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The Transition from High School to College in Texas: Hispanic Students on the U.S.-Mexico Border Redefining College Readiness

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THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE IN TEXAS:
HISPANIC STUDENTS ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER
REDEFINING COLLEGE READINESS

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Dedication

Amanda, Gael y Andrea, ustedes son mi inspiración y mi razón de ser. Sin ustedes no existiría la necesidad de esforzarme por ser un mejor esposo, padre y amigo. Espero algún día poder llegar a inspirarlos de una manera similar a la que hoy ustedes me inspiran a mí. Gracias por entender y soportar mis desplantes y enojos. Siempre seguirán siendo mis más preciados tesoros, los amo.

A mis padres, gracias por los cuidados, ayuda y oportunidades que me han dado a través de los años. Es gracias a ustedes, a su amor y ejemplo que hoy puedo compartir este gran logro con mis seres queridos.

Sobre todo, gracias a Dios por darme la oportunidad de realizar mis sueños y compartir estos "instantes de maravilla" con mis seres queridos.

THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE IN TEXAS:

HISPANIC STUDENTS ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

REDEFINING COLLEGE READINESS

by

HECTOR HERNANDEZ JR., BS

THESIS

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Abstract

  This study addresses the barriers and challenges that could potentially impede successful high school-to-college transitions for Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-México border from the perspective of Hispanic youth. U.S. demographical data indicates that the Hispanic population continues to grow at a rapid pace and accounts for the majority of the U.S. population growth in the last decade (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Hispanics have been identified not only as the fastest growing ethnic group, but also as highly underrepresented in institutions of higher learning. While numerous perspectives and descriptions of this phenomenon have been advanced by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from diverse arenas, this study builds on two of the primary research approaches that have shaped the discussion and research on college readiness for Hispanic youth over the last two decades. Qualitative research methods were utilized to highlight the voice of a group of Hispanic "rising high school seniors" in a U.S.-México border community. Through this study, students describe the barriers they have experienced as high school students and the perceived challenges they might experience as they prepare to transition to college, providing their interpretation of these barriers and challenges.

  The study yielded a deeper understanding of this timely and important topic from the insiders' perspectives. Informants provided new insights regarding their understanding of socioeconomic status (SES), their support systems, readiness to pursue their educational dreams and the potential impact that they could have on their attempt to transition from high school to college. Finally, the role that cultural capital plays on college readiness, particularly Yosso's (2005) conceptual model, is further explored. Data collected in this study helps to generate new understandings about the lived realities of these students, yet further research is needed on this timely topic based on the lived experiences of Hispanic students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The growing number of high school students who are underprepared to enter college successfully has been identified as a problem of significant proportions in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) as well as in the State of Texas (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010). Research and programmatic support for college readiness initiatives have grown in number in Texas and throughout the nation, as increasing attention has been focused on this critical issue (Conley, 2010). While scholars, practitioners, and policymakers from diverse arenas have advanced numerous perspectives and descriptions of this phenomenon, this study builds on two of the primary frameworks that have shaped the discussion and research on college readiness for Hispanic youth over the last two decades. Policymakers and scholars (e.g., Conley, 2010; Perna, 2006; THECB, 2010) present different perspectives about college readiness, and they differ in terms of the parameters used to frame the context in which the concept is used; in this study, discussion of this timely and critical issue takes into account the rapidly changing demographics of today's K-16 students.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers predict a 166% growth in the school-aged Hispanic population in the U.S. by the year 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). The Hispanic community, already the nation's largest minority group, will triple in size and will account for most of the nation's population growth from 2005 through 2050. Hispanics will make up 29% of the U.S. population in 2050, compared with 14% in 2005. Furthermore, Hispanic school-aged youth are quickly becoming a dominant subgroup throughout the nation, yet high levels of educational achievement in secondary/post-

secondary school continues to elude this large and growing group of students in our nation's schools (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Hispanic students in Texas, for example, the state with the second highest Hispanic population in the U.S., have an alarmingly low educational K-12 attainment rate (Johnson, 2008).

Texas has the opportunity to create models of success that can be studied and replicated throughout the nation. This is of particular importance on the U.S.-México border, where the majority of the population is not only of Hispanic descent but also characterized by low socioeconomic status and recent immigrant status. In addition, numerous scholars (e.g., Beattie, 2002; Dolan 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Treviño & Mayes, 2006) link the economic strength of a community to the education level of its members. Recent findings show that the median wealth of white households is 18 times that of Hispanic households (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). The rapid growth of the Hispanic population, their low level of education attainment and the fact that Hispanics are now the minority-majority in Texas make the education of Hispanic youth critical in securing the future of our region and the nation (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Need for the Study

Education data indicate that an uncertain future awaits Hispanics, and the multifaceted challenges that this population confronts in the U.S. public education system (K-20) have not been fully addressed. For example, research and practice point to several critical issues, including a low K-12 attainment rate (i.e., only 40% of Hispanic students graduate from high school), and longitudinal studies indicate that those who graduate high school do so with plenty of remedial needs (Terry, 2007; U.S. Census, 2007). These findings are indicative of the

immediate need for focused efforts to address these timely problems facing Hispanics and the nation.

Over the last ten years, a number of scholars have conducted studies seeking causes and proposing solutions for this crisis of low levels of educational attainment and access (e.g., Beattie, 2002; Dolan 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Terry, 2007; Treviño & Mayes, 2006). One of these studies, for example, indicated that 96% of Hispanic students acknowledged the importance of post-secondary education, yet not all of them had a realistic view of what it would take for them to graduate from high school and enter college (Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

Other reasons underlying the lack of academic achievement and access of minorities have been explained by research conducted by Lee and Burkam (2003) who found that, "Interviews with dropouts as they left school revealed that half said they were quitting explicitly for social reasons: because they didn't get along with teachers or other students" (Lee & Burkam, p.363).

Moreover, some of the other challenges that are faced by these students, including systemic inequities (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Lee, 2003; Nieto, 1994, 2007) and access (Dolan, 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Perna, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005) have been under examination during recent decades. Conclusions drawn by these scholars seem to indicate that issues present in the daily lives of the students are predominant factors leading to their failure to succeed in high school and continue their education further. The authors call upon practitioners and policymakers to attend to the complexities of the students' lived experience in the U.S. school system in order to bring about changes that will help the students move forward and reach their full potential.

Although the research findings are clear, little has changed, and the truth of the matter is that things are not getting any better. This, according to Dolan (2008), who tells us in his study

that not only are the majority of Hispanics first generation college students, but many of them will face a culture shock leading to feelings of loneliness and alienation. In addition, the opportunities available to guide first generation minority students who plan to attend college is not one of the level playing fields in our society (Dolan, 2008).

This is a multifaceted problem in desperate need of a well thought out, comprehensive solution, since research indicates that, unless appropriate interventions take place throughout the entire educational continuum, beginning at an early stage, the numbers of Hispanic dropouts will increase (Fry, 2003). As the data demonstrates, Hispanics in the U.S. are now a minority-majority and there is an urgent need to address the educational challenges faced by this population, projected to be 28 million of our school-age population by the year 2050 (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Despite the results reported by Perna (2000), which indicated that, "Over the past decade, the number of African American and Hispanic undergraduates enrolled in colleges and universities nationwide has increased by 32% and 98%, respectively, whereas the number of White undergraduates has declined by 1%" (Perna, 2000, p. 117), we still continue to see minorities underrepresented on college campuses. Additional data indicates that the two minority-majorities (Hispanics and African American) represent only about 18% of the general college population (Perna, 2000). Additionally, further research is needed from a critical, interpretive perspective because very few, if any, of the studies have been conducted from neither the insider's perspective nor do they give voice to the informants.

Significance of the Study

This study and its findings have practical implications for educational practitioners and scholars in Texas, the Southwest and beyond. This research project seeks to generate new

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knowledge that will contribute to filling the gap that currently exists in the literature. By highlighting the voice of the informants, the researcher was able to collect firsthand accounts of a group of individuals being impacted by the problem. At the same time, the study provided a forum for the informants where they could discuss freely and openly, sharing their lived experiences and opinions. The data collected and the results yielded offer great potential for scholars in the field, inviting further research on the topic; in like manner, policy makers may develop a deeper understanding of the issue, directing more resources to ensure the timely and effective transition of Hispanics students from high school to college.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of primary barriers experienced in high school and the challenges that may impede successful high school to college transitions for Hispanic students on the U.S.-México, border from the perspective of Hispanic youth.

The research questions this study has examined are: How do Hispanic students on the U.S.-México border describe the barriers they have experienced in high school and the challenges they might experience as they transition from high school to college? How do they interpret the meanings of these barriers and challenges?

Limitations

The study's limitations included anticipated and unanticipated issues related to time, access, and resources:

Time. The window of time available for interviewing the informants was limited by two primary factors relating to academic timelines impacting both the informants and the researcher. First, the study's primary informants were concurrently enrolled in high school as fulltime students, with a number of responsibilities and school activities that they needed to comply with for graduation. Additionally, the researcher's time was limited by schedules and academic calendars, with less than one year available to identify potential participants, finalize schedules and formalize agreements required to conduct ethical research, collect data, and complete all initial analysis prior to the beginning of the informants' college freshman year.

Access. In recent years, a number of regulatory controls have been put into place in area high schools, particularly during semesters when high stakes testing and related activities are in place. Thus, access was limited to one high school and students' availability was limited.

Resources. Finally, resources were limited, due to financial considerations that impact the life of every student in the border community where this study was conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were handled professionally and in compliance with all official guidelines. The UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee reviewed the researcher's design and plan of study, and insured strict adherence to guidelines (see Appendix A). In an effort to avoid any conflict of interest (implied or otherwise), the formal study began officially after I had completed my contract as coordinator of the summer bridge program. I decided to collect data from the second cohort of the program, with which I collaborated in the capacity of a research

associate. Access to the data was limited to the principal investigator (PI) and the members of the

thesis committee. Consent forms were made available in both English and Spanish to ensure full

disclosure in seeking parental consent for the informants to participate in the study (see appendix

A). Furthermore, each one of the informants filled out an assent form in order to participate in

the study (see appendix A) and all of them participated in the study of their free will and without

external coercion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A large and growing number of studies (e.g., Conley, 2010; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007; Kuh et al., 2005; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Perna, 2006) have examined issues related to the challenges preventing Hispanic students' transition into college. Mainstream scholars' perspectives (e.g., Beattie, 2002; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Conley, 2010; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Treviño & Mayes, 2006) on the causes and outcomes of this dilemma converge around several common themes: socioeconomic issues, parental involvement and student engagement. Many of the studies conducted on this topic support the views of mainstream scholars, centering primarily on deficits, (i.e., the things that the students can do or should do in order to improve their situation), placing primary responsibility on the individual student, and blaming the victim (Valencia, 2010). A number of critical scholars, however, have introduced alternative approaches to this research topic, identifying a variety of structural issues that present new questions and different areas of inquiry. Some of these include studies on educational inequality (e.g., Nieto, 1994, 2007; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tienda, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999); culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2007); and bilingual/multilingual education (e.g., Huerta-Macias, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999).

This chapter will provide an overview of these distinct yet connected bodies of literature, pointing to the topics that have challenged educational practitioners and policymakers in the attempt to more fully understand the nature of the problem and find solutions. While clearly the findings of the above-mentioned distinguished scholars contribute greatly to this field of research, this thesis study uses careful qualitative methods over a period of two years to examine

the issue from yet another angle, examining the ways in which a group of Hispanic high school students on the U.S.-México border describe the barriers they have experienced in high school, the challenges they might experience in the transition from high school to college, and how they interpret the meanings of these barriers and challenges. Further research is needed to more fully understand the perceived and actual challenges faced by Hispanic first- and second-generation immigrant students from diverse backgrounds and in diverse settings as they prepare for the transition from U.S. public schools to higher education. This study, highlighting the voice of the central actor, the Hispanic student herself/himself in preparation for the transition from high school to college, presents a new set of lenses for viewing and interpreting the lived realities of these individuals.

College Readiness

Historical overview.

Research on this topic dates back at least to the late 1980s, with studies (e.g., Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper 1999; Paulsen, 1990) which have provided a foundation for a plethora of later research on the topics of college access and choice. While most research conducted at that early point in time relied on quantitative methodologies, examining large-scale populations and generalizing findings to all students, there is a need today for critical, interpretive studies that provide in-depth understanding of particular groups, taking into account the roles of culture, context, and history.

The original term coined by early scholars was "college access and choice" (Perna, 2006). In the early 1990s, the term referred to the "three-phase college choice" model, a linear process that all potential students went through: predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler &

Gallagher, 1987). Although the original model holds several similarities to the current trend (e.g., SES factors, social and cultural capital) regarding the barriers affecting college readiness, differences are found in the theoretical approach to current research on the topic. In today's college readiness research literature, scholars and practitioners tend to be cognizant of increasing diversity in the student population, and the current trend is more qualitative. More importantly, it is not until recently that minorities have been included in analysis of the problem and the search for solutions (Perna, 2006).

The following section provides a cursory overview of the bodies of literature that have given shape to the conceptual framework for this study: readiness for college; socioeconomics of education; parent and family involvement; student engagement; and the role of culture. The review of the literature is organized in dialogical form, with the "mainstream voice" followed in each section by the "alternative voice" as a response. "Mainstream" here is a category used to describe that perspective in education scholarship which minimizes or excludes the roles of culture, context, history, and language from analysis procedures, relying on statistical methods to generalize findings to a population; "alternative" is the descriptive used here to define scholars who acknowledge that a "one-size-fits-all" approach has had deleterious effects on underserved students in our schools (Lincoln & Cannella, 2004). Scholars from each one of these paradigms are presented in the sections that follow.

Defining the term.

Mainstream voice. One of the frequently-cited definitions relating to the term "college readiness" comes from the body of work by Conley (2010), broadening the discussion to include both college and career readiness. From this perspective, focus is on the transition to college as

well as on the degree to which the beginning college student is (or is not) ready for the rigors of college studies. According to Conley (2010), the term "College and Career Readiness" is used to identify the segment of the high school student population that has gained the level of preparation needed in order to enroll in and succeed at a post-secondary institution by taking credit-bearing courses. In the application of Conley's definition, the term "success" refers to attaining the required academic scores required for completing the entry-level coursework needed to move into the next level course in any given subject while completely avoiding the need for remediation (Conley, 2010).

Policymakers at the state level (in Texas) have provided an interpretation of the term "college readiness" which is recognized and applied in educational policy across the state of Texas. Thus, for the state of Texas this key concept is a sub-component of the one provided by Conley (see table 1). The views are similar, yet not identical; while Conley uses academic scores as the standard to measure success, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) does not prescribe the criteria used for assessing college readiness, focusing only on the knowledge that the high school student is expected to have acquired before completing high school as a measuring tool. Thus, the THECB applies the definition prior to the transition, labeling some high school students as "college ready" versus "non-college ready" before they complete their senior year; in contrast, Conley's definition is applied after the student has transitioned to college. The coordinating board defines "college readiness" according to the curriculum standards created to ensure Texas students are ready to attend college. It is expected that the curriculum integrating the "college and career readiness standards" (CCRS) be infused across all public high schools in the state of Texas. In the THECB view, college readiness is defined as "what a student must know and be able to do to succeed in entry-level courses at

postsecondary institutions" (THECB, 2000, p. iii). These standards are prescriptive and determine the college readiness of the student, since according to the THECB, the higher the number of CCRS that a student masters, the more likely she/he will be ready to enter college (THECB, 2000).

New voice. In the recent decade, a number of scholars have published studies associated with alternative views of college readiness (e.g., Nieto, 1994, 2007; Perna, 2000, 2006; Perna & Thomas, 2006, 2008; Tappan, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tienda, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). This body of work tends to focus on the need for a systemic change as well as a paradigm shift that will enable policymakers to think outside of current structural arrangements to put an end to the disparity in the services offered and ensure that students receive adequate support. This alternative view calls for an examination of the student in a holistic manner, attending to the relevance of her/his lived experiences and aspirations in order to determine the level of readiness to enter college. These scholars seek a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, taking into account the roles of culture, history and language, and rejecting the notion that one can simply evaluate academic grades or test scores to determine students' ability to enter college and predict their success rate.

Perna and Thomas (2006) contributed one of the pivotal definitions of the term college readiness under this alternate view, describing appropriate measures of college readiness as the "educational aspirations or expectations and academic preparation for college" (Perna & Thomas, 2006 p.4). This definition moves college readiness beyond the mainstream "one-size-fits-all" view, and takes what Conley and the THECB have to say about college readiness, turning the concept on its head. In this view, college readiness begins with valuing the educational aspirations of the student, understanding the academic preparation she/he received,

and moving beyond academic scores as the sole predictor of readiness (Perna & Thomas, 2006, 2008). That is to say, that the students themselves have as much, if not more, input on their level of readiness as the system they are preparing to enter. Furthermore, under this definition, the system must ensure the availability of as many different resources as there are students, making them accessible to all while still allowing for autonomy in the determination of their future instead of attempting to prescribe "the same pill for all ailments."

Table 1
Defining College and Career Readiness

	College & Career Readiness		Alternative Voices
	Conley (2010)	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) (2010)	Perna & Thomas (2006)
Definition	Successful completion of college level coursework	Knowledge required to succeed in postsecondary entry level courses	Educational aspirations or expectations and academic preparation for college
Population	College students	High school students	Both
Measurement	Academic achievement	Number of CCRS mastered	Efficacy

The socioeconomics of education.

Mainstream voice. Although socioeconomic reasons do not account for all of the students that drop out or "stop out" (i.e., do not continue) from college, Beattie (2002) explains that students continue to plan for college according to their socioeconomic status (SES). Her findings concluded that, "individuals from low-SES backgrounds are disadvantaged indirectly in their educational attainment through cumulative processes (e.g., early marriage and the lack of resources) that suppress academic ambitions" (Beattie, 2002, p. 22). These life circumstances and related "impediments" have been part of the landscape of higher education for years, but surprisingly, issues that might be considered a part of the social fabric are cause for alarm. This assertion is supported by the results presented by Treviño and Mayes (2006), scholars who posit

that despite the accelerated rate of growth of the Hispanic population, it continues to be the most underedcated ethnic group in the United States. Results from their study indicated that in 2000 only 53.1% of the Hispanic population in the U.S. had completed their secondary education and obtained some college credit (Treviño & Mayes, 2006). Similar results were yielded in a study conducted earlier by Pascarella et al. (2004), who after taking a close look at the SES issues across ethnic groups, found that the transition from high school to college for immigrant students is also linked to transitions in their social and academic levels. This study further concluded that:

> Compared to their peers, first-generation students completed fewer first-year credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studied fewer hours and worked more hours per week, were less likely to participate in an honors program, were less likely to perceive that faculty were concerned about students and teaching, and made smaller first-year gains on a standardized measure of reading comprehension (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 251).

A separate way, in which SES affects not only the transition, but also the retention of college students, is by delaying the entrance to college after graduation. This is according to Bozick and DeLuca (2005), who identified that a high percentage of low-income first generation college students tend to delay their entrance into college by up to seven months.

   New voice. Tienda (2009) provides new insights and relevant information regarding the social and economic consequences of low academic achievement rates of the Hispanic student population. She indicates that due to the fact that the labor market is increasingly influenced by the advanced education of future employees, and that Hispanics today form the largest minority represented in U.S. public schools, our nation can not continue to ignore the fact that the low academic achievement of this segment of the population can be detrimental for our economy

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(Tienda, 2009). She goes on to say that "rate of growth, age structure and generational composition" (Tienda, 2009, p. 12) are the main demographic features of the Hispanic population to keep in mind, as these are the catalysts that will drive the need for education and health services. For example, the enrollment numbers of colleges and universities indicate an increase of Hispanic student participation in higher education (98% enrollment growth and 90% in degree completion) since 1990 (Perna, 2000). Yet the two states with the highest density of Hispanic population, California and Texas, have underinvested in higher education. This according to Tienda (2009), who reported that the lack of infrastructure made available to fill the educational needs of the Hispanic student population in these two states has created formidable barriers. These findings challenge the assertions of educational economists who build on assumptions of a level playing field; alternative scholars point to the inequities in political power and access to resources that disadvantage many Hispanic students, particularly those who are first- and second-generation college goers (Ferri & O'Connor, 2005; Kless, 2010).

Parental involvement.

Mainstream voice. Another major criticism of the Hispanic culture emerges from mainstream scholars who decry an alleged lack of parental involvement in the preparation, goal setting and pursuit of higher educational accomplishments of their children (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). The claim is framed around the assumption that due to the low educational attainment of the parents, typically below high school level, few Hispanic adult family members have the ability to properly prepare their children during this critical time of their lives. One particular study on this topic (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006), reported that low rates of participation in literacy activities were recorded in homes of families where the primary

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language of the parents is Spanish. This particularly held true of Hispanic families with low socioeconomic status. The problem was compounded for families where both of the parents used Spanish as their primary language of communication in the home. In these families, the study reported that as a whole, the parents were "less likely to read to their children, tell a story, or visit a library" (Schneider et al., 2006, p. 182), further concluding that the Hispanic parents' propensity to primarily speak Spanish will have a detrimental impact on levels of parental involvement in the education of their children (Schneider et al., 2006; Zulmara & Necochea, 2003).

New voice. The above-mentioned mainstream view traditionally blames the parents for the shortfall of the students, alleging parental inadequacies, cultural deficiencies and lack of engagement in the education of their daughters and sons as primary causes of the children's low academic achievement. These claims related to the involvement (or lack thereof) of Hispanic parents in the academic achievement of their children have been challenged and critiqued by alternative scholars. For example, Moreno and Valencia (2002) contest this assertion, concluding that there is a major flaw in the studies that report Hispanic parental disengagement in education. They indicate that one of the major flaws is directly correlated to the fact that very few, if any, of the studies involve in depth research with families from Mexican descent (Moreno & Valencia, 2002). The relevance of these findings is that census data clearly show that Mexican descent is the most self identified ethnic group amongst Hispanics (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In addition, Valencia and Black (2002) further indicate that not only is this parental involvement myth surrounding Hispanics inaccurate, it can easily be debunked. They contend that numerous studies (e.g., Achor & Morales, 1990; Delgado-Gaitán, 1992; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Gándara, 1982; Laosa, 1978; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Moreno & López, 1999) have

identified not only a multitude of behaviors practiced in Hispanic homes that support the academic achievement of their children, but also hold high expectations for them (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Student engagement.

Mainstream voice. Research on the topic of student engagement has shown that students tend to lose interest in their schooling unless they perceive themselves to be a member of the institution's community, as documented through pre/post-questionnaires, with a notable decline of interest reflected in the students' change of attitude towards school over time (Levine & Hirsch, 1991). Although the study conducted by Levine and Hirsch is dated (by more than two decades), merit can still be discerned from their findings. This seminal research study continues to hold value since it is one of the few studies conducted in the 1990s where the topic is examined from an insider's perspective, albeit to a limited degree.

Kuh et al., (2005) found that "What students *do* during college counts more for what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are or even where they go to college" (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 8). In addition to this, the investigating team observed that "the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development" (Kuh et al., 2005). Scholars have documented the positive effects that socialization and school involvement have on the academic attainment of the student body. As the students become more involved, there is a need to create additional programs to cater to the fostering of these initiatives. This is leading more and more colleges and universities to invest money and resources to establish and maintain the programs; some colleges are even willing to offer credit in return for student involvement, a reactive rather than proactive tendency to find quick fixes instead of effective long-term solutions (Levine & Hirsch, 1991).

Newer research in the field also points toward the link between "proper student acculturation" and the level of success achieved. This is according to Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvain (2007*),* whose study observed 104 recently graduated Hispanic high school students and the relation between their success and their acculturation to college life. The results of the study yielded some interesting data, indicating a direct correlation between acculturation and college attendance. Furthermore, the study also showed that "acculturated" prospective college students perceived themselves as able to afford their college education (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). This shared vision has been growing in popularity and it seems to be spreading across the nation. Kuh et al. (2005) have provided a list of six philosophies: 1) A "living" mission and "lived" educational philosophy; 2) An unshakable focus on student learning; 3) Environments adapted for educational enrichment; 4) Clearly marked pathways to student success; 5) An improvement oriented ethos; and 6) Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success; which have been identified by them as being successfully implemented and used by universities to "foster engagement and persistence" (Kuh et al., 2005 p.24). These scholars are also very clear regarding the changes that an institution must implement to successfully complete the transformation. Their research indicates that:

> In sum, student engagement has two key components that contribute to student success. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. The second is the ways the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities. (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 9)

This traditional ("mainstream") view of college readiness holds the students responsible for their lack of achievement and unwillingness to engage and invest in their education. Under the perspective presented by this body of literature, it is the student's responsibility to search for the resources available, even when they might not know what those are. Furthermore, this view, despite offering possible solutions to the problem, does so from a one-size-fits-all framework and with complete disregard for culture, ethnicity, history or academic aspirations. Therefore the mainstream view tends to ignore and fails to account for individual differences and lived experiences of the students.

New voice. An equally important set of scholars in the field have concluded that if the bond between the educator and the student is built on mutual trust and care, the student will have a much better chance to succeed (Nieto, 1994, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela's in-depth analysis of the cultural strengths and needs of Hispanic students provides us with a better understanding of not only why many of these students are not succeeding in the classroom, but more importantly what it will take to turn the trend around; her theories continue to hold as true today as they did over a decade ago. In Mexican culture, Valenzuela points out, education goes beyond grades and academic achievement; success is also achieved through interpersonal relations built between the student and the teacher (Valenzuela, 1999). As with the work of Valenzuela, Nieto's work continues to be validated in actual practice today, providing a window for valuable understanding of the problem. Her studies indicate that educational reform must take place not only at a structural level but also within educators and the students we serve. The reform of school structures must be accompanied by a reflective change in practitioners' and policymakers' views of what all students deserve, as well as the

acknowledgement of their capabilities and abilities as future agents of change (Nieto, 1994, 2007).

Scholars sharing this critical view of college readiness, while presenting a wide diversity of perspectives and insights on this timely issue, do agree on basic principles. For example, there is a great need to identify the individual's innate abilities and provide support systems through which students can transition safely, efficiently and effectively into higher education. They call for a paradigm shift and an approach to educational change that will allow students to truly live up to their full potential and be successful and contributing members of society (Nieto, 1994, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tienda, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999).

Critical and Cultural Capital

Current scholarship on critical capital (e.g., Garcia & McDowell, 2010; Tappan, 2006; Yosso, 2005), indicates that racism and other oppressive societal forces must be confronted and eradicated so that individual students may be empowered as agents of change and improve their chances to succeed in school. The approach to educational change depicted by Tappan (2006), indicates that individuals can learn to address and overcome the internalized stigmas placed on them by society. To succeed, the student must play an active role developing her/his internal resources, learning how to appropriate oppression and mediate it in order to be liberated from its grip (Tappan, 2006). Researchers like Tappan (2006) believe in the importance of "critical capital" and the influence that it could exert on the perceived barriers being faced by Hispanic students, describing the "appropriation of cultural tools and resources that enable the oppressed to challenge the status quo, critique the dominant paradigm, and move toward true freedom/liberation" (Tappan, 2006, p. 10). Garcia and McDowell (2010) further articulate this

view by stating that the accumulation of resources (e.g., increase in the number of contacts, opportunities and knowledge) should theoretically be the end result of interactions and exchanges between individuals and the contexts in which they live. They also allude to the fact that the lack of existence of social capital is due to the oppressed not being "insiders" and not belonging to the group that dominates the social webs (Garcia & McDowell, 2010).

A second body of literature from critical theorists meriting consideration is the research on cultural capital. Yosso (2005) grounds her research in the historical examples of DuBois (1989), whose foundational work in critical race theory "can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Yosso's model provides a key foundation for the conceptual framework of this study, in her discussion of the diverse ways in which educational policies and practices impact students who have been mistreated by any form of oppression. In the case of this study, the focus is on the ways in which schools have fallen short or failed to provide structures to support the development of Hispanic students who might be redefined as "college ready." Yosso's model underlines the need and also the opportunity to create new structures for underserved students, in this case Hispanics, to realize that systems exist to provide them support and help them become aware that they are not alone in their battle against the layers of racialized oppression that they face (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's model, which is also an adaptation of Oliver and Shapiro's (1995) model of community cultural wealth, points to the influence of six mutually important forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant), which are neither limited nor fixed. She rather perceives these forms of cultural capital as a dynamic sphere where the components complement each other and build upon the strengths of one another (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso's discussion of forms of capital rounds out nearly 30 years of research and study on this topic. From her perspective:

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.

Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.

Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledges nurtured among extended family members (*familia*) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.

Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources.

Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions.

Resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequity. (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-80)

This alternate view of the problem provides new lenses for understanding and analysis of the issue and its implications in children's lives.

Summary

The data collected through this review of the literature on the topic have provided a background for better understanding of what scholars in the field have found to be the underlying factors preventing smooth and timely transitions from high school to college for Hispanic students. More importantly, they seem to validate the fact that although data might show an improvement in the efforts to offer access to higher education for all, a gap continues to exist between the growth observed and size of cultural/ethnic communities as compared to their

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representation in institutions of higher learning. In reality, Hispanic students continue to be as underserved today as they were 30 years ago, while this ethnic group continues to grow at a much more accelerated rate than any other demographic in the U.S. today. A solid solution is needed to facilitate the issue to improve and truly tap into all of the resources available in order to make a difference. However, an important component is missing: very little, if any, of the scholarly work provides insight into the challenges faced by these students from the "insider's perspective" (i.e., the point of view of Hispanic students themselves). The next chapter of this study will focus on the methodology used in this thesis project to seek a deeper understanding of this timely topic and further information to fill in some of the important gaps missing from the literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative research study aims to develop a deeper understanding of barriers that have impacted Hispanic students on the U.S.-México border during their high school experience and challenges that could impede them from successfully transitioning through the K-16 pipeline, from the perspective of a selected group of Hispanic youth. The study examined the ways in which these students on the U.S.-México border describe the barriers they have experienced to date, followed by their discussion of challenges they may experience in the future during the transition from high school to college and how they interpret the meanings of these barriers and challenges.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) tell us that qualitative research, in particular phenomenological studies, give researchers the opportunity to collect data from a human group in order to better understand how the group as a whole forms and functions as a culture. Furthermore, phenomenological approaches explore, depict and examine the meaning of individual lived experiences; thus the underlying intent is to view and understand the phenomenon from the insider's perspective. A distinguishing feature of this approach is that lived experiences are at the center of the inquiry (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). Hahn (2008) adds that phenomenologists are driven by the quest to discover the objective and subjective realities of the phenomena being studied. The insights and lived experiences of these individuals provide opportunities for the researcher to understand issues from the insiders' perspectives (Hahn, 2008). Participants in the study are viewed as insiders, due to their lived experience, insider knowledge, sensitivity, and insights into the phenomenon being studied, as well as their

willingness to discuss the phenomenon openly, and their ability to help generate new insights into this timely topic (Krathwohl, 2009).

Setting

The study was conducted in the context of a school-university partnership between a Hispanic-serving institution of higher learning along the U.S.-México border and "Sun Valley High School"[1], an urban high school serving a primarily Hispanic community.

Sun Valley High School (SVHS) is nestled in the U.S.-México border and is one of only two high schools in the Hillside Independent School District (HISD)[2]. HISD serves a primarily Hispanic student population, with 90.6 % and 79.1% of its students being Hispanic and economically disadvantaged, respectively, during the 2008-09 school year. During the same school year, SVHS had a student population of 1,596 students of which 94.1% were Hispanic, 5.1% were White and 0.8% represented the other ethnicities. Furthermore, campus data indicate that 76% of SVHS population qualified for free or reduced lunch and 11.5% of the students were limited English proficiency (LEP) students. It is important to also note that even though SVHS is not the only campus in the district, it presented a 16.8% mobility rate in the campus population that year, which may be indicative of the migrant make up of the community it serves (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Students from SVHS were invited to participate in Project BEST, a summer bridge program funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that aimed to measure the impact of college readiness strategies (e.g. study skills, socializing skills, financial literacy, reading and math instruction) based on the students' levels of readiness to enter college. The project invited a cohort of 50 students from local high schools to participate.

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[1] Sun Valley High School (SVHS) is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the participating high school.
[2] Hillside Independent School District (HISD) is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the school district.

The only requirement to participate in the project was that the student participants satisfy the THECB definition of being "below college readiness", that is to say, that these "rising-seniors"[3] must have scored between 2000 and 2200 on their 10th grade TAKS test[4]. Having met this prerequisite, students were invited to voluntarily self-select and participate in the project. Table 2 illustrates detailed demographic information of both Hillside ISD and Sun Valley High School.

Table 2
District and Campus Level Demographical Data, 2008-09

	2008-09 Academic Year	
	Hillside ISD	Sun Valley High School
Student Population	5,719	1,596
Economically Disadvantaged	79.1%	76%
LEP	30%	11.5
Mobility	14.8%	16.8%
	Ethnic Distribution	
Hispanic	93.9%	94.1%
White	4.9%	5.1%
Other	1.2%	0.8%

Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System 2008-2009

Sample/Participants

Informants participating in the study self-selected to do so, since participation was completely voluntary, and they did not receive any form of compensation for participating. This made for an information-rich pool of informants since the majority had made vocal their desire to pursue a college education and did not seem to quite fit the "below college readiness" assigned label. The researcher had also gained access and entry (i.e., built a personal connection with the

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[3] Rising Senior is the term used for students during the summer between their junior and senior year.
[4] TAKS, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is the high school level standardized examination. Passing score for the exam is 2000 points.

informants) not only through the interactions that took place during Project BEST, but also due in part to shared ethnicity, histories, and the similarities of lived experiences. All of the SVHS project participants received an invitation to participate in this study; the resulting sample consisted of 20 participants. The sample group was further refined and finalized by the researcher, based on the informants' potential to contribute to the understanding of the underlying phenomenon, also known as purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002), identifying the five participants to take part in the focus group component. The focus group consisted of four females and one male, and the students were either 16 or 17 years of age. Table 3 (below here) displays data collected regarding ethnicity, SES and related family demographics:

Table 3
Informant SES and Family Data

	Study Informants				
	Sofia[5]	Jovita[5]	Herlinda[5]	Concha[5]	Jesus[5]
Grade Level	11th	11th	11th	11th	11th
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
Primary Language at Home	Spanish	English/ Spanish	English	Spanish	Spanish
Female Guardian Level of Education	No High School	Don't Know	Some College	Some College	No High School
Male Guardian Level of Education	No High School	Some High School	High School Graduate	Some College	Some High School
Qualifies for free/reduced lunch	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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[5] Pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the informants

Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods were used to maximize credibility. Data collection techniques in this study included individual interviews with student participants; a focus group interview session; field notes from observations that took place over a period of two years; survey questionnaires; and demographic data obtained from records.

Interviews. Formal and informal interviews were held with selected individuals. The selected informants were invited to come to the university campus in order to participate in the interviews.

Focus group. Five SVHS students participated in the focus group data collection session. The session lasted approximately one hour and took place in a natural non-manipulative setting. During the course of each interview, in addition to the voice recorder, the researcher took detailed notes to assist during the data transcription phase of the study.

Field notes. Unstructured field notes were written up weekly to document critical incidents, including events of importance, comments, behaviors and attitudes demonstrated by participants during the course of the program.

Study habits survey questionnaire. A questionnaire was used to collect additional data regarding the study habits, educational ambitions and academic likes and dislikes of informants in the study. Data were generated from the pre-and-post questionnaires answered by the informants. Since the protocol was designed to also assist in gauging the effectiveness of the summer bridge on impacting the college readiness of the students, the pre-questionnaire protocols were filled out during the first and last weeks of the project activities.

Instruments

A pre/post questionnaire was constructed to identify the study habits, aspirations, views about school and plans for the future of each informant (see Appendix B). The protocols were collected and the data were entered into a spreadsheet. Answers were then tabulated and used to provide the raw percentages that each of the choices yielded for each question.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicate that phenomenological research usually makes use of interviews with informants who have experience with the phenomenon being observed, and following this definition, the study had a focus group of five purposefully selected individuals who engaged in in-depth discussions about the barriers experienced to date in high school and the challenges that may lie ahead, impeding or preventing them from a smooth transition into college. The protocol asked the informants about their plans during their senior year in high school and how they intended to fund their post-secondary education. Another aspect of their lives of particular interest focused on the different role models that they've had in their lives and the roles these individuals are playing on the students' decision-making processes as they prepare to continue on to college. The questions for the focus group (see Appendix B) were carefully created to help the informants tell the researcher in their own words what has influenced their decisions to pursue a higher education and what perceived challenges, if any, they believed they might encounter during the transition period. The interviews were then transcribed and coded into the different themes that emerged from the answers to the protocol.

In addition, the researcher used unstructured field notes to keep track of critical incidents, and events of interest over the course of two years of data collection. With the emerging themes documented, the field notes helped the researcher extract further meaning from the answers provided by the informants.

Data Analysis

The interview conversations were transcribed, coded and categorized into emerging themes, which were then further catalogued according to their relationship to the research questions examined by the study. The themes that emerged from the responses obtained during the course of the interviews and focus group session were then used to organize the field notes collected during the course of the summer bridge program. The survey data were analyzed by using simple frequency counts, comparing the pre and post answers, helping develop a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences and attitudes. A simple spreadsheet was created with rows for each of the coded names of the participants and columns representing each of the possible answers. The same method was used to disaggregate the answers to each of the questions. A simple Excel function was used to calculate the frequency counts of each of the answers to the questions and scores were compared across participants. A similar function was then used to analyze the group data and the same comparison took place.

The interview data were first transcribed and the data were then analyzed and categorized into themes that applied to the research questions and the new themes that had emerged. A simple coding method was used to divide the data into a number of themes, and interview protocol questions were then selected and matched to the specific research questions from the study. In-depth discussion of the results will be explored in the next chapter, and new emerging themes will be used to develop further lines of inquiry.

Ethics

The UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all data collection procedures (see Appendix A). Following the requirements of ethical research conduct, the participants were

introduced to the nature of the study and were invited to participate in the first stages of the data collection. They were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that only the researcher would have access to the questionnaires of participants that provided the consent and assent forms. All interviews and focus group session were preceded by description of the process, and informants were invited to read the IRB form, choosing to participate or not, based on their individual preferences. Each data collection session followed in like manner, i.e., the day of the pre-screening, the researcher arrived with ample time and disclosed the full instructions to the group. The data were collected in a natural non-manipulative setting. Individuals opting not to participate or who did not have both consent and assent forms were excused from completing the survey. The researcher then provided the protocol and allowed the informants the freedom to answer as they saw fit; after the allotted time the researcher collected all of the instruments and thanked the participants for their time.

Role of the Researcher

As an emerging Hispanic scholar, student, and community member, I have always been interested in participating actively in ventures that will have positive effects on youth and families in the U.S. Hispanic community. Having lived in México for almost half of my life and immigrated to the U.S. as a young adult, without having attained full fluency in the use of the English language or even been prepared for the shock that the move would represent, I share more than my ethnic background with the informants in this study. We have shared life experiences, which have made it natural for me to not only connect with the informants but also see and relate the problem from their perspective. My views, due to the factors explained above, had a direct influence on the interpretation of the data collected.

Summary

Scholars have identified the use of qualitative research methods (e.g. phenomenological research) as an emerging and effective way to observe cultural phenomenon and make sense of lived experiences of informants and their transformation into the consciousness of the cultural fabric of the individual and the community (e.g., Creswell, 2008; Hahn, 2008, Krathwohl, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). This study draws upon the work of these scholars to structure the research methodology, data collection and analysis of the perceptions reported by the informants. More importantly, the study attempts to generate new understandings about the phenomenon from an insider's perspective. The study does not aim to yield generalizable solutions to the problem; the goal and purpose have been to deepen the understanding of this timely topic and provide informants a medium through which to share their life experiences.

Chapter 4: Findings

The research questions examined by this study are: 1) How do Hispanic students on the U.S.-México border describe the barriers they have experienced in high school and the challenges they might experience in the transition from high school to college? and 2) How do they interpret the meanings of these barriers and challenges? A series of questions was used during the focus group that enabled the informants to discuss their lived experiences regarding the topic. The focus group data, as well as the individual unstructured interviews, initial questionnaire and demographic records, combined with over 24 months of participant observation during summer bridge activities, provided a wealth of information regarding the lived experiences in high school, the challenges that informants might experience as they transition from high school into college, and the meanings that these barriers and challenges have for them.

The fresh insights and unique perspectives highlighted by these informants are grouped into four major themes in this chapter to provide a framework for developing deeper understandings about critical issues that shape my analysis of this timely and critical topic: Socioeconomic issues, Parental involvement, Academic attainment, and Systemic Issues. Woven into the data presentation in this chapter are sections confirming and expanding upon the foundational work of critical theorists (e.g., Freire, 1970, 1973; Nieto, 1994, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tappan, 2006; Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999) who have conducted extensive research on inequalities in the public education system. The data analysis specifically builds on the work of Yosso (2005), who indicates that an accumulation of capital (e.g., aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant) results in a

dynamic process by which, building on one another, community cultural wealth is generated (Yosso, 2005).

The qualitative framework for this study provided an opportunity to take a look at the issue from the insiders' perspective. Through the use of phenomenological methods of data collection and qualitative data analysis, informants who were directly impacted by this phenomenon were invited to share first-hand observations and comments, allowing me to listen, learn and reflect upon the meanings of what they had to say, coding the findings to develop a framework for developing a deeper understanding of the issues from their point of view. The data gathered were continually read and re-read throughout the lifetime of the study, and through this in-depth analysis of the transcribed data four major themes emerged that aided me in answering the questions presented by the study.

The Informants

Sofia (*SVHS student).*

At the time of the study, Sofia was a junior at Sun Valley High School. A Hispanic female and an English Learner (EL), Spanish continues to be her primary language of communication. This informant reported that she is part of the first generation in her family to have set her sights on attending college; she is also the first in her family to have attended high school. Both of her parents lack a high school education and completed only their elementary education. As in the case of seventy-six percent of the students at SVHS, Sofia qualifies for a free or reduced lunch. Among her life ambitions she named attending college, although not quite sure about the career she would like to pursue. Her biggest fear is that her limited English might keep her from achieving her dreams since she immigrated as a young child and did not exit her

ESL classes until she reached middle school. Her parents are very supportive of her but she mentioned that if she attends college she realizes that she might struggle financially, as did her cousin before her. She is thankful to her family, teachers and friends for always having her best interests in mind.

Jovita (*SVHS student*).

Jovita was also a junior at SVHS during her participation in the study. Her life experiences, although similar to Sofia's, have the major differences of exposure to both English and Spanish at home and one parent with some high school education. Jovita also has plans and aspirations to attend college; she wants to make a difference in the lives of children by becoming a special education or ESL teacher. A major hurdle that she needs to overcome is passing the exit examinations (TAKS) in order to graduate from high school. Her parents and family members encourage her to continue pursuing her dreams and obtain a college education. She sees money as the biggest obstacle to reaching her goals, not in relation to financing her education but rather due to the fact that she must work to help support her family. Jovita is also one of 1,213 students receiving a free or reduced lunch at SVHS. Although she indicated that she would like to fly to distant cities such as San Antonio (500 miles away) or Los Angeles (807 miles from home), St. Mary's University and UCLA respectively, to attend college although she realizes that her ties to her family and the community are likely to keep her grounded in El Paso. She is grateful for the fact that she has two universities in the area to choose from if she decides to stay close to home. She mentioned that there is nothing more that she wishes than to make her mother happy and be like her older sister.

Herlinda (*SVHS student*).

Herlinda is another one of the informants and was a junior at SVHS at the time she participated in the study. She is a Hispanic female, and English is the primary language at home. The educational attainment level of her household differs from the rest of the informants in that she comes from a family where both parents have completed their high school education and her mother has completed some college. However, despite this major difference, she still faces challenges similar to the rest of her peers at SVHS. She is also one of the many students in her school who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Although one might expect to see a difference in the economics of the home, given the level of education of her parents, she must hold a part time job to help her mother out and to provide for her personal needs. This student manages to keep on track with her studies because of the strict academic guidelines placed on athletes. As a disciplined cross-country runner, she feels prepared to face the short and long term challenges of completing a college education. She knows that she must pace herself and avoid as many distractions as possible. Although she would like to travel more than 600 miles away from home to attend college at UT Arlington, she feels that staying close to home in El Paso and attending UT El Paso is likely to be more within her reach. As did her peers, she also reported having a strong support system that encourages her to pursue her dreams.

Concha (*SVHS student*).

As a Hispanic female, and a junior at SVHS during her participation in the study, Concha shares more than her college dreams and aspirations in common with her peers. Her family too qualified for free or reduced lunch despite the high academic achievement of her parents. In her family, she is a first generation English speaker and Spanish continues to be the dominant language at home. One thing is for certain; Concha will not be the first in her family to attend

college. Both of her parents have attended college, although she may be the first one to actually graduate. The value of academic attainment is something that her parents have instilled in her from a young age and proof of this is the Advanced Placement (AP) courses that she is taking at school. She knows that pursuing a career in a health-related field will not be an easy task and intends to accomplish her goals. In her plans for college she includes the need to continue to overcome her learning disability and wants to ensure that her dyslexia does not get in the way of her dreams. A unique feature of Concha's story is the fact that her accomplishments to date have been developed and nurtured in a home where Spanish is the primary language. She would like to move to Houston, a 670-mile trip, or San Angelo Texas, a bit closer at 360 miles, to attend college and has begun to inquire about scholarships and other financial aid available. She does feel that she might have been misadvised by counselors at SVHS and was not made aware of the importance of taking AP courses as early as possible. Instead she will enter her senior year without enough room in her schedule to fit all of the advanced credit courses she would like to complete.

Jesus (*SVHS student).*

Jesus is the only male informant in the study and is also of Hispanic background. As with the other participants, he was a rising senior at SVHS during the 2008-09 academic year and also qualified for free or reduced lunch like many others in his school. He comes from a family where Spanish is the primary language spoken, and neither one of his parents finished high school. In fact, his father attended high school, but his mom never made it there. Just like Concha, Jesus took advanced placement classes in high school. He would like to attend college in Houston or Austin, Texas (well over 500 miles away from his hometown) to enroll in a pharmacy program; however he also knows that the same program in El Paso (at UTEP) is equally renowned and

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may be more affordable since he could still live at home. Despite this, his parents continue to

encourage him to apply for as much financial aid as there is available so that he may fulfill his

dreams. They want him to have opportunities that they never had and to explore the world. He

indicated that he has had conversations with his parents regarding his college education time and

time again and they always reach the same conclusion: UTEP is a fine institution but it can not

provide him the life experiences of making it on his own. Jesus' father comes from a humble

family and his dreams for an education were abandoned at an early age, when his dad told him

that he needed to work in order to help provide for the family. Since then he has worked in

several industries and every attempt at completing his education has resulted in failure. Jesus

indicates that this is the reason his father has been such a strong supporter of his dreams of

attending college. Jesus knows that the dream is within his reach, and it will take a concentrated

effort to achieve it. He is determined to succeed.

The Emerging Themes

The four themes that emerged from the analysis of the data in this study confirm and

expand on findings of scholars whose scholarly work shaped the framework for this study (e.g.,

Kuh et al., 2005; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Although the informants

touched on each of these areas: Socioeconomic Status, Parental Involvement, Academic

Attainment, and Systemic Issues, their comments provide new perspectives and fresh insights

that depart from the mainstream discourse that has framed much of the research on college

readiness issues. The information provided by the informants of this study and their insights also

expand the findings of alternative scholars' views, providing new lenses for looking at this

timely topic, based on the informants' lived experiences and their expectations of academic attainment.

Socioeconomic issues: "Don't call us pobrecitos."

All five of the informants come from a low socioeconomic status that qualifies them for free or reduced lunch. Each of the participants share common lived experiences through the strong need for them to work and be able to help satisfy the needs of their families. When money was discussed, there was consensus that it is a factor identified as one of their perceived challenges. The informants indicated that some of them worked to help their families. As expressed by Herlinda "Yes, I'm employed and I do get paid, I do help my mother out, and I do give them money for whatever is needed." Herlinda also commented, however, that despite having to overcome financial difficulties she would not be deterred from achieving her dream of attending college "I would need to work to buy my own things like clothing and things like that. But I mean I do not think having to give my mother some money to help out would be an issue."

> *Unfortunately, inadequate information about college options, especially cost and financing alternatives, continue to depress Hispanic college-going rates, even for high-achieving students. Even as Hispanic high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates improve, they are falling further behind Whites and African Americans, which bodes ill for Hispanics' economic future and that of the nation.*
> (Tienda, 2009, p. 21)

Herlinda went on to describe her plan to continue to work to support herself while attending college; she answered with a resounding "yes" when asked if these were her plans.

The informants demonstrated similar attitudes during the focus group interview when the theme of financing their higher education was discussed. The overall sentiment was that they

would do whatever is needed to finance their education and more importantly they were already

taking initial steps as we spoke. A comment portraying this sentiment came from Jovita, who

said that she would finance her education with "scholarships, and financial aid, I guess, and

maybe I could work, too, to help out myself." Once again the mention of having to work while

engaged in their education if needed surfaced, but more as a secondary mode to finance their

education than as a barrier to fulfill their educational aspirations. These informants understand

what it will take for them to attend college, and more importantly they know where to find the

information. Herlinda spoke about a trip she took to the counselor's office in order to retrieve

information on possible scholarships, "The counselors told us that they had a lot of scholarships

coming in. So I went to the counselor's office and got some information." Concha also made

interesting comments regarding the ways in which she plans to finance her education,

> Well, financial aid, I do not qualify for too much because my parents make too much
>
> money. So, my parents are willing to help me out as much as they can, and I'm
>
> going to apply for a few scholarships.

Jesus also talked about the ways in which he plans to pay for his higher education. He

mentioned that he was pretty sure that he could not expect to receive much financial support

from his parents, since things are tight at home. He plans to concentrate his efforts on obtaining

scholarships and other forms of financial aid to pay for college. Jesus stated that he was "trying

to stay away from loans so that I do not have any debt." These students not only see themselves

as ready to attend college, but more importantly they do not perceive their socioeconomic status

as a barrier. Not only are they aware of the ways in which to effectively finance their education

and know where to obtain information to do so, they also clearly understand and embrace the

challenge of having to work through college to help their families. They also appear to be wise enough to think about life after college.

Effective support systems: "Mi familia."

Another key theme that emerged from the data is the discussion of the importance of family as an effective support system. All of the informants indicated having strong support systems composed of individuals ranging from immediate to extended family members, in addition to teachers and friends. These support systems serve as the catalysts that keep the students going and in some cases, members from these inner circles function as role models for them. Sofia talks about how she has been inspired to pursue her college career because of what other family members have achieved "I have family that already… graduated from school, from UTEP, too. So…they inspire me to try my best---like, if they could do it, I can do it, too." An interesting fact that emerged from the data is that the systems by which these students are supported go beyond home and family. The informants also found inspiration and support at school. Jovita alluded to this in her comments on the close relationship that she has with her counselor:

> She is a counselor but she was also my Algebra teacher when I was a freshman.
> Yeah, she like helped me out like a lot. I could say I look up to her, because she is
> like a strong woman. So, I could say, she is the one who helped me out a lot.

Numerous comments referred to family members serving as inspiration to continue on to college. For Sofia, this individual is her aunt who graduated from UTEP; Jovita indicated that she wants to be like her sister attending college in California in order for her mother to be proud of her. Herlinda described her cousin as the individual she looks up to and wants to imitate; for

Jesus, his dad is the role model who, and for Concha, it is her mother who overcame major obstacles by immigrating from México and still managed to finish high school and enroll in college "My mother, because even though she came from Juárez, she was still able to get into college, and she proved to everybody around her that she could do it. She supports me a lot."

Familial capital, a form of cultural wealth, engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship.

Social Capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources.
(Yosso, 2005, p. 79)

In addition, the data indicate a common premise across the answers provided by the informants; all of them mentioned that their parents are not only deeply involved in their education, but that they also attempt to influence the decisions they make. Concha indicated that her mother continues to attempt to keep up and understand her reading assignments for school in order to stay connected. She further commented that her mother's lack of formal education has never deterred her from trying to help. "My mom, once I got into high school, she really didn't understand things as much. She still tries…she reads the books with me, as much as she can understand them, she tries to understand them with me."

The bond to their family is strong, however they also demonstrated a desire to break loose and experience the world on their own. They mentioned that sometimes it takes time for parents to understand that their children need to learn about life on their own and that their unconditional support is what their children most appreciate. Their informants would like for their parents to trust that in the end, they will be fine and will return as grown women and men, as Jovita mentions, to be a part of and give back to their community "My mother says that,

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although she supports me, she does not want me to go because she will miss me, and I tell her that I will come back. She says she is okay with whatever I choose."

Academic attainment: "Sí se puede!"

The number of schools and locations named by the informants as desired places to continue their education were as varied as the reasons why they want to attend each particular institution. However, a common message derived from the informants' responses came across loud and clear: they all want to further their education. This overwhelming desire to further their education is a strong attribute shared amongst the informants, and their drive and determination became evident throughout the lifetime of this research project. Concha alluded to this when she indicated that she would not allow even a learning disability to prevent her from accomplishing her dream of studying "physical and occupational therapy" and explained that she finds ways to cope with her dyslexia. She goes on to mention that even though it is difficult to make the adjustments, she does not have any plans to give up "Yeah, it is frustrating, but I continue to try." These informants provided further evidence demonstrating their understanding of the steps that they can take in order to be better prepared to enter a college

> *Aspirational Capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evident in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals.*
> (Yosso, 2005, p. 77)

career. Some of the informants described taking AP coursework in order to receive college credit prior to graduating high school and saw them as "challenging classes that will prepare them for what is coming their way." Concha comments on the importance that AP classes play in her

future "I had barely started my junior year, I took chemistry pre-AP, and I had just moved here, but I really did not know anything about those programs. They are challenging but they also help you out." Jesus also provided an in-depth description when he shared his experience with AP classes. He mentioned that he plans to graduate with a total of three AP classes that will give him credit for college "Now, I just need to find another advanced [course], because I've already had two. I'm taking one right now that will count."

Systemic issues: "*Ay Caramba*!"

Throughout the study, informants described barriers that they feel are being placed in their way by the system (i.e., teachers and administration at their high school campus). They describe themselves as feeling "left behind" or set aside from the time when they first entered the U.S. education system. Through their interactions in their high school campus, they reported that the biggest challenge is twofold. Informants feel that their campuses either failed to provide them with the necessary information to successfully prepare for college; or that a delay in receiving the information might have caused them to not be fully prepared. Concha describes how lack of information prevented her from completing the advanced placement program, and even though she understands that information might not have been available to her since she had just moved to the campus, she still feels that someone should have taken time to make sure that the information reached her:

> Yeah, that happened to me, I could have graduated having completed the AP
>
> program. I needed just one more AP class, but I did not know about Spanish AP. I
>
> could have taken the class, but a school counselor did not tell me about the Spanish
>
> AP on time and I did not have room in my schedule to fit it in. I am taking a

pedagogy class in first period, and that was the same period as Spanish AP, so I could not fit it in.

Jesus also confronted similar challenges during his years in high school. For this informant, information about graduating with honors and what that would do for his college career was not fully disclosed or fully explained during meetings with his counselor:

As a freshman, they do not tell you a lot of stuff for your college. They just tell you stuff for high school. So, they do not tell you about the importance of accomplishments like graduating with honors. I found out about that on my own, they knew about it [counselors], but they did not tell me exactly how to do it. They just had a little outline. I thought that it just meant getting recognition. I did not know that it meant getting college credit for all four courses. I did not know you had to complete them by your junior year, not your senior year. I thought you could get them during your senior year.

Sofia's experience, although a bit different, still created some barriers; her feelings of exclusion came from the perception that she received a cold shoulder from the high school counselor who worked with her and that she only received information that she asked about. She mentioned that she understands that counselors are busy; however information still needs to be communicated to the students "Maybe the counselors are too busy with schedules and other things they need to worry about. Basically, doing their jobs. Because, if you do not ask, they are not going to tell you." A similar thing happened to Jovita, who felt that she might have missed some great opportunities to receive advanced credit due to the lack of depth on the information made available at her school. She made this known when she commented on the topic "Well, they gave us a pamphlet with every single class we had, but it has a very brief description. It

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> *Navigational Capital refers to the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. For example, strategies to navigate through racially-hostile campuses draw on the concept of academic invulnerability, or students' ability to 'sustain high levels of achievement despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and, ultimately, dropping out'.* (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)

doesn't go much in depth about what it is we need to take." Herlinda described the underlying problem not only as a lack of depth in the information provided; she would also have liked to see counselors sharing the information or having it readily available instead of the student having to initiate the request for information. She said, "Maybe more like, more specific information or more details. You have to go get it on your own."

The data also unveiled that an effective transition is prevented by more than just perceived challenges, it brought to the surface an issue of major concern. According to these informants, human error has caused students to potentially delay their plans to graduate and move on to college. Informants reported that a coding error by their high school counselors that was not identified as a potential issue by administrators had caused some of them to retake a course. Herlinda made mention of this issue:

> 120 seniors lost credit, and now we are taking it again as enrichment class. We took speech and debate our freshman year, but I guess the state of Texas does not have it under that name, but the counselors put it under that name. It was supposed to be communication skills but they put speech and debate, so now the state of Texas is not counting it. So now, we have to take a test and if we do not pass it, well, we do not get credit.

This has the potential to cause terrible ripple effects for some of the students at SVHS. That is because if the students did not pass the exam they would have failed to receive credit and would not have the required number of credits to graduate.

Clearly, barriers and obstacles have been created in these cases because of human error. Further research could examine this troubling finding: Underfunded schools? Incompetent professionals? While the scope of this study limits the time and resources available to pursue further inquiry into some of these findings, new questions have emerged that merit further attention.

Summary

In order to find realistic solutions to the barriers faced Hispanic students in our public school system, we must first look at the underlying issues and situations, examining the nature of these problems from diverse perspectives. While distinct and different approaches have been researched, and help to identify both individual factors and systemic inadequacies leading to the failure of students in the classroom, more research is needed. While individual characteristics, beliefs and values and other issues that seem to be deeply rooted in the self need to be addressed, scholars, practitioners and policymakers must also examine themselves and their work to seek to find ways to make changes in the system that will positively impact the life experiences of students. After years of oppression it is important to engage these students in a critical examination of the issues and discussion of potential solutions.

It is evident through the responses provided by the informants that they are tacitly drawing upon their cultural capital on a daily basis to handle the challenges that they face. Although they might not be familiar with the academic discourse surrounding the concept of

college readiness, through their words and their actions, these students are well aware that it will be through their decisions today that their future will be defined. They do not expect anything to be handed to them, and it is through their resilience, determination, and effective use of support systems, that these young people are redefining college readiness.

Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion

Substantial evidence indicates that access and enrollment rates in higher education have improved for Hispanic students; however not only do Hispanics continue to be highly underrepresented, their retention and graduation rates are also at alarmingly low levels (Dolan, 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Perna, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005). Comparisons of data across ethnic groups indicate that the ratio of population growth of Hispanics fails to match that of White students in relation to their educational attainment, making them the most underrepresented minority in higher education. Furthermore, these studies have also shown that completion rates in higher education for Hispanic students present a series of even greater challenges. High school students, in particular those of Hispanic descent, face barriers that have the potential to derail their academic progression and prevent them from effectively transitioning from high school to college (Beattie, 2002; Tienda, 2009).

Various studies have sought to identify the challenges impeding students as they transition from high school to college; however few of these incorporate the insiders' perspective. In this research project, the time spent interacting with students from SVHS, combined with personal life experiences, have provided the researcher access to first-hand qualitative data about how the informants experienced the phenomenon. The collection of this body of knowledge has deepened the understanding of the barriers experienced and perceived challenges that lie ahead for first-generation Hispanic students on the U.S.-México border. The purpose of this study was to highlight the voice of the informants to develop a deeper understanding of barriers that have impacted Hispanic students on the U.S.-Mexico border during their high school experience and the challenges that could impede them from successfully

transitioning through the K-16 pipeline, by learning about how they perceive and respond to these barriers and challenges.

Discussion

Some of the major themes identified by the informants confirmed, in large part, findings proposed by mainstream scholars involved in the study of college readiness. However, key differences emerged as the informants described the barriers they must overcome and the challenges that they might face. The major message communicated by these informants was the fact that they perceive themselves as ready to enter their college careers. Although the informants are aware of socioeconomic issues and other challenges that will be hurdles to overcome, they indicated that they would not allow anything to prevent them from attaining their education goals and achieving their dreams of attending college. The informants also showed an understanding of the different ways in which they can finance their education. All of them mentioned their intentions to apply for scholarships and financial aid. An interesting finding arose from a discussion of student loans. Although the informants understood the possibility of having to take out loans to finance their education, they wish to avoid borrowing money to attain their education. This strategy has been passed on to them from their parents who encouraged them to avoid accumulating unnecessary debt. The academic aspirations of the informants were varied. The majority had the desire to attend school outside of the region even if it meant having to spend time away from home. Although some of the informants were encouraged to pursue their academic goals away from home, most of them felt the need to stay close to home and attend a local college or university.

The informants also reported experiencing some systemic issues during their senior year in high school that could prevent them from graduating in time. Some of these issues could prove to be more of a barrier than Socioeconomic Status. Students had concerns, for example, with credits they had received and due to an administrative error, some of them could potentially lose credit for a class and not graduate in time. The informants expressed frustration toward the situation. They felt as if the same system that is supposed to be helping them was holding them back.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations based on the new insights generated by the study. First, additional research should be conducted to develop clearer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. More time must be spent with the informants in order to hold a series of follow up sessions where more prolonged conversation, data collection, and member checks can take place. This will enable the study to have richer credibility and improve its quality. Secondly, a larger sample is needed and additional data collection opportunities, such as multiple focus groups, should evolve from there. Thirdly, it would be important to replicate the study in a different demographic context. This will aid in identifying if the results observed in the U.S.-México border are unique or shared within the ethnic group across the country. Finally, due to the lack of time and resources available, the study only provided a cross-sectional view of the phenomenon. In order to truly understand the underlying issues preventing students' smooth transition into college, a longitudinal approach to the study would produce important insights. Having contact with the informants during their college careers might also help identify

additional issues such as retention and degree completion. This expansion of the study would further develop our knowledge of the phenomenon.

Conclusions

Data obtained through the lifetime of the study generated new insight into the barriers confronted by Hispanic students as they prepare to transition from high school to college; the study yielded three major conclusions. The first one is that SES factors alone will not have major impacts on these students' life decisions at this time, the informants in this study stated that they will not abandon their dreams and aspirations of continuing their education. Contrary to the mainstream views regarding the role that SES plays on the aspirations for a college education, the Hispanic students in this study demonstrated that they have a good understanding of what they will need to do in order to accomplish their goals and seem to be mentally prepared to face the challenge. The second conclusion is that the informants in this study have strong support systems encouraging them to continue their education. These support systems are reportedly composed of nuclear as well as extended family members in addition to individuals trusted by the student (e.g., teachers, counselors and friends). The informants also reported that the majority of the time individuals who are part of these tightly woven support systems emerge as role models. The third conclusion drawn is that these informants do not perceive themselves as underachieving students who are not ready to attend college, but rather quite the opposite. They feel that their transition to college will be as successful as their chances to complete the journey. Informants understand the financial and academic challenges that they will be facing in college and are preparing themselves by collecting information about the different options available to

finance their higher education and taking courses that will not only prepare them for college but also offer advance credit.

By the time the study came to its conclusion, it became evident that there is great potential for studies like this one to further extend our understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, research is needed on the next steps for these future leaders; how can researchers and policymakers work towards the development of structures to ensure the students' retention in college, once they have made it in? As researchers and policymakers move towards a better understanding of the barriers and challenges preventing Hispanic students from transitioning to college, new structures will be developed. More important is the need for additional studies to examine the phenomenon from the insiders' perspective and to ensure that they are culturally responsive. As the data indicated, it is important to address this relevant and timely topic before is too late.

This study may help generate new thinking or theories on this topic, but one thing is certain, the study has posed new questions and opened new avenues for conducting qualitative research with Hispanic youth, highlighting the importance of their voice in expressing the potential, as these young people focus their energies on the opportunities that lie ahead.

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Appendix A: IRB Documents

New Project Approval Notice

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
Office of the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Projects
Institutional Review Board
El Paso, Texas 79968-0587
phone: 915 747-8841 fax: 915 747-5931

DATE: May 14, 2009

TO: Hector Hernandez, BS

FROM: University of Texas at El Paso IRB

STUDY TITLE: [91982-1] Transitioning from High School to College in Texas: "Closing the Gaps" for Hispanic students

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: May 14, 2009

EXPIRATION DATE: May 13, 2010

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. University of Texas at El Paso IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This study has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after termination of the project.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact the Institutional Review Board Office at 915-747-8841 or irb.orsp@utep.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Project Continuing Review/Progress Report Approval Notice

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
Office of the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Projects
Institutional Review Board
El Paso, Texas 79968-0587
phone: 915 747-8841 fax: 915 747-5931

DATE: May 18, 2010

TO: Hector Hernandez, BS

FROM: University of Texas at El Paso IRB

STUDY TITLE: [91982-2] Transitioning from High School to College in Texas: "Closing the Gaps" for Hispanic students

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: May 14, 2010

EXPIRATION DATE: May 13, 2011

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this research study. University of Texas at El Paso IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This study has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

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Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after termination of the project.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Athena Fester at (915) 747-8841 or afester@utep.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Informed Consent Form: English

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Transitioning from High School to College in Texas: "Closing the

Gaps" for Hispanic students

Principal Investigator: Hector Hernandez

UTEP: College of Education

In this consent form, "you" always means the study subject. If you are a legally authorized representative (such as a parent or guardian), please remember that "you" refers to the study subject.

1. Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Please take your time making a decision and feel free to discuss it with your friends and family. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

2. Why is this study being done?

You have been asked to take part in a research study of the perceived barriers preventing Hispanic High School students to transition into College.

Approximately, 25 High School juniors will be enrolling in this study at UTEP.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are a Hispanic High School student participating in the Summer Bridge Program (Project BEST) at UTEP.

If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last about two to four months.

3. What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, the researcher will ask you to participate in any or all of the following:

- A 30 – 45 minute Pre and Post questionnaire

- o The questionnaire will be paper and pencil based and all information will be kept under strict confidentiality guidelines
- A 60 minute focus group comprised of 5 study participants
- A 60 minute individual interview
  - o Both the focus group and the individual interviews will be tape recorded under the following guidelines:

    1. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have access to the recorded conversations.
    2. The recordings will be stored electronically and password protected in the researcher's computer.
    3. At the end of the study the recordings will be kept for a period of up to five years after which they will be destroyed.
    4. The recorded conversations will be transcribed in order to analyze their content.

- A 1 – 2 hour member check discussion group about the findings yielded by the study
  - o You, your parents and school district administrators will be invited to participate in a member check forum where the findings yielded by the study will be discussed.

4. What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

There are no known risks associated with this research

5. What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Hector Hernandez (915) 747-8703 and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

6. Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand how to better assist Hispanic High School students with their transition into college and assure their academic success.

7. What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

8. Who is paying for this study?

There is no Internal or External funding for this study. The researcher is assuming all of the costs involved with the study.

9. What are my costs?

There are no direct costs. You will be responsible for travel to and from the research site and any other incidental expenses.

10. Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research study.

11. What if I want to withdraw, or I am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.

12. Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Hector Hernandez at (915) 747-8703 or at hhernandez10@utep.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

13. What about confidentiality?

Your part in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. All records will be kept in a locked cabinet and the recordings will be stored electronically and password protected in the researcher's computer. Access will be restricted to him and the faculty advisor only. The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your identity will not be disclosed in those presentations.

14. Mandatory reporting

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

15. Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

Participant Name: _____   Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____   Time: _____

Participant or Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Consent form explained/witnessed by: _____

Signature

Printed Name: _____   Date: _____

Time: _____

Informed Consent Form: Spanish

Universidad de Texas en El Paso (UTEP) Comité de Revisión Institucional
Forma de Consentimiento Informado para Investigación que involucra la Participación de Sujetos Humanos

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Título del Protocolo: Transición de la Escuela Preparatoria a la Universidad en Texas:

"Cerrando Brechas" para Estudiantes Hispanos

Investigador Principal: Héctor Hernández

UTEP: Facultad de Educación

En el presente documento de consentimiento, "usted" siempre se refiere al sujeto del estudio. Si usted es un representante legalmente autorizado (por ejemplo, padre, guardián o tutor legal) recuerde que la palabra "usted" se refiere al sujeto del estudio.

1. Introducción

Se le está pidiendo que participe voluntariamente en el proyecto de investigación abajo descrito. Por favor tómese el tiempo necesario para tomar su decisión y discutirlo con sus familiares y amigos. Antes de estar de acuerdo en participar en el presente estudio, es importante que usted lea la forma de consentimiento que lo describe. Por favor pídale al investigador del estudio o al personal del mismo que le explique o aclare cualquier palabra o información que no entienda.

2. ¿Por qué se está llevando a cabo este estudio?

Se le ha pedido que participe en un estudio de investigación respecto a las barreras que, según se ha percibido, impiden que los estudiantes hispanos hagan la transición del nivel de preparatoria al nivel universitario.

Aproximadamente 25 estudiantes del Onceavo Año de High School formarán parte de este estudio en UTEP.

Se le está pidiendo que sea parte del estudio, porque usted es un/una estudiante hispano/hispana de nivel preparatoria que participa en el programa de verano "Project BEST" en UTEP.

Si usted decide inscribirse en este estudio, su participación tendrá una duración de entre dos y cuatro meses.

3. ¿Qué es lo que involucra el estudio?

Si usted está de acuerdo en ser parte de este estudio, el investigador le pedirá que participe en alguna o en todas las siguientes actividades:

- Cuestionario inicial y posterior de 30 a 45 minutos de duración
  - Este cuestionario será en formato de papel y lápiz y toda la información se mantendrá en estricta confidencialidad según los lineamientos correspondientes
- Un grupo de enfoque de 60 minutos, formado por 5 participantes
- Una revisión individual de 60 minutos
  - Tanto el grupo de enfoque como las entrevistas individuales serán grabadas bajo los siguientes lineamientos:

    - Solamente el investigador y el asesor o la asesora del personal docente tendrán acceso a las conversaciones.
    - Las grabaciones serán almacenadas electrónicamente y protegidas con contraseña en la computadora del investigador.
    - Al finalizarse el estudio, se conservarán las grabaciones por un período no mayor de cinco años, después del cual serán destruidas.
    - Se transcribirán las conversaciones grabadas con el fin de analizar su contenido.

- Un grupo de discusión y evaluación de los miembros, de 1 a 2 horas de duración respecto a los resultados obtenidos en el estudio
  - Se les invitará, tanto a usted como a sus padres y a los administradores del distrito escolar, para que participen en el foro de discusión sobre los resultados obtenidos gracias al estudio.

4. ¿Cuáles son los riesgos e incomodidades del estudio?

No hay ningún riesgo conocido asociado con esta investigación

5. ¿Qué pasará si me lesiono en este estudio?

Ni la Universidad de Texas en El Paso ni sus afiliados ofrecen pagar ni cubrir el costo de ningún tratamiento medico relacionado con ninguna enfermedad o lesión causada por esta investigación. No se ha asignado ningún tipo de fondo para pagar o reembolsar a ninguno de los participantes en el caso de que se presentara dicha lesión o enfermedad. Usted no cederá ninguno de sus derechos legales al firmar esta forma de consentimiento. En caso de presentarse dicha enfermedad o lesión, deberá comunicarse con Héctor Hernández al (915) 747-8703 y con el Comité de Revisión Institucional de UTEP (IRB) al (915) 747-8841 ó irb.orsp@uteo.edu.

6. ¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?

No habrá ningún beneficio directo para usted por participar en el presente estudio. Sin embargo, este trabajo investigativo nos permitirá entender cómo podemos ayudar mejor a los estudiantes hispanos de nivel preparatoria en su transición hacia el nivel universitario, y asegurar su éxito académico.

7. ¿Existen otras opciones?

Usted tiene la opción de no participar. No habrá ninguna sanción para usted si decide no ser parte del estudio.

8. ¿Quién está cubriendo los costos de este estudio?

No hay ningún fondo interno o externo para financiar este estudio. El investigador asume todos los costos relacionados con el mismo.

9. ¿Cuáles van a ser mis costos?

No hay costos directos. Usted será responsable de los costos de traslado de ida y vuelta al sitio de la investigación y cualquier otro gasto incidental relacionado.

10. ¿Se me va a pagar por participar en el estudio?

Usted no recibirá ningún pago por participar en este estudio de investigación.

11. ¿Qué pasa si me quiero dar de baja, o se me pide que abandone el estudio?

El participar en este estudio es algo totalmente voluntario. Usted tiene el derecho de decidir no ser parte del mismo, y si no participa en el estudio, no habrá ninguna sanción.

Si usted decide participar, puede dejar de hacerlo en cualquier momento. Sin embargo le recomendamos encarecidamente que hable con un miembro del grupo de investigación, para informarle de la razón por la cual usted abandona el estudio. Si hubiera cualquier descubrimiento o resultado nuevo que pudiera afectar su deseo de continuar en el estudio, se lo haremos saber.

El investigador puede decidir interrumpir la participación de usted sin su permiso, si piensa que participar en el estudio pudiera causarle a usted algún daño.

12. ¿A quién debo llamar si tengo preguntas o problemas?

Puede hacer preguntas para aclarar cualquier duda que tenga ahora. Si tiene preguntas más adelante, puede llamar a Héctor Hernández al (915) 747-8703, o enviar un correo electrónico a hhernandez10@utep.edu.

Si tiene preguntas o preocupaciones acerca de su participación como sujeto de investigación por favor comuníquese con el Comité de Revisión Institucional de UTEP (IRB) al (915) 747-8841 ó irb.orsp@utep.edu.

13. ¿Qué hay de la confidencialidad?

Su participación en este estudio es confidencial. Ninguna porción de la información le va a identificar por nombre. Todos los archivos se conservarán bajo llave, y las grabaciones serán almacenadas

electrónicamente y protegidas con contraseña en la computadora del investigador principal. El acceso será permitido solamente para él y el asesor del personal docente. Los resultados del presente estudio de investigación podrían ser presentados en reuniones o publicaciones; sin embargo, la identidad de usted no será divulgada en dichas presentaciones.

14. Obligación de reportar

Si se llegara a revelar información sobre abuso a menores o negligencia, o algún riesgo potencial futuro a terceras personas, la ley requiere que dicha información sea reportada a las autoridades correspondientes.

15. Declaración de Autorización

He leído (o alguien me ha leído) todas y cada una de las páginas del presente documento sobre el estudio. Entiendo que la participación en este estudio es voluntaria, y he tomado la decisión libre de participar en el mismo. Sé que puedo interrumpir dicha participación sin temor a sanción alguna. Se me dará una copia de esta forma de consentimiento en este momento, y más adelante puedo recibir información sobre los resultados del estudio si así lo deseo.

Nombre de el/la Participante: _____ Fecha: _____

Firma de el/la Participante: _____ Hora: _____

Firma de el /la Participante o del Padre /Guardián/Tutor Legal: _____

La forma de consentimiento ha sido explicada/ atestiguada por: _____
                                                                                                    Firma

Nombre en letra de imprenta: _____ Fecha: _____
                                                                                    Hora: _____

Assent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Assent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Transitioning from High School to College in Texas:
                                "Closing the Gaps" for Hispanic students
Principal Investigator: Hector Hernandez Jr.
UTEP: College of Education

I am being asked to decide if I want to be in this research study because I am a Hispanic student from who is currently participating in the Summer Bridge Program (Project BEST) at UTEP.

I am aware that to be in this study I will need to participate in one, two or all of the activities below:
- A 30 – 45 minute Pre and Post questionnaire
- A 60 minute focus group made up of 5 study participants
- A 60 minute individual interview
- A 1 – 2 hour discussion group about the findings yielded by the study

I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in this study.

I asked and got answers to my questions.

I know that I can stop being in the study at any time without any penalty.

I know that only the people who work on this research study will know my name.
I want to be in the study at this time. I know that I can ask questions about this study at any time.
If I feel distressed while participating in the study I should contact the school counselor, Ms. Irene Baeza, at 877-7800.
Child's Printed Name: ———————————————————

Child's Signature: ——————————————————— Date: ——————————

Witness or Mediator: ——————————————————— Date: ——————————

I have explained the research at a level that is understandable by the child and believe that the child understands what is expected during this study.

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent:

———————————————————————————————— Date ——————————

Appendix B: Data Collection Instruments

Pre/Post Questionnaire Instrument

Date: _____

Name: _____

Directions: Please answer the following questions truthfully. Circle the phrase that best describes how you feel about the statement. This survey will remain anonymous.

1. I enjoy activities that allow me to be creative.

strongly agree agree   not sure   disagree   strongly disagree

Give some examples:

2. I enjoy activities that allow me to think in nontraditional ways.

strongly agree agree   not sure   disagree   strongly disagree

Give some examples:

3. I like school.

strongly agree agree   not sure   disagree   strongly disagree

Examples:

4. I think of myself as a good student.

strongly agree agree   not sure   disagree   strongly disagree

Examples:

5. I plan to graduate from high school

strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

Why?

6. I plan to go to college after high school.

strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

Why?

7. I like to write.

strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

Give some examples:

8. I read outside of school.
strongly agree agree not sure disagree strongly disagree

Examples:

9. What do you expect to be doing 5 years from now?

10. Anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences in school, and your plans for the future?

Focus Group Protocol

1. Are you on track to graduate next May?

2. What challenges have you faced to get your senior year?

3. From whom would you say that you received the most support during your high school education years?

4. Are you planning to attend college?

5. What career or degree will you be pursuing?

6. What do you think will be some of the challenges as you transition to college?

7. What challenges do you think you will face during your college career?

8. Do you currently working, if so do you plan to continue doing so while in college?

9. How do you plan to pay for college?

10. Which is your dream college?

11. What do your friends and family say about you going to college?

12. Who would you say is the biggest influence in your life?

Curriculum Vita

Héctor Hernández Jr. was born in El Paso, Texas. The first son of Héctor Hernández and Elida Casillas, he spent the first 17 years of his life living with his family in northern México primarily along the border with the U.S. in the states of Chihuahua, Sonora and Tamaulipas. The family returned to the U.S. in 1989, migrating to San Antonio, Texas where he learned the English language while completing his junior year at Clark High School. He graduated from Eastwood High School, El Paso, Texas the following summer and as a first generation college student, he now holds a Bachelor of Science in Social Psychology from Park University.

Mr. Hernández manages UTEP's College of Education Advising, Recruitment and Career (ARC) Center and is directly involved in the work done by the college in the preparation of future teachers, entering freshman and has been involved in Project BEST from its inception. He has presented his findings on this topic at several research conferences (e.g., American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), UTEP's CIRCLE and BEEMS Conferences) and participated as an emerging scholar in the 2009 IUPLR Workshop on Higher Education: Research on the Condition of Latinos in U.S. Colleges and Universities at the University of Notre Dame.

Permanent Address: 7721 Parkland
                                   El Paso, Texas 79925