speak with school staff], and she didn't like that the children would have to translate." Ximena stated, "I had to translate for my mom, now my sister just comes to me [to] help her with it but it was a little bit harder for me."

Cattleya shared, “So I was kind of the interpreter, I [would] be talking to her and then I’ll be talking to my teachers.”

Latina/o and/or bilingual teaching staff, and teachers who received training in multicultural education are few and far between (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Instead of encouraging the culture and language Latina/o students bring to the classroom, educators often view these as deficits and place students in groups and classrooms that label the students as inadequate (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Language is a major barrier for parents as well. Not only in the college-going process, but also the school experience in general. Providing school and college information in English and Spanish and taking the time to explain the college-going process will help parents to feel confident in supporting and motivating their student through the process (Perez Huber et al., 2006). “Speak English, we’re in America” is a phrase I’ve heard often. I often wonder if the same would be said to a White person speaking French or German. Is it really the language, or is it the color of the persons skin that is the issue? Instead of viewing bilingualism as a weakness, it should be viewed as a strength and celebrated.

Theme 3c: Parental involvement in student’s education. All participants shared their mother or mother figures were primarily involved in their education; their fathers (if present) were minimally involved. This reflected on their cultural backgrounds and the “roles” within the family. Specific to Latina/o students, Rodriguez (2002) found family income, parents’ involvement in their child’s education, and parents’ own educational backgrounds are indicators of academic achievement and aspirations.

Additionally, this theme found the level of parental involvement can be tied back to language as well; all of the participants indicated Spanish was their parents’/primary caregivers’ native language. The participants’ parents were more involved if the secondary school provided

opportunities for involvement and materials in their native language. The level of parental involvement can also be related to the family's socio-economic status as in Erick's case; he stated, "My parents were as involved as they could be at that time. At that time, we weren't making a lot of money, so they spent most of their time working."

The participants shared that not only language but the family's socio-economic situation affected the parents/parental guardians level of involvement. The parental lack of involvement can be viewed by the school system as the parent not caring or not wanting to be involved, but this deficit thinking that parents do not care about their child's education creates assumptions and barriers to education, instead "...schools should engage and support parents in their child's educational goals" (Aragon, 2016; Perez Huber et al., 2006, p. 5; Valencia & Black, 2001). There are many opportunities for secondary and postsecondary institutions to positively affect change and improve and enhance the lives of not only the Latina/o student but their family as well, it will take the systems shifting their thinking to "what is wrong with them" to "what can I do differently".

Students' diverse background, language barriers, and parental involvement in their education were the themes of focus in this section. The themes in this section answered the research question that sought to gain an understanding of the participants' educational experiences as a whole (PK-12), and how their diverse backgrounds influenced their experience. The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program fostered acknowledgement, hope and provided participants the opportunity to understand the college-going experience; it provided sensitivity and knowledge of their language, culture, identity, ethnicity, and with the guidance of program staff participants were provided a path to higher education. But programs like the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program are few and far between, and are not an everyday or permanent division of

the school system. In order to elevate the Latino condition and support students to seek out higher education, the program elements of guidance and support with a focus on the student as a whole, must be inherent within the school systems, and public education in general must make this level of guidance and support a priority.

Implications for Practice

To determine from the data what were the main implications for practice, I examined the themes within the main sections: College-going Experience, Program Support, and School Experience. The three areas that were identified as important implications for practice were: family, diversity, and sharing of knowledge. This section provides an overview of each implication for practice, and suggestions for practice that can be developed to help address these issues.

Family

Parents and family was an ongoing theme across all the data. The participants shared how supportive and proud their parents are of their attending college. They also shared regarding the lack of knowledge their families had of the process, and how language barriers affected their parents' ability to get involved in their education. Educating and involving parents from the beginning of a student's education and through their college career will provide parents the education and support they need from educators to effectively support their students. Parents and families want their children to be successful, want them to do better and have an easier life than they have had. Unfortunately, they do not have the experience and knowledge to support their student. If PK-12, precollege programs, and higher education institutions add focus and resources to this area, I believe it will increase access and completion.

It is never too early to begin discussing college and its importance, an example of an event that would support this implication is “Future Student Night” for all parents of incoming kindergarteners. This type of event would begin to prepare and educate parents/families of not only what to expect in the next twelve years, but why those twelve years are so important and how they as parents can begin shaping their students’ educational futures by instilling college in their student’s everyday life. Something as simple as teachers and staff showcasing and proudly displaying a banner/pennant or wearing a T-shirt of the higher education institution he/she attended brings about conversation and questions from students and parents.

Diversity

Expanding the diversity of staff, not only in terms of precollege programs but also PK-12 and higher education staff is a practice that could have a considerable impact on access. For this study, diversity was found to be more than race/ethnicity, it encompassed a larger more holistic view of diversity. Diversity in language, immigration status, cultural backgrounds, first generation status, and socio-economic status provides an added benefit and comfortability for students.

Language was a major issue for most participants and all parents in this study. The participants expressed the lack of parental involvement due to language barriers as well as a feeling of isolation due to their own language issues. Participants also expressed the comfort in knowing the precollege program staff was “similar” to them in terms of cultural background, language, and first-generation status. They felt they could openly express issues and concerns and not have to explain their situation to staff. They also viewed the staff as “examples of success,” they saw themselves in them, and what they could achieve.

I understand well there are rules and regulations around hiring practices. I also understand well there is a deep need of well educated, diverse employees not only in education but across many different employment sectors. This study has shown that diverse staff in race/ethnicity, language, and background is an essential component of a successful precollege program. An example of how to begin implementing this implication and moving toward diversifying staff, is by adding specific qualifications when developing job descriptions. For instance, adding bilingual (English/Spanish), experience working with undocumented students, first generation students, and experience serving diverse student populations.

Sharing of Knowledge

Throughout a student's path to college, there are information keepers. Information keepers are those individuals who have the college-going knowledge but do not share this information. Guidance counselors and educators are the students' primary resources for college preparatory information and services (Corwin et al., 2004). Students who attend schools that are overcrowded have a large population of students of color, and students with lower socioeconomic status (SES) are not receiving the services necessary to gain access to college (Fallon, 1997). These students too often are not seen as college material and not encouraged by counselors and teachers to pursue higher education (Fallon, 1997). Each counselor may interpret a student's college aspirations differently, which in turn may affect how often, and the type of college information provided to students (Corwin et al., 2004).

It is the responsibility of educators working with students to educate the student and provide him/her the guidance and knowledge he/she will need to be successful. Every student does not begin on an equal playing field, and as such, educators have the responsibility to help to raise the field for their students of diverse backgrounds. First-generation students and

underrepresented students have increased needs in these areas as they typically do not have the background or the guidance and support from educators. This support can be the determining factor of whether that student is successful. “Academic help, good guidance about school programs, and school counselor assistance with the college admissions process can provide the strong network and social capital that can compensate for family networks when students' parents have limited resources” (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 191).

Creating college-going cultures, not only in high schools but throughout students' educations, is an example of how to implement this implication. The first step is in weaving college into lesson plans, classrooms, school buildings, and sharing college knowledge at every step of the student's education. Changing the entire school environment and providing this level of support to help the student connect how what they are doing right now, whether a 2nd grader or a sophomore in high school, impacts their future. Educators must have clear training in their educator programs to prepare English language learners or students of color with clear college-going knowledge to assist with ensuring there are equitable opportunities for such students. Such college-going preparation will create a college-going culture in which educators are hired, trained, and supported to promote the advancement of students, particularly Latina/o students. Such training must revoke epistemological racism and instead promote epistemological beliefs that every person, every child, and every student can be successful. It also means individuals in senior leadership positions have a responsibility for their schools and staff. School staff can either build students up and support them to college or break them down. College needs to be promoted school wide, and school staff need to be held accountable when they are not promoting this for all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

In making recommendations for future research, I reviewed the literature to determine where there are gaps and a need for further exploration. The two areas I believe will add value and provide support for precollege programs are parental and familial training in multicultural college-going opportunities and clear and supportive student transition training from their last year of high school to the first day of college.

Parents and Families

Although most programs noted in the literature review provided some type of parent/family component, there is very little research focused on how or if these types of programs are providing parents/families the support they need to support their student. Participants shared both how their parents/family positively supported and encouraged their continued education and how they were unable to provide support...such as completing a FAFSA application or admissions application. Instead, the pre-collegiate program showed them how to complete paperwork necessary to advance to college. Further research focused on parent/family training of how to guide their student in the college-going procedures; further research for parent outcomes of such training may determine beneficial types of programs and services to assist families within precollege programs with such guidelines. An added benefit to shifting focus to parents and families is the opportunity for conversation around issues/concerns that affect their students. I believe this shift will provide parents/families an opportunity for open dialogue with educators around the policies and practices of educational institutions (PK-12 and higher education) that may be hindering their students path to college.

Transitioning from High School to College

Specific to transitioning to college, my suggestion is to focus research on programs that provide transition programming and not just summer melt. These types of programs work on building connections with students and supporting them through the enrollment process throughout their senior year of high school. They help create a bridge from high school to college; they build an intentional hands-off and coordinate programming and services with higher education institutions.

The precollege programs provide the support and information students need to navigate the college-going process, but there is a drop off between high school graduation and the first day of college. This lack of enrollment trend over the summer is known as summer melt (Castleman, Page, & Snowden, 2013). Summer melt is a common issue, and programming provided during the summer to address this problem is a great start, but summer melt programming—which is traditionally offered during the summer only—does not always provide the intensive intentional hand-off and support students need to be successful in college.

The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program—the focus of this study—began by building this type of program. The goal of the program was to support and connect students as they transitioned to MSU Denver and to intentionally hand students off to the precollege program's college counterpart, Excel at MSU Denver. There is little research around these types of partnerships and the possible added value and increased enrollment rates they may yield. Most importantly, students receive a direct support person at the higher education institution to help them successfully navigate the college system, and ultimately support them to college graduation.

Researcher's Perspective

I believe the six participants in this study display college-going success. Examples of how education provides an individual power and knowledge and opens doors never previously imagined. I had the great pleasure of leading the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program while I was employed at MSU Denver. I worked with some of the participants in this study and witnessed their achievement. Enrique went from believing his only path in life was cutting grass or working in construction the “stereotypical Latino male,” to double majoring in mathematics and education. He is also currently working as a coordinator with an after-school program. Although his path has not been without barriers and challenges, he is an example of success.

Perla began school in the U.S. in 8th grade. She spent 8th grade and most of high school in ESL classes. She struggled to overcome the language barrier to complete testing for admissions to college. Not only did she do well on these tests, she excelled. She is an example of success.

Ximena is another successful student. Ximena's parents are undocumented, and were tentative of the U.S. educational system and the information that was asked of them. They essentially “outed” their undocumented status on the financial documents required from the institution. Ximena worked hard to get them the information and help them understand the educational process; she had additional steps to complete on her path to college, but she overcame and kept moving forward and now she in her last years of college.

These students drive my work and I believe precollege work as well. They are students who never thought they could achieve and never dreamed beyond what they could see. They are students of color, they are low income, and they are first-generation students. Most are native Spanish speakers; their parents are non-English speakers. These students do not have a

background in higher education and yet they are successful, college attending students on their way to receiving bachelor's degrees. I attribute their success in part (as they have as well), to their participation in and the support they received from the precollege program. The precollege program provided them the knowledge, guidance, encouragement, and confidence to reach their goals. The precollege program is just one part of the equation; secondary and post-secondary institutions need to adjust their policies and practices to serve and support this population. Without an intentional shift from these organizations, the inequity and educational gaps will continue.

As the lead in the development and implementation of the program of focus for this study, I am proud of all the program accomplished, in terms of supporting students to successfully enroll in college. Precollege programs, including the program of focus for this study, are not perfect and are not the answer to all the issues around the continued low college enrollment of Latina/o students. But, they can provide the support that schools—both secondary and post-secondary—cannot and unfortunately many times do not provide.

Conclusion

This chapter restated of the purpose of the study and the research questions. It also provided a brief overview of the methodology and theoretical framework that guided this study. The discussion of findings section revisited the themes and how they related back to the research questions. Under implication for practice, I provided three implications derived from the data and serve as suggestions for programming. In the recommendations for future research section, I provided two suggestions for future research I believe will positively impact precollege programs and untimely student success.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Latina/o students who participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The study aimed to determine what type of impact the program had on the participants' college-going process and how the participants' backgrounds and cultures influenced their college-going and their general educational experiences. The participants provided rich data to inform practice which educators may use in their work with students.

As evidenced by this study, precollege programs are an important and needed opportunity for students to gain the skills and knowledge to successfully navigate the college application process and enroll in college. Precollege programs address many of the barriers and challenges that deter Latina/o students and students of color in general from attending higher education institutions. They are a mechanism to develop the connection, transition, and partnership between postsecondary and secondary schools. These partnerships are crucial in beginning to close the opportunity gaps between Latina/o and white students' enrollment rates at higher education institutions (Swail & Perna, 2002). Without all the players (students, families, and educational institutions) reflecting on what they can do differently and working together to combat the issue of low enrollment rates, the barriers students face on their path to college will continue.

Throughout the students' educational experience, there continues to be issues of missed opportunity, oppression, and racism that Latina/o students encounter on their path to college. Primary (including pre-K), secondary, and higher educational institutions too often operate from epistemological racist and deficit perspective that hinder and halt students of color college educational advancements. This is why the Excel Pre-college program worked to eradicate the barriers around college access, which in turn helped to transform and elevate the student, their

families, and ultimately the Latina/o community. In utilizing the LatCrit lens to analyze the data, this study purposefully addressed the cultural, ethnic and racial elements of Latinas/os. Through the student voices, the data confirm this program effectively nurtured and guided the participants' college entrance pathways. Knowledge and education are a means to build a base of power. The Excel Pre-Collegiate Program provided the Latina/o students they serve the knowledge and support to achieve their higher education goals.

REFERENCES

- About MSU Denver. (n.d). [online web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.msudenver.edu/about/>
- Adelman, C. (1999). *Answers in the Tool Box. Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment* (Report No. PLLI-1999-8021). Washington, DC: ED Pubs. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED431363>
- Aragon, A. (in press). Achieving Latina Students: Aspirational Counterstories and Critical Perspectives on Parental Community Cultural Wealth. *Journal of Latinos and Education*.
- Aragon, A. (2016). Ignored by the board: Disrupting school closure and illuminating white racism through counterstorytelling. In T. Marsh, & N. Croom (Eds), *Examining Critical Race Praxis in K-12 Leadership through Critical Race Counterstorytelling* (107-138). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.
- Barrier. (n.d.). *In Oxford Dictionary online*. Retrieved from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/barrier
- Bell, D. (1995). Who's afraid of critical race theory? *University of Illinois Law Review*, 1995(4), 893-910.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bryan, J., Moore-Thomas, C., Day-Vines, N.L., Holcomb-McCoy, C. (2011). School counselors as social capital: The effects of high school college counseling on college application rates. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 8(2), 190-199.
- Broton, K. (2009). Increasing Postsecondary Education Access and Success: Raising Achievement through Outreach Programs. Brief. *Wilder Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.wilder.org/WilderResearch/Publications/Studies/Increasing%20Postsecondary%20Education%20Access%20and%20Success/Increasing%20Postsecondary%20Education%20Access%20and%20Success%20%20Raising%20Achievement%20Through%20Outreach%20Programs,%20Brief.pdf>
- Brown, D. A. (2003). *Critical race theory: Cases, materials, and problems*. West Group.
- Brown, K., & Jackson, D. D. (2013). The history and conceptual elements of critical race theory. *Handbook of critical race theory in education*, 9-22.
- Ceja, M. (2004). Chicana college aspirations and the role of parents: Developing educational resiliency. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3, (4), 338–362. doi:10.1177/1538192704268428

- Chaney, B., Lewis, L., Farris, E., & Greene, B. (1995). Programs at higher education institutions for disadvantaged precollege students. *Advances in Education Research*, 4, 105-116. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs96/96230.pdf>
- Chen, X., & Carroll, C. D. (2005). First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report. NCES 2005-171. *National Center for Education Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS62728>
- Constantine, J. M., Seftor, N. S., Martin, E., Silva, T., Myers, D. (2006). Study of the Effect of the Talent Search Program on Secondary and Postsecondary Outcomes in Florida, Indiana and Texas. Final Report from Phase II of the National Evaluation, US Department Of Education, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000062891356;view=1up;seq=3>
- Contreras, F. (2011). Strengthening the bridge to higher education for academically promising underrepresented students. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(3), 500-526.
- Cooper, R., & Liou, D. D. (2007). The structure and culture of information pathways: rethinking opportunity to learn in urban high schools during the ninth grade transition. *High School Journal*, 91(1), 43-56.
- Corwin, Z., Venegas, K. M., Oliverez, P., & Colyar, J. E. (2004). School counsel: How appropriate guidance affects educational equity. *Urban Education*, 39(4), 442-457.
- Crenshaw, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.
- Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Davis, J. A., Kenyon, C. A. (1976). A Study of the National Upward Bound and Talent Search Program. Final Report. Volume I. Review of the Literature Relevant to the Upward Bound and Talent Search Programs (Report No. RTI-22U-889). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED131150.pdf>
- Delgado Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126.
- Domina, T. (2009). What works in college outreach: Assessing targeted and schoolwide interventions for disadvantaged students. *Educational Evaluation and Policy analysis*, 31(2), 127-152.
- Ewell, P. T., Jones, D. P., & Kelly, P. J. (2003). Conceptualizing and researching the educational pipeline. National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, The National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis.

- Excel Programs. (2012). 2011-2012 annual report. Denver, CO: Author
- Excel Programs. (2014). 2013-2014 annual report. Denver, CO: Author
- Fallon, M. V. (1997, May). The school counselor's role in first generation students' college plans. *School Counselor*, 44(5), 385-393.
- Fenske, R. H., Geranios, C. A., Keller, J. E., Moore, D.E. (1997). Early Intervention Programs: Opening the Door to Higher Education. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 25(6). Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED412863>
- Fung, M., & Swail, W. (2011). *Findings from the National Survey of College Outreach Programs* [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.slideserve.com/deirdre/findings-from-the-national-survey-of-college-outreach-programs>
- Garcia, M. (2010). When Hispanic students attempt to succeed in college, but do not. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 34(10), 839-847.
- Gelber, S. (2007). Pathways in the past: Historical perspectives on access to higher education. *Teachers College Record*, 109(10), 2252-2286.
- Green, D. (2006). Historically underserved students: What we know, what we still need to know. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2006(135), 21-28.
- Groutt, J. (2003). Milestones of TRIO History, Part 1. Opportunity Outlook: The Journal of the Council for Opportunity in Education, January 2003, 21-27.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *ECTJ*, 29(2), 75-91.
- Hecker, D. E. (2005) Occupational employment projections to 2014. *Monthly Labor Review Online*, 128(11), 70.
- Hernandez-Truyol, B. E., Harris, A., Valdes, F. (2006). Beyond the first decade: A forward-looking history of LatCrit theory, community and praxis. *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal*, 17, 169-216.
- Huber, L. P., Huidor, O., Malagon, M. C., Sanchez, G., & Solórzano, D. G. (2006). Falling through the Cracks: Critical Transitions in the Latina/o Educational Pipeline. 2006 Latina/o Education Summit Report. CSRC Research Report. Number 7. *UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (NJI)*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED493397.pdf>
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.

- Lorratta, C. & Yamamura, E. (2011). A community cultural wealth approach to Latina/Latino parent involvement: The promise of family literacy. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, 5(2), 74-83.
- Loza, P. P. (2003). A system at risk: College outreach programs and the educational neglect of underachieving Latino high school students. *Urban Review*, 35(1), 43-57.
- Luna, N. A. & Martinez, M. (2013). A qualitative study using community cultural wealth to understand the educational experiences of Latino college students. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, 7(1), 1-18.
- Marquez Kiyama, J. (2010). College aspirations and limitations: The role of educational ideologies and funds of knowledge in Mexican American families. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 330-356.
- Martinez, J., Unterreiner, A., Aragon, A. & Kellerman, P. (2014). Demystifying mythologies about Latina/o students: Immigration reform and education. *Multicultural Teaching and Learning*, 9(2), 115-218. DOI: 10.1515/mlt-2013-0014.
- McElroy, E. J., & Armesto, M. (1998). TRIO and Upward Bound: History, programs, and issues—past, present, and future. *Journal of Negro Education*, 67(4), 373-80.
- McKinney, L. & Novak, H. (2013). The relationship between FAFSA and persistence among first-year community college students. *Community College Review*, 41(1), 65-85.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An Expanded Sourcebook: Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Muñoz, S. (2013). I just can't stand being like this anymore: Dilemmas, stressors, and motivators for undocumented Mexican women in higher education. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 50(3), 233-249.
- Muraskin, L. (2003). National Evaluation of GEAR UP: A Summary of the First Two Years. Department of Education, Office of the Under Secretary, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS125728>
- National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics. (2013). Percentage of 18-24-year-olds Enrolled in Degree-Granting Institutions, by Level of Institution and Sex and Race/Ethnicity of Student: 1967 through 2012 [Table 302.60]. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_302.60.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics. (2013). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and race/ethnicity of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2012 [Table 306.20]. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_306.20.asp

- National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics. (2010). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity, sex, attendance status, and level of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2009 [Table 235]. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_235.asp
- Nora, A. (2004). The role of habitus and cultural capital in choosing a college, transitioning from high school to higher education, and persisting in college among minority and nonminority students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(2), 180-208.
- Novak, Heather, & McKinney, Lyle. (2011). The Consequences of Leaving Money on the Table: Examining Persistence among Students Who Do Not File a FAFSA. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 41(3), 5-23. Retrieved from <http://publications.nasfaa.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=jsfa>
- O’Conner, N., Hammack, F. M., Scott, M. A. (2010). Social capital, financial knowledge, and Hispanic college choices. *Research of Higher Education*, 51(3), 195-219.
- Oesterreich, H. (2000). Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs. The Educational Resources Information Center Digest, 159.
- Passel, J. S. (2006). The size and characteristics of the unauthorized migrant population in the US. *Pew Hispanic Center*, 7. Retrieved from <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2006/03/07/size-and-characteristics-of-the-unauthorized-migrant-population-in-the-us/>
- Perna, L. (2002). Precollege outreach program: Characteristics of programs serving historically underrepresented groups of students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(1), 64-83.
- Plyler v. Doe, 457 US 202 (1982).
- Reese, K. L. (2008). Bridging the education gap through college access programs. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, 1(1), 54-58.
- Reid, K., Flowers, P., and Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring lived experience. *Psychologist*, 18(1), 20-23.
- Rios-Aguilar, C. (2010). Measuring funds of knowledge: Contributions to Latina/o students’ academic and nonacademic outcomes. *Teachers College Record* 112(8), 2209-2257.
- Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., Coca, V., Moeller, E., Roddie, K., Gilliam, J., Patton, D. (2008). *From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College*. Research report Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED500519>
- Rodriguez, J. L. (2002). Family environment and achievement among three generations of Mexican American high school students. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6(2), 88–94.

- Rodriguez, L. F., Oseguera, L. (2015). Our deliberate success: Recognizing what works for Latina/o students across the educational pipeline. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 14(2), 128-150.
- Shelton, C. (2011). Helping first-generation college students succeed. *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture*, 1(4), 63-75.
- Smith, J. S. (2004). The effects of student receptivity on college achievement and retention. *Journal of College Student Retention Research Theory and Practice*, 6(3), 273-288.
- Smith, J. A., Larkin, M. & Flowers, P. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research: London, UK: Sage.
- Solórzano, D. G., Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and Latcrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education* 36(3), 308-342.
- Strage, A. A. (1999). Social and academic integration and college success: Similarities and differences as a function of ethnicity and family educational background. *College of Student Journal*, 33(2), 198.
- Swail, W. S., and Perna, L. W. (2002). Pre-college outreach programs: A national perspective. In W. G. Tierney and L. S. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Increasing Access to College: Extending Possibilities for All* (pp. 15–34).
- Success. (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionary, online*. Retrieved from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/success
- Trevino, J. A., Harris, M. A., Wallace, D. (2008). What's so critical about critical race theory? *Contemporary Justice Review*, 11(1), 7-10.
- Turner, C. S. V., Garcia, M., Nora, A., & Rendon, L. I. (1996). *Racial & Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education. ASHE Reader Series*. Pearson Custom Publishing, 75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116.
- United States Census Bureau. (2011, May). The Hispanic Population: 2010 (2010 Census Briefs). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf>
- United States Census Bureau. (2011, March). Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010. (2010 Census Briefs). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/2010census/data/>
- United States Census Bureau. (2001, May). The Hispanic Population: 2000 (2000 Census Briefs). Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/>
- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1995). Programs at Higher Education Institutions for Disadvantaged Precollege Students (NCES 96-230). Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=96230>

- United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (n.d.a). *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>
- United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (n.d.b). *Talent Search Programs*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/index.html>
- United States Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (n.d.c). *Upward Bound Programs*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html>
- United We Dream, DREAM Educational Empowerment Program. (2015a). Tuition and State Aid for Undocumented Students and DACA Grantees, Access by State. Retrieved from http://unitedwedream.org/sp_faq/resources/
- United We Dream, DREAM Educational Empowerment Program. (2015b). UndocuPeers: Liberating Campus Climate Curriculum [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from http://unitedwedream.org/sp_faq/undocupeers-liberating-campus-climate-curriculum-school/
- Valdes, F. (1997). Foreword: Under construction-LatCrit Consciousness, community, and theory. *California Law Review*, 85(5), 1087-1142.
- Valencia, R. R., Black, M. S. (2001). "Mexican Americans don't value education!" On the basis of the myth, mythmaking, and debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(2), 81-103.
- Villalpando, O. (2004). Practical consideration of critical race theory and Latino critical theory for Latino college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2004(105), 41-50.
- Volle, K., Federico, A. (1997). Missed opportunities: A new look at disadvantaged college aspirants. *Advances in Education Research*, 4, 43-69.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2006). Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline. Latino Policy & Issues Brief. Number 13. *UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (NJI)*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED493404.pdf>

APPENDIX A: CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS LETTER

[Date]

Dear,

My name is Cynthia Armendariz and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Colorado State University in the School of Education. I am serving as the Co-Principal Investigator under the supervision of my dissertation chair Dr. Antonette Aragon. The title of this project is *A Thematic Analysis of the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program as an Avenue of Successful Postsecondary Enrollment for Latina/o Students*. The purpose of this study is to explore the college-going experiences of Latina/o students that participated in Excel Pre-Collegiate Program.

We would like to invite you to participate in this study to discuss your experience in the program. Your total participation including completion of an electronic information sheet, initial meeting, interview, interview transcript review, and follow-up (if needed) will take approximately two hours.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. There are no known risks regarding your participation in this study.

Participants' identity will be kept confidential; you will select a pseudonym to use throughout the study. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge of Latina/o students' participation in precollege programs and what components of a program are needed for Latina/o students to successfully enroll in college.

If you are interested in learning more about this study and/or would like to participate please click on this link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JDMC5GN> and you will be directed to a questionnaire. Please be advised that not all individuals who respond to the questionnaire will be selected to participate.

If you have any questions please contact Cynthia Armendariz, at armendarizcynthia02@gmail.com or 720-560-5222 or Dr. Antonette Aragon at antonette.aragon@colostate.edu or 970-491-5208.

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Sincerely,

Dr. Antonette Aragon
Associate Professor
School of Education

Cynthia Armendariz
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education

APPENDIX B: ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SHEET QUESTIONS

What is your name?

What is your gender?

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your country of birth? What languages do you speak?

Did either of your parents complete a four year degree?

What high school and year did you graduate?

Did you participate in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program your senior year?

Are you a: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior

What is the best phone number and email to reach you at?

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JDMC5GN>

**APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY COLORADO
STATE UNIVERSITY**

TITLE OF STUDY: A Thematic Analysis of the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program as an Avenue of Successful Postsecondary Enrollment for Latina/o Students.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Antonette Aragon, Ph.D., School of Education, antonette.aragon@colostate.edu, 970-491-5280.

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Cynthia Armendariz, School of Education, Ph.D. Candidate, armendarizcynthia02@gmail.com /720-560-5222

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are being invited to participate in this study because you participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program while you were in high school and you are now enrolled at Metropolitan State University of Denver.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This study is being conducted by Cynthia Armendariz, Ph.D. candidate, and supervised by her dissertation chair Dr. Antonette Aragon and dissertation committee.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of Latina/o students that participated in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program. The study will focus on barriers students encountered on their path to college, and how their experience in the precollege program supported them to overcome those barriers and successfully enroll in college.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? Time commitment for participants:

- 5-10 minutes-complete an online Participant Information Sheet
- 10-15 minutes- Introduction Meeting
- 45-60 minutes-in person interview
- 30 minutes-transcript review
- 30 minutes-if needed participants may be asked for a follow up conversation if discrepancies or further questions were discovered during the transcript review.

All in person meetings will take place at a time and location that is most comfortable for participant.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire and to answer questions regarding your experience in the Excel Pre-Collegiate program, barriers/challenges you faced on your path to college, and how your identify as a Latina/o student affected your college experience.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no foreseen risk in your participation in the study, it is completely voluntary and will be dependent on your availability.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no known risks associated with this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge of Latina/o students' participation in precollege programs and what components of a program are needed for Latina/o students to overcome barriers on their path to college and to successfully enroll in college.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Participants identity will be keep confidential and you will select a pseudonym to use throughout the study. We may be asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? If you fail to complete the items outlined in “**What Else Do I Need to Know**” you may be removed from the study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Cynthia Armendariz at aremendarizcynthia02@gmail.com/720-560-5222. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? In checking and initialing each statement you are acknowledging that you understand and agree to complete or that you have completed each of the steps of this study.

- _____ Completed the electronic Participant Information Sheet
- _____ Completed the Introduction Meeting to discuss study and consent
- _____ In person iinterview: approximately 45-60 minutes
- _____ Complete review of interview transcript: approximately 30 minutes
- _____ If needed, follow-up conversation if discrepancies arise during the transcript review: approximately 30 minutes

All interviews will be audiotaped and will be held at a time and location which is best suited to the participant.

The researchers would like to digitally audio record your participation in the interview to be sure that your comments can be transcribed accurately. The digital recording will be destroyed after transcription. The interview transcripts will be kept for at least three years to be used for educational purposes with non-identifying information. Do you give your permission for us to digitally audio record the discussion?

I give the researcher's permission to digitally audio record my participation in the interview.

YES NO

In addition to your digital audio recorded information, it is common for researchers to utilize direct quotes from interviews, letters, or other collected data from participants. Such quoted information is used for educational purposes, such as manuscripts written for journal articles, presentations at conferences or teaching purposes. If you provide consent for this, we will only use your pseudonyms as an identifier. Please let us know if you would like your comments to remain confidential or attributed to you. Please initial next to your choice below.

I give permission for comments I have made to be shared using my exact words and to include my (pseudonym). _____ (initials)

You can use my data for research and publishing, but do NOT,
_____.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing ___ pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself and your family?
 - a. Where were you born/where were you raised?
 - b. What is the makeup of your family?

2. Is English your native language? If not, what is your native language?
 - a. How did this affect your educational process?
 - b. How did this affect the process for your family/parents?

3. Tell me about your elementary and middle school experience?
 - a. Were your parents involved?
 - b. Did you ever feel your experience was different because of your ethnicity?

4. Tell me about your high school experience?
 - a. Did you have any issues in high school?
 - b. Did you feel supported by staff and teachers?
 - c. How were your parents involved in your high school education?
 - d. Did you ever feel your experience was different because of your ethnicity?

5. Throughout your Pk-12 educational experience did you ever feel that you or your family was discriminated against?

6. What were your college goals when you were in high school? Or earlier?

7. Are you the first in your family to go to college?

8. What do your parents/family think about college?

9. What does your parents/family think about you attending college?

10. Tell me about the college-going process for you?
11. What challenges /barriers did you face in the college-going process?
12. Who helped you through the process?
 - a. Family/friends
 - b. School staff
 - c. Community members
13. Did you participate in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program at your high school?
14. What was your experience in the Excel Pre-Collegiate Program?
15. What services did the program provide that helped you to successfully enroll in college?
16. What was the program missing, that would have been helpful for you?
 - a. What could the program have done more of or differently to help you through the college-going process?
17. How was the program different from other college services offered at your school?
18. How did your family encourage, guide, or provide support in this process?
19. Do you feel your parents/family understand college and the expectations?
20. As a Latina/o student, what do you believe was different from your process than other students?

21. Now that you are successfully enrolled at MSU Denver, and look back on your path to college what insights would you want to share with current Latina/o high school students?

22. What is your major?

23. When do you plan on graduating?

24. What do your goals for after graduation?