

DISSERTATION

THE PERCEPTION OF BELONGING: LATINO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC LIFE AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTION OF BELONGING: LATINO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC LIFE AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

This study explores the perception of belonging by Latino undergraduate students attending a predominantly White private university by documenting, in their “own voices,” the extent of their participation in the social and academic life of the campus.

Tinto (1975) suggests that,

the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interaction between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person’s experiences in those systems (as measured by his/her normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94).

In addition, other researchers have added to the growing body of literature on students’ perceptions of the college environment. Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest that, “Studying a sense of belonging allows researchers to assess which forms of social interaction (academic and social) further enhance students’ affiliation and identify with the colleges” (p. 328). In addition, Hurtado and Carter stated that, “understanding

students' sense of belonging may be the key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these (racial and ethnic minority) students" (p. 324). They also asserted that, "further research is necessary to understand racial and ethnic minority students' views of their participation in college as an important part of the process of engagement in the diverse learning communities of a college" (p. 324). In addition, studies by Allen (1988), Oliver, Rodriguez and Mickelson (1985) and Smith (1988) have indicated that in predominantly White campuses underrepresented students are alienated from the mainstream of campus life.

The research approach for this study utilized a phenomenological form of qualitative inquiry. This approach seeks to understand the central underlying meaning or essence of an individual's experience. Themes related to the Latino's students perceptions of socially and academically belonging emerged from the interview data.

It is my desire that the emerging insights will serve to help higher education professionals create a welcoming and supportive campus climate for Latino undergraduate students. I believe that a supportive campus climate will result in an increase in the Latino graduation rate. Further, I undertook this inquiry, "not so much to achieve closure in the form of definitive answers to the problems but rather to generate questions that raise fresh, often critical awareness and understanding of the problems" (Schram, 2003, p. 4).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation is a culmination of an extremely long journey with numerous detours and delays. The passion for the topic of this dissertation had its genesis many years ago, although its structure I did not perceive for a very long time. My desire is to continue to investigate the lives of Latino students in higher education from various perspectives but always from the perspective of success. Regardless of what the future holds in regards to further research, it is imperative that I acknowledge those that assisted in completing this dissertation and those factors that motivated me to even begin the journey.

My motivation for seeking a college education and eventually pursue graduate studies came foremost from my father, Jose Sr., and my mother, Sara. Both undertook life changing steps to ensure that my sister, Carmen, and I would not live under an oppressive, dictatorial government by immigrating to the United States with nothing but the clothes on our backs. Their lives would never be the same but they never wavered from instilling in us the value of an education and a strong work ethic. I am, therefore, grateful for their sacrifices. Further, I have been motivated to contribute to the collective achievement of the Cuban community in the United States.

I acknowledge the prolonged support of my wife, Florence Dawn, who has been with me throughout this three decade journey and has made sacrifices to assist me

achieve my academic goals. She should be receiving a Ph.D. in patience and understanding.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge Drs. Ellen Dickmann and Clifford Harbour who as my original methodologist and adviser continuously reminded me to not give up. In addition, my sincerest gratitude to Drs. Louise Jennings and Michael de Miranda who agreed to replace Drs. Dickmann and Harbour and ensured that I finished the journey. They all have my undying gratitude and sincerest apologies for having to deal with “this problem child”.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to our son, Adam, our daughter-in-law, Heather, our granddaughter, Alexandra, our niece, Annette, and our nephews, Jim, Nick, and Phillip in the hopes that it will motivate them to pursue their own educational journeys and become lifelong learners.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provides a description of a study that explores the perception of belonging by Latino undergraduate students at a predominantly White private university by documenting in their experiences in the social and academic life of the campus.

This chapter includes the (a) description of the study, (b) personal reasons for this study, (c) researcher's stance, (d) significance of this study, (e) research problem (f) research questions, (g) rationale for a qualitative study, (h) study limitations, (i) definition of terms, and (j) summary.

Description of the Study

This study focuses on developing an understanding of the perception of belonging by Latino undergraduate students attending the university. Further, by providing insights into the experiences of Latino students at the university this study aims to help higher education professionals in creating a welcoming and supportive campus climate for Latino undergraduate students that results in an increase in the retention rate of Latino undergraduate. Further, to add to the literature and knowledge regarding college student development model and sense of belonging from a Latino perspective. Lastly, it is my desire that this study adds to the body of knowledge related to Latino undergraduate students in higher education.

I have selected a phenomenological interview design because a researcher can use qualitative methods to construct a “complex, holistic picture [by exploring] multiple

dimensions of a problem or issue,” and report the findings through rich narrative (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). I have selected the phenomenological tradition because it emphasizes the discovery and description of the essence of shared experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998). Additionally, I have chosen the interview method to document the experiences of the study participants and gather background information on the university because interviews allow a researcher to interact with the study participants, investigate emerging themes, and collect information in the participants “own voices” (Creswell, 1998).

Motivation for this Study

I emigrated from Cuba to the United States with my parents and sister in 1962. Although I rapidly assimilated into the dominant culture, some of my White peers perceived me as less intellectually capable. That perception was also shared by some of my teachers and counselors. The first example of this occurred when I enrolled in elementary school in Miami, Florida. I was placed back a grade although my academic skills, particularly in mathematics, were superior to most of my White peers. I was simply not fluent in the English language, which seemed by default to label me as less intellectually competent than my peers. In high school, it was assumed that I was older as a result of being “put back” due to academic limitations. Coincidentally, two other Cuban students in my high school class had experienced “being put back” and were also at least a year older than our classmates. That coincidence seemed to confirm the perception of “our lower intellectual capacity.” It was a constant challenge for me to dispel the perception of being an underachiever. Unfortunately, I substantially subscribed to the

perception that my academic and intellectual skills were not up to par with the more affluent White students in our high school and I focused on athletics rather than academics. I took a less rigorous academic curriculum, had unproductive interactions with college counselors, and lacked specific planning for a college education.

At home and amongst other Cubans, however, the expectations to excel academically served to somewhat counterbalance the conditions outside our homes and community. It was collectively understood that a quality education was the best way to overcome stereotypes and retain our valued ethnic identity and Cuban culture. The expectation for me to seek a quality education was especially strong from my parents' generation who suffered substantial indignities because of their linguistic limitations. This limitation served to "hide" their academic preparation and intellect, and limited their ability to pursue their Cuban careers in the United States. There is no doubt that my experiences and those of my parents and their peers remain the dominant source of motivation for my pursuit of academic success.

My academic journey has been very long and punctuated by many, many detours. Each detour has been emotionally draining because each has postponed reaching my objective of completing a Ph.D. in Education. I have made light of these detours to prevent further emotional pain. But, the most important outcome of completing this journey will be that it will honor the sacrifices, expectations, and memory of my parents.

Researcher's Stance

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge. I desired a stance that would enable me to

interactively identify the nature, score, and knowledge related to the student's perspective of belonging at the university. Therefore, I selected the transactional/subjectivist stance for my epistemology.

The transactional/subjectivist stance suggests that findings can be co-created (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Assuming that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Therefore, a transactional/subjectivist stance allowed me to reflect upon my own experiences while suspending judgment on my part about what is reality. However, I realized that "we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 104). I believe that a transactional/subjectivist stance adheres to the ontological constructivist/relativist perspective that posits that reality can be local and co-constructed. Therefore, I reasoned that the study participants, the institutional informants and I could reasonably co-construct the findings from our individual contributions to this study.

I was interested in the experiences of the Latino student in higher education because of my own experiences as a Latino student at both public and private universities and because of my strong desire to contribute to the success of Latino students in higher education through the findings of this study. I elected to chronicle the Latino students' perception of belonging by describing in their own voices their experiences of the social and academic life of the campus, and use myself as the chronicling instrument. However,

I was not a detached observer or unaware of this study's significance to me personally due to sharing ethnic and experiential kinship with the students. Therefore, my intention was to be reflective and introspective of my own experiences and how those experiences may shape the interpretive process, but found myself on occasion sharing a personal understanding of the experiences of the study participants. However, I believe I was successful in listening and documenting the study participants' responses without changing the context. I acknowledged my own experiences, biases, values, and interests during the data analysis. This study was a journey into my past through the lenses of current Latino students. It has been a culmination of years of hypothesizing how other Latinos experience their path through higher education. I am also enthusiastic about this study because the experiences of Latino students attending predominantly a White private university has been substantially unexplored, particularly "in their own voices."

Significance of this Study

We simply do not know enough about the processes of interaction that lead individuals of different racial backgrounds to drop out from higher education. Nor do we know enough about how these processes relate to differing patterns of academic and social integration or how they vary between institutions of different academic and social characteristics. (Tinto, 1975, p.119)

Tinto (1987) theorized that the students' level of involvement in the formal and informal social and academic environment of an institution accounts for a student's decision to leave or remain. Thus, it is reasonable to surmise that a student's involvement in the social and academic life of an institution influences a student's sense of belonging.

Tinto's observation is particularly poignant when the following research is considered. Howe and Strauss (2000) describe the next generation of college students, the Millennials, as the most racially and ethnically diverse ever, due to the "irreversible browning of American civilization" (p.16). According to the US Government Accounting Office report in 2007, enrollment of Hispanic students in higher education grew 25 % from 2001/2002 to 2006/2007 academic years. The Pew Hispanic Center (2011) reported that since October 2009 Hispanic youth 18 to 24 years old enrollment in college has increased by 24%. This reflects a much higher percentage increase than any other ethnic group and is substantially higher than the 3 % increase realized by White students. By 2050 nearly one in every four Americans will be of Hispanic origin Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), (2001). However, Latinos continue to be substantially underrepresented on the nation's college campuses (Collison, 1999). Less than 43% of Hispanic high school students are qualified to enroll in 4-year institutions (Saunders & Serna, 2004). Of those that are qualified, about 40% will immediately enroll in college upon high school graduation.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002) reported that in the 1997-1998 academic years, Latinos earned the lowest number of bachelor degrees (5.5%), of any ethnic group, except Native Americans. Further, Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) substantiated that Latinos continued to do poorly in the attainment of bachelor degrees because of the 1.4 million bachelor's degrees awarded in 2004 less than 5% were earned by Latinos. It is also worth noting that this low achievement at the bachelor degree level is not surprising because Latino undergraduates are disproportionately

enrolled in two-year institutions (ERIC, 2001). But, *The Chronicle of Higher Education's Almanac Issue 2007 – 2008*, indicated that enrollment of Latino students in private 4 –year institutions of higher education has showed a steady increase from 1999 to 2005. Further, there is just a few percentage points (45.4 to 58.2 %) difference between Latinos enrolled in private versus public institutions. Therefore, although there is “room for improvement” to ensure access and success for Latinos in higher education at all levels of higher education, it is particularly germane to this study that Latinos are increasingly attending private four-year institutions of higher education.

Higher education must also take notice of the Latino population increase but acknowledge and account for the growing diversity within the Latino community in the United States. Duane (2003) stated that the Hispanic/Latino classification incorrectly lumps together a wide variety of immigrant histories, colonial legacies, racial and ethnic groups, social classes, cultural traditions, languages and dialects.” Suro (2002) identified thirteen distinct nations of origin listed in the 2000 U.S. Census, ten alone from Central and South America.

Latinos also differ in economic and educational attainment. Although Latinos lag behind Whites in economic attainment, Cuban Americans have the largest percentage of full time workers above \$35,000 (Therrien & Ramirez, 2000). Regarding educational attainment, 73% of Cuban Americans, 64.3% of Central and South Americans, and 51% of Mexican Americans are likely to have at least a high school education. The reasons for these differences are complex and rooted in timing and circumstances of migration, type of schooling available, socioeconomic status, and other social issues. There is also

evidence that suggest that subgroups of Latino students differ in demographic characteristics that affect or are related to academic success (Ballesteros, 1986; Mestre & Robinson, 1983; Ortiz, 1986). Therefore, getting a larger proportion of a diverse Latino population through college will require focusing on differences amongst Latinos (Wojkeiwicz & Donato, 1995).

Unfortunately, “at most universities, the differences between Hispanic subgroups are ignored when data are collected on ethnicity” (Harrington & O’Shea, 1980; Mestre, 1981; Mestre & Robinson, 1983). Therefore, the practice of aggregating all Latino students in a single ethnic category may distort research results. Further, Mayo, Murgula, & Padilla (1995) highlighted that given the increase in the Latino population in higher education the study of Latino retention remains a critical issue for research.

Hurtado (1994) suggests that more scholarly work must be conducted to bring to the forefront the voices of Latino students regarding their experiences on campus. In addition, further research on the Latino student experience in college is warranted by the retention and degree completion rates that indicate that Latinos are not succeeding (O’Brian, 1993). Therefore, understanding the Latino undergraduate student's participation in the social and academic life on campus addresses the call for scholarly work focusing on Latinos in higher education. Scholarship that may provide insights that may aid higher education professionals in creating a campus climate where Latino undergraduate students will succeed and graduate.

Research Problem

Studies have shown that Latino students face unique and serious obstacles in college, particularly at predominantly White institutions (Bennett & Okinaka (1990) and Smedley, et al., (1993). According to Strayhorn (2008), “only recently have scholars paid attention to the unique experiences of Latino college students in terms of a sense of belonging” (p.307). Strayhorn asserted that,

future research might employ qualitative methods to unearth the experiences of Latino students in college and understand how they negotiate their sense of belonging. (p. 315)

Strayhorn further states that based on his findings future theories should reflect that what occurs in college matters substantially in terms of the sense of belonging of Latino students (2008). Thus, unless higher education professionals can identify and mitigate obstacles to Latino student’s success in higher education, the low rate of Latino enrollment and noticeable attrition rate may continue. The goal, therefore, for higher education professionals is not just to enroll Latino students but rather to have them persist to degree attainment, as suggested by Arbona and Nora (2007).

Hurtado (1994) suggested “...that understanding Latino student experiences is the first step in developing successful intervention strategies that may eventually improve student outcomes. Further she states that the initial step is to conduct research on campuses to understand the scope of the problem in order to influence policy. This study aims to understand the Latino student experiences from the student’s perspective on their sense of belonging academic and social on this campus. The outcomes may highlight the

scope of the problem and ideally influence policy and generate actions that improve the outcomes for Latino on campus.

Research Questions

Schram (2003) stated that, “Phenomenological questions are targeted toward understanding the meaning of lived experiences and the essence of a particular concept or phenomenon” (p. 72). The overarching research question was constructed in order to investigate and gain an understanding of the sense of belonging of the Latino students participating in this study. Open ended questions were used to ensure that the subjective character of the experiences was not prejudiced and to ensure that the themes generated by the in-depth interview data arise out of the data and were not imposed.

The overarching research question that guided the investigation of the phenomenon was:

How do Latino undergraduate students perceive a sense of belonging at a western private predominantly white university through description of their participation in the social and academic life on campus?

Six undergraduate Latino students enrolled at the university as juniors or seniors were interviewed to construct their emerging stories from their experiences through their narrative, demographic information was gathered related to the students and their families, and three institutional informants familiar with the Latino student population at the university were interviewed to incorporate supplemental perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation.

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

Although there are several legitimate quantitative research methods, a quantitative research method is not appropriate for this study. Quantitative methods are suited for measurement studies that are statistically or numerically centric and generally limit the responses of the study participants to those aspects covered by a survey or questionnaire instrument. Survey items and brief interviews gather data supporting only superficial account of the student experience (Cookson, 1998; Kember, 1989; Morgan and Tam, 1999; Schilke 2001).

In contrast, a researcher can use qualitative research methods to construct a “complex, holistic picture [by exploring] multiple dimensions of a problem or issue,” and report the findings through rich narrative (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Marshall and Rossman (1989) add that qualitative research methodology values the participant’s view of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process allowing the participants to create the research in their own voice or words. In addition, Geertz (1973) suggests that a qualitative research design provides descriptions of experiences and emphasizes the voice, experience, and student culture of the participants.

It was the multi-dimensional descriptive experiences of the study participants and understanding of those experiences that I sought to discover through the in-depth interviews. This methodological approach assist in identifying categories and themes, and write passages and descriptions from the discussion between the researcher and the study participants in a dynamic and naturalistic setting (Creswell, 1998). In contrast to generating cause and affect relationships or statistical analysis to which quantitative

research designs are better suited, a qualitative methodological approach is best suited for inquiry of this nature.

Study Limitations

This study was conducted at a single predominantly White university located in the western United States. The study participants were a small volunteer cohort drawn from a larger pool of eligible Latino students that did not reflect equal gender representation. Thus, they may not be representative of the broader Latino student population attending the university. Their responses, therefore, may not be representative of the responses of other Latino students attending this university. Further, the study cannot account for biases on the part of the study participants or institutional informants nor inaccuracies in their recollections. In addition, any affect caused by the interview site was not considered in the study. Therefore, attempting to generalize the findings of this study to other institutions and student populations is unreasonable.

Definitions of Terms

Hispanic or Latino: The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably for the purpose of this study. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), Hispanics or Latinos are those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire: Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban as well as those who indicated that they were “other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.” Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or

ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race (p. 1).

Campus Climate: Campus climate is defined as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Hurtado, 1992).

The Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME): is chartered to improve the campus climate for students with non-traditional ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual orientation.

I focused in Chapter 2 on the relevant literature related to student attrition models, emerging student success models, Latinos in America, Latinos in higher education, and campus climate. These topics support the rationale for this study by highlighting the various models applied to student attrition in higher education and observations from scholars regarding their applicability to Latino students. There is also discussion on models that focus on student success rather than attrition. Exposure to student success models caused a personal paradigm shift promoting an interest in why students succeed rather than depart higher education. It served as a catalyst for conducting this study. Further, the concept of campus climate was outlined because the campus climate can have a profound effect on retention of students, particularly students of color.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that during the 1997-1998 academic year Latinos earn 5.5% of bachelorette degrees conferred. In part, it is attributable to the number of Latino students that matriculate in community colleges. However, it is also attributable to the low numbers of Latinos attending higher education institutions that persist and graduate. The lack of persistence by Latino students will not improve without understanding the factors that differentiate successful Latino students from those that depart. Some scholars attribute persistence to students developing a sense of belonging at an institution. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating the sense of belonging at the university as perceived by the study participants.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest that, “Studying a sense of belonging allows researchers to assess which forms of social interaction (academic and social) further enhance students’ affiliation and identify with the colleges” (p. 328). In addition, they stated that, “understanding students’ sense of belonging may be the key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these (racial and ethnic minority) students” (p. 324). Further, studies by Allen (1988), Oliver, Rodriguez and Mickelson (1985) and Smith (1988) have indicated that in predominantly White campuses underrepresented students are alienated from the mainstream of campus life.

Therefore, constructing a sense of belonging by Latino students at an institution of higher education may be achieved differently from those in the dominant student population on campus. In fact, there may be differences amongst Latino students in regards to developing a sense of belonging within the same institution. What is clear is that there exists a need to study Latino students across different types of higher education institutions to institute a climate on campus that will allow a broad spectrum of Latino students to develop their sense of belonging and persist.

We simply do not know enough about the processes of interaction that lead individuals of different racial backgrounds to drop out from higher education. Nor do we know enough about how these processes relate to differing patterns of academic and social integration or how they vary between institutions of different academic and social characteristics. (Tinto, 1975, p.119)

The study of students in higher education has been ongoing for many years. The study of students in higher education from the perspective of student culture on campus and considering students of color in higher education has a shorter history. Kuh (1990) found that a majority of the research on student culture was conducted during the 1950s and 1960s when enrollment in higher education was homogenously White. College campus are becoming increasingly more heterogeneous, therefore, the need for more recent research on the state of students of color on campus is warranted. Mayo, et al. (1995) who stated that given the increased presence of Latinos in the general population and in higher education, the recruitment, retention, and academic performance of Latino college students is a critical issue for research (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bean, 1980; Gonzàlez, 2000; Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Jones, Castellanos, &

Cole, 2002; Padilla, 2009; Reyes & Rios, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Torres, 2003; Zamani, 2000; Zurita, 2005).

The following sections in this chapter expand upon the research that informs and frames the phenomenon under investigation, the Latino students' sense of belonging. Each section, therefore, is an element that according to the literature contributes to a student's ability to develop or not a sense of belonging. I start with discussing models of student attrition that posit why students leave higher education institutions. This chapter will also explore scholarly literature related to student success, including a theoretical model proposed by Padilla (2009), campus climate, and research on Latinos.

Student Attrition Research

The study of college student attrition has led to the development of several theoretical models to identify, analyze, and the explain reasons why students depart or remain in college (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993; Bean, 1985). Spady (1970) attempted to combine numerous researchers 'models into a single design in order to simultaneously treat multiple clusters of variables related to persistence. Spady concluded that no single theoretical model or research design could systematize or operationalize the relationships among the numerous variables considered in his analysis. However, Spady hypothesized that student attrition or departure may be explained best using an interdisciplinary approach that involves interaction between the student and the particular college environment; and approach where the student's attributes would be exposed to influences, expectations, and demands from a variety of sources. Spady (1971) stated, "The interaction that results provides the student with the opportunity of

assimilating successfully into both the academic and social systems of the college.... to the extent that the rewards available within either system appear sufficient; the student may decide to withdraw” (p. 77).

Becoming socially successful, according to Spady (1971), is framed by having attitudes, interests, and personality dispositions that are compatible with attributes and influences of the institutional environment or normative congruence. The second important factor is the establishment of close relationships with others in the institutional system; a condition Spady calls friendship support.

Spady (1971) empirical definition of perceived students’ social integration encompasses students’ subjective sense of belonging and “fitting in” on campus, perceptions of the warmth of their interpersonal relationships, and feeling unpressured by “normative” differences between them and the environment.” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 325)

Spady further observed that a student who is career oriented is more likely to successfully assimilate when his/her grades provide an extrinsic reward. Intellectual development, however, may be a more important reward for some students. These rewards result in engagement by a student in the academic system of the institution. Spady’s model, however, contained concepts too complex to empirically test. For example, normative congruence, or the compatibility of an individual with contextual norms, has been difficult to measure (Edward, 1994). Thus, it seems that researchers have avoided this component of integration in favor of constructs that capture the participation of students in the social and academic systems of the institution (Hurtado and Carter, 1997). However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) indicate that assumptions of congruence and

of normative or dominant values of an environment underlie social and academic integration research.

Prominent Models on Student Attrition

As of 1993, only two theoretical frameworks have provided a comprehensive framework on college departure decisions, Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) "Student Social and Academic Integration Model" and Bean's (1980) "Student Attrition Model" (Nora and Castañeda, 1993). Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow and Salomone (2002) state that,

Vincent Tinto, the theorist credited with developing the most comprehensive theoretical model of persistence/withdrawal behavior (1975, 1985), posits that post secondary institutions are comprised of distinct social and academic systems. Integration into these systems, which reflects a student's judgment of "fit" within the new setting, represents perceptions on the part of the student of shared values and support in the collegiate environment. This subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community is known as sense of belonging. (p. 228)

In addition, it is theorized that the greater the "sense of belonging" to the institution, the greater the commitment and subsequently the greater the likelihood that the student will remain in college.

Student Attrition Model

Bean (1980) identified four classes of variables in his model that all have both direct and indirect effects on intent to leave that are the immediate precursors to dropping out. The four classes of variables are: background, organizational, environmental, and attitudinal and outcome. The model, therefore, allows researchers to identify classes of related variables in a causality sequence. Bean (1980) explains that the background variables can be used to indicate the type of issues an institution may expect when

admitting students with certain attributes. However, background variables do not contain attitudinal assessments; the background variables only indicate facts. The organizational variables are indicators of a student's interaction with the organization. The organizational variables reflect a student's objective experience of the organization. The environmental variables are reflective of the environment outside the institution and over which the organization has little or no control. The environmental variables indicate ways in which the student might be pulled from the institution. Lastly, the attitudinal and outcome variables indicate more subjective evaluations of education, educational institutions and goals. Bean (1980) does not suggest that his model fully explains the dropout process across institutions or at the national level, rather he posits that his model characterizes a student that may dropout and some of the reasons for his/her decision to depart.

Tinto's Student Social and Academic Integration Model

According to Bean (1980), Tinto produced what has become the most widely cited and tested model of the student attrition process. Rendón, Jalomo and Nora (2000) observed that much of the research on college student attrition is based on testing and validation of Tinto's acclaimed model of student departure.

Tinto (1975) stated that past research on student departure from higher education paid inadequate attention to the questions of definition and the development of theoretical models that sought to explain and simply not describe the process that brings individuals to leave institutions of higher education. He stipulated that definitions of dropout failed to distinguish dropouts resulting from academic failure from dropouts who voluntary

withdrew or those that temporary withdraw versus permanently withdrawing. Tinto stated that failure to adequately define non-persisters had a significant impact upon policy since administrators may be unable to identify target populations that require specific forms of assistance. Therefore, he sought to

formulate a theoretical model that explains the processes of interaction between the individual and the institution that lead different individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in definably different forms of dropout behavior. (Tinto, 1975, p. 90)

Tinto (1975) drew from the work of Durkheim, which stipulates that an individual breaking his/her ties with a social system stems from a lack of integration into the social fabric of that society. Durkheim (1961) posited that the likelihood of suicide in society increases when moral (value) integration is lacking and the individual has insufficient collective societal affiliation. Hurtado and Carter (1997) stated that,

Tinto can be credited with improving Spady's application of Durkheim's social integration to higher education by modeling systems in which students' interactions take place. Yet, the distinction between students' interactions in the academic and social systems and their actual psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community remains ambiguous. (p.326)

Tinto (1975) points out that it is important to distinguish between normative and structural integration in the academic domain from that of the social domain of a college. This distinction is necessary because withdrawal from college can occur either from voluntary withdrawal or from forced withdrawal, which may arise from the breaking of established rules concerning proper social and academic behaviors. Tinto also noted that a person may be able to achieve integration in one of these domains without doing so in

the other. A person may be doing adequately academically and elect to withdraw because of insufficient integration into the social life of the institution.

He also stated that his model was developed to explain certain but not all facets of dropout behavior that may occur in a particular higher education setting. He notes that the model, for example, did not seek to directly address the impact of finances or forces outside the institution.

Tinto's 1975 model posits that given an individual's characteristics, prior experiences, and commitment, that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his/her continuance at college.

Tinto (1975) suggests that,

the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interaction between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his/her normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Tinto (1975) acknowledged that an individual enters college with various personal attributes (e.g., sex, race, ability), precollege experiences (e.g., academic and social attainments), and family background (e.g., values, social status, expectations) that have direct and indirect impacts upon performance in college. Therefore, he builds into the model of attrition sets of individual characteristics and dispositions relevant to educational persistence that include individual background characteristics, attributions, and expectation and motivational attributes. Thus, Tinto posits that for individuals the higher the degree of integration into institution's the academic and social systems, the

greater the individual's commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of completing college.

Later work by Tinto (1987, 1993) expanded of his original model into a more sophisticated longitudinal model that included the interaction of multiple factors such as finances, personal adjustment, academic difficulty, lack of congruence, feelings of isolation, and external obligations and commitment. Tinto (1993) argued that “the majority of colleges are made up of several, if not many, communities or “subcultures” (as cited in Rendón et al., 2000, p. 138). Students would need to find at least one community in which to find membership and support in order to persist, but that the community did not necessarily need to be the dominant culture on campus.

Tinto (1993) suggests that “the concept of membership is more useful than ‘integration’ because it implies a greater diversity [of modes] of participation” (p. 106). Thus, the concept of membership is intended to capture the various communities on campus and the multiple affiliations without adopting a dominant set of norms (Hurtado and Carter, 1997). Hurtado and Carter further suggest that this advancement may be valuable for understanding the ability of underrepresented students to function in social environments on campus besides their own cultural group. However, Hurtado and Carter noted that,

Forms of affiliation that may reflect specific interests of Latino students, such as participation in ethnic student communities and cultural forms of expression on campus, have been excluded from measures of social integration that include campus activities (p.327)

Hurtado and Carter also discovered that Latino students' membership in religious and social communities during college significantly related to a student's sense of

belonging. The researchers posit that these external affiliations maintain a link to familiar communities and aid in feeling at home. The exclusion consideration of religious and social communities from studies may explain the reason why some studies have determined that constructs for social integration are not significantly related to outcomes for Latinos (Nora, 1987). Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest that these exclusions necessitate assessing distinct forms of student integration in college by applying a conceptualization of integration and by using distinct measures that capture the students' view of whether they are included in the college community.

Views on the Prominent Student Attrition Models

Nora and Castañeda (1993) undertook the challenge of determining the extent to which Tinto's and Bean's models could be merged to enhance understanding of the processes that affect students' decisions to persist in college. Nora and Castañeda cite evidence from research by Cabrera, Castaneda and Nora (1992) that these two models overlap.

Nora and Castañeda (1993) observed that by merging Tinto's and Bean's theories into an integrated model, a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between individuals, environmental, and institutional factors was achieved. Rendón et al. (2000), however, found internal inconsistency with the integrated model in multi-institutional or single institutional assessments of residential and commuter universities and across college female and male students. As a result, Rendón et al. stressed the need for administrators to focus intervention strategies that address those

factors that can be manipulated and that have been found to be the strongest predictors of predispositions to leave. They warned, however, that generalizing the findings to other institutional types should be approached cautiously. Tinto (1987) himself indicated that patterns underlying the college experience process may vary by type of institution, the setting, and the composition of the student population. These key observations seem to support the need for studies focusing on various types of campuses, such as a predominantly White private university.

Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) analyzed the departure puzzle through the models developed by Tinto. They found that only White males afforded strong support for the core proposition that “the greater the level of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution” (p. 136). Tinto (1982) stated that regarding students of color, his model “fails to highlight important differences in the educational career that mark the experiences of students of different gender, race, and socioeconomic status” (p. 689).

Tierney (1992) suggests that Tinto misinterpreted the anthropological notions of ritual. He suggests that by doing so Tinto created a theoretical construct, in this case “social integration,” with potentially harmful implications for racial and ethnic minorities. One harmful consequence is the concept that racial and ethnic minority students in order to persist in college must first go through cultural “suicide” of their own culture in order to assimilate into the dominant culture on campus. “In order to become fully incorporated in the life of the college, [students] have to physically as well as socially dissociate themselves from the communities of the past” (Tinto, 1993, p. 96).

Tierney (1992) called for alternative frameworks related to racial and ethnic minorities. For example, Attinasi (1989, 1994) proposed constructing theory from grounded (native) concepts drawn from a particular student group's perspective. The current study seeks to address this call by following on Latino students' perspectives.

Numerous researchers have investigated the application and validity of Tinto's model to Latino students in higher education (Gomez 1998, Nora 1987, Nora and Cabrera 1996). Their findings also contradicted Tinto's early claims that severing ties with family, friends, and past communities aids Latinos in their transition to college. The researchers stressed that such attachments are important to the successful transition of Latino students to college. Further, Attinasi (1989, 1994) and Tierney (1992) agreed that the underlying concept that successful minority students must adapt, acculturate, or adopt the dominant values of the college environment is a potentially harmful practice. Other researchers found that family support and involvement have contributed favorably to student persistence and retention, further documenting the importance and impact of family support to the success of Latino students (Cibik & Chambers, 1991, Garza, 1998, Hernandez, 2000, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler, 1996). Further, Nora and Cabrera (1996) validated the notion that minorities do not tend to sever ties from past communities in order to attain membership status in a new or different culture. This is illustrated by minority students that retain a sense of cultural identity and values while integrated in the dominant campus culture.

Rendón et al. (2000) suggest that a bicultural educational model aids in explaining how individuals learn and practice both the mainstream culture and their ethnic cultures

at the same time. Valentine (1971) advanced the concept of biculturalism- the ability of a minority person to function in two cultures that are perceived as distinct and separate. The concept of biculturalism challenges the assumptions of separation, which suggests that disassociation from a student's native culture is necessary in order to assimilate into college life. According to assumptions of separation, minority students must struggle with leaving their "old environment" behind in order to obtain full membership in a new college environment since the two are distinctly different.

Torres (2003) extended the work by Valentine and introduced the "Bicultural Orientation Model" (BOM). The model stipulates that students with high levels of ethnic identity and acculturation have a bicultural orientation, indicating equal preference for multiple cultures. Torres (2003) classified multiple orientations in addition to behavioral, (a) Latino orientation, which indicates a preference for the Latino culture, (b) Anglo orientation, which reflects a high level of acculturation and low level of ethnic orientation, and (c) those with marginal orientation, indicating some conflict with both cultures. He stated that "When we understand the process students use to make these choices we will better understand their expectations and needs in the college environment" (Torres, 2003, p. 3).

In an attempt to close the knowledge gap related to the effect of the college environment on Latino students, Torres (2003) conducted two studies in which her findings indicated that a student's ethnicity is more important for Latino students than it is for White students. This finding was supported by other research that concluded that Latino students rated ethnicity as important as religion and more important than political

orientation. Torres also discovered that the environment in which the Latinos grew up greatly influenced the issues they faced when they arrived on campus. Students in predominantly White college environments who came from predominantly Latino environments focused on locating others who shared their values and culture. Whereas Latino students who came from areas where there was a mixed ethnic background or low “critical mass” of Latinos strive to be around Latinos, but feel excluded if they do not speak Spanish. Language has always been a salient variable in identifying level of ethnicity, and these students confirm that speaking the language continues to be important (Torres, 2003, p. 4).

De Anda (1984) contended that the bicultural experience was possible because of overlaps in the two cultures. For De Anda, “dual socialization” was made possible and facilitated by the amount of overlap between two cultures. She further argued that finding convergence between two cultures could allow individuals to function more comfortably and effectively in both worlds, however, it will require transforming the academic and social culture of higher education institutions to accommodate culturally diverse students.

Biculturalism, therefore, challenges the proposition inherent in the early dominant attrition models that an individual must abandon their cultural values and beliefs in order to successfully incorporate into an institution. It also challenges the view that some student attrition models further presupposed that there exists one dominant culture and that in order to succeed, members of minority cultures should assimilate into the dominant culture. Biculturalism suggested that students can retain their cultural values

and beliefs and succeed in higher education institution. Balkanization, however, may become a concern when retaining cultural values and beliefs results in self-segregation by the students of color on campus.

Researchers have defined racial balkanization as the tendency for students of color to self-segregate from the university's predominantly White student body and into their respective racial "enclaves" (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Astin, 1993; Duster, 1991, 1993, 1995). The process of balkanization is purported to polarize campuses along racial/ethnic alliances and have negative effects on a range of post-college educational (cognitive) and behavioral (affective) outcomes for students of color (Berube & Nelson, 1995; D'Souza, 1991).

Biculturalism and balkanization may not affect Latino students that are comfortable with the dominant Anglo culture. Quintana, Vogel, and Ybarra (1991) stated that Latino students attending universities with a dominant Anglo culture experience less stress when they are familiar and comfortable with the Anglo culture.

There are instances when, rather than requiring the Latino students to assimilate or separate from the dominant Anglo culture, convergence of the two cultures is possible. Jalomo (1995), Rendón and Hope (1996), and de Anda (1984) found that the converging of two worlds requires the use of cultural translators, mediators, and role models. Students need information and guidance to assist them in deciphering unfamiliar college customs and rituals, mediate issues arising from disjunction between the prevailing and the student's culture, and model behavior amiable with the norms, values, and beliefs of the minority and majority cultures.

Attinasi (1989, 1994) found that students become integrated not because they share the values and orientation of the majority of students at their college, but because the specific collective affiliations they form help them acquire the skills to negotiate the social, physical, and cognitive geographies of large campus environments. This theoretical perspective is important because it suggests that the affiliations that some of the Latino students in this study made allowed them to navigate what was an unwelcoming campus environment.

Lastly, Latino students are also influenced by the expectations of their parents. First generation students are more likely to experience conflict between their own choices and their parent's expectations. This is especially true for Latinas who are expected to maintain a more "protected" lifestyle than Latino males. As Latino students work through these issues, their definitions of autonomy, independence, and interdependence differ from the definitions accepted within the dominant White culture (Torres, 2003).

Student Success Model

There are scholars who suggest that instead of focusing on attrition theory the focus should be on those factors that lead to successfully completing a college degree. Rendón et al., (2000) suggested that while theory building is important, advancing the development and transformation of academic and student services is more or as important because a "student will elect to stay or leave college not so much because of theory, but because college and university faculty and administrators have made transformative shifts in governance, curriculum development, in-and out-of-class teaching and learning, student programming, and other institutional dimensions that affect students on a daily

basis” (p. 152). Braxton et al., (1995) recommended that researcher should identify factors that help more minorities to be successful in college by asking, “What helps this particular type of student to attend and succeed in college?”

In order to identify the optimum transformative actions to undertake to increase student success, Padilla (2009) has proposed a two part model of success that adheres to Rendón et al call for transformative action and Braxton’s call for understanding success factor for minorities in higher education .

These models (Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) and the Local Student Success Model (LSSM) can be applied to almost any educational setting and level. Once developed, the LSSM can be used to take actions that may help student to be successful (Padilla, 2009, p. xviii) Student success involves more than preventing students from leaving an institution. To promote success it is important to understand why some students are capable of completing a program of study and graduate, even under challenging circumstances, and why others are not. Once that understanding is attained, strategies and practices may be constructed that will enable other students to perform as the successful students perform. In contrast to departure prevention strategies, the focus on success promotes enabling strategies and practices that ultimately lead to graduation Padilla, 2009). As a result, Padilla (2009) argues that what should have been of interest are the students that succeeded.

Some of the classic research literature on student departure, as well as some of the literature on student retention and persistence, points in the direction of student success modeling but falls short of envisioning student success as the central phenomenon of interest. (Padilla, 2009, p. 11)

Padilla (2009) argues that student retention and persistence are precondition to success. A student that is registered at a specific point in time has been retained. Those that remain registered for a continuous period of time are persisting. A student that persists for a sufficient period of time and meets academic requirements becomes a graduate. To his progression through an academic program may seem intuitive, but in execution can be very difficult as illustrated by lackluster graduation rates, particularly among students of color. Therefore, the challenge is to identify success factors for a broad based of students attending the various types of higher education institutions and create services and cultural environments that will increase retention and persistence. In the case of this study, the pertinent student population is Latino students at the university.

Studies conducted by Padilla and Pavel (1986) and Trevinó, Gonzalez, and Trevinó (1997), indicate that by retrieving information about how students successfully navigate a specific campus, the information retrieve may be integrated into a variety of student support services that can result in greater student success. This study strives, without applying the model proposed by Padilla, to retrieve information from that can be utilized, using the Padilla model, by relevant professionals at this university to improve the retention and persistence of Latino students by investigating Latino students that are succeeding at the university.

Padilla's model is discuss in some details below and referenced in relationship to this study in Chapter 4: Findings. The Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) developed by Padilla "is a theoretical model that presents a particular understanding of

student success by bringing together a set of concepts and the relationships that connect them” (Padilla, 2009, p. 8).

The EMSS model is based on a set of assumptions about how students experience the campus, expert systems theory, and on qualitative survey methods to gather data. Specifically, the model acknowledges that: (a) to date we are unable to explain why one student can enroll, begin their studies, and graduate while another entering at the same time fails to graduate; (b) from the student perspective the campus that they matriculate presents a series of barriers to their academic progress and graduation; (c) those students who are successful are experts at being students; and (d) students require heuristic knowledge but must undertake effective actions to overcome barriers to success.

The Local Student Success Model (LSSM) evolved from three specific parameters of the EMSS- “the barriers that the students encounter, the knowledge they use to identify effective solutions and the actions they take to actually overcome the barriers” (Padilla, 2009, p. 28). Padilla (2009) posits that the aforementioned parameters may be determined for any particular campus and any desired student population, including subgroups such as Latino students. It is this “instance” of the EMSS that is designated as the LSSM for a specific campus. The LSSM can then drive the institutional strategies and practices to improve student success. Padilla suggests that it is the local nature of the LSSM that is missing from the other models. Using Padilla’s model, higher education professionals may more effectively address the barriers that affect student retention. Those barriers may vary by student population and institutional characteristics, but exists with the campus climate of an institution. Therefore, it is also important to

consider campus climate when investigating student retention and persistence since perception of campus climate is important particularly when investigating sense of belonging at an institution of higher education from the Latino student perspective.

Campus Climate

According to (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999), a growing body of literature on students' perceptions of the college environment has shown that the institutional climate for diversity can have a considerable impact on students' academic and social lives. Hurtado et al. (1999) also discovered that the majority of research available on campus climate provided an incomplete view because most of it had been gathered using quantitative methods. A limitation of assessing campus climates using surveys and questionnaires is that study participants are limited to responding to those aspects of the campus environment addressed by the particular instrument.

Braxton et al., (1995) found that institutions that met the pre-matriculation expectations of students, the students were more committed to graduating from that institution. Further, the authors posited that the expectations students formed regarding their college experiences in turn influenced their assessment of whether or not the campus academic and social communities fulfilled their expectations. Therefore, I believe that the interviews will highlight the Latino student's expectations and perception to a level of clarity and depth not possible using a quantitative method.

Baird (2000) observed that the student's individual interpretation of their institution's challenges and opportunities determine campus climate. Campus climate is, therefore, critical to a student's perception of the comfort level that exists on a college

campus. Furthermore, to fully understand a campus environment a researcher must ask students what they feel, perceive, observe, and how they evaluate and construct their college environment. According to Baird (1990), a person's perception of the climate is based, in part, on his or her personal perception of an experience. Therefore, in order for decision makers to avoid actions and policies that would be detrimental to their student body, they must first understand how students perceive their realities and how they react to those perceptions (Baird, 1990).

Strange and Banning (2001) provide a comprehensive review of literature focusing on the complexities of campus environments, the impact the campus setting has on student success, and the quality of their learning experience. The key elements of any human environment, and those specific to colleges and universities include (a) the physical condition, design, and layout of the campus; (b) the characteristics of the students attending the institution; (c) the organizational structures related to institutional purposes, goals, and mission and (d) students' collective perceptions or constructions of the context and culture on campus (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Strange and Banning (2001) affirm that a student's decision to leave an educational institution may be caused by an unsupportive environment and incongruence with the educational institution. These scholars claim that "educational environments are most powerful when they offer students three fundamental conditions: a sense of security and inclusion, mechanisms for involvement, and an experience of community" (p. xii). Furthermore, when person environment congruence is lacking, students often experience dissatisfaction and instability that contributes to their decision to either seek a new

congruent environment, attempting to remake the environment, or adapt their behavior to the dominant characteristics of the environment.

Rapaport (1982) reported that the physical environment of any college campus communicates and elicits varying emotions, interpretations, and behaviors. Nonverbal messages and physical artifacts on college campuses have a strong influence on student behavior and campus culture (Banning & Bartels, 1993; Rapaport, 1982). These nonverbal messages and physical artifacts generate intense messages to students that may create a sense of belonging, safety, sense of role, worth and value or the converse (Banning & Bartels, 1993). According to Mehrabian (1981) nonverbal messages are seen as more truthful than verbal or written messages and can actually contradict those offered verbally.

Models of Campus Climate

Numerous researchers have identified that understanding an institution's campus climate requires establishing a sense of community (González, 2000), Hurtado et al, 1999, and Menne, 1967). Research has validated that those students that are more involved in the campus community consequently feel a greater sense of belonging, typically stay in college longer, and are more likely to graduate.

According to Menne (1967), educators interested in learning more about campus climate are encouraged to assess their campus by gauging objective factors that affect the climate. He suggests using qualitative means to obtain students perceptions of the environment, particularly as they relate to experiences in and out of the classroom, cultural events, social activities, and school policies.

Menne (1967) developed a three stage (assessment, manipulation, and reassessment) experimental paradigm for assessing college environments based on objective factors. He believed that educators need to first determine the perceptions of upper-classmen and experienced faculty and administrators. Menne's observation guided the selection of upper-class Latinos and inclusion of the narrative of institutional informants in this study. Then, administrators should create a congruent environment that aligns with the stated goals of the institution and the desires and expectations of the campus community and newcomers. Lastly, Menne suggested a pattern of assessing the effectiveness of the environmental manipulation, while continually reassessing the environment.

Hurtado et al. (1999) developed a four dimensional framework of the campus climate: (a) an institution's history of inclusion or exclusion, (b) structural diversity, (c) psychological climate and (d) behavioral dimensions. These researchers encouraged the uncovering and understanding of the institutional history because of its potential effect on the racial climate of the institution. They also encouraged that staff determining the numerical representation of underrepresented students on campus in order to examine the impact of structural diversity. They posited that the first step in improving the environmental climate is to understand the racial and ethnic enrollment on campus. Increasing student diversity on campus can improve the experiences of underrepresented groups by reducing their perception of being tokens on campus. In regards to the behavioral dimension of the model, they recommended creating opportunities for cross-racial interaction in and out of the classroom, adding racial/ethnic diversity into course

content, encouraging cooperative learning activities, and encouraging ethnic minority students to become involved with each other in part to enhance their identity and comfort on campus. Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest “that greater attention needs to be paid to ethnic minority students’ subjective sense of integration in campus life” (p. 324). Therefore, the level of belonging has a bearing on the Latino students involvement and subsequent the sense of integration with the institution.

The experiences of ethnic minorities in predominantly White campuses is said to be different from that of the majority student population (Bennett, Cole, & Thompson, 2000). Hurtado (1990) found that students of color who do not feel welcome in the dominant campus life are unlikely to succeed and remain in college. Further, Hurtado (1992) posed that since Latino students tend to have more negative perceptions of the campus climate than Whites, it is crucial to fully understand their perceptions of their college experiences.

Rankin (2005) surveyed almost 8,000 undergraduate students from multiple campuses to explore whether students from different ethnic backgrounds experience campus climate differently. Her findings indicated that students of color reported more incidents of harassment than White students. The students of color also reported that the classroom and campus climates were less welcoming than the White students

Loo and Rolison (1986) conducted a qualitative study at a predominantly White, elite public university to assess the extent and nature of socio-cultural alienation and academic satisfaction among students of color and identify differences and similarities in attitudes of White students and students of color. Their theoretical framework was based

on Spady's (1970) and Tinto's (1975) models on attrition. The researchers concurred with Tinto's conceptualization of the university as an enclosed social system composed of social and academic subsystems. However, their results indicated that White students and students of color perceived the university environment from vastly different perspectives and the socio-cultural alienation of students of color was significantly greater than that of White students the students of color required adaption to different class and cultural situations that took time from their academic pursuits. However, the data suggested that positive student-faculty relationships and satisfaction with the quality of education were balanced against socio-cultural differences, alienation, academic unpreparedness, and isolation for students of color. These positive factors encouraged students of color to remain at the institution. The authors called for

fuller understanding of the societal, racial, class, and institutional barriers to assuring equal opportunity for academic success for minority populations and a determined effort by academic institutions to address and eliminate these barriers. (Loo & Rolison, 1986)

Therefore, Rankin (1995) and Loo and Rolison (1986) support the premise that students of color view the campus climate differently than their White peers.

Campus Environment for Latinos

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that Latino students at predominantly White campuses reported facing stresses related to their underrepresented status. Further, the Latino students illustrated substantial psychological sensitivity to the campus social climate and experienced actual or perceived discrimination and racism. They further state that, "We hypothesized that Latino students' perceptions of a hostile climate directly

affect the students' sense of belonging in their colleges" (Hurtado et al., 1997, p. 330). Hurtado, Carter and Spuler (1996) posited that dimensions of the campus climate and the institutions structural diversity in terms of Hispanic enrollment could affect the adjustment of Latino students to the institution. Further, Hurtado et.al., (1996) affirmed that it is not just overt experiences of discrimination that require attention but rather subtle forms of intergroup dynamics that can undermine the Latino student's adjustment to college; even the most talented of Latino students are not immune.

Latino students' perception of their college environment has considerable impact on their social and academic lives (Hurtado et al., 1999). As a result of having to negotiate stereotypes, social biases, and prejudices many Latino undergraduates experience cultural shock in the academic environment (González, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Valencia & Black, 2002). Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) discovered that overall the constructs of university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs were significantly interrelated and predicted academic non-persistence decisions, with social support and university comfort being the strongest predictors. Therefore, Gloria et al. (2005) suggested contextualized investigations when addressing the educational experiences of Latino undergraduates.

González (2000) conducted a two-year study investigating the experiences and actions of first-generation college students who identified themselves as Chicano at a large southwest predominantly White university. He analyzed interviews, observations (shadowing), and documents to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of the experiences and actions of Chicano students. He discovered forms of marginalization and

alienation. For example, the Chicano students experienced lack of Chicano representation within the campus community, lack of political power that other groups on campus possessed, and lack of Spanish language spoken on campus. Being ignored was a common manifestation of the marginalization and alienation experienced within the social world of the campus by the Chicano students.

What I mean by the social world is a system of representations which includes the racial and ethnic makeup of individuals and groups on campus, the power relationship that exists between and within these groups, and the language utilized between and within these groups. (González, 2000, p. 75)

González, (2000) also explored the “physical world.” He defined the physical world as a system of representations that encompassed the physical spacing on campus, its architectural features, sculptures, and other physical symbols such as those found on posters and flyers. González found that for Chicano students, the campus environment was alienating and marginalizing because of a lack of relevant representations on campus. He noted that of the more than 80 buildings on campus, only two possessed any sculptures or art work representing Chicano culture. He further found that due to a lack of Chicano knowledge existing and being exchanged on campus Chicano students experienced marginalization and alienation.

González (2000) observed, however, that these Chicano students “were not simply objects acted upon by a dominant, oppressive environment, but subjects acting toward the transformation of this environment” (González, 2000, p.80). He called these students “cultural-workers” – working to transform their cultural environment. The students used the social, physical, and epistemological worlds as the media for transformation; “...the impetus for their cultural work stemmed from the daily

contradictions they experienced as marginalizing and alienating” (González, 2000, p. 81).

The students found “energy” to pursue transformation from family, friends, role models, language, and existing cultural work. He concludes that,

The findings of this study show that much of the alienation and marginalization minority students experience on a predominantly Anglo university campus are, concomitantly, forms of cultural starvation. Family, friends, minority faculty, and other role models serve not simply as support systems, but also as powerful sources of cultural nourishment for the replenishment of cultural starvation. (González, 2000, p. 88)

According to González (2000), the outcome from this study for administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty was a framework for better understanding the relationship between the culture of their institutions and the culture possessed and produced by various ethnic students of color, the various forms of alienation ethnic minority students may experience and marginalization on a predominantly White university, and insights into the process of creating multicultural campuses.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) stated that, “Many institutions that have acquired large numbers of Latino students in recent years still retain structures and practices that reflect assumptions that preserve predominantly White norms” (p. 235). These authors conducted a longitudinal study based on data collected from various 4-year public institutions throughout the United States. Their findings indicated that students who spoke Spanish at home perceived a hostile climate for diversity on campus in contrast to those students that were English dominant. the results of the study seem to indicate that predicting a perception of a hostile campus environment may depend more on experiences on campus than the student’s background. Not surprisingly Latinos who

perceived a negative climate for diversity reported a significantly lower sense of belonging in their campus. However, the results also indicated that Latinos who reported positive interactions with diverse peers and participated in academic support programs tended to have a higher sense of belonging, confidence, and skills that reflect a pluralistic orientation, their capacity to manage differences and function in a diverse workplace. Therefore, the campus climate is critical to the creation of a comfortable experience for students of color.

Student perceptions of the campus climate for diversity vary substantially by ethnic/racial group (Hurtado, 1992). These differences in perception are reflective of both the students' experiences in variable climates across institutions and students' background characteristics. In fact, students of the same ethnic/racial group differ substantially in their perception upon entry into college due to demographic characteristics, prior socialization contexts, and attitudes and values (Gurin and Epps, 1975; Hurtado, 1990). Further, student views and educational outcomes differ substantially by characteristics that are often excluded from studies on college students, but are important to Latinos. For example, nativity or generational status (Ortiz, 1986), Spanish-language use and proficiency (Duran, 1983), ethnic consciousness (Hurtado, 1993), and the level of segregation experienced in high school prior to entering college.

Hurtado (1994) reported that Latino students felt that their institutions knew very little about Hispanic culture, a factor associated with Latinos perceiving racial/ethnic tension and reports of discrimination on campus. She noted that Latino students experience some degree of stereotyping and discrimination on campus. Further, despite

strong academic preparation a quarter of the Latino students reported they “do not fit” and more than one-third reported that they felt most students believe minorities are “special admits.” Hurtado (1994), therefore, concluded that increasing the number of Latino students on campus cannot be the sole answer to improving diversity on campus. She posits that perhaps the most important finding of her study has to do with the general climate on campus. She stated that, “Low campus tension and fewer experiences of discrimination are associated with campuses where Latinos perceive campus administrators were open and responsive to student concern” (p. 36). Quintana, Yodel and Ybarra (1991) identified studies that indicated that students perceived lower levels of stress on campuses where the students had a positive attitude toward other groups and a secure ethnic identity. Further, the study suggested that “understanding Latino student experiences is the first step in developing successful intervention strategies that may eventually improve student outcomes (Quintana et al., 1991, p. 37)” Lastly, the researchers stated that “the first step in this policy-making process is to conduct research on our respective campuses to understand the dimensions of the problem that students face” (Quintana et al., 1991, p. 37).

Research on Latinos in Higher Education

The existence of few minority students results in small sample sizes or total exclusion from the samples (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Tierney, 1992). Consequently, much of the most widely acclaimed research guiding theories of students’ transition to college, departure, involvement, and learning were based on White male students. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), this type of research produced a

monolithic view of students devoid of issues related to race/ethnicity, culture, gender, politics, and identity. Padilla, González, Treviño, and Treviño (1997), stated that “The retention of ethnic minority college students continues to be an important concern in American higher education” (p.125).

Banning, Ahuna, and Hughes (2000) conducted a comprehensive 30-year review (1967-1997) of articles published in the *Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education* (NASPA) Journal and found that of 72 articles in the journal focusing on racial and ethnic topics; only a single article was related to Latino students. Olivas (1986) stated that “Our understanding of Hispanic college students is not significantly increased by the available student literature” (p. 4).

Although not extensive, Latino students have been studied from several contexts. Saunders and Serna (2004) studied the long term effects of college access/intervention programs by examining how first-generation Latino students navigate the transition from high school to college. They found that Latino student’s differed in their ability to marshal the tools, resources, relationships, reconfigure and create new ones, once situated in the college setting. They found that behavior of most first generation Latino students attending a 4-year institution could be categorized as those (a) who demonstrated that they were proficient at reconfiguring social networks and establishing new ones, (b) who sought resources and assistance to continue academic success, (c) who maintained old relationships, networks, and resources but were not adept at establishing new resources that ensured their continued academic success, and (d) those who were unable to create or maintain ties to any social network.

Researchers suggested that Latino students that succeed in creating new networks in college and/or maintain ties to old networks persist and progress toward degree completion. In addition, that involvement and membership in religious, social-community, and ethnic student communities frequently increased the sense of belonging on campus for the Latino students.

For Latino students the effect of the first year experience may have greater impact on their perception of their ability to succeed than for other ethnic groups. Malaney and Shively (1995) conducted a study to determine how students' perceptions changed in the course of their first year in college. At the beginning of the academic year, Latino students recorded the highest expectation of graduating from university among ethnic groups surveyed. However, by the end of the first academic year on campus their expectation ranked the lowest, and was the only significant drop of the ethnic groups surveyed.

Hurtado et al. (1996) sought to understand the factors that affect Latino student adjustment in the first two years of college. Their study focused on Latino students identified as having the highest potential for success. The study found that even with a qualified group of Latino students, "there is a significant amount of adjustment that must take place in the transition to any undergraduate institution" (p. 136). The study's results suggested that campus climate affected all forms of student adjustment, as do transitional experiences that are common to most students in the first year at college. The researchers relied on a body of literature that focused on college adjustment and literature on aspects of minority experiences that had generally not been included in college impact models.

Several students reported socio-economic status and financial concerns were reported by several studies (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Cibik & Chambers; 1991; Vasquez, 1982). Consistently these studies reported the stress factors related to a lack of financial resources. Riley (1998) reported that family income and enrollment rates significantly affect the accessibility of Latino students to higher education. Nearly 40% of Latino children live in families with an income below the poverty level. He also reported that Latino college students are less likely to receive financial aid than Whites or Black students. In fact, only 17% of Pell Grant recipients in 1999 were awarded to Latino college students, although Pell Grants are the most effective means for low income students to access higher education. Given the low-income status of a substantial segment of the Latino student population, Latino students are more likely to be required to work to finance their education.

Arellano and Padilla (1996) suggested research should have focused on those Latino students who have overcome barriers, sustained their enrollment, and succeeded by graduating. Lastly, according to Zurita (2005), “What is missing from the literature, has been the actual voices of the Latino college student describing in their own words their experiences in American colleges and universities in recent years” (p. 15).

The literature presented in this chapter frames and informs this study. It focuses on the various factors that constrain or barriers and support Latino students’ sense of belonging on campus. It highlights the numerous “layers” that collectively compose a campus’ environment or campus climate for Latino students. Figure 2.1 illustrates the layers discussed in this chapter, which interact to produce the sense of belonging this

study seeks to investigate through the narrative of the study participants, contribution of the institutional informants, and the observations of this researcher.

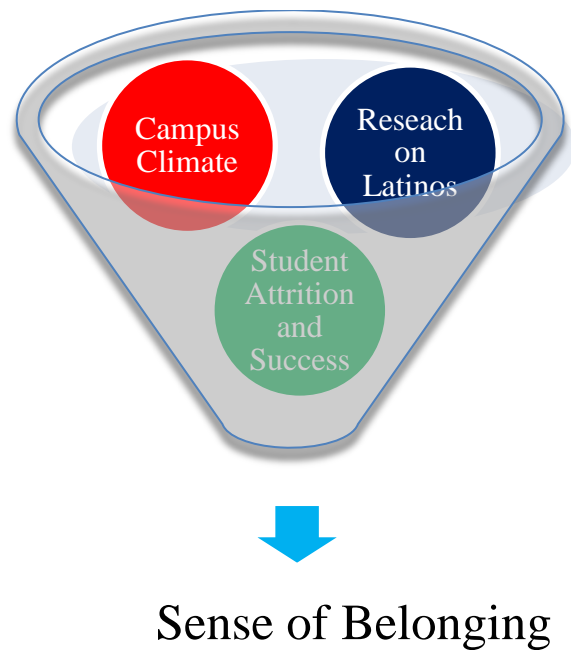


Figure 2.1 Confluences of Influences Leading to a Sense of Belonging

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Research Methodology

I selected a qualitative tradition because it can produce descriptions and explanations. “It can aim to ‘give voice’ to those whose accounts tend to be marginalized or discounted” (Willing, 2008, p. 12). I applied a phenomenological epistemological stance (How can we know?) to develop an understanding of the sense of belonging of Latino undergraduates attending a predominantly White private university through their experiences in the academic and social life of the campus.

A phenomenological “position is one that argues that while experience is always the product of interpretation and, therefore, constructed (and flexible) rather than determined (and fixed), it is nevertheless ‘real’ to the person who is having the experience.” (Willing, 2008, p. 13)

I explored their experiences in the social and academic life of the university through interviews that captured the essence of their experiences in their own words with a desire that the insights derived from this study will assist education professionals in constructing a welcoming and supportive environment for Latino students and promote their success in higher education. Further, I wanted to make sense of the intersection of the dominant and marginalized cultures on campus by identifying similarities and differences amongst and between the study participants and the dominant culture on campus.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Creswell (1998) stated that qualitative research methodology “fits” when attempting to understand and describe the “lived experiences” of the participants.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated that the qualitative research methodology values the participant’s view of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process allowing the participants to create the research in their own words and voice. Further,

Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experiences. It is the life-world as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of the study. (Schwandt, 2001).

Moustakas (1994) noted that the qualitative researcher is focused on the multi-dimensional, holistic experience that seeks meaning and essences rather than measurements and explanations. Creswell (2007) indicates that the research process is collaborative between the researcher and the participants; consequently rationalizing an approach that utilizes one-on-one interviews for drawing first hand and “closely” on the experiences of the Latino students.

They aim to understand “what it is like” to experience particular conditions and how people manage certain situations” (Willig, 2008, p. 8). Lastly, according to (Willig, 2008) qualitative researches study people within natural settings and in “their own territory.”

Those characteristics of qualitative research supported the essence of my study. I was interested in how the Latino study participants made “sense of the world” and how they experience belonging at a western private university. Further, as a kindred spirit, that

shared a common ethnic background and similarities in academic and social experiences, I had a personal interest in the subject of this study and a unique sensitive to the Latino students in the study. I believe that as result it lead to findings that naturally emerged from our conversations.

Epistemology

I sought a relationship with study participants and institutional informants who were open and conducive to lengthy discussions in an attempt to obtain uninhibited, insightful responses about the participants' sense of belonging at a western private university. As stated by Creswell (2008) “[Q]ualitative researchers interact with those they study” (p. 76). Further, I was seeking a transactional/subjectivist stance, which suggests that findings can be co-created (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Assuming that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Thus, I desired a stance that would enable me to interactively identify the nature, score, and knowledge related to the students' perspectives of belonging at the university. Therefore, I selected the transactional/subjectivism stance for my epistemology.

Therefore, a transactional/subjectivist stance allowed me to reflect upon my own experiences while suspending judgment on my part about reality. However, I realized that “we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects” ((Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 104). I believe that a transactional/subjectivist

stance adheres to the ontological constructivist/relativist perspective that posits that reality can be local and co-constructed. Therefore, I reasoned that the study participants, the institutional informants and I could legitimately co-construct the findings from our individual contributions to this study.

Constructivism

I selected constructivism or interpretivism as my theoretical perspective because interpretivism attempts to understand and explain human and social reality. According to Crotty (1997) the interpretivism approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world. Further, I desired to focus on the “local understanding” of the experiences of the Latino students rather than deriving generalized truths or laws (Willis, 2007). The desire to understand the contextualized experiences of the Latino students’ sense of belonging academically and socially was more important than discovering universal laws or rules (Willis, 2007). I believe that my study aligns well with the interpretivism theoretical perspective.

Constructivism is appropriate because it posits that there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered. Trust or meaning comes into existence out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without the mind, and meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1997). Further, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, (2011) posit that the constructivist paradigm posits that relativism is constructed or co-constructed locally and specifically, which is the ontology or nature of the reality for me as the researcher (Creswell, 1998).

Relativism

According to Guba (1990), the relativist perspective states that,

Realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them. (Guba, 1990, p. 27)

To Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) relativism means “that we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society” (p.103). Further, they propose that “as researchers must participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p. 103). Therefore, I believed that in this study the students’ collective experiences and reflections, in concert with my own, will co-construct the perception of their sense of belonging at a western private university. Lastly, constructivism or interpretivism directed the selection of the theoretical perspective, methodology, and method for this study.

Philosophical Assumptions of a Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology

Methodology is the “process of how we seek out new knowledge. The principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 190). I selected phenomenology as the method for this study because it is appropriate for a study focusing on describing and understanding the real world experiences of people.

Phenomenology is interested in the world as it is experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times, rather than in abstract statements about the nature of the world in general. Phenomenology is concerned with the *phenomenon that appears* in our consciousness as we engage with the world around us (Willig, 2008, p. 52)

Further, the phenomenological tradition seeks to understand the central underlying meaning or essence of an individual's experience (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Moustakas (1994), in addition, described the aims of phenomenological study "to determine what an experience means for the person who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. Moustakas indicated that from the descriptions of the individuals meaning may be derived, which provides the essence or structure of the experience. A phenomenological account, therefore, gets inside the common experiences of a group of people and describes what the participants have experienced, how they have experienced it, and the meanings they make of their shared experiences providing insightful self-reporting of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), van Manen posed that the purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the individual experiences to a description of a universal essence. In addition, Polkinghorne (1989) observed that a researcher and readers of a phenomenological research study should be able to state that they understand what it is to have a similar experience.

Analytical Approach

Phenomenological Research

Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements (phenomenological reduction), the generation of meaning units (themes), and the development of an essence description (findings). Creswell (1998) stated that epoché is the key concept in phenomenological reduction. Thus, I aimed to set

aside preconceived ideas and beliefs, prejudices, and predispositions during the interviews. This was important because of my own experiences as a Latino college student and perceptions of the particular university, having grown up in the area. However, I was aware that not all experiences and entities can be bracketed (Moustakas, 1994).

Heidegger provided an alternative to bracketing. He acknowledged that our own culture, background, and gender influence our experiences. He did not think bracketing was possible. Instead, he talked about authentic reflection that would enable us to know our own assumptions about a phenomenon. Husserl (1917/1981) used the term *epochè*. (Litchman, 2013, p. 89)

Further, Litchman (2013) stated that there is substantial literature on the philosophy of phenomenology, but “the practical aspects on conducting the study are left to the researcher” (p.89). Thus, I maintained field notes in recognition of my personal interest, experiences, and preconceptions about the phenomenon under study. I also elected to share these experiences, perceptions, and observations intertwined with the narrative of the study participants and institutional informants to collectively construct the essence of the phenomenon under study.

I recognized the tension in phenomenological philosophy that extends to this study and must be acknowledged. The phenomenological philosophy that originated with Edmund Husserl was intended as a descriptive enterprise. Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, argued that the phenomenological method was interpretive and converged with the tradition of hermeneutics. Both Husserl and Heidegger agreed that descriptive and interpretive phenomenology were legitimate methods, but disagreed with respect to which method was primary (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). The principle difference in their

opinions relates to Husserl's pre-transcendental stance. These differences in approach were the genesis for interpretations among practitioners of hermeneutic phenomenology (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

Van Manen (1990) attempted to combine contributions from Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer and concluded that "hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to be attentive to both terms in its methodology" (p. 168). Van Manen, however, did not strictly follow Husserl's thoughts and was influenced by Gadamer's anti-methodological position. He was interested in conducting systematic research that was in line with Husserl's, arguing that "Human science is a systematic study of human experience" (p.168). Van Manen contradicted Husserl, however, when he stated that, "there is no research design or blueprint to follow" (van Manen, 1990, p. 167). In addition Packer and Addison (1989) argued explicitly against Gadamer's anti-methodological position. Therefore, phenomenological methodology, nominally since Heidegger, has been a topic of debate and the genesis for various approaches to phenomenological research.

My desire was to have the ability to insert personal experiences and observations in concert with supplemental, contradictory, and/or complementary insights on Latino students from the institutional informants that are engaged with the Latino students on campus. Smith and Osborn (2003) proposed a strategy that is more interpretive than phenomenological. Smith and Osborn state that, "what they are offering is 'not a prescriptive methodology'. It is a way of doing IPA (interpretive phenomenological analyses) that has worked for us and our students, but it is there to be adapted by researchers who will have their own personal way of working" (p.66). What Smith and

Osborn propose is more an approach or a perspective than a method, with some malleable procedures. I perceived an inability to insert the institutional informants' narratives in the fashion I desired within the methodological constructs of Husserl, Moustakas, and others. Therefore, I applied the more interpretive approach offered by interpretive phenomenological analyses (IPA) to introduce both my and the institutional informants' narratives into the analysis. I believe that this blending of data analysis is justified because according to Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), the blurring of postmodern paradigms results in inquiry methodologies no longer being "treated as a set of universally applied rules and abstractions" (p. 97).

IPA has a strong theoretical basis and may be complementary to traditional phenomenological approaches. Eatough and Smith (2008) posit that IPA has been articulated as a specific approach to qualitative research for only a short time "but with a much longer intellectual currents in phenomenology and hermeneutics" (p.179). In addition, "Phenomenology describes both a philosophical approach and a range of research methods" (p.180). However, IPA does not obfuscate the need to use careful and systematic procedures. IPA draws on a range of phenomenological positions and has affinity with the interpretive positions of Heidegger and Gadamer (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In this study, the recursive steps (phenomenological reduction) proposed by traditional phenomenology necessary to transform units of meaning into themes (imaginative variation) and maintain the narrative of the study participants were carefully applied during the data analysis phase. Further, I was cautious to refrain from influencing the narrative of the study participants and complied with the first step in the data analysis

phase, epochè. I was particularly sensitive to the epochè phase because of my similar life experiences to the study participants. The co-created findings are reflected in the Findings in Chapter 4.

Research Design

Description of the Study Site

I conducted the interviews at the university in order to preserve the natural context. Creswell (2003) stated that a qualitative researcher often goes to the site of the study participants. This western private university was founded in 1864 and is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a private, non-profit research university. Its 125-acre campus is located in an urban residential neighborhood eight miles from downtown. In 2006, the university reported an enrollment of 10,492 students, of which 4,781 were undergraduates. Fifty percent of the 2006 freshman class came from out-of-state. Approximately 90% of undergraduates are full time students. The gender distribution for the undergraduate population is 55% female and 45% male. In 2006, White non-Latino students comprised 80% of the undergraduate student population, while Latinos accounted for 6.9% of the undergraduate student population. The total student of color undergraduate population is 14.3%. Sixty nine percent of students graduate within five years. The university reported an 89 % return rate for freshman entering their sophomore year. The Education Trust (2009) reported that the six year graduation rate at the university is 72.2%, which places the university in the mid range of similar institutions. According to the university's admissions statistics, students of color return to the university for their sophomore year at a higher rate (92%) than White students (88%).

However, the six year graduation rate for Latinos was reported as 59.3%. The gender graduation gap was more pronounced between Latinas at 69.7% and Latinos at 42.9%. That is the largest graduation gap for Latinos at any of the reporting state's public or private 4-year institution.

The university's administration has invested in structures, programs, and initiatives to improve the retention and campus environment for students of color. For example, the Center for Multicultural Excellence, outreach to high school students of color through the VIP Program, and support for multicultural organizations. Further, the university states in its vision statement that, "Our campus life is distinguished by inclusiveness, collaboration, involvement, responsiveness and accountability."

The majority of the study participant's interviews were conducted at The Center for Multicultural Excellent (CME) on campus. The CME is one story office building close to the university's sports area. The CME houses programs geared toward students of color and sexual orientation. The interviews were conducted in the conference room of the CME, which is also the employee lounge. However, the CME staff was exceptionally accommodating and respectful not to interrupt while interviews were in session. Two of the interviews were conducted at the campus' administration building in a conference room. These accommodations were more "luxurious" and spacious. Interviews at the administration building were coordinated by the institutional informant in admissions.

Selection of Study Participants and Access

In a phenomenological study it is essential that all the participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). To meet this important methodological requirement it is

necessary to construct a sound definition of the phenomenon. The primary objective of the research is to seek an understanding of the perception of belonging academically and socially at a western private university by Latino undergraduate students. Therefore, the Latino students in the study voluntarily elected to participate, which demonstrated an interest in the nature of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The decision to interview upper class students (juniors and seniors) was based in the research of Mow and Nettles (1990) and Madrazo-Peterson and Rodriguez (1978) that indicated that freshman students exhibited a higher satisfaction and optimistic view of campus life than upper class students. Therefore, upper class students have experienced time on campus and should not be affected by “freshman optimism.” The study participants were drawn from a pool of eligible Latino students provided by the university. The eligible students were contact by email, in-person, and/or by telephone. Those demonstrating interest in participating were furnished with a statement outlining the purposes of the study and an Invitation to the Participants in the Study (Appendix B). Only those agreeing to participate in the study were selected.

According to Glesne (1999), a gatekeeper must provide his/her consent before a researcher may enter a research site. Therefore, the Director of The Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME), agreed to serve as the “gatekeeper” and “intermediary.” The Director arranged for holding the majority of the interviews at the CME and provided the resources of the CMU to assist me identify the eligible students, contacting eligible students, and assisting with the scheduling of the interviews with the study participants. Further, the Director assisted in identifying two other institutional

informants that routinely engaged with Latino students at the university. The other two institutional informants were female Latinas and worked at the university for several years. One was a professional in the Office of Admissions responsible for recruiting students of color to the university and was a graduate of the university. The Professor taught in the humanities and served in an unofficial support group for Latinos on campus. All the institutional informants routinely interacted with Latino students on campus and expressed in interest in assisting them to succeed.

Data Collection

Research by Cookson (1989), Kember (1989), Garland (1993a, 1993b), Morgan and Tam (1999), and Schilke (2001) noted that survey questions and brief interviews associated with qualitative methodology gathered data supporting a superficial account of student experiences. They recommend thorough, in-depth, personal interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the human experience: Began and Bilken (1998) recommend interviewing as a strategy for data collection when the primary goal is to “gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some pieces of the world” (p. 94). Fontana and Frey (2000) describe interviewing as “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 645). They further state that interviews are “active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results ... the focus of interviews is moving to encompass the how’s of people’s lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional what’s (the activities of everyday life)” (p. 664). Therefore, my data

collection method was two sixty minute individual interview sessions with each of the six study student participants and the three institutional informants. During the interview sessions with the study participants and institutional informants, I kept a notebook of field notes that chronicle excerpts of important narrative, observations of the interview site, date, time, and my reflections. The relevant field notes were associated with the emerging themes during the final data analysis step, imaginative variation.

Interview Preparation

Forty-five male and female Latino undergraduate students meeting the study criteria were identified on a list provided to the researcher by the university. Initially, all forty-five students were contacted using the student's university email address or personally by the staff of The Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) at the university. It was determined that initially receiving an email or personal contact from a university "sanctioned" organization may have a greater probability of soliciting a response that contact directly from the researcher. All forty-four students received a copy of the invitation to participate and consent form for their review. Students were asked to contact me directly through email or by telephone.

After the initial contact, those students who demonstrated an interest in participating were contacted by me to further discuss the study. For those students that demonstrated interest, I arranged an interview date on campus and sent them the Institutional Informant/Participant Consent Form (Appendix C) and Participant Demographic Data Sheet (Appendix D), requesting that it be completed and brought to the initial interview. In parallel, the CME staff continued the effort of encouraging

eligible students to contact me. My intention was to secure participation from eight to ten students and ideally balance participation by gender. Ultimately, seven students agreed to participate in the study, two males and five females. However, one female student became ineligible due to a failure to complete the consent or demographic information. The female student participated in a Semester at Sea Program during the remaining of the academic year and post graduation attempts at securing her Institutional Informant/Participant Consent Form and Participant Demographic Data Sheet were unsuccessful. Selection of study participants ceased when the eligibility list was exhausted and multiple attempts at further recruiting participants failed to yield additional study participants.

Interviews

The interviews provided the information that allowed me to identify themes and construct the essence of the study participant's sense of belonging. Moustakas (1994) describes the phenomenological interview as an interactive process that utilizes open-ended questions designed to evoke a comprehensive description of the individual's experiences of the phenomenon. He also emphasized the importance of creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere to allow for full description of the experience. Furthermore, "talk little, listen a lot" was suggested by Wolcott (1990) in order to avoid becoming one's own best informant (p. 127). I detected that the study participants sensed my personal interest in the subject under investigation and understood that it was my intent to accurately record and report their observations. I used the interview questions below to facilitate the process of data collection, gain an understanding of the experiences of the study

participants, and assist in answering the research question (Creswell, 1998). However, my intention was to allow the interviews to flow naturally and thus provide the opportunity to investigate directions flowing from the conversations. Therefore, not all interview questions were asked of each study participant or institutional informants. The findings in Chapter 4 reflect the natural narrative that developed during the interviews.

Interview Questions

Student Participant Interview Questions

1. Describe your social and academic life on this campus.
2. Describe the reasons why you elected to attend this university.
 - a. Do those reasons remain valid, why or why not?
3. How would you describe the social and academic life on this campus to a prospective Latina/o undergraduate student?
4. What influenced Latina/o students that you knew to leave this university before graduating?
5. What differences and commonalities do you perceive between Latina/o and the White undergraduate students at this university?
6. Describe your formal and informal interactions with faculty at this university?
7. Describe the welcoming and unwelcoming physical aspects of this campus.
8. Describe the extracurricular activities and/or organizations you engage in at this university.

- a. Why did you select them?
- b. How have they influenced you to remain at this university?

Institutional Informants Interview Questions

The institutional informant's perceptions were solicited to gather supplemental and complementary narrative from professionals familiar with the Latino population on the campus. Questions were used only as they naturally evolved during the interviews. Therefore, not all interview questions were asked of each institutional informant. The findings in Chapter 4 reflect the narrative that naturally developed during the interviews.

1. Describe the social and academic life for Latina/o undergraduate students on this campus.
2. From your experience, why have Latino undergraduate students left this university?
3. Describe the characteristics that successful Latino undergraduate students at this university exhibit.
4. Describe the social and academic factors that encourage Latino undergraduate students to remain at this University.

Creswell (1998) suggest that interview questions are designed to facilitate the process of collecting data in order to assist answering the research question. The use of the interview questions outlined in Interview Protocol Guide – Appendix A, facilitated the development of a richer description of the central research question.

Each interview began with an introduction, a description of the purpose of the study, and the interview process. I assured the study participants and institutional informants of confidentiality, retrieved the signed Institutional Informant/Participant Consent Form and the complete Participant Demographic Data Sheet. I then held two sixty minute individual interviews with each of the six study participants utilizing the Interview Protocol and Guide. One participant neglected to complete the Demographic Data Sheet or consent form and was disqualified from the study. The Demographic Data Sheet aided in generating the descriptions of the study participants included in Chapter 4.

I used two recorders to document the interviews. One recorder was the backup for the primary digital recorder. Glesne (1999) and Merriam (1998) recommend audio taping as a way of recording detailed and accurate interview transcripts. A field log was used to document reflective field notes, capture ideas, concerns, emerging patterns, themes, biases, and/or personal observations (Began & Bilked, 1998; Glesne, 1999).

The interviews were transcribed into electronic format by a professional transcriber. The electronic files of the original interviews and transcriptions were archived in a computer and backed up offline for each study participant and institutional informant. The copies of the transcriptions were emailed to each study participant and institutional informant. Each participant had the opportunity to review the transcripts (member checking) to confirm accuracy. Only one study participant submitted a clarification and no corrections were offered.

The follow up or second interviews were used to explore emerging themes generated from the initial interviews and allow the participants to expand upon the initial

interview. A similar process was followed regarding the transcription and member checking. However, fewer responses were received from the study participants due to the summer break and graduation. The institutional informants did not submit corrections or additional observations.

I initially interviewed each institutional informant in their respective offices for sixty minutes. The institutional informants provided insights into the Latino students on campus from their particular perspectives and positions. My desire was to capture their observations of the Latino students on campus, the institutional perspective regarding Latino students, and personal experiences with the Latino students. The interview questions assisting in guiding and framing the interviews. Their narratives served to supplement, contradict, and/or confirm the narratives of the study participants. The second interviews with the institutional informants were interspersed with the second interviews of the study participants.

I noted in the field notes that the second interviews, particularly with the study participants, tended to be more conversational and reflective than the original interviews. I believe that there was a comfort level with me and the interview process that facilitated our second conversations. The narrative from the second interviews remained relatively unchanged, but solicited deeper insights because I asked them to reflect further on their earlier responses. Thus, the second interviews sessions were generally less than the full hour allocated due to less extended responses and comfort level with the interview process.

Data Analysis

Husserl believed that phenomenology should concentrate on finding “the essence” (Smith et al., 2009). Willig (2009) stated that Husserl employed epochè, phenomenological reduction and imaginative reduction to pursue essence. According to Willig (2008), epochè is employed in descriptive phenomenology, where in order to not obstruct the understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher’s presuppositions, judgments and assumptions are suspended or “set aside.” Phenomenological reduction is where the physical features and experiential elements of the phenomenon are described.

In phenomenological reduction we describe the phenomenon that presents itself to us in its totality. This includes physical features such as shape, size, color and texture, as well as experiential features such as the thoughts and feelings that appear in our consciousness as we attend to the phenomenon. (Willig, 2008, p. 53).

In this study the physical features of the phenomenon related to the physical characteristics of the university and its surroundings, which the students collectively praised while some also considered those physical characteristics as overwhelming and markedly different than their previous schools and neighborhoods. The thoughts and feelings expressed in the narrative of the study participants were the dominant descriptors of the phenomenon under study in this phase of data analysis. It was the expressive and extended narrative that I was seeking by conducting the interviews and from which the essence of the study evolved.

Finally, imaginative variation is where the phenomenon’s structure or “how” is explored. Without the structure, according to (Willig, 2008, p. 53), the phenomenon “it would not

be what it is.” The texture and structure together compose the essence of the phenomenon.

Epochè

In epochè, the phenomena are revisited in a fresh, wide open sense. According to Moustakas (1994), epochè is “a necessary first step” (p. 34). “Epochè is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

I contemplated Moustakas’ comment regarding “the truth of things” as I collected and analyzed the data in this study.

As far back as I can remember I have sought to know the truth of things through my own intuition and perception, learning from my own direct experiences and from awareness and reflections that would bring meanings to light. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41).

I acknowledged that my intuition, perceptions and direct experiences has let me to this study. Therefore, I realized that in order to see the phenomenon with “freshness and in wide open sense”, I had to allow the participants to describe their experiences and perceptions “unencumbered” by my experiences and perceptions. Thus, I logged my observations as field notes and concentrated on listening and capturing the “voices” of the participants. I focused on the research questions and expanding only in the directions “opened” by the participants. However, I did on occasion admit to the participants having similar experiences and/or understanding their reality. Lastly, it was only during the data analysis phase that my field notes and personal perspectives were incorporated into the

process as “sidebar” notations on the transcripts and subsequently influenced the narrative in Chapter 4: Findings.

Phenomenological Reduction

I began the phenomenological reduction process by reading and rereading each interview transcript completely that were transcribed from the audiotapes. I then highlighted preliminary textural summaries or significant statements of what the participants reported about their experiences (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I focused on identifying commonality in the narrative of both interviews while capturing nuances and any divergence for each of the study participant (case). Subsequently, I followed a similar process across cases noting relevant phrases, observations and/or explanations from the institutional informants and my from my field notes (Smith et.al. 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated that the addition of the field notes enhances the depth and breadth of the information gathered from the interviews. Further, Butler-Kisber (2010) proposes “a new topology for classifying qualitative inquiry: thematic, narrative, and arts-informed” (p.8). Butler-Kisber posits that “this notion of connection in narrative research applies to both connecting a social phenomenon to individual stories and also connecting the researcher and the participants in a more intimate way than in other methodologies” (Cooper, 2010, p. 99). Thus, I blended autoethnography (my experiences and perspectives) to create a richer narrative. Jones (2008) describes auto-ethnography as,

Setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and exploration ...and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives (Jones, 2008).

Therefore, I have added my narrative to the “voices” of the study participants reflecting my own experiences as a Latino undergraduate student and growing up in close proximity to the university.

The second interview transcripts were compared and contrasted with the first interview transcripts to refine the identification of the significant statements. Once the significant statements were identified across the study participants, incorporating institutional informants and personal observations, I generated a matrix partitioned by each of the study participants, summarized by theme in Chart 1, to formulate initial clustering and thematic development (Smith et. al, 2009). This was a reiterative process that included several “passes” through the statements and notes each time refining the analysis of the interview transcripts data. I ultimately categorized the data into two broad categories: academic belonging and social belonging. For example, I noticed a textual trend regarding the sense of belong academically by the study participants. Some of the participants indicated explicitly that they perceived themselves as belonging academically because they were capable of competing in the classroom. Reviewing transcripts of the informants, I noted that the perception of the institutional informants was that Latino students were academically competitive and the statement about the Latino’s entrance grade point averages being, on the average, above those admitted to the university. This refinement of the transcript data was used in the final data analysis step, imaginative variation.

Imaginative Variation

In the final data analysis step of imaginative variation, the researcher derives structural themes from the textual descriptions that have been generated through the phenomenological reduction process (Moustakas, 1994). I looked for underlying meanings in the textual descriptions or statements that were generated in the phenomenological reduction phase of the data analysis. I contemplated whether the participants had motives besides candid reporting of their experiences. In the process, I discovered unstated contexts related to the participants' experiences in their neighborhoods or within university departments that they had in common that provided similar and at times different perspectives. Often, these perspectives had emotional undertones and alluded to perceptions and experiences of the participants, their peers and/or the university, for example. It was these contextual and structural descriptions that produced the essence of the phenomenon and framed the participant's perceptions of themselves belonging academically and socially at the university or the essence.

Further, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive."

Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale from the field may assume several forms: confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, grounded theory and so on. (Van Manen, 1988)

In the case of this study, to ascertain from the study participants how they perceived their sense of belonging at the university.

However, according to Moustakas (1994) "The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted" (p. 100). He further stipulates that the fundamentally textual-

structural synthesis represents an individual researcher following an imaginative and reflective study of a phenomenon from a particular vantage point at a particular point in time. I believe that this study results reflect the collective reflections of the study participants, institutional informants and me in a particular point and time and from our particular vantage points.

I coded statements from the institutional informants relevant to the emerging themes following the same process applied to coding the study participant's narrative. For example, in reference to the academic preparedness theme, I coded or associated the following statements. All the informants mentioned that the Latino students performed academically on par with the dominant student population on campus. The Professor described the Latino students as the cream of the crop from their respective schools, very gifted, and very bright. In addition, I associate my field notes to the emerging themes. The individual themes and associated narrative are explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Verification Strategies for Qualitative Research

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) suggest that rejection of reliability and validity in qualitative inquiry has resulted in a shift for "ensuring rigor" from strategies implemented during the research process to strategies for evaluating trustworthiness and utility implemented once a study is completed.

Lincoln and Guba (1981) recommended specific strategies for attaining trustworthiness such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation, audit trails, and member checks. They also suggested that the characteristics of the researcher was

important because the investigator must be adaptable and responsive to changing circumstances, holistic, having professional immediacy, sensitivity, and ability for clarification and summarization.

Figure 3.1 shows the relationship of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability that Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend have adherence to the naturalistic axioms and can establish trustworthiness. They for the purpose of establishing trustworthiness the terms “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “conformability” are “the naturalist’s equivalents” for “internal validity, “external validity, “reliability,” and “objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). To operationalize these terms, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose various techniques that are discussed below. Further, verification also has been reconceptualized by qualitative researches. Lather (1991) called for “new techniques and concepts for obtaining and defining trustworthiness data which avoids the pitfalls of orthodox notions of validity” (p.66).



Figure 3.1. Naturalist Axioms Frame

Trustworthiness

A critical aspect of the research design was to implement measures that ensured quality and verifications. These measures establish that the researcher “got it right” with confidence (Creswell, 1998).

Credibility

Credibility is comprised of several strategies including reflexivity (Creswell, 1998). Reflexivity consisted of framing by my personal experiences as a Latino student in higher education and acknowledge by biases by the reflections in the field notes and recalling and reporting on personal experiences prompted by the participant's comments. These reflections offered insights into my thoughts, feelings, and impressions.

Another strategy to establish credibility was to have the study participants reviewing the transcripts of their interviews or member check. Moustakas (1994) identified participant feedback as a method of data verification. I also held second interviews with the study participant to provide them an opportunity to elaborate upon the study question and reflect and modify upon their original responses. Moustakas (1994) acknowledges that data gathered through first person accounts of the experiences is recognized for scientific investigations and provides validation for in-person data gathering as a legitimate means of scientific inquiry. Further, the study participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. According to Creswell (1998), checking by the source of the information assures the researcher that the perspective of the participants is close to the "truth." Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider member checks to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility." Therefore, the study participants perceived the transcribed interviews reflected their comments accurately.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that prolonged engagement and persistent observations in the field including building trust with the participants can be considered

as establishing credibility. Although Lincoln and Guba do not specify what constitute “prolonged engagement,” I spend hours with each of the participants at the university during the interviews. I perceived that they trusted me to capture and report their “voice” accurate and without bias. In addition, I used the responses of the institutional informants as a different source to provide corroborating evidence or triangulation. Therefore, I believe that we did have fruitful prolonged engagement that lead to candid responses to the research questions and corroboration from the institutional informants.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability may be established through an auditing of the research process (Creswell, 1998). The research process and theoretical framing for this study is outlined in this chapter (Chapter 3). I believe that the research process utilized in this study is sufficiently detailed that other researches may duplicate this study. In addition, Polkinghorne (1989) refers to a study having validity or verification referring to the notion that an idea is well grounded and well supported. He asks, “Does the general structure description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?” (p.57). For example, Polkinghorne suggest that the researcher ask themselves questions such as,

1. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
2. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?

I am confident that the oral meanings of the study participants have remained intact in the transcriptions of the interviews and those meanings have been conveyed in this study. Further, it is possible to progress from the general structural descriptions to the more specific content of the experiences and connections between participants' through the thematic development process.

Transferability

The write describes in rich, thick detail the participants under study, thus the readers are enabled to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred “because of shared characteristics” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). I have intentionally included a substantial portion of the content of the interviews transcripts verbatim in Chapter 4 to avoid paraphrasing the information provided by the study participants and in the process loss the contextual perspective or nuances of the responses. In addition, I have included relevant observations from the field notes, personal reflections, and relevant comments from the institutional informants to add to the “richness and thickness” of the details. I perceived a strong sense of transferability because of the shared characteristics and experiences with the study participants. I posit other Latinos will also find a sense of transferability in the details of this study because I believe there are “universal” experiences that Latinos experience in during their journey in higher education.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The majority of this chapter discusses the themes that developed from the analysis of the interview data provided by the study participant, data supplemented by the narrative of the institutional informants, and my field notes and observations. The Findings section in this chapter reflects the essence of the perception of belonging at the university by the study participants and answers the overarching research question. The study participants perceived that they belonged at the university because they were successfully participating in the academic and social life on campus. However, each participant's perceptions of belonging and experiences differed from their peers, and those differences are reflected in their narrative in this chapter. All study participants were provided the opportunity to select pseudonyms during the first interview session. Not all study participants elected that option.

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

An analysis of the Demographic Data Worksheet (Exhibit C) illustrated that although the study participants shared common eligibility factors for this study, they are not a homogeneous cohort. Table 4.1 highlights the demographic characteristics of the study participants and illustrates that there are differences, for example, in the educational attainment of their parents, family income, and the type of high schools the participants attended. They are, however, clustered closely in regards to their ages and class standing.

Table 4.1.

Study Participants' Demographic Information

Characteristics		Respondents ^a
Ethnicity	Hispanic	2
	Chicano/a	2
	Mexican American	1
	Latina	1
Age	18-20	5
	21-24	1
Primary Language	English	5
	Other than English	1
High School	Out of state	1
	In-State	5
	Urban	2
	Suburban	4
	Rural	0
	Public	6
	<100	1
	100-499	1
	500-900	1
	1,000-1,500	1
>1,500	2	
Dominant HS Culture	Latino Dominant	2
	White Dominant	4
College Class Standing	Junior	5
	Senior	1
In-State	Yes	5
	No	1
College Plans	Bachelor's	5
	Graduate School	1
	4 Years	5
	> 4 Years	1
	Full-time student	6
Family Annual Income	\$20,000-\$49,999	3
	\$50,000-\$74,999	1
	\$75,000-\$99,999	1
	>\$100,000	1
Parents' Education	>High School	1
	High School	1

Characteristics	Respondents ^a
Attended College	2
2-year Degree	1
College Graduate	2
Graduate Degree	2
Professional Degree	1

^a N=6

Introduction to Study Participants

Each participant’s introduction provides a narrative of the demographic information and additional personal details obtained from the interviews. The introductions highlight that the study participants were not a homogenous cohort.

Raul

Raul described himself as a White Hispanic non- Spanish speaking male from a large, suburban, predominantly out-of-state public high school. He was in his junior year pursuing a degree in music, with a minor in business. He plans on continuing to pursue his master’s degree with the long term goal of managing a classical orchestra or performing arts center. His parents hold graduate degrees and had expectations that he would pursue a college education. Raul did not report whether he was receiving financial aid.

Raul was attracted from out-of-state by the outstanding music program, its outstanding faculty, and facilities that he describes as “professional.” Raul is deeply engaged in the music department and considers them to be “family.” He values the small population in the School of. The small size creates a community that Raul describes as “very tight.” During his campus visit, students in the department asked him to “play

music with them,” and “so I felt welcome there.” Raul “started to fit in other ways” once he started attending the university. Raul stated that although the School of Music was and remains a strong reason for remaining at the university, he is certain that he would still have found “a fit.”

Robert

Robert identified himself as a Mexican/American male who attended a large, local predominantly White suburban high school. He is a native Spanish speaker with family in Mexico City that he visits regularly. He was in his junior year pursuing a degree in international business and German. Both of his parents are from Mexico, both attended college, and his mother graduated. His family’s expectation is for him to graduate from college. Robert did not report whether he was receiving financial aid.

Robert spent a semester abroad studying in Germany. He noticed during his study abroad that students had “extremely competitive curriculums” with good internships, knew important people, were multilingual, and had “seen most of the world,” which caused him to realize, “man, I need to differentiate myself.” Robert elected to become engaged in activities that would increase his network of contacts and result in him being more competitive upon graduation. His first steps were to pledge to the business fraternity and join the Investment Club. He recognized that the university offered many opportunities outside the classroom in the form of lectures, visitors, and events, but was disappointed that more students do not take advantage.

Robert elected to attend the university for two reasons. The first one was location, because “I live 20 minutes from here by car and you know (it) was the best university in

the area.” His second reason for electing to attend the university was, “I was interested in the ‘4+1’ program (which results in a bachelor and graduate degree in five years) and I liked the international business program they had here.”

Robert values his support system—his parents, brothers, and sisters—because they make it easier and minimize adjustments. Robert elected to be a commuter student because of his disappointment with the lifestyle he experienced in the residence halls.

Dolores

Dolores described herself as a Chicana and attended a small, public, urban, selective local high school that shared facilities within a larger, predominantly Latino urban high school. Dolores attended the equivalent of an academy or charter. Dolores attended the university full time and planned on graduating in less than four years. She reported that she was a political science major. Dolores’ family income was one of the lowest of the participants and her parents had the lowest aggregate formal education. Dolores did not report whether she was fluent in Spanish.

Dolores admitted that financial reasons influenced her decision to attend the university. “This university is really expensive and unless you get a full-ride scholarship, it is really hard to be able to come.” However, she states that she encourages students in high schools she visits to apply because “money should not matter even if you are indebted in loans for a long time, it is worth it because of the education that you are getting.”

Jessica

Jessica described herself as a Chicana. She attended a large, predominantly Latino urban local public high school. She elected not to provide demographic information on her parents or socio-economic status. She reported her major to be art/film. Jessica did not report whether she was fluent in Spanish.

Jessica is attending the university because it offered the most financial assistance. “I definitely think if it wasn’t the case (financial aid), I’d be out of state at a different school.” Jessica surmised that she may have been overwhelmed by a larger university.

Tiffany

Tiffany described herself as non-Spanish speaking, mixed Hispanic and Anglo. She attended a small, suburban, and predominantly White local public high school. Tiffany reported being a public policy and philosophy major. She reported one of the highest annual family incomes and parents who held either a professional or graduate degree. Although she did not report receiving financial aid, it’s possible that she is receiving tuition assistance since her father is an employee of the university.

Tiffany mentioned that she “has no ties to her old neighborhood,” which she described as “lily White.” Her relationship with her parents is good, “they are a big part of why I am here” and they provide great support. Tiffany elected to attend the university because of financial support, its strong public policy program, and her desire to remain in the local area. Tiffany revealed that her father, a Hispanic, worked at the university. They have talked about her experiences and shared common concerns. She indicated that

he “has struggled within his department.” His supervisor made the comment, “Oh, you don’t act the stereotype of a Hispanic.” Tiffany and her father “have a lot to talk about and he really helps me get through.”

Adelicia

Adelicia described herself as Mexican/American, Latina, but also selected Mexican/American and Hispanic. She attended a predominantly White, suburban, mid-size, local public high school. Adelicia’s parents both attended college, but only one completed a bachelor’s degree. She reported one of the lowest family incomes of the participants. She reported that she was finance major. Adelicia was the only no show for the second interview. She did not report whether she was fluent in Spanish.

Adelicia enrolled at the university because she perceived the university as a prestigious institution, selective, private, with a strong business school that was particularly attractive, and she received valuable financial support. She stated that “I knew that it was one of the best schools in the state ... with a good business program. That is why I wanted to go here ... seeing it as a child it made me want to come here more.” It seems that her father’s affiliation with a bridge program that often conducted activities at the university provided Adelicia an early insight into the university.

Introduction of Institutional Informants

I was interested in enriching the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by soliciting insight from members of the university who routinely interacted with Latino students on campus. I identified three institutional informants that

met the selection criteria and were receptive to participating in the study. The volunteer informants were:

- The Director (Director) of The Center for Multicultural Excellent (CME) was a Latino PhD with many years of experience working in multicultural programs and in conducting research on campus climate and related topics. He was hired by the university to improve the institutional multicultural environment.
- Ramona was an experienced administrator in admissions focusing on the recruitment of students of color and in improving the diversity of the student population on campus. She was also a graduate of the university under study.
- The Professor (Professor) was a Latina PhD faculty member teaching in the social sciences. She was deeply involved with Latino students through her classes and her participation in the Latino Center for Engagement and Options, an informal support group for Latino students.

Each institutional informant expressed dedication to assisting and guiding students of color through their journey at the university and in maintaining a strong commitment to the concepts of inclusiveness. The institutional informants' narrative is individually detailed in this section, starting with the Director, and is followed by supplemental narrative in the Findings section.

The Director

The Director stated that the charter of The Center for Multicultural Excellence was to “get policies, procedures, and traditions” to transform the university to an institution that has inclusiveness embedded in its culture. However, he was concrete in

that “You’re not going to transform an institution by focusing on race and ethnicity. Many universities are still operating under that model, so it is very limiting.”

According to the Director, there has been an increase in people of color on the campus, in contrast to a time when a student of color was accepted to the university and told that “there were no students of color at the university.” The Director challenged his staff to develop a week long program for entering students of color to ensure that they are aware, “before there’re in a group of Whites,” that there were people of color at the university. He also mentioned the Excelling Leaders Institute (ELI) and diversity retreat. These initiatives were designed to instill and foster leadership and allow for students of color to interact with other racial groups on campus to “help build community.” I believe that it was through these activities that some of the students in this study began to create relationships with other Latino students with similar backgrounds.

The Director also emphasized the extraordinary support the center received from the administration, reflected in a million dollar budget and a staff of six, unusually generous compared to most universities. He credits the efforts of the Office of Admissions to pursue highly qualified students of color and believes that percentage wise the university matches well with the in-state public flagship university regarding enrollments of students of color in the freshman class.

The Director believes that there has been a reduction in aggression toward students of color because of The Center for Multicultural Excellence’s emphasis on embedding the concept of inclusiveness into campus functions; he has noticed an increase in requests by colleges for multicultural training. However, he emphasized that there

remains a lack of knowledge amongst the general faculty and student population about students of color. But, he perceives that the younger faculty is sensitive to multiculturalism.

The Director highlighted a particular instance where Latino students reported an incident in the classroom involving faculty. He pointed out an incident in the College of Business where a professor held a debate on immigration and selected the three Latino students to represent the pro-immigration stance, but argued against the student's points of view during the debate. The students approached the professor and "cleared the air" by expressing their concerns. I noted that some of the study participants alluded to classroom situations when they were uncomfortable because of the instructor's lack of sensitivity or simply because they were the "sole ethnic representative" in the classroom.

The Director shared that once the structural diversity is in place it is then a question of "how are the communities treated"? He emphasizes that it is a matter of "cleaning up the campus climate." He stated that "he is not going to invest in structural diversity without taking care of the campus climate," which he perceives as critical to the success of students of color.

The Director reiterated the observation made by the other informants that the Latino students attending the university are highly capable academically and are motivated. He too reinforces that the Latino students accepted are qualified and must meet the standard guidelines for admissions. The Director perceives family support as key in retaining students, although occasionally there are differences between the student, family, and/or community due to changes in the student. The Latino students in this study

expressed that they maintained family and community ties. Some students expressed a greater attachment to their families and communities than to the university. I noted that my own early experiences in college reflected a similar attachment to my family that eventually was tempered as I became engaged in the campus and local communities. However, it remained comforting that I could visit my family and neighborhood. I found that it was important to “keep in touch” with my ethnic upbringing and to continue to assist my parents.

The Director supports the observations of the other informants who posit that Latino students that voluntarily left the university prior to graduation failed to find a support group within the university and became disillusioned, have experienced financial circumstances that force them to withdraw, or on occasion have performed poorly academically. However, he emphasized that those who are committed find ways around the issues persist and graduate. The Director believes that those Latino students that are successful are engaged and involved on campus.

The Director acknowledged that there are some Latino students who do not seek the services of The Center of Multicultural Excellence. He posits that they come from predominantly White high schools and will identify themselves as Latinos “if there is a scholarship,” but without a benefit “they will disappear into the woodwork.” This observation is validated by a comment from a study participant who stated he attended a center function because of a \$500.00 stipend for books, but otherwise had not used the center services. Further, he did identify with the dominant White culture on campus.

Ramona

Ramona is a pseudonym selected by this informant. Ramona's mission is to oversee the recruitment initiatives directed toward increasing diversity on campus. She is an administrator in the Office of Admissions and a graduate of the university. Ramona remarked on the heterogeneity of the Latino students at the university, noting that the Latino student population diversity extends beyond socio-economic status. Latinos attend the university from out-of-state, international locations, are native born, and immigrants.

The student experience of a Latina student who comes to us from a private boarding school in Miami ... is very, very different from what a local public schools, first generation immigrant who receives a full ride scholarship

However, she stated that they collectively seem to have a common understanding of the opportunities the university affords them.

Ramona further noted that affluent Latino students from educated homes who have isolating racial or ethnic experiences "work well into the university community." She acknowledged that Latinos with the "private or boarding school experience from out-of-state" may find the university racially and ethnically diverse, which is different than Latino students from local public schools who may feel less welcome or engaged on campus. Ramona stated that Latinas in particular struggle with the "class issues" as much as the "race issues" on campus. When considered in combination with gender, it "might really be challenging for some." I noted that the Latina sorority sisters struggled with class, race, and identity issues more than the male study participants.

Ramona highlighted the persistence or work ethic of the Latino students that she believes is a trait of successful students. Latino students, in her view, exhibit "resiliency

to overcoming unintended and unforeseen obstacles.” Ramona stated that Latino students are “one of the few faces of color” in the classroom. Unfortunately, she states, some faculty members view them as “native informants of the classroom.” She believes that for some Latinos there is a concern about belonging in a classroom with students from better school districts, who were exposed to more resources and more rigorous curriculums. Although academic rigor experienced before matriculation at the university may vary, it “does not mean that it hinders their ability to persist to succeed.” Ramona stated that, “making the cut here at the university, they are highly qualified academic students, if they are getting admitted.” She stated that the Latino students “are academically prepared,” and when they leave it is primarily due to financial concerns, debt on the family, transfer to another institution, or “are not comfortable” at this university.

Ramona posits that those Latino students who are uncomfortable often speak Spanish at home, do not ski on weekends, and therefore “why are they wasting their time here.” Ramona believes that many are disconnected with the campus because they are commuters and do not engage in the support system offered by other students of color, which she describes as, “gelling together.” She also indicated that students coming from the five high schools in the Very Important Person (VIP) Program perceive that they “have each other, mentor each other, study with each other, create ‘safe spaces’ and create a network.” Many participate in multicultural groups, such as Black, Asian and/or Native Student Alliance in addition to community groups and student government.

Although the university has a superior study abroad program and significant participation (75% of students), few Latinos take advantage. Ramona posits that it has

been difficult enough for them to adjust to this university, therefore why go further from home if it has already been a challenge. Ramona recalls that she was a local public high school graduate. She “never considered this university and there was no reason for me (to do so).” She stated that she had all the academic qualifications, but “would never have perceived it as a welcoming environment.”

Ramona highlighted that some Latino students had assimilated more into the dominant culture at the university. Those students seem to have parents that attended college and were born in the United States. She believed that many of the students she described in her comments are first generation, immigrants or have parents who are immigrants, or parents with less than a high school education. Ramona stipulate further that Latino students from the suburbs have a different acclimation to the university because of their experiences and socio-economic status. Ramona’s descriptors of the students she was familiar with accurately described characteristics of several of the study participants and reflected the spectrum of socio-economic, experiential, and backgrounds represented by the study participants.

I found the statement profoundly meaningful because many years earlier I experienced the identical feelings about the same university. I grew up in the area of the university and had often ridden my bicycle through the campus. I mingled occasionally with the students from the university at local establishments, but clearly I was not “in their class.” I had difficulty identifying with the wealth and experiences of the predominantly White students. Therefore, the university was physically a mile away from home but on a “different planet.”

Ramona believed that racism, classism, homophobia, and everything that exists in the general population continue to exist at the university. Ramona perceived that the university is “a conservative university” breeding meritocratic ideas that may make it difficult for Latino students to be seen for their strengths and deserved credibility. Ramona mentioned that even highly qualified Latino students are confronted with perceptions of admittance because of affirmative action rather than their qualifications. Ramona highlighted that some Latino students had assimilated more into the dominant culture at the university. These students seem to have parents that attended college and were born in the United States. She believed that many of the students she described in her comments are first generation, immigrants or have parents who are immigrants, or whose parents had less than a high school education. She also stipulated that Latino students from the suburbs have a different acclimation to the university

According to Ramona, some Latino students may not share fully in the campus lifestyle because they are overrepresented in the commuter population. Often, it is an economic decision as on campus living expenses can be upwards of \$10,000 annually. She believes that the choice to live off campus may hinder Latino students’ social connections and engagement with the faculty. She perceives that students may feel disconnected but still perform academically, even if the social experience is hindered. “They’re still willing to do what they need to do to get a degree because they see the value and the prestige of a degree coming from this university.” But, Latino commuter students may “feel like guests on campus rather than this being their home.” Ramona also noted that Latino students tend to abandon traditional roles and challenge the authority of

their parents. She stated that this is a natural pattern for college students, but that it is exacerbated in Latino families. The Latino student population at the university is dominated by local Latino students who stay close to or live at home. Therefore, families unfamiliar with the responsibilities and rigor of college may unintentionally hinder Latino students through interruptions, such as the need to care for siblings or work, which infringes on study time. Further, family pride and serving the community “is a big thing.”

Ramona stated that the university has a policy of embracing diversity and provides a variety of support mechanisms for Latinos. The most often mentioned support resource was The Center for Multicultural Excellence. The center was described as a “pocket of safety,” a place that “drives cultural awareness,” and a source of academic resources and social exchange that a number of the study participants indicated was fundamental to them remaining at the university.

Ramona highlighted the Very Important Person (VIP) Program, which is focused on remedying the high dropout rate experienced at local high schools with a high Latino student population. The VIP program was a common experience mentioned by informants that bind local Latinos together at the university. Ramona also mentioned the Faculty of Color Association, Latino Alumni Association, and Latino Student Association as other potential sources of support for Latino students on campus. Ramona stated that she had witnessed the progression of the institution from improving the retention rate of students of color to enhancing the experience of the students. Ramona stated that “so much had changed in 20 years” and the university has improved by “leaps and bounds on the environment and sense of belonging and welcome

Ramona believed that Latinos must recognize that color is a social construct and that they must find their cultural identity, which will have different patterns and norms due to the diversity of the Latino population. The study participants indeed exemplified multiple identities, patterns, and norms that produced differences, particularly their social communities and organizations on campus. I noted that the differences would be even more striking had the study population been representative of the entire cross section of Latino students on campus.

The Professor

The Latino students were described by this informant as, “the cream of the crop” from their respective schools. “They are very gifted, very bright. Many are leaders in their communities on and off campus and have drive and determination.” She further stated that many gravitated toward those with similar backgrounds and shared experiences.

Of the students that I have come to know over the last few years, I would say that they’re pretty similar in terms of the backgrounds, the schools and they come from (similar) family structures, neighborhood composition, and so forth.

The Professor stated overwhelming they are first generation college students, working class, lower middle class, and from very tight knit families. She described them as “pioneers.” The Professor mentioned that several local high schools in predominantly minority areas are perceived as sharing common characteristics by Latino students and therefore contributed to the pool of Latinos that gravitated toward each other at the university. “So I think it is really interesting when I hear ... talk with one another that sort of common ground that they use to sort of establish themselves on campus. She

stated, “I know that they are very supportive of one another” and that those students with family and peers with similar backgrounds formed a network within the university that extended to other institutions. Further, she believes that the Latino students perceive their peers to be other Latinos at area universities and not generally students with whom they attend classes with, “those are their classes, and they’re not necessarily their peers.” Several of the aforementioned characteristics described some of the study participants.

In addition, as the Latino faculty has grown, some have become mentors to Latino students and beyond, “sort of mother and father of Latino students.” I noted that the Professor’s insights matched those of the study participants engaged in the multicultural communities and organizations. However, they did not describe the study participants who elected to engage with the dominant culture on campus. Statistically students of color return to the university at a higher rate for their sophomore year than their White peers. However, some Latino students do leave the university. The Professor stated that in conversations with students they expressed that “they’ve had enough; they don’t want anything to do with the university or anyone associated with the university.” It is unclear whether it is a conflict with the university or that a student perceives that they have “betrayed where they came from.” Many of their peers have not gone to college, nor did they have the opportunity to go. These students question why they did have the opportunity. They are concerned that they must act differently at college, which makes it hard for them to “fit in” with their peers at home. The students explained that their friends and family think they are becoming “white washed.” The Professor explained that Latino upperclassmen are concerned about their ability to return to their communities

after graduation because they have been transformed by the collegiate experience. Several students have indicated to her that, “they have tried to fight the transformation,” but notice the changes and realize that “slipping back” may not be an easy task. She believes that many of the students she described are first generation, immigrants, have parents who were immigrants, or parents with less than a high school education.

The Professor realized that she may be engaged with a subset of the Latino students on campus. She noted that some Latino students she has not engaged with may have a higher level of “assimilation” into the dominant culture on campus. These are the Latino students whose parents attended college and were born in the United States. She also stipulated that Latino students from the “suburbs” have a different acclimation to the university. I noted that the suburbs were often cited as representing “Whiteness” and affluence during the interviews. Lastly, the Professor mentioned that she was engaged in the Latino Center for Engagement and Options, an informal group of faculty and Latino students that interact with, engage, and mentor Latino students at the university. Further, she stated that the administration is supportive of Latino students and the concepts of diversity and inclusion. However, the support should be more direct from the administration rather than from The Center for Multicultural Excellence or the Latino students.

Co-Creation of Findings

The themes that were generated as the result of the data analysis process that encompassed: epochè, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation were co-created from the narrative of the study participants, observations of the institutional

informants and the researcher. Figure 4.1 is a pictorial representation of the intertwining of the co-creators in a recursive process constructing the essence or sense of belonging of the phenomenon under investigation and illustrated by the circular process that lead to the findings detailed in this chapter.

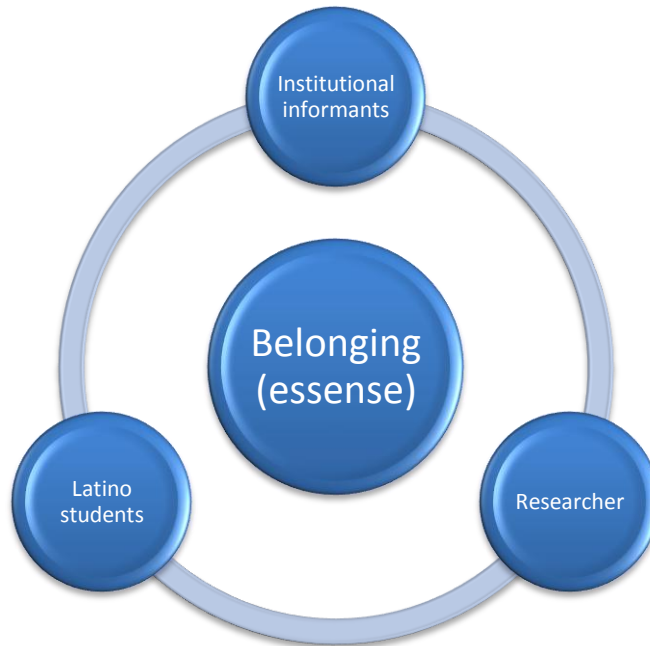


Figure 4.1. Co-creating the Findings and Exposing the Essence

Themes by Participants

Table 4.2 illustrates a representative sample of the result of the phenomenological reduction process that produced the themes from the study participant's narrative. The initial emergence of the themes began with a careful review of each of the interview transcripts and coding of sidebar notions, comments from field notes, and those of the

institutional informants. A recursive process of clustering the notations into fewer emerging themes resulted in the creation of multiple reiterations of charts similar to Table 4.2 that depicted the emerging themes and relevant quotations from the study participants and institutional informants. A thematic chart highlighting the themes outlined in Chapter 4: Findings resulted from the aforementioned refinement process.

Table 4.2.

Sample Table of Themes for the Study Participants

Themes	Adelicia	Dolores	Jessica	Raul	Robert	Tiffany
Academic Preparedness	I had a really hard time in the beginning because I graduated from the local public schools. I felt that ...I didn't receive the education that all the other students have had the opportunity to. I realize from the first class that I had to work ten times harder than every other student because there is vocabulary that I don't know, that I have to teach myself. If the professor is not going to teach me, there are things that I have to teach myself that I should have known, that I don't		Fine, compared to other students or better	I think I do fine compare to other students, if not better in the classroom		(I am) almost a straight A student

Table 4.3 depicts the themes associated with the study participants. It does not depict the textual details of the charts generated during the phenomenological reduction process, described in Chapter 3, but rather depicts which study participant's quotes

matched the themes developed during the phenomenological reduction process. The individual themes are listed under two overarching thematic dimensions: academic and social.

Table 4.3.

Themes by Participant

Themes	Participants					
	Adelicia	Dolores	Jessica	Raul	Robert	Tiffany
ACADEMIC						
Academic Preparedness		X	X			
Classroom & Departments	X	X		X	X	X
Faculty Relations	X	X	X	X	X	
SOCIAL						
Campus Communities & Organizations	X	X	X	X	X	
Residence Halls					X	X
Campus Peers		X	X	X		
Campus Characteristics						X
Off Campus Support	X	X	X			
Departure of Latino Students	X	X	X	X	X	X

Overview of Themes

The initial codes and subsequent themes of this research that emerged from the data analysis reflect a transition from the particular to the shared. Phenomenological reduction describes the “what” or structural elements of the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenological reduction can include thoughts and feelings associated with the phenomenon. Imaginative variation attempts to identify the conditions

associated with the phenomenon that without the experience would not be what the experience is (Willig, 2008).

The descriptions of the experiences of the study participants were identified during the transcript analysis that was conducted during phenomenological reduction. These were the significant statements or initial codes that were associated with a student participant's discrete case. The descriptions included perceptions from the study participants, institutional informants, and observations from the field notes. The analysis of the transcripts from the interviews and field notes became a recursive process where I compared significant statements. The analysis that followed the synthesis of the themes lead to a deeper interpretation of the experiences as described in this chapter.

A single example of the initial analysis of the individual cases and emergent themes is illustrated in Table 2 on page 108. Subsequently, the cases came together in a cross-case examination depicted in Table 3 on page 109. Some of the themes remained unchanged from the phenomenological reduction process, while other combined. The themes that emerged were highlighted within two overarching dimensions: Academic and Social, to match the primary focus areas of this investigation and embodied in the overarching research question. The themes collectively contribute to a single "super ordinate theme" (Smith, 2004, p. 42) that is *Belonging*.

The co-constructed narrative and observations are detailed within the following two dimensions: Academic and Social. Within academic the following three themes emerged: (a) academic preparedness, (b) classroom and departmental experiences, and (c) faculty relationship. Within social dimension the following six themes emerged: (a)

campus communities and organizations, (b) residence halls, (c) campus peers, (d) campus characteristics, (e) off campus support, (f) departure of Latino students.

Findings

The study participants presented diverse narratives of their participation in the academic and social life of the campus. They persisted at an institution that was, to varying degree, challenging to navigate, different from their prior experiences. They perceived themselves as academically prepared to meet the expectations of the university and identified social communities and organizations on campus that affiliated them to the university.

González, Blanton, and Williams (2002) and Valencia and Black (2002) stated that as a result of having to negotiate stereotypes, social biases, and prejudices, many Latino undergraduates experience cultural shock in the academic environment. Ramona added that some Latinos have a concern about belonging in the classroom with students from wealthier school districts who are exposed to greater resources and rigorous curriculums.

Study participants experienced isolated incidents of stereotyping in the classroom and from students at the university. Some study participants were perceived as subject matter experts and representatives for Latinos and minority issues in the classroom. However, the study participants were successful in the classroom regardless of the challenges experienced. Granted, there were adjustment made regarding majors and adaptations to idiosyncrasies of departments, but the study participants were sufficiently confident in their academic preparation to make necessary adjustments and persist.

Academic Themes

The study participants and institutional informants were consistent in their perception that Latino students possess the qualifications and abilities to meet the academic expectations of the university, and therefore belong academically. The Latino study participant's perceptions of their classroom and department experiences and interactions with the faculty differed.

I found it insightful that during the interviews the study participants responded in brief unemotional statements to questions regarding their academic belonging. Their nonchalant attitude toward this topic prompted a field note surmising that they expressed little concern about their academic competency because their competency had warranted limited previous consideration. The study participants were more expressive regarding their experiences in the classroom and relationship with the faculty. Lastly, I found the observations of the institutional informants generally congruent with the study participants.

Academic Preparedness

Overall, the students' perception of belonging academically was supported by the institutional informants. The Professor described the Latino students as, "the cream of the crop" from their respective schools—very gifted and very bright. Many are leaders in their communities and possess the determination to succeed. She stated that many are leaders in organizations and possess the determination to succeed. The Director reiterated that the Latino students attending the university were highly capable academically and motivated. The Director credited the persistence and high graduation rates to the efforts

of the Office of Admissions that recruits highly qualified students that met the institutional guidelines for admissions

Ramona observed that for some Latino students there is a concern about belonging in a classroom with students from wealthier school districts who had greater resources and rigorous curriculums. Although academic rigor experienced before matriculation at the university may vary it “does not mean that it hinders their ability to persist, to succeed.” Dolores was initially concerned with her ability to meet the academic standards of the university due to her perceived lack of comparative academic preparation.

I had a really hard time in the beginning because I graduated from the public schools. I felt that ... I didn't receive the education that all the other students have had the opportunity to. I realize from the first class that I had to work ten times harder than every other student because there is vocabulary that I don't know, that I have to teach myself.

Kozol (1991) indicated that low-income families tend to reside in impoverished neighborhoods that often have neglected schools and lack resources conducive to providing a quality education. Therefore, Dolores' initial academic concerns may have stemmed from her social-economic status and neighborhood characteristics because Ramona shared that Latino students at the university tended to have a higher grade point average than the average student admitted.

Other study participants actually affirmed their ability to perform academically at the university. Raul stated that, “I think I do fine compared to other students, if not better in the classroom.” This was reinforced by Jessica who stated that, “(I do) fine compared to other students and better.” Finally, Tiffany seemed perplexed and simply stated that

she is “almost a straight A student.” Therefore, the Latino students in this study indicated confidence in their academic capabilities and demonstrated it by persisting.

Classroom and Departmental Belonging

The Latino study participants were expressive and emotional in their narrative related to their classroom and the departmental experiences. I hypothesized that it was because the classroom and academic departments had a social component and the socially related topics solicited strong and emotional responses during the interviews. The study participants expressed varying degrees of affiliation with the faculty, but overall described a strong affiliation with the departments in which they majored.

Robert described the atmosphere in the College of Business as respectful, but student attendance was inconsistent, homework limited, and many in class are “on the computers.” He has pondered whether he is receiving “his money’s worth.” However, Robert rationalizes that he is meeting students and professors and nurturing relationships of value in the future.

Raul described the School of Music as a place where professors took the time to know the students and welcomed student interaction outside of class. “I know a lot of the people in all of my classes and ... I never go into that building (School of Music) and don’t see somebody that I am friends with.” However, his experience at another college department was markedly different. “This year I started my business curriculum and that is a completely different environment.”

There are times I don’t fit in as well (as in the School of Music). One example of that is in the business school the professors don’t expect you to participate in the classes as they do in the music school

Raul knows only one other student in the music class because he is a fraternity brother. He blames part of the lack of involvement with other students on the structure of the classes, which are strictly lecture and very large.

Raul described the business community on campus as “shockingly different than the one I am used to in the music school.” He noted that students in the music department indicate that they attend the Lamont School of Music at the university. Students in the College of Business are prone to indicate that “they attend the university.” Raul perceives this as a strong difference in identity and affiliation.

Tiffany found her niche in the Department of Public Policy and Philosophy. According to Tiffany, it’s a small department that attracted a diverse student population that is open-minded and intelligent. Tiffany mentioned that she “gets along with all of them.” She described the students in the department as “really ambitious, politically-oriented people who are going to be senators and rule the world.” However, she mentioned that there are places on campus where she senses that “I do not belong here and everybody knows it.” Tiffany did not expand regarding the campus locations or the reasons for perceiving a lack of acceptance.

Adelicia indicated that she “feels like any other student going to class.” at the College of Business. She acknowledged that “there aren’t many Latinos,” and that “she is usually the only one.” Adelicia found it noteworthy that she had taken one class in the last two semesters in which there was another Latino student. I wondered whether it was Robert or Raul.

Dolores mentioned that she did not make a lot of “classroom friends” because she has little in common and thus limited her interactions with students and faculty in her classes

You know when students’ talk they all talk about like going skiing or this party that they went to or whatever. I felt I had nothing in common with them, so I don’t talk to a lot of students who are in my classroom

Dolores elected to switch her major from international business to political sciences, although it is “probably was one of the more diverse majors”, because “there were big socio-economic differences.”

I mean I just couldn’t relate as much as they could because ... they talk about all the places they have traveled and stuff like that.” She could not afford to travel “the world”

Study participants highlighted instances where faculty “have responded poorly” to them, perhaps because of lack of cultural/diversity sensitivity or understanding and/or personal beliefs or biases.

Dolores occasionally was perceived as the authority on Latino and minority issues because of her ethnicity.

And, when you are the only Latino student in your classroom and you are talking about issues, maybe regarding Latinos, everybody looks toward you and they expect you to know the answers or they expect me to speak Spanish. I don’t speak Spanish. There are some things, you know, that are tough to deal with.

Timpson and Doe (2008) studied classroom climate and stated that,

As an instructor, however, our core beliefs often come out in the classroom in ways that we don’t foresee. Performing before a class, we are exposed and may respond poorly. (p.24)

Some study participants build strong natural affiliations with their academic departments because they perceived being accepted and welcomed. Some participants also valued the interactions amongst the student and faculty in the department. Raul was

an example of a study participant who developed a strong natural affiliation with his major department. However, his experience in the School of Business was virtually diametrically opposed. The School of Business was less personal and welcoming although he seemed to make an attempt at becoming engaged. Dolores, in contrast, elected to change her major because of lack of congruence with the students in the international business department. She transferred to political sciences although she acknowledged the diversity in the international business department and potential career value, but was unable to reconcile the gap in experiences between her and the students in her classes. Paradoxically, Robert was also an international business major and he was very engaged in that department. A primary reason may be Robert's experience studying in Europe. Therefore, the study participants affiliated with their academic departments, but for some they experienced challenges that seem to relate to lack of cultural sensitivity or lack of common experiences that isolated them.

Faculty Relations

All the study participants built relationships with faculty and staff at the university. The students bonded selectively with faculty and staff with whom they shared commonality. Some of the study participants preferred to establish relationships with faculty that were sympathetic to their ethnic experiences and/or engaged in organizations relevant multiculturalism.

Tiffany described the relationship between her and a particular faculty member as being "father and daughter." Further, she stated that, "I really enjoy the faculty here." Raul made direct efforts to engage and interact with the faculty in the School of Music

with whom he shared a common interest in music. Further, he believed that his preferred learning style, based on asking questions and being an active participant, made him known to his professors and resulted in positive interactions. Other study participants seemed to be less interested in establishing relationships or established them based on the faculty's ethnicity and/or engagement in the multicultural community on campus.

Robert believed that his relationship with the faculty is more personal because they discuss careers, family, and personal experiences. He acknowledges that his relationship with his professors may be better than average because it is an academic relationship and he is respectful to the professors. Robert admitted to establishing a "close to a friend" relationship with at least one of his professors. However, he shared that only one professor knows him by name because he visits the professor during office hours.

Dolores stated that she had not created a significant connection with the faculty, although she attended events with and met some of the faculty. "I don't have much of a connection with my professors other than getting done what I have to get done." She stated, however, that she "really likes the Spanish professor" who is welcoming, open, and attends functions at the Center for Multicultural Excellence and at Dolores' sorority. However, as Dolores expanded on this topic it seemed that she connections with the faculty than she perceives.

I found other ways to relate to my professors without them having to be Latinos. Just because we are both interested in politics, I can go to my professor's office hours and talk to him about what is going on. I am working on it and I am trying to get to know my professors a little bit more.

I feel more comfortable in my political science classroom and welcome than I do in my international business classes. It has to do with other interests that we share.

Adelicia had relationships with certain faculty advisors but, “I don’t really reach out to them (faculty) or talk to them unless they are advisors for the Latino Student Alliance or for the sorority.” She reinforced that the advisor for the Latino Student Alliance was “always there.” She did reach out to the staff at The Center for Multicultural Excellence and acknowledges that she knows that it is a good resource.

Jessica, Adelicia, and Dolores seemed to overall prefer relationships with faculty that were multicultural and/or engaged in multicultural organizations and activities on campus. In contrast, Raul, Robert, and Tiffany seemed to establish relationships with the faculty based on common interests, personality, and attention placing less importance on ethnicity.

Jessica admitted that she bonded with only some of her professors. Jessica highlighted her strong relationship with her film advisor, whom she describes as “amazing,” “a good teacher,” and understanding of what it means to be a minority. She said other faculty has aided her in locating resources on campus. However, she characterized her relationship with faculty outside the art “realm” as uncomfortable. She mentioned that some of the difficulty may be because of “the fact that she is Mexican.

Coming out of the realm of the Art Department ... I have felt professors didn’t really care about certain things. I didn’t feel a close bond with them. I didn’t feel like I could really talk to them. I maybe that is just my experience, but outside those realms (Art Department) I don’t feel comfortable with the professors.

The relationships established by the study participants with faculty members depended on several factors. Some study participants gravitated toward faculty with an

understanding of their ethnicity and engaged in multicultural organizations. Other study participants established relationships with faculty that were approachable and shared common interest, such as music or philosophy. Some relationships were described in terms such as friendly and parental. Regardless of the rationale for establishing the student and faculty relationship, the study participants did establish, at times, close relationships with faculty at the university.

The academic dimension highlighted the themes created from the study participant's narrative related to their academic preparedness, experiences in the classroom and academic departments, and their relationship faculty at the university.

The study participants confidently perceived that they were academically prepared and capable to meet the academically expectations of the faculty and the university. Their confidence may derive from the university's high academic admission standards and their own academic success in high school. Further, the study participants reported varying degrees of engagement and comfort in the classroom and academic departments, but made adaptations and accommodations to persist. Lastly, all the study participants established relationships with faculty members based on various criteria including common interests and ethnicity.

Social Themes

The study participants found varying paths for constructing their social connections to the university. Tinto (1975) posits that given an individual's characteristics, prior experiences, and commitment, that it is the individual's integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his/her

continuance at college. Some of the study participants perceived the university to be welcoming which prompted them to participate predominantly within the dominant culture at the university. Others perceived the university to be less congruent with them prompting them to affiliate with the multicultural entities on campus.

Campus Communities and Organizations

The participants found campus communities and organizations that became means of affiliating with the university. The participants selected their campus communities based on compatibility, for example, with their socio-economic status, backgrounds, ethnicity, and perceived acceptance. Therefore, the perception of belonging within the constructs of the dominant campus culture reflected the campus communities and organizations the study participants elected to affiliate at the university.

Raul and Robert elected to affiliate themselves with campus communities and organizations that reflected the dominant campus culture. They perceived that the dominant campus culture communities and organizations most congruent with their socio-economic status, interests, backgrounds, and experiences. It's important to highlight that the rest of the study participants selected their social affiliations also for reasons of congruence although not all chose dominant campus culture affiliations. However, for the study participants selecting multicultural affiliations, there affiliations were critical to their persistence at the university because those affiliations produced the integration or sense of belonging with the university that would not have occurred without those particular affiliations.

The Greek system was a source of affiliation for the majority of the study participants. Raul was very engaged in the Greek system, which he described as, “the biggest thing I can talk about.” Raul elected to join a small fraternity because of philosophical alignment with the philanthropic nature of the fraternity. Raul’s fraternity interacted closely with the Latino fraternity because of their mutual small size, which encouraged the two fraternities to collaborate on some activities. That interaction allowed Raul to build bonds with members of the Latino fraternity and “got to know them well.” He cited that his fraternity attended events sponsored by the multicultural Greeks and “support them in any way that we can.” He lamented that those events were “lightly attended.”

Raul perceived that the Latino Greek organizations valued “philanthropy because they “don’t just throw parties.” He stated that as a Latino student he wished he would have become more involved in the Latino community because, “that is really something I have not taken advantage of. For example, this is the first time I have been to the Center for Multicultural Excellence.” I noted that Raul may not have been fully embraced by the Latino fraternity because he lacked the background characteristics that seem to be a bind the fraternity’s membership. Raul seemed to sense it as well,

I discovered that a big part of that (fitting in with the Latino community) was because the Latino community is dominated by the Mexican culture and that’s not something I’m very familiar with.

Raul’s statement regarding the lack of congruency with some Latinos resonated with me. I was discouraged by the emphasis on the Chicano culture at a public state university during my search for an undergraduate institution to attend. Therefore, I

selected another public institution whose campus culture was not as heavily influenced by the Chicano movement. Further, Raul stated that, “I grew up in a predominantly White community, and I am half White. When it comes to identity, I definitely identify as Hispanic, but my communities are primarily not Hispanic.” I again related to Raul’s comment having lived most of my adolescent years in a predominant Dutch, White neighborhood.

Raul was very expressive in regards to the aspect that differentiated the multicultural Greek organizations from the traditional Greeks on campus. Raul noted that “most Greek recruitment is open to all on the campus. He mentioned that the multicultural Greeks recruiting of new members seemed “very secret.” They recruit like one or two people at a time.” He admitted that, “I think that makes it very special.” Nonetheless, he mentioned that there were people who said, “Why is it fair that they can take advantage of being part of the Greek community, but not follow many of our rules?” This point was alluded to by Latina sorority sisters who confirmed that they selectively recruit pledges rather than having pledges select the sorority. I noted that the unique approach for the selection of new members clarified why the sorority sisters seem to have similar backgrounds. Raul mentioned that the Greek leadership had stopped negative conversations from continuing about the Latino/a fraternity and sorority.

Further, Raul identified another feature differentiating the multicultural Greeks that was confirmed by the Latina sorority sisters. That difference was that non-multicultural Greeks were prohibited from writing or speaking the Greek letters of the Latino/a sorority or fraternity. The Latina sorority sisters explained that they intentionally

restricted other Greek organizations from mentioning or writing their Greek letters to ensure that their sorority is respected and the letters not misused. The sisters consider it disrespectful, for example, to have flyers with their Greek letters distributed because they could be left on the ground or defaced. However, I wondered whether the perception that the multicultural Greeks were allowed to operate under different guidelines produce animus and foreshadowed balkanization within the Greek system?

Robert did not seek involvement in the Latino communities or organizations on campus. He admitted that he attended a multicultural event sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Excellence to qualify for a small book stipend. Electing to attend the multicultural function because of its practical benefit seemed to adhere to Robert's approach to affiliations. Robert tended to select his affiliations on a pragmatic basis.

The business fraternity and the investment club and other small groups like that are more specific to a major or a degree (I joined) mainly because this summer when I was abroad I saw a lot of students from all over the world that were extremely competitive. I said, I have to insert myself into some group ... to make contacts and to be more competitive if I am going to be successful in international business

Robert expressed attachment to the university through his fairly extensive participation in campus activities. Interestingly, Robert's increased his involvement on campus after becoming a commuter, the antithesis of the perception expressed by Ramona who suggested that commuter students were prone to being disengaged from the campus. In Robert's case, he was originally disengaged from the "party atmosphere" he perceived on campus, which encouraged him to become a commuter. As a commuter, Robert may have been able to retreat from the campus avoiding social situations he

disliked. However, he acknowledged that he still felt some disengagement from the university.

Tiffany's social engagement on campus was a journey that began with unpleasant experiences in the residence hall her freshman year. It prompted Tiffany to independently identify social campus affiliations that accepted her. Further, although she considered herself White until entering the university, her experience on campus indicated that being of mixed race prohibited her from affiliating successfully with either the dominant White or Latino communities on campus. Tiffany "resurrected" the university's Free Thinkers Club. She became involved in the university's Writing Center, which fostered her desire to serve and nurture freedom of expression and lifestyle. Tiffany's social community values her social engagements and validates her apparently without regard to her ethnicity. She stated that she, "finally found kind of my niche in this school and I am able to be myself, and that can happen to anybody."

However, Tiffany struggled to affiliate, "I am forcing myself to get involved in the campus." Remarkably, Tiffany was resilient stating that,

I don't feel that this is the worse place in the world by any means. There are really some great people here and there are some really culturally aware people. You kind of just have to fish them out, it is hard, and every once in a while I feel like I'm just kind of forcing myself to assimilate. But, I have finally found kind of my niche in this school and I am able to be myself, and that can happen to anybody.

Adelicia found her social communities within the multicultural community and organizations. Adelicia was active in the Latina Sorority, The Center for Multicultural Excellence, the Latino Student Alliance, and Spanish Club organizations that contributed to

Adelicia stated that she found validation for her cultural values within the multicultural culture on campus. She mentioned that she fit at the Latino Student

Alliance, which allowed her to “relax” because “coming here (the university) was so uncomfortable.” Without the Latino organizations, “(I) probably (would) not (have) found a sense of belonging at this university,”

Adelicia “migrated towards the Latinos, I don’t really involve myself in non-Latino activities.” Adelicia commented that she “found like a family” from the start in the university’s Latino community where it was tight knit and she could discuss traditions and other common interests. “I would not have had a social life (without the Latino community on campus) and that is important to me.” She admits that,

I don’t really hang (outside the multicultural community). Maybe those other organizations or those other clubs didn’t really like grab my attention at the beginning.

Adelicia mentioned that the Latino Student Alliance that asked her to “hey, come hang out” and “come to our next meeting.” Whereas the other organizations approach was impersonal. Adelicia explained that she may not have been comfortable attending the university were the Latino Student Alliance and Latino sorority not on campus. She further acknowledged the importance of the support she received from other Latina/o students.

Other Latinos encourage you because like you’re friends, you all want to succeed ...you know that they want you to succeed

Adelicia emphasized that the multicultural Greek organizations align across college campuses in the state to create a network to collectively advance their particular chapters. Adelicia suggested that it was important to have the traditional Greek organizations “recognize us and kind of embrace the differences in our cultures and the cultural traditions.” Adelicia perceived recognition of cultural differences as a distinct

difference between the multicultural Greek organizations and their mainstream counterparts. In regards to the Latina sorority's position within the university's Greek system, Adelia stated,

that being the first multicultural sorority at the university, we had to really, you know, fight hard for our presence and that included making other traditional sororities and fraternities know that we are actually a sorority ... telling them our needs how we are different.

Adelia understood that attending the university has exposed her to people she many not ordinarily meet and it has prepared her to interact in society.

Being able to collaborate with traditional White students on project ... being mindful that they don't always understand where I am coming from. None of my experiences in the last four years have been negative whatsoever. If anything has really helped me prepare for the real workforce where there are not going to be many Latinos. Overall it has been a good experience at this university.

Dolores was disappointed with her first year experience at the university. "My freshman year I didn't feel like I belonged at all." I considered going to other universities. I even looked at applications to transfer. I really considered changing schools

The only thing that was holding me here was the support network that I got from the campus programs. That was really a good support network. Like a home on campus for me. The girls kind of showed me that you do have support at (the) Center for Multicultural Excellence.

Dolores predominantly maintained her social interactions within the multicultural community and perceived that her "fit" with the university was within the context of the multicultural community and organizations on campus. She felt "really comfortable at this university" once she joined the Latina sorority. She met more Latino students though the Latino Student Alliance, which she described as "awesome, because you can hang out with people that are like you. ... That does not happen every day at this university."

I am in the Latina sorority, Latino Student Alliance, Volunteers in Partnership (high and middle school mentoring program in the local public schools). I'm pretty involved so I see myself like fit (ting) in into the university in a different way. I really love it only because of the people that I hang out with the university's diverse population.

Dolores stated that "through the sorority (I) learned that I have a voice on campus." She described herself as "pretty involved." Dolores joined campus communities that she categorizes as "for others." "I have not joined any communities based on like any student from this university." Dolores believed that even the Latina sorority is "not regular Greek Life."

There is this main student life and then there's this one set aside for multicultural life, if you don't feel like you fit into that main, that main campus life, student life. I have chosen like communities that are for other, for students of multicultural background, I guess.

Jessica expressed similar sentiments as Adelia and Dolores regarding the Latino Student Alliance and The Center for Multicultural Excellent, which she stated provided her "validation." Jessica mentioned that she "fit" at the Latino Student Alliance and "I hung out with other minorities, that's when I did feel (that) I belonged at the university." She stated it was within the minority community that is "where my friends were ... that is where I belonged." She did admit that although she remained engaged in the Latino Student Alliance, "it was a lot of men."

Jessica preferred to interact and be around other women "who were like me." She subsequently chose to pledge the Latina sorority. She wanted more girls that were friends. She stated that she "needed sisters," and that is what she found. The importance of the sorority in her ability to remain at university cannot be underestimated.

I function through them; they are a big support system for me. Yes, that is a lot of the reason why I'm here at this university. I have not left ... because I have very strong ties to the people. They are family.

I noted that some of the study participants entered the Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) for the first time for the study interviews, although they were all aware of its existence. Other participants frequented the center and used its resources and services.

Robert acknowledged participating in, "some events at the CME, but it was off and on to qualify for a small book scholarship." The Director of the CME acknowledged that there are some Latino students that "they never see" at the CME. He posits that they come from predominantly White high schools and will identify themselves as Latinos "if there is a scholarship," but without a benefit "they will disappear into the woodwork." Those comments described Robert's engagement with the CME, which I found ironic because Robert expressed his affinity and understanding of Latino culture but did not seem to have a need to interact with other Latinos on campus. I realized that I was Robert on my campus more than 40 years ago. An immigrant proud of and knowledgeable about the Latino culture, but perceived as White and having limited engagement with other Latinos on campus.

Adelicia singled out The Center for Multicultural Excellence as an additional attractive characteristic of the university. "Having (the) CME present so that we know that (the) CME is here for us for any diversity issue we may encounter." She has also reached out to the CME for "campus-wide programming."

Jessica contemplated transferring until she found support at The Center for Multicultural Excellence, which she described as providing classroom support, diversity retreats, and freshman orientation. She stated that through these and other activities her experiences were validated.

I mean, the opportunities would be in California or New York. But, socially is a big, big, big aspect for me. There is a lot of things holding me here as far as like I have my sorority and I love my sisters, I love my friends here, the friends that I have made, but outside of those circles it is really difficult to function in this institution

Jessica became familiar with The Center for Multicultural Excellent because her scholarship required her to attend the Excelling Leaders Institute; she also attended a diversity retreat and freshman orientation hosted by the CME.

I have used The Center for Multicultural Excellence as a good aid. I had a lot of issues in the classroom as well with people disregarding my opinions or not letting me speak or completely ignoring me to the extent that my teacher recommended I come here (CME). (The CME) brought a workshop into the classroom with these students so that they could learn a little bit about what they were doing to me.

Jessica believes that many minority students access the center at one point or another. However, this perception may be faulty considering that the Director acknowledged that there is a segment of the Latino population that does not frequent the center. My observation is that Jessica's perception is based on the population of Latinos on campus with which she is familiar.

I perceived that for Jessica having her experiences validated was important for her. Therefore, she engaged in communities that were welcoming and composed of individuals that "were like minded" and familiar with her life experiences.

Residence Halls

The participants' experiences in the residence halls varied from accommodating to alienating. I contemplated whether for those alienated it may have been because it was the initial point of consistent contact with the dominant campus culture that challenged their sense of identity and belonging. However, the residence hall was an aspect of the social dimension in this study that did not substantively cluster the study participant's responses by background characteristics. For example, Adelia was a resident assistant in the residence halls while Jessica with a similar background was alienated and elected to transfer to the social justice residence hall. Further, a similar situation was experienced by Raul and Robert. Robert elected to become a commuter because of his poor experiences in the residence hall while Raul was a resident assistant.

Robert, Tiffany and Jessica represented those in the study that had a poor experience in the residence halls. Robert elected to become a commuter because the residence hall was "a mess, filled with drinking and drugs." However, Robert did not disengage from the university and stated that "I like it here and I think I'll continue at least until my bachelor's degree is finished and then see what else happens."

Tiffany perceived being welcome on campus with the exception of the residence hall. Tiffany stated that it was her "worse year" on campus. The resident halls were "all about drinking, they were dense, nothing to talk to them about." She felt that she was surrounded by "empty shells." Her first roommate decided that she was a "Jewish American Princess and her and others had an "attitude" towards her. Tiffany's response

was to misbehave and do “weird things to weird them out.” She experienced an overwhelming sense that, “I do not belong here and everyone knows it.”

Unique to Tiffany among the study participants was a struggle with ethnic identity that was a critical concern during her tenure in the residence hall and for a period thereafter. Tiffany struggled to reconcile a lifelong perception of being White that was challenged early at the university. Tiffany admitted that as a youngster she would remain indoors during summer so that she “would not tan too much.” She came to the realization that “like people didn’t consider me White, as hard as I tried to be White.” But, she has found it difficult “trying to embrace that side (Latino) of me.” She realizes that not growing up familiar with the Latino culture or Spanish language “makes her feel too White.” Her conclusion was that “I just kind of have nowhere to go.” Therefore, Tiffany “actually struggled with it (sense of belonging) the first couple of years.” Tiffany revealed that the experience caused her to move off campus where she “hermited.” In retrospect, she realizes that such isolation “was not the way to meet people.” Tiffany now avoids the residence halls, “I don’t know if it is that I have this traumatic negative association with them.”

Jessica exhibited strong emotion when describing the alienation she experienced at her first residence hall. “When I first came here, I was completely and totally alienated in my dorm.” She mentioned that people would “ignore the fact that she was there.” However, she “handled the situation” by switching to the Social Justice Residence Hall.

I switched to (the) Social Justice dorm, which ultimately had people who were interested in the things I was interested in (and) so it was easier to function with these people.

Raul found the resident hall staff to be a tight knit community. He stated that they “got very close as a staff.” He became a resident assistant to meet the service expectation of his fraternity. Adelia commented that the Student Life staff “was there for the students.” I found her involvement in the residence halls interesting because I surmised that her experiences in the residence hall would have been similar to Jessica’s based on compatible backgrounds and perceptions. Further, Adelia mentioned that she tended to not “involve myself in non-Latino activities.” Thus, I was left with a question regarding the reasons Adelia sought a resident assistant position, unless it was in the Social Justice Residence Hall.

Campus Peers

Ramona stated that the diversity in the Latino student population at the university included out-of-state and international students, private school graduates, affluent Latinos, and native born and immigrant Latino students. She stated that collectively the Latino students collectively seem to have a common understanding of the opportunities the university affords them.

The student experience of a Latina student who comes to us from a private boarding school in Miami... is very, very different from what a local public schools, first generation immigrant who receives a full ride scholarship”

Further, Ramona noted that affluent (Latino) students from educated homes who have isolating racial or ethnic experiences “work well into the university community.” This observations correlates with the experiences of Raul and Robert and rationalizes why they constructed their social affiliations within the dominants campus culture. It also

provides insight on how the study participants identified and perceived their peers at the university.

The study participants varied in regards to how they perceived their peers on campus and whom they considered peers. Adelia, Dolores, and Jessica consider the multicultural students on campus their peers. Raul and Robert, although aware and open about their ethnicity, considered the White students on campus their peers. However, Raul did mention his interactions with the Latino fraternity members.

Tiffany expressed strong opinions regarding student social groups on campus. She described some of the Hispanic students that she has met as fitting into “that group of privileged students.”

They have like five pairs of Ugg boots and designer jeans, which isn't that they are acting White in any way, but they are still like, there's that sense of ignorance of something else other than them.

She mentioned that the campus was permeated with “a culture of ignorance” about the realities of life. Tiffany expanded on the “culture of this university is ignorance” statement by stating that,

students really (don't) want to delve into the social issues ... attached to race. They are fine with being aware of race, but they don't want to go any further beyond that

Tiffany stated that she has met students that exemplify a “level of ignorance” about Latinos that she perceived within the student body.

If they see a Hispanic student, they immediately ask, “Oh, are you Mexican, which is really insulting to me. They will say, “You don't act Hispanic, which is just really insulting. I don't know what it means to “act Hispanic.” Because I am of mixed race, I don't really feel that I belong in either group. It is kind of funny that this interview is happening now because up until probably last spring I have been pretending to be White my whole life.

Therefore, Tiffany has elected to “surround herself” with people that make her comfortable and not nervous. She mentioned White students that listen and appreciate Hispanic Hip Hop music, for example. These White students have grown up in Hispanic communities and have “a better sense of “who we are.” Nevertheless, she expressed a sense of “solitary coping” that is self-reflective and “doing it on her own.” However, she acknowledges that there are “diamonds in the rough” that appreciate her identity.

I contemplated what kept Tiffany at the university, considering the poor opinion she seemed to possess of the many of the students at the university. However, Tiffany expressed a strong desire to attain a prestigious degree from the university, which was a common rationale for attending the university among the study participants.

Robert described his peers as “well rounded, extremely smart, athletic, good looking, and superficial”. I recall perceiving the university students living in my neighborhood as having to be academically gifted to attend the university and athletic considering my perception that “all skied and played tennis.”

Robert perceived differences between himself and other Latinos on campus, however, and was expressive about it. He was vocal regarding these differences and had strong opinions on the subject. He stipulated that Latino students did not accept him because he considered himself White, his parent’s are well educated, cultured, and from a wealthier area of Mexico. However, those Latinos had less understanding of Mexican culture, history, and rarely spoke Spanish, as he did. Robert stated that “for me it’s not an issue to be Mexican.”

Robert was clearly disturbed by the behavior of some of the Latino students. He stated that,

Those are the same people that I see ... I don't want to say whining, but that are complaining to themselves and others that. "Oh, I feel discriminated here, nobody respects my heritage. Those are the same students who I think are in the Latino fraternity and sorority, they're second and third generation most of them, I don't know if they need to feel some sense of belonging, but I think that they joined those communities because they like that other students are in the same situation with them. I mean, my perception of being in a group is you're always with people who have, who share the same interests, I mean, and that is why I'm in choir because I like to sing. I think they just like to be around people who they know reflect their kind of Spanglish tradition or whatever they have, you know, so and I think they might feel a little less sense of belonging because maybe they have, they feel like they have something to prove, or something, I don't know.

He further states that,

But for me, I just feel like well it is just school you know it doesn't bother me anybody saying racist jokes or anything because my relatives have told me well you know, you know what's going on with you then who cares what anybody else says and then so I think most students react to that because they feel some sense of responsibility to oh to pick on "ah, don't say that about me or whatever" and get aggressive and everything. But, I just think it is not worth it and stuff you know.

He noted, similarities between the Latino students and the other students on campus citing common interest in socializing, having friends, a good time, joining clubs, and meeting people. He also believes that students on campus share the common goals of graduating and starting a career. I found Robert's observations puzzling because he exhibited a strong judgmental stance regarding Latino and other students on campus and yet also considered them intelligent, athletic, and very sociable. Maybe Robert tolerated the social condition, dynamics, and contradictions on campus because it was necessary to achieve his future goals that required making worthwhile campus contacts and a prestigious degree.

Jessica describes her peer group as other students of color and in particular her “sisters” in the sorority with whom she shares a similar background.

I mean, personally like I hang out with people that are of my descent or of some type of Latino descent. I hang out with a lot of different African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian students, anybody, and anyone that is a minority

Jessica perceived that differences of opinion between her and the dominant culture on campus were caused by cultural differences that affect interactions and communications. She handles the social disconnect by not allowing people to ignore her. “I don’t let them ignore me. It is not acceptable by any means.” Jessica insinuated that she will address misconceptions, stereotyping, and/or micro aggressions when she confronts them. confronted. Her stance is to ensure that the dominant culture does not ignore the presence of Latinos and respectful of her ethnicity. However, she perceives an important distinction between the social and academic settings. “But at the same time in an academic setting is not as hard to make yourself fit in versus a social (setting).”

Jessica mentioned that one of the most difficult adjustments was adjusting to the affluence on campus. Her perception is that acceptance is not solely based on race, but more importantly on being upper-class. She describes it as “Caucasian AND RICH.”

These people have no idea of what it means to be lower class or not have any money, and that is like having a scholarship is like a status symbol, like you can’t pay your own tuition.

In Jessica’s view, “We (Latinos in her social group) and they do not have the same type of relativity and they make it an issue.” Relativity was a reference to having similar experiences, socio-economic status, and backgrounds. She, therefore, elected to socialize with those of Latino decent or “anyone that is a minority.” However, Jessica

recognized that some Latino students have a social economic status and experiences similar to the dominant student population and elect to associate with the White students. She acknowledges having some commonality with the affluent Latinos, although she did not provide specifics.

I noted that Jessica seemed “irritated” during our initial interview and wondered what she thought of me, whether she found me genuine or “a coconut” that is brown on the outside and white on the inside. I could not relate to her level of discontent or affiliation only with students of color, but I did not express those feelings and did not explore whether she indeed perceived me as “a coconut”. Refreshingly, I noticed a behavioral change during our second interview several months later. Jessica seemed much calmer, outgoing, and happy. My apprehension at meeting with her dissipated quickly. I mentioned that she seemed much more at ease and content, but actually received little feedback besides a smile. Therefore, I still left wondering how she perceived me or my intentions for conducting the study.

Dolores perceived that she was “not the typical student at this university.” She expressed that the socio-economic status and experiential differences discouraged her and separated her from the dominant student population on campus.

I am not involved in the senate thing that they (have) for the university. I am not part of like the Alpine Club where like all the kids go skiing every weekend. I don't hang out with a lot of like typical stereotypical students.

Dolores perceived students at the university as generally pretty wealthy, mostly White, strong leaders, good students, student athletes, really smart, and many participate in Greek life. She suggested that the dominant characteristics of the students on campus

are affluence and being White. However, those she considers her peers are “insanely intelligent, really hard workers, and leaders”. Many have two jobs, are full time students, and participate in the student senate. Therefore, as Jessica and Adelia, Dolores elected to socialize with the multicultural students that best matched her background and experiences.

Dolores reported that she has not been the recipient of racial comments. She posited that she has never had a hard time because she “looks more American than a lot of other Latino students on campus.” But, they “always think that I am half of something.” However, Dolores had friends that have shared hard experiences. She recalled an instance where a Latino student hung a Mexican flag in their room and that was viewed as racist. Another instance involved a Latino who did not respond in Spanish and was told, “Aren’t you Mexican, aren’t you suppose to speak Spanish.”

The study participants affiliated across a spectrum of social communities and organizations on campus. Regardless of the social communities or organizations, the study participants identified peers with whom they had common characteristics, interests and/or values. The study participants described both positive and negative characteristics related to their peers but seemed to reach common ground regarding the high socio-economic status of many of the students at the university. The study participant’s paths to identifying and connecting with their social affiliations may have differed and required varying levels of effort and time, but ultimately the affiliations developed and the students persisted because they gained their sense of belonging within the campus

climate. An important point to note is that the campus climate incorporated the diverse social and academic constructs highlighted in this study plus likely others not exposed. Lastly, peers of the study participants shared the university but functioned in seemingly discrete social communities that may divide or balkanize the university into social “clicks”.

I became concerned about social “clicks:” because of the non-inclusive campus climate that separate social communities and organizations paralleling one another functionally and differing only in ethnic or other social attributes may produce and how balkanizing the campus climate may become. However, I ultimately realized that balkanization is caused by parties electing to minimize interactions and engagement with other groups and that it’s a conscious choice driven a desire to affiliate within social constructs that are congruent with the individual. Further, that for some students it’s solely these affiliations that integrate them into the university and allow them to persist. Therefore, by not providing these discrete social communities and organizations the university may be perceived as unwelcoming to some students and increase the probability of their departure or at minimum provide an uncomfortable campus climate that must be tolerated in order to persist. Thus, it’s worthwhile to consider what constitutes a campus climate that is inclusive while offering multiple social communities and organizations for the students.

Campus Characteristics

The physical characteristics of an institution can influence whether the institution is perceived as welcoming. Rapaport (1982) reported that the physical environment of

any college campus communicates and elicits varying emotions, interpretations, and behaviors. Nonverbal messages and physical artifacts on college campuses have a strong influence on student behavior and campus culture (Banning & Bartels, 1993; Rapaport, 1982). These were the reasons for inquiring of the student participants about the physical characteristics of the university; the desire to gauge whether the physical environment and non-verbal messages assisted in creating a sense of belonging for the Latino students.

The study participants universally agreed that the university was physically beautiful and pleasant. Participants reported that they were impressed with and drawn to the quality and appearance of the campus. Jessica described the university campus as “much different than her community.” Jessica acknowledged that the campus took some adjustment. “I am not used to anything like this at all. I come from a complete urban setting.” She mentioned that she did not find any particular physical aspect of the university as “welcoming.”

Jessica experienced an epiphany with her arrival at the university because the environment at the university was substantially different from her life experiences.

I have never really thought anything else different, so it was difficult coming to each building as a huge building, each person lives in a different room, not a home, it is, it is different, but that’s pretty much what I went through.

Dolores wanted a residential college experience and preferred to remain local. In addition, she was influenced by the appearance of the campus.

This is a really nice school it is really cool, and I wanted to go here because the buildings are beautiful.

Nevertheless, she “stepped into a different world” and realized she was starting a new life with new opportunities.

I had stepped into a different world. I got into this university and ... then I stepped into this world that I never thought like I could be in ... this university is really nice and stuff and the schools I went to weren't.

Adelicia described the university as short on diversity and knowledge of other cultures. She mentioned that she occasionally has encountered a lack of cultural understanding from the people in the institution. She mentioned being "pointed out as a Latina in class or the professor that asked, 'Do you guys eat oatmeal at your house,' as if we would not eat oatmeal or something."

Adelicia mentioned the discussion on campus regarding the appropriateness of the school mascot, Boone, that some associated with the genocide of Native Americans. Adelicia pointed out that "I don't think that anybody really cares about the mascot ... I wasn't really involved that much with it, I don't think I really cared too much." I found her comment surprising as it seemed to indicate a lack of sensitivity for Native American students that found Boone a symbol of past aggression. I wondered whether ethnic sensitivity is restricted to the context of our own ethnic background, particularly in light of pejorative comments by other participants regarding the Caucasian culture on campus.

Tiffany described the campus as pretty. However, she emphasized that "frat row is what this university really is so don't forget." She noted that the fraternity and sorority rows were build 100 years ago but "may want to embody" the social changes since then. She perceived frat row as symbolic of "rich, White men," although sororities also occupy the area.

Raul finds the Campus Green a focal point of the campus, a gathering place, and a place where classes are held during good weather. Another feature of the campus he

noted was University Hall. Because of its distinctive architecture, Raul believes that it lends itself to housing the administrative functions of the university and is easy for new students to locate. Raul stated that the lack of a defined entrance to the university detracts from its atmosphere, although University Hall “sort of is”; University Hall, however, does not equate to the eastern schools with a “big gate and everything.” According to Raul, “you can come on to campus from pretty much any direction.” He, nevertheless, values the beauty of the campus, which “blew him away” during his pre-matriculation visit.

Robert describes the university as, “really a nice campus. I appreciate (the maintenance) it, and I also really like that all of our classrooms are clean, have Internet, electrical outlets, pull down screens, (and) lights that dim.” He stated that it makes a big difference if campus is a comfortable, appealing environment for learning.

The study participants universally agreed that the university was physically beautiful and pleasant. Participants reported that they were impressed with and drawn to the quality and appearance of the campus. The study participants seemed to value the physical qualities of the university and generally perceived it as a welcoming physical environment. Jessica explicitly expressed that she needed to adapt to the physical surroundings of the campus. Raul, on the other hand, was immediately attracted by the outstanding facilities and which encouraged him to enroll. Thus, there is evidence that students from less affluent backgrounds may require time to adapt to the physical characteristics of the university, but recognize the quality of the facilities and attractive appearance of the campus.

Off Campus Support

The Director perceives family support as a key in retaining the Latino students. The study participants from the local area, particularly, expressed interest in maintaining family and community ties by often returning to their families and communities.

I noted my own early experience while an undergraduate returning to the neighborhood each weekend my freshman year. Interestingly, with each passing year I identified more with my friends, social structure, and neighborhood at college. I became acculturated into a different social structure while an undergraduate. In fact, it was closer to the upper middle class lifestyle that I experienced in Cuba prior to immigrating. However, it remained comforting that I could visit my family and neighborhood. I found that it was important to “keep in touch” with my ethnic upbringing and to continue to assist my parents.

Jessica’s off campus support centered on her family and neighborhood. Jessica returned home frequently.

I am home pretty much each Sunday. We all have breakfast together on Sundays. I do homework at my grandmother’s house on Sunday. Sunday is for family. I don’t think I would be able to function unless I did get to go back

Jessica also described her neighborhood.

I came from the neighborhood north of the campus, so the houses are not necessarily big. . . . I mean the houses are really grouped together, they are really tiny, they are old. . . nothing is in a nice building. They are no really nice buildings around that neighborhood.

Further, Jessica shared that she worked at her neighborhood community center.

Dolores was encouraged to go to college by her family with whom she maintains a close relationship. She is also involved in the neighborhood schools encouraging students to attend college and considers herself a role model to her siblings.

My dad went to college for like a year and he didn't graduate and my mom didn't go to college. It was always a thing growing up, like you're going to college no matter what, you don't really have a choice. Going, you know, and continuing on in college has been a really important thing to my family. I will be the first person in my family to graduate from college. I have two younger brothers, kind of a role model to them. So there is the pressure from like my family. The people at the university who have invested, you know, time and effort into my education or supporting me. I don't want to disappoint people.

She maintains a close relationship with her family and perceives herself as a role model to her younger siblings.

I go home often and I see old friends and I encourage them too (as she does the middle and high school students she mentors). This may sound really bad but I don't want to be like them. I don't want to live the lifestyle that they did. They are working now and they hate their jobs, and I don't want that life.

Dolores mentors students in her neighborhood that "look up to her." She often tells them, "I graduated from your high school and I am going to this university." She finds it inspirational, "so I can't let them down." She also realizes that her opportunities are different than some of her former classmates. "This may sound really bad but I don't want to be like them. I don't want to live the lifestyle that they did. They are working now and they hate their jobs, and I don't want that life." Dolores has pressure to succeed because of the expectations from her family. She will be the first to graduate from college.

Dolores mentioned that she encourages Latino high school students to attend the university. She acknowledges that the university is perceived as a predominantly White campus, but she emphasizes that

There are so many resources that you can use once you are here that will make you feel included and they will still make you feel welcome at this university, whether you get along in the regular campus community or not there is always resources and there is a way to fit whether you think you will or not.

Dolores' comment regarding "not wanting to be like them" initiated an immediate emotional response during the interview that I had difficulty containing. It reinvigorated the guilt about having a lifestyle in college that was superior to my parents and understanding that my opportunities were going to be far greater, although my parents were educated and had professional careers in Cuba. The guilt extended to my relationship with my friends at the recreation center with whom I had increasingly less in common. I was fundamentally ashamed that my opportunities would allow me to move beyond the neighborhood that nurtured me. It also reminded me of comments by the institutional informants alluding to feelings of guilt by Latino students regarding attending the university and changes that were separating them from their families and friends.

Tiffany mentioned little about her family and neighborhood. In part, because her parents moving from the neighborhood when she enrolled in college. However, Tiffany mentioned that she has long conversations with her father regarding her experiences at the university. He is an employee at the university and has experienced some of the disfranchisement Tiffany experienced. I sensed that Tiffany was incrementally becoming

more affiliated with the university as her social community expanded and she gained self-esteem. Further, Tiffany did not express a sense of loss or a desire to return to the neighborhood. Therefore, her ties to her neighborhood and friends seemed of less important than for other study participants.

The study participants universally found support outside the university, primarily from family. Jessica and Dolores also maintained connection to their neighborhood and were involved in community organizations or local schools. Raul, Tiffany and Robert discuss little about their neighborhood and did not seem to have maintained ties to neighborhood. For Jessica and Dolores their families and neighborhoods were a source of grounding and affirmation. For Robert and Tiffany, their families also provided council and emotional support but expressed little affiliation with their neighborhoods. Adelia and Raul shared that family support was important but expanded little on the subject and provided very limited information regarding maintaining affiliation to their neighborhoods. The study participants did not cluster on this theme based on demographic characteristics. However, universally the study participants expressed having and appreciating the support of family. However, it seemed to be an independent choice whether study participants maintained affiliation to their previous neighborhoods. Those that did were engaged in neighborhood organizations or schools and retained strong neighborhood affiliations.

Departure of Latino Students

It is important to determine the reasons that Latinos leave the university. Models on student attrition indicate that it is because of lack of congruency with the institution.

Studies on Latino students posit that besides the lack of congruency, many Latino students have financial and family obligations that affect their ability to persist.

The study participants seemed to have difficulty offering direct insight into the reasons why Latinos left the university. “I can’t think of any (Latino students) that have left,” stated Raul. He believes that a great aspect of the university is that it values inclusiveness and diversity through programs and services on campus. I believe that Raul was unable to identify any Latinos who left the university because his social community does not include many Latino students. Study participants engaged in the multicultural community recalled instances of Latinos departing the university and some themselves considered departing. However, it was Adelia’s observation on Latino student departure that captured the essence for departure from the university. Adelia suggested that Latinos that leave the university before graduating are “not being involved or as involved in after school activities like clubs.”

Robert knew a couple of Latino students who left the university. One elected to transfer to a college in New York. Robert believes that it was because the student was interested in gaining independence from her family. The second student, a personal friend left because of the financial burden caused by having to pay out-of-state tuition.

Jessica stated that one Latina student who she knew left because of her major, but she was unsure. She was sure that, “everyone has a little bit of issues here. I have known a lot of students who still are thinking about switching schools because of the social barriers here.” The social barriers were related to socio-economic differences and cultural perspectives. Jessica addressed. Jessica stated that changing living environments is an

option that she and others have successfully undertaken to remain at the university and minimize the effect of social and cultural differences. She stated that leaving because of the social barrier is valid, but it should not be the sole reason for leaving the university.

Tiffany mentioned that she knew of few people who left the university outside of “getting kicked out for low grades and things like that.” However, she stated that some students leave because of the ignorance on campus about diversity. She describes the campus as a “bubble campus” unable to deal with social issues.

It is not that they pick up on the ignorance; they still want a campus with more diversity. More (of a) change to meet people of different cultures and different backgrounds. Because it does get really boring, everyone here is so much the same.

Finances, Dolores believed, caused students to leave because “they can’t afford it” and others because “they just can’t seem to fit in, no matter what.” Further, she was aware of a case where a student experiencing academic difficulty left and returned after a few semesters at another institution. Dolores was the first study participant who seemed to know of students who departed for a variety of reasons. I surmised that her involvement on campus exposed her to a broader population of the Latino students on campus.

The Director posited that Latino students that voluntarily left the university prior to graduation failed to find a support group within the institution, financial circumstances forced them to withdraw, and/or a few left because of poor academic performance. He emphasized that those who are committed find ways around financial and other issues and persist.

Ramona indicated that in her experience some students face social barriers that affect their academic performance or have study skills deficiencies that become more pronounced in a rigorous academic environment. Further, it may have just been that they “are not comfortable” at the university. For example, “they speak Spanish at home, don’t ski on weekends, so why are they wasting their time here?”

The study participants had difficulty identifying Latino students that left the university. The study participants reported isolated cases and some with little confidence in the accuracy of their statements. The institutional informants, however, were able to cite reasons cited in the literature, but little concrete instances of Latino student departure from the university. I perceive the lack of specificity and concrete examples as an indication that Latinos attending the university are motivated to succeed and perceive value in persisting even when presented with challenges. It also speaks to the ability of the study participants to construct affiliations that nurture a sense of belonging at the university. Further, it indicates that the university is offering resources and services that engaged the study participants.

Conclusions

The overarching research question that guided this investigation focused on gaining an understanding of the sense of belonging of Latino students at the university by chronicling their participation in the academic and social life on campus. The academic and social dimensions investigated in this study are representative of the campus climate. It is the campus climate that encourages or inhibits a student from attaining a sense of belonging on campus. The study participants identified and nurtured academic and social

affiliations that generated a sense of belonging for them. However, the academic and social affiliations differed among the study participants, although this study highlights instances of thematic clustering from the narrative of the study participants. For example, the study participants thematically clustered on the theme of academic preparedness because they all perceived that they belonged academically at the university. Further, the Professor mentioned that Latino students from some area high schools shared common characteristics and experiences that prompted them gravitate toward each other and construct multicultural affiliations on campus. In contrast, the study participants that elected to construct social affiliations within the dominant culture on campus attended predominantly White suburban high schools and reported higher socio-economic status and parental educational levels.

Tinto (1993) described the act of leaving college as a highly idiosyncratic event. He noted that one can understand this idiosyncratic event only by gaining insight into individual circumstances. However, this study intended to understand individual circumstances of the study participants that allow them to persist at the university. By understanding the experiences of the successful Latino students, the idiosyncratic event of departure may be better understood and techniques of successful Latino students applied to reduce departure of Latinos from higher education.

Tinto (1993) and others have suggested that students will persist when they find congruence with the academic and social dimensions of an institution. The study participants did not come from wealthy backgrounds and were cognizant of the divide affluence created on the campus. Most of the study participants indicated that fully

belonging at the university depended on an individual's socio-economic status. The university was described as a place where "wealth is an equalizer." Despite differences in socio-economic status and other factors, the study participants perceived sufficient congruence with the university academically and socially and value in the education the university afforded to adapt, accommodate, develop a sense of belonging, and persist.

The narrative from the study participants yielded themes that were detailed in this chapter. The observations of institutional informants and this researcher were incorporated and augmented the narrative of the study participants. From the narrative, two overarching dimensions—academic and social—framed the themes that emerged.

The academic themes reflected that the participants perceived they belonged academically at the university because they were prepared to meet the academic expectations of the university. However, the study participant's perceptions differed in regards to the experiences in the classroom and departments and relationship with the faculty. Some participants found congruence with their departments and experienced synergy in the classroom, although not always immediately. Other participants "tolerated" the classroom environment while experiencing occasional micro-aggressions and a sense of disconnect. By enlarge, the study participants found departments that engaged them because of synergy with personal interests. Similarly, the study participants gravitated toward relationships with the faculty when there were common interests and/or ethnic background. The extent of the relationship between the study participants and faculty varied from incidental interaction to friendship and "parental" status.

The social themes highlighted differences between the study participants based on the social communities and organizations they elected to engage in at the university that were generally determined by the study participant's demographic characteristics and experiences. The study participants ultimately affiliated with social structures on campus that integrated with the campus and offered a sense of belonging. However, study participants' paths varied regarding identifying and creating their social affiliations and highlighted that multiple and distinct social communities and organizations existed on campus in order to satisfy and integrate the diverse student population attending the university. Without, for example, the multicultural communities and organizations, several of the study participants may not have persisted at the university or at minimum struggled more navigating the campus culture.

In addition, the study participants illustrated strong adherence to themes identified by Tinto (1993) associated with persistence. Tinto (1993) outlined three overarching themes that influence a student's ability to either persist or to depart. The themes are defined herein: "the disposition of individuals who enter higher education, to the character of their interactional experiences within the institution following entry, and to the external forces which sometimes influence their behavior within the institution" (p.37). The phrase "disposition of individuals" pertains to students' intention and commitment. Intention is a predictor of college completion and is defined as the extent of specificity, ambition, and clarity of educational goals. Commitment is also a significant factor related to persistence. Therefore, a high level of both commitment and academic competence leads to a higher probability of degree completion.

Interactional experiences on campus are comprised of several elements: the student's ability to adjust to the challenges of college, the difficulty of not meeting institutional academic standards, a mismatch between what the institutions offers and the student's interests and needs or incongruence, and isolation or lack of significant and substantive relationships on campus. External forces that may impede persistence include employment or other commitments that limit substantive or full participation in campus opportunities and activities; finances, which pertains to the ability of a student to pay the costs of attending college; and the value a student's community holds for a college education. A student from a community that does not place a high value on a college education may abandon their educational goals.

The study participant's narrative highlighted how they aligned with Tinto's persistence themes. The study participants exhibited a strong commitment to the academic goal of graduating from a prestigious university and their affirmation of belonging academically at the university. The narrative of the institutional informants confirmed that the Latino students admitted to the university were academically eligible. The Latinos were described as the best and brightest from their high schools. The Latino persistence rate, grade point averages, and graduation rates indicated that the Latino students were academic equals. Therefore, the study participants had a high level of disposition or commitment and clarity regarding their academic goals.

The study participants' interactional experiences varied, with some requiring more adaption to incongruence and isolation. Incongruence and isolation extended into the classroom and interactions with faculty. Isolation in the classroom or from the faculty

depended on the incongruence of the student and faculty with each other. Faculty insensitive to cultural differences occasionally created an unwelcoming environment in the classroom. Study participants uncomfortable with the dominant campus culture limited their engagement with faculty to those with similar ethnicity and/or an understanding of the study participants' culture. However, all the participants established relationships with faculty members who in some cases were described as "close to a friend" or like "father and daughter" relationships. Other relationships were less personal and more in the context of mentors and advisers.

For Raul and Robert, whose demographic and experiential characteristics most closely matched the dominant campus culture, the social communities and organizations affiliations they selected were those of the dominant campus culture. Adelia, Dolores, and Jessica, however, experienced incongruence with the dominant campus culture and indicated feelings of separation or isolation within the university. However, they ultimately affiliated with the multicultural social communities and organizations that integrated them with the university and generated a sense of belonging. For one study participant, however, it was a more difficult process because Tiffany was unwelcomed by the dominant campus culture and the multicultural community. Tiffany eventually found congruence by identifying social communities and organizations that paralleled her interests and disregarded her ethnicity.

External forces aided rather than hindered the study participant's persistence at the university. Financially the study participants seemed to have sufficient monetary resources from family and/or financial assistance to remain full time students. Further, to

varying extents, the study participants had bonds with family, neighborhood, and friends that supported them. Granted, some of the study participants came from communities and families with limited experience with higher education. But, although the participants recognized that their higher education experiences differentiated them from their communities and families, none indicated that the emerging differences caused them to consider departing the university. Therefore, the study participants persisted because they were capable academically, committed to their educational goals, and, when necessary, adapted sufficiently to mitigate incongruence with the institutional culture.

Hurtado and Carter assert that, “understanding students’ sense of belonging may be the key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these (racial and ethnic minority) students” (p. 324). This study has attempted to understand the sense of belonging of Latino students and uncovered from their experiences what affected or created their sense of belonging at the university. Hurtado and Carter also argue that, “further research is necessary to understand racial and ethnic minority students’ views of their participation in college as an important part of the process of engagement in the diverse learning communities of a college” (p. 324). The findings of this study provide an insight into the perceptions of the study participants regarding academic factors and social affiliations that influenced their sense of belonging and enabled them to persist at the university. The findings highlight that a common path to belonging is unreasonable given the diversity of the Latino experience and demographic characteristics. However, the study findings hint of paths for Latino

students to create a sense of belonging that will enhance their opportunity to successfully navigate the higher education maze and persist.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Discussion and Recommendations

Chapter 4 discussed the two major dimensions and underlying themes uncovered in this study. The overarching observations derived from the themes were: that the study participants perceived a sense of belonging academically because they possessed the academic capabilities to meet the expectations of the university and that the study participants adapted to the campus culture sufficiently to develop congruence with the institution and gain a sense of belonging. The institutional informants affirmed that the Latino students accepted to the university were well qualified and prepared academically. Further, the institutional informants recognized that the diversity of the Latino population on campus resulted in various social communities and organizations engaging and appealing to different segments of the Latino students on campus. Lastly, the narrative of the study participants and institutional informants provided an insight into a phenomenon that is complex due to multiple elements that inform the phenomenon under study. Figure 5.1 graphically illustrates the dimensions and how these elements effect the sense of belonging that if attained may lead to a student's persistence at an institution of higher education and that these elements contribute to the campus climate. In the remaining portion of this chapter, I will present reflections on the study findings and discuss recommendation for further research.

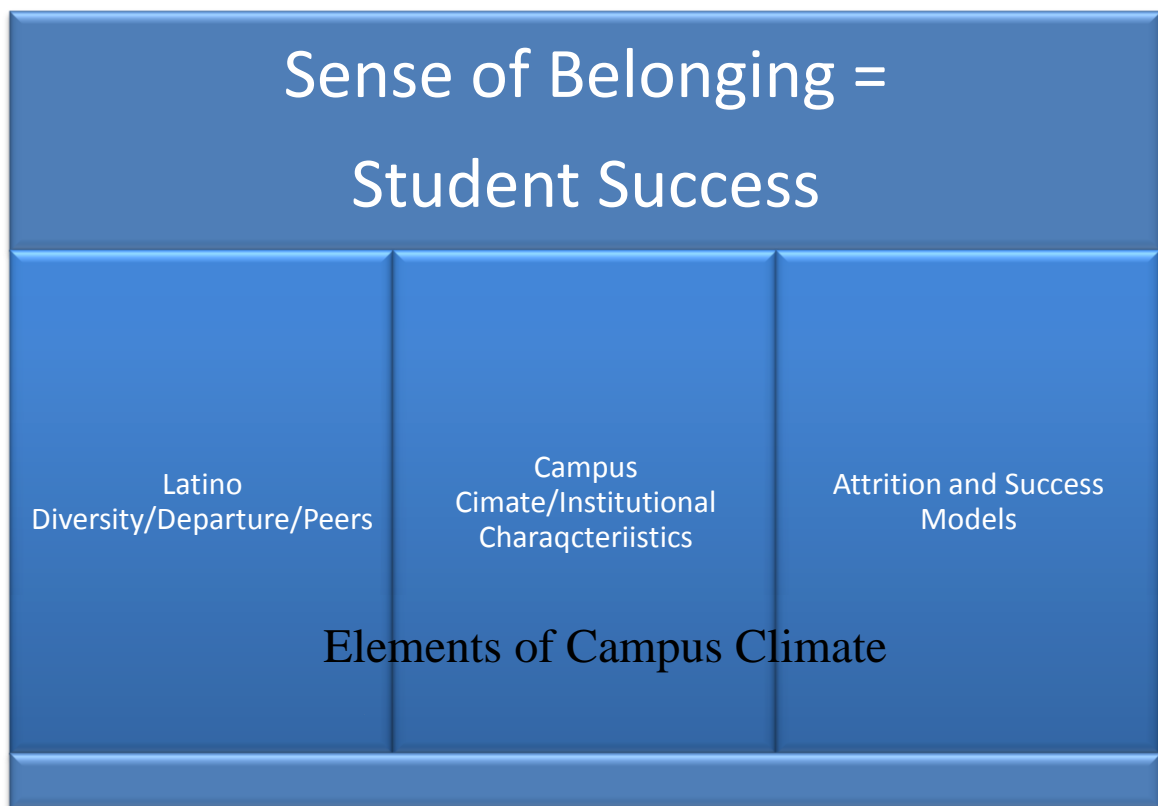


Figure 5.1. Elements of Campus Climate that Inform the Sense of Belonging and Contribute to Student Success

I believe that higher education professionals involved with Latino students will not be surprised by the findings of this study. They are probably aware of the diversity in the Latino population on campus and how that diversity poses challenges to creating an inclusive campus culture that encourages persistence. Therefore, the value of the study's findings may be for those that come into contact with Latino students on campus but are unaware of their diversity, factors that affect their sense of belonging, and impact their persistence. Further, it is unreasonable to posit that the findings of this study will be germane across different types of higher education institutions or Latino populations on

campus. Thus, the importance of continuing to conduct studies on Latino students across various types of higher education institutions remains a priority.

Attinasi (1989, 1994) found that students become integrated not because they share the values and orientation of the majority of students at their college, but because the specific collective affiliations they form help them acquire the skills to negotiate the social, physical, and cognitive geographies of large campus environments. This theoretical perspective is important because, for some of the study participants, the values and orientation of the majority on campus were not congruent with their experiences and backgrounds. Those participants selected affiliations within the multicultural social communities at the university that provided the support and engagement on campus that allowed them to persist within the dominant culture on campus. Therefore, it is important to understand that students may remain at an institution without having to assimilate into the dominant campus culture, as long as alternative social communities and organizations are available that are congruent with the student's experiences, interest, and background.

A problem with persistence may occur when those resources are not available or remain unknown to the Latino students. Proactive programs that engage students of color prior to matriculation and that inform students of multicultural resources and communities start the process of integration with the institution. This university has been successful in implementing pre-matriculation programs and supplementing them with post-matriculation programs that further integrate Latino students with the university. Those engaged with Latino students recognize the diversity of the Latino population and recognize that there are those Latinos that will find congruence within the dominant

campus culture and not participate in these programs and/or multicultural social communities or organizations. Some students in this study indeed affiliated with the dominant White culture at the university. Further, I can attest to this “division” within the Latino student population in that my undergraduate college selection was based on identifying an institution in which the expectation for a Latino to not participate in the Chicano social and political movement was acceptable. This stance was based on not having substantial exposure to the Chicano culture and perceiving that my social alignment was with the dominant White campus culture since my life experiences had been predominantly within the White and Cuban cultures. However, it was discouraging that there were multiple separate ethnic cultures within my university that were identifiable but not openly discussed. The separation between ethnic groups reduced the social interactions that may have dispelled stereotypes and encouraged understanding and appreciation for divergent experiences and points of view, which I perceive to be a potential benefit of the college experience. I sensed that this same separation was operative at this university. Perhaps, my experience was more in line with the concept of biculturalism or dual socialization because overall I did feel comfortable in the White and Latino cultures.

De Anda (1984) described the bicultural experience as the overlap of two cultures. In practice, most campuses will have overlaps of more than two cultures. However, this “dual socialization” concept is intriguing because it argued that finding convergence between two cultures could allow individuals to function more comfortably and effectively in both worlds. According to De Anda, dual socialization requires

transforming the academic and social culture of higher education institutions to accommodate culturally diverse students. This model challenges those attrition models that suggest that students must abandon their cultural values and beliefs in order to successfully incorporate into an institution. Further, it challenges the concept of a single dominant campus culture where successful persistence demands assimilation. Indeed the bicultural model seems to honor multiple cultures that coexist and complement each other on campus. It demands understanding and sensitivity to diversity in multiple dimensions and minimization of judgmental perceptions that “rate” values and beliefs. I am not convinced that human nature has evolved to that level of fairness, regardless of the socio-economic, gender, and/or ethnic attributes of the individual. Therefore, I am concerned about the onset of balkanization rather than biculturalism.

Researchers have defined racial balkanization as the tendency for students of color to self-segregate from the university’s predominantly White student body and into their respective racial “enclaves” (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Astin, 1993; Duster, 1991, 1993, 1995). The process of balkanization is purported to polarize campuses along racial/ethnic alliances and have negative effects on a range of post-college educational (cognitive) and behavioral (affective) outcomes for students of color (Berube & Nelson, 1995; D’Souza, 1991). This scenario is disconcerting because separation does not advance inclusion or tolerance within institutions that by historical and philosophical stances should be the bastions of tolerance and open discourse. Granted, I comprehend that some of the Latino students in this study greatly benefitted and integrated into the university primarily because of their involvement in the multicultural communities and

organization, but is separation fundamentally a desirable state on campus or may there be the potential for choosing to integrate or separate from the dominantly campus culture without creating a balkanizing climate on campus?

The following quote from Dolores suggests that balkanization exists at this university.

There is this main student life and then there's this one set aside for multicultural life, if you don't feel like you fit into that main, that main campus life, student life. I have chosen like communities that are for other, for students of multicultural background, I guess.

Further, biculturalism and balkanization may not affect Latino students who are comfortable with the dominant Anglo culture. Quintana, Vogel, and Ybarra (1991) stated that Latino students attending universities with a dominant Anglo culture experience less stress when they are familiar and comfortable with the Anglo culture. Raul and Robert were comfortable within the dominant Anglo culture and affiliated with traditional communities and organizations. They had attended predominant, suburban high schools, and their families had the highest annual incomes of the participants studied. Therefore, their experiences and social economic status was closer to those of the dominant student population on campus. However, sadly, when Raul attempted to socialize cross-culturally it seemed to be that his attempts were rejected because he did not have similar experiential collateral as the multicultural affiliated Latinos on campus. Robert, on the other hand, selectively elected to engage cross-culturally when that participation had personal benefits, such as a book stipend for attending a multicultural function. Unfortunately, I cannot assertively state that I perceive significant differences, besides formalized rhetoric, between my undergraduate experiences and those of the study

participants in regards to cross-cultural interactions. However, lack of cross-cultural interactions does not imply that persistence is not warranted regarding promoting biculturalism and minimizing balkanization.

According to Rendón et al. (2000), a bicultural educational model aids in explaining how individuals learn and practice both the mainstream culture and their ethnic cultures at the same time. Torres (2003) introduced the “Bicultural Orientation Model” (BOM). The model stipulates that students with high levels of ethnic identity and acculturation have a bicultural orientation, indicating equal preference for multiple cultures. He stated that “When we understand the process students use to make these choices (ethnic identity and acculturation) we will better understand their expectations and needs in the college environment” (Torres, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, there are means of investigating ethnic identity and acculturation that could assist higher education professionals to further understand the construction of campus cultures that are inclusive and amiable to cross-cultural interaction while preventing balkanization. Nevertheless, the dispute should be limited in regarding the value of multicultural communities and organizations on campus. This study indicates that a segment of the Latino student population persisted because of those multicultural resources.

According to Nunez and Murakami-Ramah (2012), there is evidence that Latino students who participate in ethnic programs achieve higher educational thresholds than those who do not and graduate on par with White students. Further, socio-economic status was reported to be a prime differentiator for inclusion regardless of ethnicity. Conceptualizing the Latino student population on campus as homogeneous and having

common values, experiences, ethnic identification, and perceptions is inappropriate. Even a small sample of Latino students at a single university illustrates the differences amongst Latino students in higher education.

Deborah Santiago, Vice President for Policy and Research at Excellencia in Education, suggest that a majority of Latino students are not completing by design but by chance (Padilla, 2009). She was alluding to Latino students who arrive on campuses ill prepared academically, with additional obstacles related to family obligations and financial limitations. However, the students in this study were academically prepared; had resolved their financial concerns through merit scholarships, grants or other means; and were blessed with supportive families. These are the Latino students in higher education who are, in contrast, completing by design through preparation, adaptation, and commitment to educational goals. These are the Latinos who warrant additional research attention across the full spectrum of higher education because they are succeeding in spite of primarily social challenges on campus. The findings suggest that having strong academic preparation, motivation to succeed, and expectations of a selective institution aided these students to persist regardless of the social community or organizational affiliations. Therefore, it seems that because of their academic preparation the study participants substantially integrated into the academic life of the campus and thus eliminating or minimizing the potential for non-persistence associated with poor academic integration. However, the classroom climate presented challenges for some of the study participants and thus considers attention. Timpson and Doe (2008) suggest that, “At the heart of a positive (classroom) climate is the responsibility that both teachers and

students share for learning generally as well as for the success of any particular class” (p. 37). The applicability for this study is that students will not be engaged in this collaborative shared learning process when they perceive that they are marginalized and misunderstood. It’s important to note that the study participants were academically prepared and were successful students in the past. Thus, it’s reasonable to assume that they were capable of substantive engagement and contribution in the classroom. In fact, these students may have been capable of contributing unique perspectives based on their life experiences.

I believe that the institution of higher education can create welcoming campus climates for Latino students. However, such climates will not be homogeneous in nature because Latino students are not a homogeneous population. There is evidence that suggests that subgroups of Latino students differ in demographic characteristics that affect or are related to academic success (Ballesteros, 1986; Master & Robinson, 1983; Ortiz, 1986). The students in this study are an example of well prepared and academically motivated Latinos. They support the premise that there are well prepared and qualified Latinos who can meet the academic requirements of competitive institutions. Granted, not all institutions have selective admission standards, and research highlights that the majority of Latino undergraduates attend less selective or open access institutions. Therefore, in those instances the variable of academic competency becomes a greater factor regarding persistence than it was in this study. It can be surmised that instituting proactive intervention to assess academic preparation, develop remediation strategies, and supervised assessment and progress activities will be critical to preventing

departure due to poor academic performance. It also gives credence to conducting studies on the Latino population at a variety of institutions and Latino populations.

The social component of this study highlighted most the differences amongst the Latino students. It is important to note that it is at the university level where Latinos with different experiences and backgrounds are intermixed. As the study illustrates, for some Latinos there were glaring differences between the university's physical and social environment and their experiences. Other study participants were attracted by the university's attributes that concerned other study participants however.

This university presented challenges beyond the normal challenges experienced by higher education students, i.e., accelerated academic environment, noticeable gaps in socio-economic status, a small population of students and faculty of color, and physical characteristics of the campus that overwhelmed some of the study participants. Other institutions may have had less of a dramatic effect on some of the study participants because the institutional attributes matched closer their life experiences, socio-economic status, and other characteristics. For other study participants, it was those same institutional attributes that attracted and engaged them.

I noticed the Latino students in this study may have more variances in their socio-economic and background characteristics than amongst the White students on campus. Also, several of the students studied had more synergy with the dominant student population than with the multicultural elements of the Latino population on campus. But, in fact, were described as affluent by the study participants, a characteristic which was said to be the social equalizer on campus. Lastly, I am intrigued by whether the

“mainstream” Latinos on campus could be characteristically defined and whether the definition would be centric to this university? These observations resonated because it seems valuable to ascertain whether students with similar characteristics, regardless of ethnicity, experience the university similarly. This last observation is particularly intriguing considering the ability to apply Padilla’s Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) and related Local Student Success Model (LSSM) to this university using this study data as partial input.

According to Padilla (2009), the EMSS is “based on a set of assumptions about how students experience the campus and on conceptual borrowing from expert system theory” (p.21). It relies on a qualitative research method called a “qualitative survey”. The Local Student Success Model (LSSM) evolved from three specific parameters of the EMSS, “the barriers that the students encounter, the knowledge they use to identify effective solutions and the actions they take to actually overcome the barriers” (Padilla, 2009, p. 28). I believe that the findings of this study can contribute to the development of the LSSM because it identified barriers, solutions and actions that the Latino students utilized to overcome the barriers. However, the barriers differed amongst the study participants and therefore the solutions the study participants applied to persist at the university. Further, the study participants applied solutions available primarily through the resources of the university rather than creating individual strategies of coping. Nevertheless, the LSSM’s taxonomy has several dimensions, (a) personal barriers, (b) financial barriers, (c) coursework barriers, (d) learning barriers, (e) institutional barriers, and (f) student support barriers that extend beyond the depth achieved by this study. In

addition, it is designed to identify actionable initiatives that are institutional centric. In my view, this study may be a call to action, but the combined EMSS and LSSM produce the actionable steps.

The fact that there was diversity in the perceptions of the study participants related to their social integration into the university was not surprising to me. The study participants viewed the university from the perspective of their experiences and background. Therefore, those whose experiences were closest to the dominant culture at the university sensed greater belonging, particularly socially, than those with experiences that were incongruent with the dominant culture on campus and sought affiliation with those with similar experiences and backgrounds. However, I perceive that some of the study participants were less interested in inclusion than achieving cultural validation and acceptance while sustaining a separate social structure on the campus. It seems to me that this separate social structure is classic the definition of balkanization. The salient question is whether balkanization is perceived by the students at the university, its affect on inclusion, and whether it is feasible to construct a welcoming cultural climate on campus for current and future students without it?

The themes that emerged from this study reflected upon the campus climate at this university. The themes, therefore, may be mapped to elements in the definition of campus climate proposed by Hurtado et al., (1999), an institution's history of inclusion or exclusion is a factor in considering campus climate. Therefore, it seems prudent to gauge whether the study participants perceived a history of inclusion or not. I believe that inexplicitly some study participants perceived a history of racism at the university,

although not institutionally condoned. Further, the psychological climate and behavioral dimensions on campus also define the campus climate. The study participant's narrative indicated that for some there were instances of unfavorable psychological climate in the residence halls, classrooms and departments, and to a lesser extent, behaviors that demonstrated cultural insensitivity and possible bias. Even those engaged socially in the dominant culture on campus reported incidents that seemed to have negative psychological and behavioral implications and that they deemed unpleasant. Thus, campus climate at this university for the study participants had elements of commonality, but also the study participants perceived differences reflected predominantly in their social affiliations. Nevertheless, all the study participants persisted because they did find affiliations within the campus climate of the university and sustained supportive relationships off campus sufficiently to gain a sense of belonging at the university. Maslow (1954) proposed a hierarchical model of needs based on deficiency and growth needs. The deficiencies must be met before an individual is able to progress to the growth levels. Maslow's model is important in the context of this study because the study participants had their physical and safety needs met and thus were capable of acting upon the higher level needs. One of those needs was described as belongingness and love. That level was characterized by affiliations and acceptance. For some of the study participants, that level of need was fulfilled within the dominant culture on campus. However, other study participants experienced difficulty in establishing belongingness and obtaining acceptance until they affiliated with the multicultural communities and organizations or identified others on campus with whom their values, experiences, interest, etc. were

congruent. Dolores, Jessica, and Adelia with the multicultural entities on campus and Tiffany with “like minded” students and her academic department.

In conclusion, this study was personal and its genesis more than four decades old. I was one of the study participants four decades ago when, from a distance, I perceived this particular university as a formidable, unattainable citadel catering to the privileged. My parents urged me to pursue a higher education and this university was remarkably tempting because of its proximity and prestige, but I did not belong. I remained in awe of the university during visits to the neighborhood while attending college. I was a college student, but those at the university were “different” from me.

Years later, I earned a graduate degree from that prestigious university and experienced some of the campus dynamics that the study participants eloquently described. Therefore, in part, I undertook this study to selfishly satisfy my intellectual and personal curiosity. However, there was also a strong interest in augmenting the body of research on successful Latinos in higher education.

I am pleased that I undertook this laborious, circuitous, and self-reflective journey that required decades to complete because it now has tremendous meaning and value to me. I had a lifetime of experiences that I joyously reflected upon during this study.

Recommendation for Further Research

This study yielded insights into the academic and social experiences of six Latino undergraduate students at a private, predominantly White university. The findings afforded a view into the phenomenon under study. However, questions and issues remain

that warrant further scholarly consideration. There must be more exploration of the diversity amongst Latino students in higher education. Latinos are enrolling in greater numbers and reflecting increasing diversity at a variety of higher education institutions. Regardless of the institutional type, these students deserve an opportunity to belong and succeed. Therefore, the researcher makes the following recommendations.

1. This institution has instituted programs to improve inclusion. Some inclusion initiatives include multicultural organizations that parallel existing student organizations. Research on whether parallel multicultural organizations and social communities may balkanize an institution requiring refinement of the inclusion initiatives to sustain a universally welcoming campus climate.
2. The selective nature of this institution may have mitigated a factor in Latino student departure, inadequate academic preparation. Further research on whether selective admission requirements reduce departure of Latino students for academic reasons is warranted.
3. Some of the students in this study elected to integrate into the dominant culture on campus although multicultural options for engagement were available. Research to identify the characteristics of Latinos who chose to engage in the dominant culture on campus may highlight the diversity in the Latino student population on campus and produce a contrasting schema from those students who benefit from multicultural affiliations on campus.
4. Ability to finance their education was discussed by the study participants. However, finances did not seem to be issue for the study participants in regards to

their persistence at the university. Further research should explore how financial support for low incomes Latino students at private institutions differs from those attending public institutions and how it affects departure.

5. The research literature indicates that those students who sense that they belong are most likely to persist. The findings of this study highlighted that there were differences in how the study participants achieved a sense of belonging academically and socially on campus. Therefore, extending this research to other types of institutions may uncover similar patterns of integration or highlight differences unique to the type of institutions and/or the demographics of the Latino students.
6. Research literature on Latino students in higher education seems to focus on the Latino students without soliciting narratives from higher education professionals that routinely engage with the Latino students on campus. Therefore, future research should consider including the narrative of professionals engaged with the Latino students to enrich and expand upon the contributions of the Latino students. I believe that the narrative of the institutional informants in this study enriched the findings and provided the institutional informants the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge related to Latino students in higher education.
7. Balkanization maintains separation between groups of individuals and is not restricted to ethnicity. Balkanization may be based on socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability or other characteristics. Regardless

balkanization seems to be the antithesis of inclusion. This university has invested in developing an inclusive culture on campus. For this study, the primary form of balkanization seemed to be ethnicity, although socio-economic status was recognized as an additional source of separation on campus. Therefore, it may be worthwhile continuing to investigate the attributes that balkanize students on campus and its effects on campus climate.

8. According to Padilla (2009), “general models of student success have been lacking, and researchers need to redouble efforts to generate new ones and improve those that already exist” (p. xviii). I encourage accepting this call to action by focusing on success models that are Latino student centric. The diversity among the Latino student population across a variety of institutions in higher education calls into question the applicability of traditional departure models or emerging success models.

These recommendations when examined within the context of the finding of this study highlight the need for further research regarding student sense of belonging, models of success and departure, campus climate, and inclusion as they relate to Latino students across different types of institution. The current diversity amongst Latino students in higher education is likely to be more pronounced as the population of Latinos increases across the spectrum of higher education institutions. Latinos cannot be considered a homogeneous population characterized by poverty, poor academic preparation, low motivation, and unfamiliar with the experiences of the dominant White culture. The students in this study highlight the diversity of the Latino student population and the need

for them to find affiliations on campus that provides them with a sense of belonging and acceptance. However, the study participants' choices regarding their affiliations and perceptions differed depending on several socio-economic status, experiential, and background factors. To varying degrees, they were aided by family and other sources that supported their efforts. For some, those challenges led to isolation and questioning whether the institution was suitable for them. Others were enthused by aspects of the institution that challenged others. These students shared common ground in their academic preparedness and strong educational goals that they perceived would be best met by persisting at this institution.

However, the students in this study persevered at this prestigious, selective institution by identifying resources, communities, and organizations that affiliated them with the institution. They may be representative of the best prepared and best motivated of the Latino student population. Therefore, it warrants further contemplation of their narrative in order to develop an understanding of successful Latino students in selective institutions and higher education in general. I was blessed to have them share their experiences with me and in awe of their intellect and perseverance.

Estos estudiantes me dieron fe para el futuro de los Latinos.

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE

Informants

Key Questions

1. Describe the social and academic life for Latina/o undergraduate students on campus.
2. From your experience, why have Latino undergraduate students left the university?
3. Describe the characteristics that successful Latino undergraduate students at the university exhibit.
4. Describe the social and academic factors that encourage Latino undergraduate students to remain at the university.

Follow up Questions

1. Describe the classroom experience of Latina/o undergraduate students.
2. What actions can higher education professionals at the university undertake to improve the success or graduation rate of Latino students?
3. What factors lead to a lower graduation rate of Latino undergraduate males than females?
4. How is the university addressing the social and academic factors that have caused Latino undergraduate students to leave the university?

Students

Key Questions

1. Describe your social and academic life on campus.
2. Describe the reasons why you elected to attend this university.
 - a. Do those reasons remain valid, why or why not?
3. How would you describe the social and academic life on campus to a prospective Latina/o undergraduate student?
4. What influenced Latina/o students that you knew to leave before graduating?
5. What differences and commonalities do you perceive between Latina/o and the White undergraduate students at this university?
6. Describe your formal and informal interactions with faculty?

7. Describe the welcoming and unwelcoming physical aspects of the campus.
8. Describe the extracurricular activities and/or organizations you engage in at the university.
 - a. Why did you select them?
 - b. How have they influenced you to remain at the university?

Follow on Questions

1. What physical characteristics of the campus indicate to you that Latinos are welcomed?
2. Describe your peers?
3. Describe the typical classroom experience for Latina/o undergraduate students?
4. Have you heard degrading or negative remarks regarding Latinos on campus?
 - a. How has he/she made those remarks?
 - b. Do you believe it reflects the general attitude at this university regarding Latinos?
5. Have you witnessed physical signs of degrading or negative attitudes toward Latinos on campus?
6. Describe how your classroom experiences reflected the Latino historical, cultural and/or social issues.
7. Describe a situation or experience that you witnessed on campus that made you uncomfortable as a Latina/o.
8. Describe how faculty uses examples that are relevant to the Latino ethnic group.
9. Describe how the books, tests, and other instructional materials reflect the Latino ethnic group.
10. Describe a situation or experience you witnessed on campus that demonstrated an effort at developing an understanding people of different ethnic backgrounds.
11. How do female and male Latinos perceive the social and academic life on campus similarly and differently?

APPENDIX B – INVITATION TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

You are one of several Latino undergraduate students randomly selected to receive this invitation.

You are invited to participate in a dissertation study entitled, “The Perception of Belonging; Latino Undergraduate Students Participation in the Social and Academic Life on Campus at a Predominantly White Private University.”

I, Jose J. Valdes Jr., a Ph.D. Candidate in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, will be conducting this study under the guidance of Dr. Michael A. De Miranda, Professor, School of Education at Colorado State University. Dr. De Miranda is the Principal Investigator and I am the Co-Investigator. You may contact me at (970) 491-4397 or at Jose.Valdes@ColoState.Edu. Dr. De Miranda’s contact information is (970) 491-5805 or at Michael.Anthony.De_Miranda@ColoState.Edu.

The purposes for this study are to provide higher education professionals insights that may assist them in creating a welcoming and supportive campus climate for Latino undergraduate students attending a private, predominantly White university. The desired outcome is to increase the success of Latino undergraduate students attending similar institutions, as reflected by an increase persistence and graduation rate. Further, to add to the knowledge base related to Latino students in higher education.

If you agree to be in this study you will be requested to complete the following tasks:

- (1) Complete a confidential demographic data sheet that will provide background information.
- (2) Select a pseudonym for use in this study to protect your identity.
- (3) Participate with the Co-Investigator in two sixty minute individual interview sessions at mutually acceptable dates and times on campus.
- (4) Review the transcripts of your interviews.

The study questions will be open ended and designed to solicit your experiences regarding your social and academic life on this campus. You do not have to respond to any questions that you do not wish to during the interviews. The study is expected to extend from June through November 2009.

The record of this study will be kept confidential and your identity protected by the use of a self-selected pseudonym. Research records including recordings will be secured and only the Principle and Co-Investigators, the dissertation committee, and on rare occasions for auditing purposes the Colorado State University Institutional Research Board will have access to the records. Recordings will be erased at the end of two years. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When the investigator(s) write about the study to share it with other researchers, the investigator(s) will write about the combined information that has been gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. The investigator(s) may publish the results of this study. However, your name and other identifying information will be kept private.

Your decision whether or not to participate is completely voluntary and will not affect your current or future status at the university. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript(s) of your interviews and exclude any portion.

You may ask questions now or you may contact the Investigators later.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would prefer to speak with someone other than the investigators, contact Janell Barker, Colorado State University Human Research Administrator at (970) 491-1655.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at jose.valdes@colostate.edu or call me at: (970)-491-4397 by August 28, 2009.

Thank you for your interest in this study

Sincerely,

Jose J Valdes Jr. & Dr. Michael A. De Miranda

APPENDIX C – INSTITUTIONAL INFORMANT/PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: “The Perception of Belonging; Latino Undergraduate Students Participation in the Social and Academic Life on Campus at a Predominantly White Private University.”

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Michael De Miranda
970 -491-5805
Michael.Anthony.De_Miranda@ColoState.Edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jose J. Valdes, Jr.
970 -491-4397
Jose.Valdes@Colostate.Edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to be a participant in a dissertation study entitled, “The Perception of Belonging; Latino Undergraduate Students Participation in the Social and Academic Life on Campus at a Predominantly White Private University” because you have identified as a student that meets the ethnic, age, class standing, and enrollment criteria for this study.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

Ph.D. Candidate Jose Valdes will be conducting this study under the supervision of his dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Michael A. DeMiranda, Professor, Department of Education, Colorado State University.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purposes for this study are to provide insights to higher education professionals that may assist them in creating a welcoming and supportive campus climate for Latino undergraduate students attending similar institutions. The desired outcome is to increase the success of Latino undergraduate students, as reflected by an increase in the retention

and graduation rate. In addition, to add to the knowledge base related to Latino students in higher education.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will take place at the university at a mutually agreed upon date and time. The study is expected to extend from June through November 2009.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

The student participants will be expected to;

- (1) Complete a confidential demographic data sheet that will provide background information.
- (2) Select a pseudonym for use in this study to protect your identity.
- (3) Participate in two interviews with the co-investigator s that will each last approximately sixty minutes at a mutually acceptable dates and times on the university campus.
- (4) Review the transcripts of your interviews.

Page ___ of ___ Participant's initials _____ Date _____

The record of this study will be kept confidential and your identity protected by the use of a self-selected pseudonym. Research records including recordings will be secured and only the Principle and Co-Investigators, dissertation committee, and on rare occasions for auditing purposes the Colorado State University Institutional Research Board will have access to the records. Recordings will be erased at the end of two years. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When the investigator(s) write about the study to share it with other researchers, the investigator(s) will write about the combined information that has been gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. The investigator(s) may publish the results of this study. However, your name and other identifying information will be kept private.

Your decision whether or not to participate is completely voluntary and will not affect your current or future status at the university. You are free to withdraw at any time. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript(s) of your interviews and exclude any portion.

The faculty and staff participants will be asked to;

- (1) Participate in two interview sessions with the co-investigator that each will last approximately sixty minutes.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

- (1) Participant does not meet the ethnic, age, class standing and/or enrollment criteria for the study.
- (2) Participants cannot devote the time required for the interviews.
- (3) There will be no compensation.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

No physical or psychological risks are anticipated. However, 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?

There is no compensation for individual participants in this study. It is hoped that a benefit will be derived by future Latino students enrolled at the university by having the insights from this study improve the campus climate for them. The desired outcome is to increase the graduation rate of Latinos at the university.

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. Further, your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future status at the university.

Page ___ of ___ Participant's initials _____ Date _____

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

Research records including recordings will be secured and only the Principle and Co-Investigators, the dissertation committee, and on rare occasions for auditing purposes the Colorado State University Institutional Research Board will have access to the records. Recordings will be erased at the end of two years. The record of this study will be kept confidential and your identity protected by the use of a self-selected pseudonym.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

A participant may voluntarily leave the study at any time.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

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 co-investigator, Jose Valdes at 970-491-4397 or jose.valdes@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

“This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on _____.”

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Your signature acknowledges that you are at least eighteen years old and 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

Page ___ of ___ Participant's initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D – PARTICIPANT’S DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

1. Pseudonym (participant selected) _____

2. Ethnic Identification (check one)

- Hispanic
- Latina/o
- Chicana/o
- Mexican/American
- Central or South American
- Anglo
- Black
- Other (explain) _____

3. Gender

- Male
- Female

4. Age

- 18 – 20 years old
- 21 – 22 years old
- 22 – 24 years old

5. Dominant Language Spoken at Home

- Spanish
- English
- Other: Specify _____

6. High School Characteristics

- Private
- Public
- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural
- Less than 100 students
- 100 - 499
- 500 – 999
- 1000 – 1500

_____ Greater than 1500

7. High School Dominant Ethnic Composition

- _____ White
- _____ Latino
- _____ Black
- _____ Asian
- _____ Ethnically Mixed

8. Class Status

- _____ Junior
- _____ Senior

9. Residency Status

- _____ In State
- _____ Out of State

10. Enrollment Status

- _____ Full Time
- _____ Part Time

11. Graduate

- _____ Less than 4 years
- _____ 4 years
- _____ 5 years
- _____ More than 5 years

12. Terminal Degree

- _____ Bachelors
- _____ Masters
- _____ Doctorate
- _____ Professional Degree

13. Degree Major _____

14. Enrollment Status

- _____ Part-Time
- _____ Full-Time

15. Family Annual Income

- _____ Less than \$20,000
- _____ \$20,001 – \$49,999
- _____ \$50,000 - \$74,999

- \$75,000 – \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$149,999
- > \$150,000

16. Parental Educational Level (Select All That Apply)

Father or Guardian

- No High School Diploma
- High School
- Some College
- 2-year degree or certificate
- 4 – year degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate degree
- Professional degree

Mother or Guardian

- No High School Diploma
- High School
- Some College
- 2-year degree or certificate
- 4 – year degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate degree
- Professional degree