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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND HISPANIC STUDENTS' GPA, RETENTION, AND GRADUATION RATES

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND HISPANIC

STUDENTS' GPA, RETENTION, AND GRADUATION RATES

by

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Dissertation

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SIGNATURE PAGE

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DEDICATION

This manuscript has been written in dedication to my husband, Joel Francisco Alvarez. Without your amazing support, patience, and love, this accomplishment would not have taken place. To my children, Maria Briana and David Anthony, because you continue to make me proud while inspiring me to be better and do better. To my Grandma, Dora Anzúres López, who taught me the joy of reading, learning, and living life to its fullest! To my parents, José Raúl and Maria Teresa Tarango, who have allowed me to believe I can do anything I set my mind to, regardless of circumstance or situation, I love you. To my siblings, Rosalinda, Christine, Fernando, and Frances, for the many years of support, babysitting, transporting, and providing both stress and comic relief, thank you for the love and laughter. To my brother-in-law, Samuel, who saved me from many computer crashes over the years, thank you. To my nieces and nephews: Angel, Sara, Salomon, Sol, and Hake, remember you too can accomplish anything you set your mind to, regardless of circumstance or situation. Finally, thank you to my students, specifically those who are DACA students, undocumented students, and students from GOAL y Amigos. You all continue to inspire and amaze me with your perseverance, despite the many obstacles set before you.

ABSTRACT

Although the Hispanic population continues to grow throughout the United States,

Hispanic students still have some of the lowest college retention and graduation rates.

Administrators at post-secondary institutions need evidence for effective strategies to

recruit, retain, and graduate Hispanic students. The current study was created to

determine if there was a difference in grade point averages (GPA), retention, and

graduation rates between two specific groups. The first group consisted of 506 self-

identified Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student

organization versus 506 self-identified Hispanic students not engaged in any campus

organization. A quantitative study was conducted to determine academic success using

pre-existing data from a Midwestern community college. The data included GPA,

retention rates, and graduation rates. An independent t-test was used to calculate the GPA

mean for both groups, and a chi-square test was used to measure retention. Both test

outcomes indicated statistically significant results for the engaged Hispanic student with

higher GPA score means of $p < .001$ and retention rates of $p < .001$. Results showed that

the self-identified Hispanic students had greater academic success once they became

involved at least one community college student organization. A chi-square test was used

to analyze graduation rates; however, the differences were not statistically significant.

The current study could be replicated to understand other underserved populations, such

as African American students. For future studies, at least three years of pre-existing data

should be examined with clearly defined membership rules for each student organization.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2017) as of July 2016, the estimated
Hispanic population of the United States was 55.2 million, that constituted 17.3% of the
nation's total population. In 2011, there were 11.4 million Hispanic students enrolled
within the United States K-12 school system (McGlynn, 2014). By 2022-2023, it is
expected that 30% or 3.4 million of all students in the K-12 sector throughout the U. S.
will be Hispanic (McGlynn). Although those of Hispanic origin were the nation's largest
ethnic or racial minority, the educational attainment for Hispanics continued to be among
the lowest when compared to Asians, Whites, and Blacks (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).
Based on a sample population of 31,020 Hispanics, only 22.7% or 7,042 of Hispanics had
an associate degree, and only 15.5% or 4,808 of Hispanics had a bachelor's degree (Ryan
& Bauman).

With the many challenges faced by Hispanics trying to further their education,
community colleges have played a vital role in providing access and affordable post-
secondary education to students who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to go to
college (Tovar, 2015). However, simply providing academic assistance has never been
enough to promote Hispanic academic success, related to grade point averages (GPA),
retention rates, and graduation rates (Nuñez, 2014). Though there were still not enough
support programs and student organizations intentionally geared toward Hispanic

students, the programs and student organizations that do exist on college campuses have helped make a positive impact for Hispanic college students who continue working towards degree completion (Tovar).

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

Hispanic students within the United States have not completed post-secondary education at the same rate as non-Hispanics (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). There were several reasons Hispanic students did not complete college that included a lack of understanding of higher education, limited access to post-secondary education, and language barriers (Cook, Pérusse, & Rojas, 2012). If institutions of higher learning wanted to recruit and retain Hispanic students, they must also learn to support Hispanic college students (Gonzales, Brammer, & Sawilowsky, 2014). The goal of all colleges and universities should be to provide intentional support and assistance to all students throughout their educational journey so they achieve academic success. Academic success meant higher grade point averages (GPA), retention rates, and graduation rates (Nuñez, 2014).

To assist college students, on-campus student organizations were established to provide a safe space to address language barriers and promote cultural identity. The intent was to engage students on campus, so they continued their studies through degree completion (Gonzales et al., 2014). For the researcher's study, engaged students referred to students who were involved in one or more student organizations. Students who participated in student organizations and showed commitment to their academics were more confident and motivated in their education, were more likely to stay in classes throughout the semester, and often had higher GPAs and better rapport with faculty and classmates (Nuñez, 2014).

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether being engaged in at least one community college student organization made a difference to Hispanic students and their academic success. To determine academic success, data was collected regarding grade point averages, retention rates, and graduation rates. The objective was to determine if there was a difference in academic success among Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged in any student organization.

Background

There were several reasons Hispanic students' participation in college education has been disproportionately low (Rodriguez, Rhodes, & Aguirre, 2015). Reasons included: Hispanic families who may not understand the benefits of a college degree, may not know how to financially plan, or may lack the guidance in a language that could be easily understood. There were often lower expectations for Hispanic students, and quick job placement was usually promoted over career development. For many within the Hispanic culture, it was important for family members to work and contribute to the household that created more pressure for students who chose to study. Working a job while attending college led to lower grades or overall performance that ultimately affected college completion. Hispanic parents were often unable to guide their students since most never attended college. Because many Hispanic students were first-generation college students, they often lacked direction on how to properly prepare for college, what to expect, how to pay, and where to go for support (Rodriguez et al.).

Community colleges' low tuition costs, flexible schedules, proximity to home, and smaller classroom sizes were attractive to Hispanic students when compared to four-

year universities. Universities were often considered intimidating by Hispanic students because of the higher admission standards, the cost of tuition, and the larger classroom sizes (Ortiz, Valerio, & Lopez, 2012). Within community colleges, the greatest challenges for Hispanic students were academic success and degree completion. Persistence rates, as defined by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, (2019), meaning students continued enrollment at any institution of higher education, was low among Hispanic students in comparison to their peers, and unfortunately did not always translate into college completion rates (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Although many students enrolled for post-secondary education, most failed to complete college within six years (Huerta & Watt, 2015).

Due to financial need, many Hispanic college students worked a greater number of employment hours than their peers, that led students to take classes on a part-time basis. Taking fewer classes per semester meant Hispanic students took longer to complete a two or four-year college degree. Attending college as a part-time student often led to fatigue or loss of interest, momentum, and motivation in completing college, and thus created a greater likelihood that students dropped out of college altogether (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Regardless of two or four-year institutions, college culture played an important role for Hispanic students and their overall success with either college transfers or completions. Hispanic students more often elected to remain in college if the school's culture seemed welcoming, supportive, and non-discriminatory (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). In a study by Arevalo, So, and McNaughton-Cassill (2016), results indicated that Hispanic students were more likely than other students to be a helpful support system for

those who faced college stress, adjustment, and academic issues. Classmates were not viewed as competitors, but as peer support who encouraged one another and benefitted from working together to persist towards degree completion. Hispanic students took an active approach in developing friendships that turned into familial type kinship and were more likely than non-Hispanics to create and rely on one another for familial type-bonds. Understanding the Hispanic culture allowed for a better approach and provided more support for these students, thus improving retention for Hispanic college students (Arevalo et al.).

Researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi conducted a study in student satisfaction and persistence (Hanover Research, 2014). Seven factors were found to influence student retention: academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services. With colleges continuously competing for students, these seven factors should be at the forefront of every post-secondary institution. However, few schools offered the resources needed to focus on retention that could help provide the necessary growth and success of these educational institutions (Hanover Research).

Two of the seven factors found to influence student retention, social connectedness and student involvement and engagement were continued concerns for four-year, post-secondary institutions across the United States (Hanover Research, 2014). According to the Hanover Research, studies showed that students were less likely to leave college once they had joined a student organization. Contreras and Contreras (2015) found that Hispanic students who engaged on college campuses and/or

volunteered for community service projects and opportunities presented by the school were more likely to graduate from either two or four-year colleges.

According to McClain and Perry (2017) for Hispanic students and other students of color to feel included in predominantly white college campuses, it was important to be intentional with programming, allow cultural spaces, and hire more faculty and staff of color to help make a difference in student retention. While each of these elements may seem insignificant on the surface, these components demonstrated that the institutions were showing acceptance of students, regardless of race or cultural background (McClain & Perry). Most community colleges and post-secondary institutions have not considered how rich college experiences could be with a wide array of cultures on campus. Many, in fact, ignored this aspect rather than consider it within retention models for all students of color, including Hispanics (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014).

Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, and Timpson (2014) found that Hispanic students, who participated in mentoring programs and/or organizations on campus, built positive relationships while learning to navigate the campus environment. A sense of belonging was pertinent to the persistence and retention of Hispanic students. In a study conducted by Dowd, Pak, and Bensimon (2013), having a mentor or key figure on campus who provided support and validation also helped Hispanic students raise their confidence and belief in themselves. Mentors and trusted authorities often served as a bridge to institutional information that helped students take the next steps needed to succeed and navigate the educational system.

Social groups and organizations also helped students find their way through college and provided safety nets for minority students (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Recognizing the importance of culturally appropriate social interactions and support could have prevented students from feeling isolated and excluded from the college experience (Salas et al., 2014). Students believed that intercultural organizations, groups, and safe spaces were very important to their educational experiences (Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013). While students often joined college student organizations to gain a sense of belonging and support, or perhaps to stay engaged in school, these same students had a positive impact on their community years later (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015).

Research Questions

To study Hispanic student success and determine if there was a difference for self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those students who were not engaged in any student organization, the researcher examined three questions.

1. What difference exists between Hispanic students' GPAs for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

2. What difference exists between Hispanic students' retention rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

3. What difference exists between Hispanic students' graduation rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

Description of Terms

Academic persistence. Academic persistence was the continuous enrollment of college classes with the intent to graduate (Tovar, 2015).

Academic probation. Academic probation meant a students' grade point average fell lower than a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale (Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2017).

Academic success. Academic success has been defined as higher grade point averages (GPA), retention rates, and graduation rates in post-secondary education (Nuñez, 2014).

Community college. Community college was defined as a two-year college supported by the government that offered students the opportunity to earn certificates and associate degrees ("Community College," 2018).

Completion. Completion signified having earned a four-year or two-year college credential to include a certificate or degree (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Engaged. Based on the author's definition and for the purposes of this study, engaged students indicated students involved in one or more student organizations. Engaged students were those students who belonged to student organizations (Gonzales et al., 2014).

Full-time students. Full-time students were defined as students who took 12 credit-hours or more per semester (Ivy Tech Community College, 2018).

Grade point average (GPA). GPA referred to the student's grade point average calculated on a 4.0 scale (Bremer et al., 2013).

Graduation. Graduation referred to a student's completion of degree or certificate (Bremer et al., 2013).

Hispanic. Hispanic were individuals related to the people, speech, or culture of Spain or Portugal, and those of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Latin American descent living in the United States ("Hispanic," 2018).

Hispanic and *Latino.* Beginning in the year 2000, the U. S. Census Bureau introduced survey language where the terms, *Hispanic* and *Latino* were used interchangeably (Reynoso, 2017).

Independent sample. Independent sample compared two sample means, from two unrelated groups, regarding the same variable to learn if the difference between the two groups is notably significant or occurred by chance (Salkind, 2017).

Latino. Latino was someone native or living in Latin America or those who were of Latin American origin living in the United States ("Latino," 2018).

Persistence rates. Persistence rates signified students' continued enrollment at an institution of higher education that may or may not be different from the institution of initial enrollment (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Retention. Retention rates measured the percentage of students who returned to the same institution to continue their studies the following fall. (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Student success. Student success included those students who transferred from a two-year college to a four-year institution and completed a degree of any kind (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Significance of the Study

With Hispanics being the fastest growing minority in the nation (U. S. Census Bureau, 2017), educational attainment and degree completion of Hispanic students would

serve beneficial to Hispanic students, their families, and post-secondary institutions. While there have been many studies that have documented Hispanic students and lower educational achievement due to structural reasons such as poverty, overcrowded schools, or not having proper textbooks, there have been fewer studies on the cultural differences that hinder educational success for Hispanic students (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). The significance of studying student organizations and their impact on Hispanic student success in community colleges would address how to better understand the need to actively and intentionally engage, support, and retain Hispanic students in search of higher education (Salas et al., 2014).

In a study regarding racial and ethnic differences in educational expectations in adolescents, Hispanic high school freshmen were asked to project a five-year outcome (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). In comparison to Black and White students, Hispanic students were less likely to picture themselves attending college and instead pictured themselves starting a family. Hispanic students also gave very materialistic and unrealistic expectations of life. Those Hispanic students who wanted to pursue post-secondary education reported more depressive symptoms and emotional distress than Black or White students. The differences reported presented a reflection on the value and emphasis on family within the Hispanic culture. Understanding these cultural implications and educational disparities of Hispanic students was vital to promoting higher education (Turcios-Cotto & Milan).

Community colleges and universities could also benefit from studying the impact of student organizations on Hispanic students as post-secondary institutions continue to struggle to enroll, retain, and graduate Hispanic students. The need for higher education

institutions to better understand, assess, and facilitate the needs of Hispanic students could help increase college completions (Arevalo et al., 2016). According to Contreras and Contreras (2015), the traditional approach to reaching out to, retaining, and assessing persistence for Hispanic students should be considered outdated and no longer used. It was important to understand that Hispanic students were more likely to attend college part-time, work more than 20 hours per week, stop in and out of college, and take longer than six years to graduate. Post-secondary institutions have the ability and opportunity to transform the outcomes for the next generation of Hispanic college students. The sooner these institutions of higher learning realize this, the sooner they will reap the benefits (Contreras & Contreras).

Finally, the communities where Hispanic families reside would greatly benefit from this study because according to Contreras and Contreras (2015) higher Hispanic college completion rates were vital for creating financially sustainable Hispanic communities. The academic field has recognized that engaged students created more service learning that allowed students to transfer their skills and knowledge into their communities (Nuñez, 2014). Engaged college students meant increased self-esteem, more confidence in their education, more positive behaviors, learned networking skills, better relationships within the community, increased knowledge about the community, better work experiences, and a greater pursuit of post-graduate studies (Nuñez).

<center>Process to Accomplish</center>

In creating this current study, the researcher focused on Hispanic college students and whether being engaged or not engaged in at least one community college student organization would make a difference in their academic success at a two-year institution.

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The researcher used archival data from a Midwestern community college that focused on 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students for fall 2017. The college was a statewide, Midwestern community college comprised of one community college system across the state. Within this system, over 40 sites and campuses were located throughout one state in the Midwestern part of the United States.

The process to collect archival data began by going to the community college's data reporting website. Next, the online data request form was completed and submitted to the Decision Support Team. After the Institutional Review Board approval was received, data was then released by the Midwestern community college on approximately 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students. The archival data released by the Midwestern community college included all fall 2017, self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 and over. Gender, age, race/ethnicity, grade point average, degree completion, and participation in one or more college student organizations were provided.

The data provided by the systems office arrived by email with a file drop that contained an excel spreadsheet with 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students. The students were then divided into two groups: those engaged in one or more student organizations, and those not engaged in any student organization. Once the two groups of students were separated, the researcher used systemic sampling to create random samples of approximately 506 students in each sample. Systemic sampling involved choosing individuals with a predetermined sequence by chance so that each student had an equal chance of being chosen (Salkind, 2017). To create the predetermined sequence, a random scrambled list of data units was created and every second student from the list was selected (Salkind).

To better understand whether being engaged in at least one community college student organization would make a difference for Hispanic college students and their academic success at a two-year institution, the first research question was asked. What difference exists between Hispanic students' GPAs for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged? Because the question asked about the dependent variables, the researcher compared the GPA means of the two independent, unrelated groups of Hispanic students. The first group was the self-identified Hispanic students who were in at least one student organization, and the second group was self-identified Hispanic students who were not in any student organization. In looking at the archival data of the 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students, GPA information was reviewed for every student so that the comparison could be made between those self-identified Hispanic college students who were engaged and those not engaged. It was determined that the outcome or dependent variable measured was the students' final GPA on a 4.0 scale. It was next established that the predictors, or independent variables for this question, were the actively engaged students in organizations on campus. The researcher then compared GPA means of the two groups of self-identified Hispanic students. The comparison was made using an independent t-test because there were two means being compared from two different groups (Yockey, 2019).

Next, the researcher wanted to know what difference exists between Hispanic students' retention rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged? The outcome or dependent variable was fall 2017 to fall 2018 retention rates for the self-identified Hispanic students and were nominal

scale (Yockey, 2019). A nominal scale was selected because of the no/yes nominal data used to identify the different no/yes categories (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). It was determined that the predictors, or independent variables for this question, were the actively engaged students in organizations on campus. The researcher then compared the retention rates between the two groups of self-identified Hispanic students, those actively engaged in student organizations on campus and those not. The chi-square test was selected because two different groups of self-identified Hispanic students were being measured (Yockey).

Finally, the researcher asked what difference exists between Hispanic students' graduation rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged? The outcome or dependent variable was the students' graduation rates that used a nominal scale. It was determined that the predictors, or independent variables for this question, were the actively engaged students in organizations on campus. The researcher would again compare the two groups of self-identified Hispanic students. Graduation rates were compared for those students actively engaged in student organizations on campus versus those who were not engaged in any student organization. The researcher selected to conduct a chi-square test because there were two different groups being measured, and the variables, or graduation rates, were nominal scale (Yockey, 2019). The nominal scale was again, no/yes data used to identify the different categories of no or yes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Community colleges played an important role in access and affordability to post-secondary education. They provided a degree or certificate that created a path to a career

or four-year degree and beyond (Bremer et al., 2013). As stated previously, Ryan and Bauman (2016) estimated that only 22.7% of 31,020 Hispanics held an associate degree from a two-year community college. As colleges across the United States have become more culturally diverse, college professionals should work to better facilitate the needs of Hispanic college students (Arevalo et al., 2016).

With first-generation and low-income college students struggling to complete a degree or certificate, schools must begin to look at ways to improve retention and focus on these at-risk student populations (Hanover Research, 2014). Because Hispanic students were often first-generation college students, few were able to turn to parents or other family members for guidance on post-secondary education. Hispanic students must continue to depend on mentors, role models, and advisers if they want to move forward in their educational journey (Dowd et al., 2013). Encouraging all students of color, including Hispanics, to join, participate, and become engaged in college student organizations could be the difference between college students of color who complete a degree and those who do not obtain a college degree (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Chapter II addresses the theory behind student organizations within the community college setting. Also discussed will be the history of ethnic student organizations at post-secondary institutions. Finally, there will be a focus or examination of Hispanic student organizations in higher education, ethnic student organizations, first-generation college students, financial roadblocks, and barriers for Hispanic students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter II explores the importance of student engagement within college groups and organizations. Examination of existing literature revealed the significance of having ethnic student organizations on campus to help meet the needs of students of color, including Hispanic students. With the many barriers Hispanic students faced while trying to obtain post-secondary education, student engagement and participation within college organizations created a positive impact that aided with these challenges. According to Kilgo, Mollett, and Pascarella (2016) student involvement while in college contributed to positive effects including substantial growth and support of students' psychological distress. In addition, student engagement was positively correlated with student success and retention (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014).

Student Organizations in Higher Education

For first-time college students, learning to navigate time, work, academics, and student activities could be quite challenging. Understanding how to balance work, school, and extracurricular activities taught students the important life skills they needed to learn as they entered adulthood. This increased autonomy for students forced them to become more productive and maximize their well-being (Greene & Maggs, 2015).

With the many new and diverse experiences that students could discover on a college campus, being involved made students feel as if they belonged to a community that aided academic success (Salas et al., 2014). Two factors that contributed to this achievement were student participation on campus and the campus environment (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Student involvement empowered students and helped them develop their communication and networking skills, allowed for a sense of belonging, and contributed to persistence and completion (Salas et al.).

Through student engagement, students were provided with opportunities for leadership experiences that encouraged them to lead events or projects while working toward a common goal with campus faculty, staff, or peers (Smith & Chenoweth, 2015). While building positive relationships, being involved on campus permitted students to connect with campus resources, such as scholarships and leadership opportunities (Salas et al., 2014). This participation was critical to student success with several advantages for those participants, such as service learning, volunteerism, understanding professional and social skills, as well as relationship and network building, (Bush, Buhlinger, & McLaughlin, 2017).

Results of Smith and Chenoweth's (2015) study showed that students who joined campus student organizations had more confidence in their leadership abilities and skills than those who were not involved in student organizations. The development of leadership skills through college involvement was enhanced by the relationships created with peers (Riutta & Teodorescu, 2014). More important than the number of organizations students were involved in, were peer relationships and out of class experiences (Riutta & Teodorescu).

In fact, a study by Zacherman and Foubert (2014) revealed that students, who participated in more than 10 hours of extracurricular activities per week, might as well not have participated in any extracurricular activities. Participation in 11 to 20 hours per week of out-of-class activities began to negatively affect students' academic performance. It was also discovered that involvement in student activities for more than 30 hours per week was detrimental to a student's grade point average.

While a sense of belonging was important for students who attended college, many students often did not feel as if they belonged until after they joined a group or organization (Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013). Students, who had a space or an area to meet with others to discuss the same interests, thoughts, or challenges, had reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). Before trying to get students involved on campus, however, it was first important for them to understand the significance of participation. Once students realized the importance of being involved, they then needed the knowledge to know how to become involved (Musoba et al.).

According to Nuñez (2014), engaged scholarship meant students' needs and interests were identified and developed through social interactions that allowed them to use their critical knowledge and skills throughout their academic journey. Engaged scholarship permitted students to combine theory and practice into a collaborative effort as a commitment to student success and an extension of the classroom experience. Either within the classroom or outside of class, the engagement of students created invaluable experiences that built reciprocal partnerships with distinct departments across campus or throughout communities. According to Foreman and Retallick (2016), college-level involvement in extracurricular activities, such as student organizations, clubs, and

leadership positions led to strong contributing members of a community who were involved in civic engagement.

A study by Kisker and Weintraub (2016) indicated that community colleges made an impact and influenced civic responsibility among their students. Participation in student organizations created higher graduation rates and greater workforce readiness, as young adults learned soft skills such as the ability to communicate and work well with others. The ability to problem-solve with people of different backgrounds was another benefit of civic engagement. Regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or institutions of higher learning, engaged college students reported a better quality of life through political and non-political processes than those students who were not engaged (Bowman et al., 2015).

<center>Ethnic Student Organizations</center>

Throughout the history of the United States, college students have come together to create social change and address issues of concerns (Johnson, 2014). These social issues were often tackled through student activism and created within college clubs and organizations that made social change part of their mission (Johnson). Ethnic student organizations were first created in the 1960s and 1970s when students of color began to integrate into predominately white institutions, yet still felt unwelcomed (Bowman et al., 2015). Underrepresented racial and ethnic groups faced many challenges while attending predominately white institutions. Although the number of students of color increased, many were underrepresented and wanted a place where they could discuss needs and interests, as well as relevant cultural and political issues (Bowman et al.).

While critics claimed that ethnic or racial organizations created division and segregation, supporters maintained that these student organizations created support to college adjustment, encouragement, and student engagement (Bowman et al., 2015). In a study made up of 3,008 White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian students, the racial and ethnic makeup of student organizations, connections among participants, and close interracial relationships were evaluated (Park, 2014). Results indicated that of the overall sample, 2,265 or 75.3% of students had at least one close friend of another race within his/her four closest friends. White students were least likely to have a close friend of another race, while Hispanic students were most likely to have a close friend of another race (Park).

Gonyea, Lee-Gonyea, and Shea (2012) conducted a study at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) to investigate how students felt about recruited students and faculty of other ethnic backgrounds. For this study, a total of 187 self-identified Hispanic undergraduate students were surveyed. The findings showed that 45% or 85 students approved recruiting non-Hispanic faculty and that 39% or 74 students approved recruiting efforts of non-Hispanic students. Interestingly, it was students who belonged to clubs or organizations and students whose first language was Spanish, who were more likely to approve special recruitment efforts for non-Hispanic students and faculty of different ethnic backgrounds than any other group (Gonyea et al.).

Lack of representation for nontraditional students on college campuses made students sometimes feel intimidated, isolated, or overlooked by faculty, staff, and administrators who did not understand the needs or hardships of nontraditional students (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). Limited representation caused students of color to feel as if

they did not belong within their own college and sometimes generated a sense of pressure to speak on behalf of their entire communities (Castellanos, 2016). Student leaders within underrepresented groups often voluntarily played the role of student support to ensure that students felt encouraged (Castellanos).

Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) examined Hispanic sorority members' self-beliefs, social support, and cultural fit, to see if those concepts influenced the tenacity to persist through college. The study was based on 115 undergraduate Hispanic women from nine historically Hispanic Greek sororities. Outcomes revealed that 93% or 107 of the 115 students surveyed believed their sorority helped them persist through college. To learn about the organizational structures that helped Hispanic students succeed in college, another research study in the form of an exploratory case study was conducted (Castellanos, 2016). Within one Hispanic student organization for women, three specific themes emerged from the data: discussions, sisterhood among members, and a nurturing environment. These organizational structures allowed women to create a network among one another to address their members' needs. Hispanic college women on campus provided each other with social and emotional support, as well as access to information, served as one another's role models, and worked together to acquire professional development.

Stewart (2013) conducted a study to learn about the racially minoritized college students and campus involvement without comparing them to their White counterparts. A sample was selected of 1,637 students who self-identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian, or other, either alone, or in combination with another race, including White. While these full-time, first-time college students were all satisfied with

their college experiences, most of these students were found not to be fully engaged in opportunities provided by their institutions, such as leadership training, internships, and volunteer work. Students who did not participate in student organizations often cited that time was a factor. Along with other obligations such as school, work, student meetings, transportation, or childcare, there were often conflicts with trying to attend other student organizational meetings (Wright & Kimberly, 2017).

Participation in ethnic student organizations was positively associated with peer interactions for Hispanic students with interracial friendships that appeared stronger than any other groups (Kim, Park, & Koo, 2015). Hispanic students also seemed to associate a sense of belonging using familial terminology. For example, the word *family* was used to describe a feeling related to comfort (Musoba et al., 2013). In a study by Musoba et al., students talked about having friends on campus but not feeling as if they belonged or had a *family* until they joined a student club or organization. Hispanic students' sense of belonging within a college or university was related to their family of origin and provided a feeling of security.

As colleges across the nation became more diverse, there was greater responsibility to meet the needs of distinct groups. Neglecting diversity issues on college campuses affected the educational experiences of marginalized students (Karkouti, 2016). While many institutions seemed diverse in nature, some predominately white institutions' unintentional actions disrespected underrepresented groups of people (McClain & Perry, 2017). Research showed that racial campus climate can be a factor when retaining students of color (McClain & Perry). Nontraditional students were interviewed with nine out of 10 participants stating that they would join a student organization if they were

allowed a space where they could discuss real issues pertinent to their population (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014).

Students of color believed that White faculty were less compassionate and understanding than those of diverse backgrounds (McClain & Perry, 2017). Contreras and Contreras (2015) suggested that to help retain and increase the number of Hispanic students graduating from college, it was important to change the climate by hiring more Hispanic administrators, leaders, high-level managers, and faculty. Hispanic students viewed relationships with supportive faculty, staff, fellow students, and family as indispensable interactions that led to college success (McClain & Perry). Having few leaders of diverse backgrounds could be challenging for underrepresented students, as these students of color felt there was little understanding of the needs of diverse communities (Contreras & Contreras).

Unfortunately, institutions of higher education have still not recruited or retained Hispanic faculty members to reflect the number of Hispanic students enrolling in college (Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016). Having a diverse faculty and staff indicated to students that the organization was culturally competent within a progressive climate with a commitment to those of diverse backgrounds (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). In a highly diverse environment, it was found that students received enjoyment from interacting with students of distinct cultures. That exposure was much more important than the number of interactions with people who had different values (Riutta & Teodorescu, 2014). In a study by Ponjuan and Hernandez it was recommended that community colleges enhance cultural competencies to improve interactions with students of color.

Along with the hiring of diverse faculty and staff, it was important to have intentional programming and cultural spaces to improve student retention and attrition (McClain & Perry, 2017). Multicultural offices with familiar music, displaying diverse flags, and participating in cultural celebrations all reflected and validated students' sense of identity (Salas et al., 2014). Because of the importance of having minority students feel connected to the institution, there should also be more recognition of faculty and staff who supported marginalized communities (Castellanos, 2016). Advisors, for example, could be great advocates for students by understanding the role that culture and background played on students' academic career (Roscoe, 2015). Given the increased number of multicultural students, educators should be knowledgeable, responsive, and better prepared to work with diverse students (Allison & Bencomo, 2015).

Students of color needed a sense of purpose and belonging that contributed to student persistence and success. Participation in ethnic student organizations increased student commitment to racial understanding, healthier cultural insight, and increased advocacy (Bowman et al., 2015). Programs with appropriate support systems also provided a sense of validation that increased student self-worth (Salas et al., 2014).

Bowman et al. (2015) conducted a study in which results confirmed that participation in racial and ethnic college student organizations clearly led students to civic engagement within their neighborhoods, towns, and/or cities. Both two and four-year college graduates actively involved on campus as college students were found to be active community leaders who provided donations, served as volunteers, and participated in discussion of racial issues and news consumption (Bowman et al.).

Hispanic Students and Community College

According to Roscoe (2015), the number of minority students entering the college system will continue to increase in the next 35 years. In the fall of 2014, 42% or approximately three million undergraduate students throughout the United States were enrolled in community colleges. Of those three million undergraduate students, 56% or 1.69 million of the students enrolled in community colleges were Hispanic (Baum & Ma, 2016). Significant demographic changes have continued over the last few decades, most notably within the Hispanic population. The Hispanic college enrollment has now increased nationally, surpassing the rate of the Hispanic population growth within the United States (Samuel & Scott, 2014).

For many, the community college path was an option that made higher education possible (Baum & Ma, 2016). Local community colleges have granted an educational pathway for students that ranged in age, race, ethnicity, and economic background (Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016). Because of open admission policies, proximity to home, and low-cost, community colleges played a vital role for many minorities: low-income, first-generation, and returning adults (Baum & Ma).

The growth in the Hispanic population has increased the number of Hispanic students in post-secondary institutions, particularly community colleges. While the number of Hispanic students attending college has increased, the number of those graduating from college has not increased (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Due to the population growth and unique needs of first-generation Hispanic students, academic achievement has become a more pressing topic (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). With this growing number of Hispanics in the United States, the educational system has started to feel the

effects (Salas et al., 2014). Challenges within academics and schoolwork, minimal access to English as Second Language resources, peer pressure, family finances, and personal problems all contributed towards Hispanic students dropping out of school (Ortiz et al., 2012). Without noticeable differences in the academic achievements of Hispanic students, this specific population was at-risk (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013).

Per the U. S. Census Bureau (2016), among Hispanics, Whites, Blacks, and Asians, Hispanic students were reported to have the lowest percentage of educational degrees, from high school to graduate school. Native Hispanics were nearly equal to Blacks when comparing educational attainment. Native Hispanics were Hispanics born in the United States, versus non-native Hispanics or those who were foreign born. (U. S. Census Bureau). However, it was important to note that the immigrant population had greatly influenced educational trends for the Hispanic population. Included in the Hispanic immigrant population were those students who were recipients of Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA). While having DACA provided undocumented students with temporary permission to attend post-secondary institutions within the U. S., this group of student immigrants had an extra set of challenges placed before them, such as language and financial barriers (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015).

Baum and Ma (2016) believed there was a continued disproportionate number of Hispanic students enrolled in community colleges compared to four-year institutions. However, Hispanic students tended to have better success and graduation rates if they enrolled in a public four-year institution, rather than in community colleges (McGlynn, 2014). Huerta and Watt (2015) also suggested notable differences between Hispanic students who attended community college versus a four-year university. Those Hispanic

students who enrolled in four-year universities were more likely to graduate within six years after their first or second year.

Many Hispanic students began their college careers within a community college because of the open access and affordability (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). The issue of college access had not been the concern, as there were plenty of colleges throughout the United States with open admittance. The challenge for Hispanic students had been the academic success and degree completion (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). While community colleges continued to provide open admission for all students, many students still walked away without a credential of any kind (Contreras & Contreras).

In comparison to four-year schools, community colleges managed to attract students who were less prepared for college (Samuel & Scott, 2014). Students arrived academically underprepared and found it difficult to keep up with the rigor of college studies (Baum & Ma, 2016). Statistically, underrepresented students were underprepared both academically and socially to succeed in the college environment (Roscoe, 2015). Being underprepared caused most of these students to take remedial classes and increased the chances of dropping out before degree completion (Roscoe). Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, Hispanics were the least educated overall, with more than half of all Hispanic students who began a two-year degree, never completing college (Samuel & Scott).

According to Garcia (2012), most Hispanic students continued to enter college less prepared than their White and Asian counterparts. In a study conducted by Martinez and Deil-Amen (2015), Hispanic students felt either misled about their college preparation, or incompetent, leading them to doubt their abilities to get through the first

year. Students were asked to provide recommendations for high school personnel, and interestingly the students recommended that educators properly prepare students for the full-time university workload and help students improve their study habits.

First semester students were most likely to underestimate how much time it truly took to study to be academically successful (Thibodeaux, Deutsch, Kitsantas, & Winsler, 2017). By the second semester, however, students had a better understanding and increased their study hours. Unfortunately, not all students had the self-discipline necessary to change their study habits and continued to struggle with time management (Thibodeaux et al.). First-year students allowed more time for passive activities such as sleeping and watching television, rather than volunteering or joining student organizations (Small, Waterman, & Lender, 2017). Students who watched less television, usually chose more difficult courses, while those who participated in campus activities or clubs generally participated in political activism (Small et al.).

Roscoe (2015) felt that students with higher levels of self-esteem were inclined to be more involved on campus. Self-belief and confidence in students' own educational abilities were vital in influencing and shaping students' college experiences (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). Unfortunately for DACA students, it was found that most people did not know or understand what DACA meant and caused that group of students to feel invisible (Sahay, Thatcher, Nuñez, & Lightfoot, 2016).

The negative impact of the Hispanic population not progressing into higher education to obtain a college degree can be observed through the health and well-being of Hispanic families (Ortiz et al., 2012). As the number of Hispanic students increased, community colleges should teach students to balance among work, school, and family

(Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016). Institutions that can help students balance academics with their social activities could alleviate family pressures and obligations to aid retention and completion rates of minority students (Samuel & Scott, 2014).

With the continued growth of Hispanic students, community colleges should focus on support for better retention and completion rates (Samuel & Scott, 2014). Supporting institutional practices such as academic achievement, financial needs, and social obligations were the best conditions for retention and completion (Samuel & Scott). For Hispanic students, many who were first-generation college students, the schools should assist in areas of pre-college, such as the admission process, career plans, financial aid, and scholarship applications (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). For Hispanic families to gain a better understanding of the benefits of obtaining a college degree, educational institutions should provide more bilingual college fairs, student orientations, and admissions information (Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016).

In a three-year longitudinal study conducted by Cox (2016), interviews on post-secondary plans were discussed with Black and Hispanic high school students. Results of the analysis revealed that while 14 of the 16 students had a desire to attend college, the interruptions to their plans for higher education were continuous. Complicated family situations, transportation issues, work obligations, and contribution to the household could not compete with the financial burden of attending college. These high-risk students' lives often collided with first-year college enrollment and attendance.

Bukoski and Hatch (2016) conducted a survey to understand students of color as they moved into second semester within a community college. A total of 32 students were interviewed and participated in focus groups. The findings concluded that

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participants experienced many conflicts including family expectations, self-perceptions, image, and balancing multiple responsibilities. Many students reluctantly shared difficulties or admitted to vulnerabilities and linked their educational opportunity to future material possessions rather than current concerns. These students also felt responsible for their own educational outcomes that created a heightened sense of pride or blame, depending on the outcome.

The first year of college was essential to student success and set the tone for the rest of the students' college journey (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford, 2017). The first few months of school was the most crucial for high-risk students, and they should be immediately identified to keep them from dropping out of school (Connolly et al, 2017). Once high-risk students were identified, schools had an obligation to teach the necessary skills for academic success. Early intervention programs were key for students to make meaningful connections with peers and community (Connolly et al.).

First-Generation College Students

To attend college, Hispanic students must first overcome personal challenges such as first-generation status, low academic preparation, misinformation, and financial constraints (Samuel & Scott, 2014). As first-generation college students, many Hispanic students were unable to ask parents about college expectations, policies, or procedures (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Some first-generation college students felt alienated and lacked family engagement when they were not asked about school or visited when living on campus (Diefenbeck, Michalec, & Alexander, 2016). Without proper guidance, support, and lack of direction, Hispanic students were reliant on mentors to aid with college questions or concerns (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Students did not realize how much

knowledge they lacked and just how many issues they would face while attending college (Wilkerson Dias). Students' lack of knowledge on college culture, combined with the college's assumption that students understood what needed to be done, made for a difficult student-institution relationship (Musoba et al., 2013).

For many first-generation college students, there was not a clear understanding of the consequences of academic policies or financial aid penalties (Musoba et al., 2013). Students were held accountable for what they did not know, such as financial aid deadlines and class withdrawals. Colleges communicated the information in very passive ways and held students accountable with an expectation that students know about college priorities, deadlines, and policies. Students often learned what to do and not to do through experiences or mistakes made (Musoba et al.).

First-generation college students often lacked intrinsic motivation and were often motivated by extrinsic motivation, such as rewards or salary (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). According to research by Trevino and DeFreitas, understanding the power of intrinsic motivation was just as important as understanding the background of first-generation college students. Understanding the differences in internal incentives among Hispanic and non-Hispanic students could also help bridge the educational gap. If institutions truly want to retain first-generation college students, they should consider cultural backgrounds and attempt to understand the psychological reasons students of color do what they do (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013).

In an interview by Wilkerson Dias (2017) participants felt they lacked different skills and knowledge that other students already learned. This included experiential and study skills knowledge, institutional and procedural knowledge, as well as relational and

motivational knowledge. Experiential and study skills knowledge meant those things that had to be learned through experience, such as it was appropriate to ask professors for help, or tutoring services were available for free and available before failing or struggling in classes.

Many students learned about study and communication skills only after their first year of college and placed value on having institution and procedural knowledge by understanding where to go for information and how to ask for help. Hispanic students felt relational knowledge would benefit first-year college students as they understood things like textbook options, such as rentals versus purchased. Finally, Hispanic students interviewed wished they had understood the importance of relational and motivational knowledge, and the need for peer support that made the college journey much more enjoyable (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Unfortunately, Musoba et al. (2013) found that first-generation college students often refused to get involved on campus until after they completed their first semester, first year, or until they gained academic confidence.

In a study conducted by Wilkerson Dias (2017) one of the personal barriers uncovered while interviewing Hispanic students was the primary financial responsibility to their families. The family unit played a pivotal role in the Hispanic culture and was considered sacred (Roscoe, 2015). Hispanic students felt guilty for not being able to contribute to the household and were inclined to work while attending school (Wilkerson Dias). Hispanic students considered it important to financially provide for family members who included parents and grandparents; this was often done at the expense of college (Rodriguez et al., 2015). A strong work ethic within the Hispanic culture often meant negative outcomes for college enrollment and completion (Rodriguez et al.).

An investigation by Dowd et al. (2013) concluded that many low-income, first-generation college students believed they had internalized negative messages expressed by insensitive teachers, counselors, or administrators. For Hispanic immigrant students, they were additionally criminalized, minimalized, or problematized, either intentionally or unintentionally (Zarate, Reese, Flores, & Villegas, 2016). However, most students felt deceived about how ready they were for college, with sentiments of inadequacy and self-doubt during their first year (Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015). More than half of all freshmen entering colleges across the U. S. learned that their skills were not college-level, especially in math. Black, Hispanic, and low-income students were found to be less college-ready than any other group of students (Logue, Douglas, & Watanabe-Rose, 2017).

Using pre-existing data from a total of 7,898 students, Bremer et al. (2013) conducted a study to explore the outcomes of students who took developmental English and math classes during their first year of community college. Results indicated that students most likely to graduate included older, White, non-Hispanic, and occupational students. These students and women had higher cumulative GPAs. Those with math abilities at the time of college entrance, financial aid, and participation in tutoring strongly predicted student success (Bremer et al.).

Peralta et al. (2013) conducted a study to investigate how Hispanic students conformed, resisted, and persisted in school while exploring their preparation for science, technology, engineering, and math fields (STEM). Survey and focus group interviews of 17 Hispanic students asked about students' demographic backgrounds, the role their family and community played in their educational support, and challenges faced,

specifically within the STEM fields. Personal and unstructured interviews allowed individuals to guide the topics. While 39% or 7 of the 17 students felt that knowing English as a second language gave them an edge as they learned the language of science, another 39% or 7 of the 17 students felt that science was not presented as an educational option. Data revealed that students felt they received negative, hidden, and overt messages from elementary to high school with no real preparation for STEM fields (Peralta et al.).

According to Bremer et al. (2013) in an Achieving the Dream study conducted of 250,000 students in 57 colleges and seven states, only 46% or 115,000 students progressed to a college-level English course after taking lower level developmental courses. While Achieving the Dream colleges was not typical of most colleges, they did serve a higher proportion of underrepresented students (Bremer et al.).

Developmental or remedial courses were college classes that did not count towards degree completion and were identified as courses that slowed students down in trying to progress towards graduation. While many students understood why the classes were necessary, they did not understand how the timeline towards completion would increase (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Because of the number of remedial courses needed, many students ended up taking developmental courses for up to two years. This meant it could be a year or two before students were exposed to a curriculum that worked towards their intended majors, causing loss of interest (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Completed gateway courses, such as English and math, assisted Hispanic students as they moved towards graduation and were crucial towards their academic success (Musoba & Krichevskiy, 2014).

Brickman, Alfaro, Weimer, and Watt (2013) conducted a study to learn about the academic engagement differences between Hispanic students enrolled in a developmental course, compared to those enrolled in a retention initiative course. A total of 407 Hispanic college freshmen participated. Conclusions demonstrated that personal interests along with an awareness of the importance of doing well in school for a better future significantly predicted academic self-regulation.

For some Hispanic students, there were language barriers that made college even more difficult. Trying to explain college to parents in Spanish while navigating and communicating with the college in English could sometimes be challenging (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). For students who were more fluent in Spanish than English, trying to take notes and process information during class could lead to frustration. Having more faculty and staff who spoke Spanish would be beneficial not only to students but also to the college. Wilkerson Dias believed that bilingual resources could assist in the recruitment and retention of Hispanic students. Bilingual staff would especially be helpful for DACA students who often struggled to find educators, community members, or other professionals who could help answer questions regarding citizenship on college or scholarship applications (Sahay et al., 2016).

Hispanic students desired to earn a degree to make more money and improve the economic conditions of their families (Matos, 2015). These students also spoke beyond obtaining a college degree and discussed the need to give back to their parents to make their families proud. According to Matos, the cultural deficit theory that described communities of color lacking aspiration and familial support, directly conflicted with the results of his own study. Hispanic students shared that parents were involved beginning

in elementary school and all through college. While many parents could not help with homework assignments as students went up in grade levels, parents reminded children that classroom teachers needed respect and served as surrogate parents. When students excelled in school, parents exhibited a sense of pride and rewarded students with praise and/or gifts (Matos).

<center>Financial Roadblocks</center>

Although community college costs significantly less than four-year institutions, the cost of living was a huge roadblock for students who helped support their families while attending college (Baum & Ma, 2016). Students balanced completing class assignments with work schedules to help pay for expenses at home. School-related expenses were a surprise to many first-time college students, and many wished they were better prepared before enrolling, with a more comprehensive understanding of all financial expenses (Wilkerson Dias, 2017).

Because of the rapid Hispanic population growth rate within the state of Indiana, a study was conducted to investigate different forms of aid and how they affected educational attainment of different student populations (Gross, Torres, & Zerquera, 2013). A sample size of student information from 56,814 students came from the state-wide student information systems database from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students were included for comparison purposes and followed for six years (Gross et al.).

A sample of 1,592 Hispanic, first-time, first-year, baccalaureate degree-seeking students at four-year institutions were selected (Gross et al., 2013). Data revealed that Hispanic students were least likely to apply for financial aid during their first year than

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any other racial or ethnic group. The sample data also showed that the amount of money needed for Hispanic students to attend college was higher than that of their non-Hispanic peers and indicated that approximately $3000 in financial aid made a difference in educational attainment for Hispanic students (Gross et al.).

Among Hispanic students, financial aid impacted those who stopped-out, or stopped attending college for at least one semester. However, financial aid did not make a difference towards students graduating within six years. Although there was an indication that receiving financial aid showed a positive effect on degree completion, the impact decreased over time (Gross et al., 2013). As educators understood, financial aid alone did not guarantee students achieved academic success (Ribera et al., 2017). Student success was achieved when students, families, educators, and stakeholders, all worked together for the benefit of the student (Ribera et al.).

As Ponjuan and Hernandez (2016) pointed out, financial aid literacy impacted whether students of color attended college or did not attend college. Understanding the cost of college and how to pay for it helped determine if the student enrolled at a community college instead of a four-year institution. Overcoming the barriers to the financial aid process made a difference in students' persistence so they could obtain a college degree (Ponjuan & Hernandez).

Boatman and Long (2016) studied results that suggested that for low-income students of color, financial aid had a positive impact not only in academics but also in student success and engagement. Students with generous financial aid and/or scholarship packages had higher levels of interaction with their peers outside of class time to focus on

schoolwork. Additionally, these students were more likely to participate in student organizations and community service, thus further benefitting society (Boatman & Long).

For Hispanic DACA students, a large gap remained for them to be able to attend college and fund their education (DeAngelo, Schuster, & Stebleton, 2016). While many states allowed in-state tuition, there were still many other states where DACA students paid out-of-state tuition (Sahay et al., 2016). In addition, the inability to use federal financial aid or student loans provided further barriers for DACA students to attend college. For these immigrant students, the pressure of trying to finance the cost of college was a major obstacle. Having inadequate institutional resources made the college experience even more difficult to navigate (Sahay et al.).

Financial aid and cost of attendance continued to affect Hispanic enrollment and retention (Montalvo, 2012). Lack of financial resources were huge barriers for Hispanic students trying to complete college and continued to be an obstacle to student access and persistence (Gross, Zerquera, Inge, & Berry, 2014). Overall, Hispanic families were highly uneducated about financial resources to pay for college. The Hispanic culture, families, and attitudes against loan debt often discouraged students from taking out school loans (Rodriguez et al., 2015). With the shift in federal funds from majority financial aid to majority school loans, enrollment has been affected by Hispanic students who worked to avoid debt (Samuel & Scott, 2014). Institutions that promoted their work-study programs, grants, and available student loans were better able to retain students since most Hispanic students cited finances as a reason for dropping out of college (Samuel & Scott).

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Overcoming Barriers

Within the last 20 years, because of the academic failure of Hispanics in higher education, scholars have focused on college retention of Hispanic students (Salas et al., 2014). Unfortunately, rather than take institutional responsibility in supporting students with lower levels of college readiness, too many institutions followed the model where some students were told they did not necessarily belong in college (Gonzales et al., 2014). The cultural deficit theory explained by Matos (2015) was a model that blamed people of color and their culture as reasons for students not doing well in school. There was no consideration of institutional policies or practices that provided educational imbalance and/or lack of support for non-white students.

For Hispanic students to overcome barriers, strategic, pragmatic, persuasive, and supportive actions needed to take place (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Strategic actions were those related to scheduling and time management, such as making time to meet with professors. Pragmatic actions included finding cheaper websites to purchase books or understanding that academic advisors were supportive problem-solvers. Students often found it challenging to take persuasive actions and speak to faculty or staff members while the difficulties were occurring. Finally, supportive actions helped students learn from one another and provided mutual support when faced with obstacles or problems (Wilkerson Dias).

Fregeau and Leier (2016) conducted a study to investigate the perspectives of two immigrants from Peru regarding their success in higher education and why they had such different attitudes toward post-secondary education than their American counterparts. Data collected from two separate interviews included informal class discussions. Results

indicated complex and multi-layered attitudes toward higher education based on ethnic/linguistic heritage, religion, social class, immigrant status, gender, previous education, and political experiences. Two core theories emerged, including critical consciousness and resilience that tied into three distinct aspects: 1. support of family and teachers, 2. struggle to overcome gender, social class, and barriers, and 3. ethnic and religious prejudices.

More than other cultures, Hispanic students were more likely to seek out social activities and relationships on campus (Arevalo et al., 2016). When difficulties arose, social support was equally important as academic support for the underserved populations (Hanover Research, 2014). Having an intentional space that was culturally and linguistically open to the needs of Hispanic students produced first to second-year retention rates and were greater predictors of retention than either high school GPA or standardized test scores (Gonzales et al., 2014). If college administrators truly took the time to understand the Hispanic culture that included the need for relationships and support systems, the college personnel could help shed light on how to resolve low success and graduation rates for Hispanic students (Arevalo et al.). Research suggested that community colleges learn to better understand the needs of unique students, so they felt a sense of belonging and became better engaged on campus (Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016).

As a culture, Hispanics were close-knit and group-oriented and created kinships that did not necessarily need to be biological (Arevalo et al., 2016). Because of this collectivist culture, Hispanics benefitted and were more sensitive to the educational support programs offered by colleges and universities, thus improving graduation rates

(Arevalo et al.). Additionally, social clubs and organizations helped students support one another and created life-long college friendships (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) conducted a focus group to learn how relationships with friends, family, faculty, and staff impacted successful community college students of color. Data revealed that community college students conveyed three major themes that helped with their success: relationships with faculty, family support, and campus engagement and support (Sandoval-Lucero et al.).

Within the study by Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) all 21 participants mentioned the importance of their instructors, their accessibility, and willingness to help. Students not only talked about the accessibility of their professors but also the motivation they provided. Many students also explained about the number of adjunct professors who shared career expertise in the classroom.

All participating students within the Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) study believed that their families were a source of support and strength that contributed to their success. Familial support and engagement were not taken for granted and having a support system was defined as emotional, moral, or financial. Finally, about 75% or 16 of the 21 participants believed that feeling connected to their campus was a component that helped students achieve college success. Both part-time and full-time students thought that being part of the campus made students feel accepted, supported, and connected. Because many community college students worked, many students relied on their professors to feel that sense of connection to the school (Sandoval-Lucero et al.). As students became involved on campus and within their communities, students began to recognize their own self-worth as they discovered value in the skills they acquired (Nuñez, 2014).

When Hispanic students were asked why they were involved on campus, most understood the importance of being involved in their communities. They also believed they could have a real impact on social issues (Wright & Kimberly, 2017). Networking and a desire to learn within their own fields were other reasons students participated in student groups (Wright & Kimberly). Engaged students had an openness and willingness to consider different ideas and try new experiences. Involved students were more open to diversity and challenges, often making them the most successful students at college (Bowman, 2014).

According to Tovar (2015), the belief was that mentoring and personal connections increased student engagement on campus as well as academic persistence. Academic persistence was the continuous enrollment of college classes with the intent to graduate (Tovar). Key college authority figures played a vital role and helped influence students to achieve their full academic potential to overcome their feelings of inadequacy for college (Dowd et al., 2013). The approachability of faculty and staff permitted students to become better involved and allowed for greater persistence and graduation rates (Hanover Research, 2014; Kilgo et al., 2016). While meeting with faculty outside of class only had a small impact on GPA, the more often students met with faculty, the higher reported GPAs (Tovar). Because of the important role that faculty and peers played in the success of students, it was necessary for schools to create mentorship programs where second-year students could help guide first-year students (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Peer mentors were beneficial in assisting faculty and staff as partnerships were created to benefit more incoming students (Wilkerson Dias).

According to Rodriguez et al. (2015), the Upward Bound program was a model of a successful intervention program that should be used to aid Hispanic families to gain a better understanding of higher education. Created in 1965 and still strong today, this program addressed larger issues such as recognition of the importance of a college degree, proper financial planning, and guidance through the college process. The Upward Bound program provided at least four crucial areas to increase access for Hispanic students: comprehensive information, required parental involvement, academic support and remediation, and instruction on financial management and planning.

Other activities that facilitated an increase in college attendance rates included collaboration between school and community stakeholders to use advocacy and leadership to address the inadequacy of resources. Keeping track of data such as Hispanic drop-out rates, graduation rates, and college acceptance rates helped hold schools accountable regarding Hispanic student statistics (Cook et al., 2012).

Tovar (2015) conducted a study to show the impact community college relationships with faculty, staff, and support programs had on Hispanic students' GPA and their intention to complete college. Student involvement, along with academic support and faculty interaction in the classroom all contributed to student completion (Hanover Research, 2014). Findings showed that Hispanic students who participated in college support programs increased their intention to persist, while students who met with faculty members outside of class positively impacted their GPA (Tovar).

Serving Hispanic students to improve college completion rates has become increasingly crucial (Arevalo et al., 2016). Retention strategies should be more sensitive to collectivist groups on campus and include more group-oriented approaches. These

support groups should also better understand the competing demands of Hispanic students as they faced family obligations.

Matos (2015) conducted a study to comprehend the influence a family's commitment had on the academic success of Hispanic college students. The following assets were revealed: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social. However, there were three major themes that were apparent: presence and manifestation of aspirational resources, familial resources, and cultural resources.

The first major asset exposed in the Matos (2015) study was the presence and manifestation of aspirational resources. These resources were expressed as family support that served to motivate the students through academic success. Aspirations were conveyed when Hispanic students discussed graduating from college and then returned home to help their families so younger siblings could have an opportunity to go away to school.

The second asset in Matos' (2015) study was familial resources or ways that Hispanic students cared for each other and coped with difficult situations. Hispanic students found encouragement within cultural organizations and supportive staff who might serve the role of family or a parent. Interviewed responses showed this encouragement and support not only included parents and siblings but extended family members, friends, teachers, coaches, and clergy who represented family.

In the Matos (2015) study, the third asset was cultural resources. *Finishing* emerged from the data where rather than talk of graduating, Hispanic students spoke of *finishing* school. The importance of finishing what students started was crucial because often parents did not have the opportunity to finish school. "To finish is to complete what

their parents started by coming to the U. S. in search of a better life for their children"
(pp. 447-448).

Because of the importance of retaining Hispanic students, community colleges had new strategies to encourage student success. Strategies such as new student orientation, mentoring, tutoring, and other programs increased the likelihood of college success for Hispanic students (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Providing academic assistance alone was not enough for Hispanic students to succeed (Tovar, 2015). If community colleges wanted Hispanic students to graduate, administrators and staff needed to come up with a more direct approach to working with this population (Tovar). In creating retention models, community colleges needed to do a better job of taking culture into account for students of color (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Low student retention rates have increasingly concerned colleges across the United States and were detrimental to both the student and the educational institutions (Hanover Research, 2014). Colleges and universities provided a lot of time and energy in working with students for them to leave the institution with student debt but no college degree (Hanover Research). Poor retention policies had negative financial effects for individuals, institutions, and society (Hanover Research; Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). While many institutions were concerned over their retention rates, few colleges have done what was necessary to create long-term change (Hanover Research).

Because educational institutions did not always provide support for nontraditional students, ethnic student organizations and student activism contributed to student access, recruitment, retention, and success for many first-generation and low-income college

students. As Hispanic students and other high-risk student populations continued to enroll in college, it was crucial to develop new plans that focused on students in jeopardy (Rhoads, 2016). Many of these students lacked the resources to deal with the many difficulties of college (Hanover Research, 2014).

Allen (2016) believed that for institutions to do a better job of retaining high-risk populations, faculty and staff needed to help students feel as if they belonged to a community. Validation, encouragement, and appreciation for nontraditional students assisted school personnel to build relationships with students. Student support groups such as Hispanic student organizations also confirmed to students that they belonged, as student involvement was fostered and promoted through recognition of their culture. Being a part of a culturally engaged campus provided students with a greater sense of belonging so they completed their college education (Museus et al., 2017).

Summary

Access to education has been crucial as it allowed for cultural assimilation and served as a legitimate route towards upward mobility that permitted economic stability (Wilkerson Diaz, 2017). Although Hispanics lagged in education, they have contributed greatly to the nation's economic growth. A positive fiscal impact would astonish the United States if Hispanic students completed their education (Samuel & Scott, 2014). With the Hispanic population's continued growth, any positive changes made today would benefit the future (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Educators and researchers who followed demographic trends know the importance of success for Hispanic students and the impact it would have for the nation (McGlynn, 2014). Higher education has created

the rising success necessary to reach financial prosperity to permit Hispanic families to achieve the American Dream (Rodriguez et al.).

For educational institutions, there was a cost-benefit analysis to consider as Hispanic students graduated (Rodriguez et al., 2015). For college leaders who wanted Hispanic students to succeed in college, it was vital to understand what allowed students to successfully overcome barriers (Wilkerson Dias, 2017). Colleges must begin to focus on the retention and graduation rates of specific populations while being intentional with their efforts to provide academic support, encouragement, and guidance to Hispanic students on their academic journey (Wilkerson Dias).

With the increased Hispanic population within the United States, post-secondary institutions should have used student engagement as a retention strategy to not only recruit, but also help graduate students (Nuñez, 2014). Participation in these student groups or organizations did not only play a role in student engagement on campus, upon graduation, but it also prepared them for work within their communities and the broader world around them (Bowman et al., 2015).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

While Chapter II reviewed the importance of student engagement for Hispanic students in college, it also examined the many barriers Hispanic students faced while trying to attend an institution of higher education. For students who had the ability to overcome their challenges, many coped by using the support they found through student organizations or campus engagement (Kilgo et al., 2016). Students who were engaged and connected to college campuses had more positive student success and were better retained by the college (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014).

Chapter III will address the type of methods used to analyze the pre-existing data collected. The three research questions will also be restated within the research design. Throughout Chapter III, a detailed, step-by-step explanation of the methodology used will be provided to help determine if there was a difference in academic success between Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those students not engaged in any community college student organizations.

Research Design

In composing the design for the three research questions, two different analyses were chosen based on the descriptive statistics and scale of measurement. For the first

question, what differences exist between Hispanic students' GPAs for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged? an independent *t*-test was conducted. An independent *t*-test was selected because there were two means being compared from two different groups (Yockey, 2019). The first question asked about the dependent variables that were the GPAs of the two independent, unrelated groups (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher compared the GPA means between two groups. The first group was the self-identified Hispanic students who were in at least one community college student organization, and the second group was self-identified Hispanic students who were not in any student organization.

The second research question asked what differences exist between Hispanic students' retention rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged. A chi-square test was selected because two different groups of self-identified Hispanic students were being measured. The variables measured were the retention rates that were nominal scale (Yockey, 2019). A nominal scale was selected because of the no/yes nominal data that were converted into zeros and ones. Zeros and ones did not indicate there was none or one of something; they were used to identify the different categories of no or yes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). For example, a zero meant no and was placed if the student was not retained from one semester to the next, and the number one was placed if the student had been retained from one semester to the next.

The third question asked what differences exist between Hispanic students' graduation rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged. The researcher selected to conduct a chi-square test because

there were two different groups being measured and the variables, or graduation rates, were nominal scale (Yockey, 2019). The nominal scale was again, yes/no data. If the student graduated from the Midwestern community college, the number one was used to reflect yes, the student graduated. If the student did not graduate from college, a zero was included to reflect no, the student did not graduate. Again, the numbers zero and one did not indicate there was none or one of something. The zeros and ones were used to identify the different categories of no or yes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Participants

All participants for this study were self-identified Hispanic students who attended a statewide, Midwestern community college comprised of one community college system across the state with over 40 sites and campuses. The location of the statewide community college was within the Midwestern part of the United States. The population who would be most interested in this study was Hispanic students who planned to attend college, most specifically those who intended to attend a community college within the United States. Other groups who may be interested in this study were college administrators, faculty, and staff because of the importance of student involvement in extracurricular clubs or organizations and academic success.

The students for this study were self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 and older, who were registered for classes during fall 2017 at the Midwestern community college. Participants were registered as degree-seeking students and meant they were students in pursuit of graduating with either a certificate or associate degree. Included in the data were 18-year-old students because the Midwestern community college offered certificates and technical certificates that could be completed in 30 credit hours or less.

Some students chose to earn a certificate and continued for an associate degree while other students stopped after earning a certificate. Students who completed a degree and/or certificate were the Midwestern community college graduates.

For this study, the researcher used two sample sized groups of 506 students in each group. The first group of students was 506 self-identified Hispanic students registered for classes during fall 2017 at the Midwestern community college. These students were not listed as members of any student organization within the college. The second group of 506 self-identified Hispanic students was those registered for classes during fall 2017 and listed as members of at least one student organization within the Midwestern community college.

Data Collection

The archival data from the Midwestern community college included data for all self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 or older who were registered for classes at the Midwestern community college during the fall 2017 semester. The request included demographic information such as students' gender, age, race/ethnicity, grade point average, degree completion, and participation in a student organization. Because the Midwestern community college had a different portal for collecting student organization information, the researcher received two different databases with the requested information. The first database of pre-existing data was received by email and included a file drop of 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students from the Midwestern community college. First names, last names, and other identifying information such as date of birth and email addresses were included and meant identifiable information was removed. Before removing any personal information, however, the researcher put all student names

in alphabetical order and used names and school email addresses to compare and find duplicate students. After combing through the data, the entire list of 1,521 students included unduplicated, self-identified Hispanic students, enrolled at the Midwestern community college and registered for classes during the fall 2017 semester. At that point, all student identifiers and personal information were removed.

The second database arrived by flash drive and included many of the same self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 years or older, registered for fall 2017 classes at the Midwestern community college. However, this group of students included only self-identified Hispanic students who were members of at least one community college student organization. Student organization membership was determined and added into the student life portal by a designated person from each student organization.

The flash drive contained student membership information with 13 files on it. Within each of the 13 files were 25 student organization rosters that totaled 325 membership lists. The researcher combed through all 325 lists that were made up of self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 or older, registered for fall 2017 classes, and members of student organizations at the Midwestern community college. Each list contained students' first and last names, student identification numbers, date of birth, gender, email addresses, the program of study, grade point averages, and date the student joined the organization. Once all 325 student rosters were compiled, there were over 2000 self-identified Hispanic students because many of the students were in multiple organizations. The over 2000 student names were then compared with school email addresses for duplicate students and then personal identifiers were removed. A final number of 506 unduplicated, self-identified Hispanic students and members of a student

organization at the Midwestern community college were left on the list. Thus, 506 became the sample size for this study.

The researcher then had two separate databases. The first database was one with 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students from the Midwestern community college from across the state. The second database had 506 self-identified Hispanic students from the Midwestern community college who were also members of a student organization. The two lists were compared, and duplicate student information was removed. A total of 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were in student organizations were removed from the first list of 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students from across the state. Removing the students who were in student organizations brought the first database from 1,521 self-identified Hispanic students, down to 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students who were not involved in any student organizations. Then the two comparison lists consisted of 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students who were not in any student organizations and 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were in at least one student organization.

Because both student databases needed to have matching sample sizes of 506 self-identified Hispanic students, the researcher used systemic sampling to bring the list of 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students who were not in any student organizations, down to 506 students. Systemic sampling occurred by selecting every *kth* participant, using a math calculation where the answer would fall between 0 and the size of the sample (Salkind, 2017). Choosing a *kth* participant meant dividing the population size by the sample size to get the number that would be the *kth*. For example, if the answer to dividing the population size by the sample size was five, then every 5th participant would be selected.

The first step in systemic sampling was to divide the size of the population by the size of the sample needed. The population of the first group of students was 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students, and the sample size needed was 506 students. The researcher took the student population of 1,015 and divided the sample size of 506 to equal 2.0059. Rounding 2.0059 to 2.0 meant every second participant would be selected from the list. In this instance, the *kth* participant was every other student from the list of 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students.

The second step in systemic sampling was to choose a starting point at random. To make the starting point random, a dollar bill was pulled from the researcher's wallet and the first two digits from the serial number on the dollar bill were selected (Salkind, 2017). Since the first two digits of the dollar bill were 04, this meant the starting point was the fourth participant on the list of 1,015 self-identified Hispanic students. From there, every other student was selected. Because the sample size of 506 students was not yet reached when getting to the bottom of the list, the researcher went back up to the top of the list and selected every other student until the sample size of 506 was compiled. For comparison purposes, there were two lists of 506 self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 and older, who were registered for fall 2017 at the Midwestern community college. The only difference between the two groups was that the first group was 506 self-identified Hispanic students who did not belong to any student organization, and the second group was 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were members of at least one student organization.

To answer the three research questions, the researcher created one excel spreadsheet where corresponding information could be placed. The excel spreadsheet was

created to pull information from both sample sizes of 506 self-identified Hispanic

students. Within the excel spreadsheet, six labeled columns were created. The first

column was labeled, *C number*, and stood for the students' identification number. The

student number was called a C number because every student identification number at the

Midwestern community college began with the letter C. The second column was labeled

with the word *engaged*. The student was considered engaged if the student was a member

of at least one student organization at the community college. The third column was

labeled *GPA* for the students' most recent cumulative GPA information. The fourth

column was labeled *Fall2018* to include student information for those who also attended

the fall 2018 semester. Finally, column number five and six were labeled, *2017* and *2018*

to insert information for students who graduated either year.

The researcher found that the two original databases with the pre-existing data

had too many line items that were not needed and/or difficult to read. Rather than use the

original databases, it was more precise to use the Midwestern community college's

computer system, called Banner, to retrieve the information and input it into the excel

spreadsheet. In preparation for using the SSPS database to analyze the data, zeros and

ones would be used to answer the research questions (IBM Corp., 2016). Zeros

represented no, and the number one represented yes.

Because of the large amount of data that needed to be inserted into the excel

spreadsheet, the researcher hired an assistant researcher to help input the information.

Within the excel spreadsheet, the student C numbers from the two databases were copied

and pasted into the C number column. Under the word engaged, either a zero or one was

placed. If a zero was listed, then no, the students were not engaged in any community

college student organizations. If the number one was listed, then yes, the students were engaged in at least one community college student organization.

To retrieve the rest of the information needed to answer the research questions, both the researcher and assistant entered C numbers into Banner, one number at a time to enter the students' file and retrieve the needed data. The C numbers from the original file were individually copied and pasted into the Banner screen called SHATERM. From the SHATERM screen, the cumulative GPA information was entered onto the excel spreadsheet under the label, GPA. Next, the SHACRSE screen on Banner was used. The SHACRSE screen showed the semesters that the students took classes. The corresponding information from Banner was placed onto the excel spreadsheet using either zeros or ones under the column labeled, *Fall2018*. Zeros meant no, the student had not taken classes during the fall 2018 semester, and ones meant yes, the student had taken classes during fall 2018. A third Banner screen named SHADGMQ was used to learn if the student had graduated. If the student had not graduated from the Midwestern community college in 2017 or 2018, zeros were placed in the corresponding column. If the student had graduated in either year, the number one was entered under the year 2017 or 2018.

<div align="center">Analytical Methods</div>

To analyze the pre-existing data, the researcher took the data from the excel spreadsheet and placed the information into the SSPS database (IBM Corp., 2016). The excel spreadsheet consisted of data from the two sample sizes of 506 self-identified Hispanic students, aged 18 years or older, who were registered for fall 2017 classes at the Midwestern community college. Included in the data were the 506 self-identified

Hispanic students who were members of a student organization and the other 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were not members of any student organization. For comparison purposes, the data was analyzed using both an independent *t*-test and chi-square test.

Because research question number one had two means being compared from two different groups, and the GPA was the dependent variable, the researcher selected to administer the independent *t*-test (Yockey, 2019). For the second and third research questions, a chi-square test was used because there were two different groups being measured and the variables of retention and graduation rates were nominal scale (Yockey). The nominal scales were no/yes data that showed either the student was retained from fall 2017 semester to fall 2018 semester, or the students were not retained. The nominal scale for the graduation rates also included no/yes data showing that the student either graduated in 2017, 2018, or neither year.

The college's pre-existing data in combination with the collected data from Banner was used because the information was crucial to answering the research questions asked. The procedures forced the researcher to analyze each step in trying to determine what needed to be learned from each question. Reviewing the data, variables, and scales of measurements helped to better understand the data.

Limitations

While conducting research for this investigation, there were several limitations that may have affected the results of this study. The first limitation was that students self-identified when completing the race and/or ethnicity information. A second limitation was that the student organization database was made up of organizations where

designated officers of each student organization defined what qualified students to be a member of their student organization. The third limitation was human error. While pre-existing data was used for this study, there were two databases where several pieces of information were manually entered by two different people. For example, students were manually compared for any duplicate information, and data were converted into zeros and ones so the information could be analyzed by SSPS. Both the researcher and paid assistant manually entered information into both databases. Having two different people enter the data allowed for additional human error.

Summary

In reflection of the methodology used for this study, having access to the pre-existing data from the Midwestern community college allowed the researcher to take a closer look at the academic success of Hispanic students involved in a community college. Most specifically, the academic success between those students who were involved in at least one student organization versus those students who were not involved in any student organization was analyzed. Chapter IV will take an extensive look at the findings and conclusions of all three research questions. Suggestions and recommendations will also be made, and the results of the research questions and quantitative data will be discerned and discussed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

While the previous chapter addressed the type of methods used to analyze the pre-existing data collected, Chapter IV reviews the findings and conclusions for each of the three research questions. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether being engaged in at least one community college student organization made a difference to Hispanic students and their academic success. To determine academic success, pre-existing data was used and included grade point averages, retention rates, and graduation rates. Implications and results of each research question will be examined with final suggestions, limitations, and recommendations shared.

Chapter I focused on factors that prevented Hispanic students from either attending college or graduating from college. Because Hispanic students were considered nontraditional and high-risk students, additional supports were needed. Extra assistance for nontraditional students included intentional guidance to students so they better navigated higher education. Many first-generation college students did not know how to apply for financial aid or where to find financial aid information in a language parents could understand. Once the nontraditional students were on a college campus, they did not always realize the importance of asking professors for help or know they could use the free resources available.

Chapter II revealed the importance of colleges having ethnic student organizations on campus to serve and assist the students. These organizations helped students identify with others and feel as if they belonged on a college campus. Once students believed they belonged on campus they learned to better cope with the challenge of balancing work, school, and volunteer activities.

Using a step-by-step explanation, Chapter III addressed the type of methods used to analyze pre-existing, quantitative data from the Midwestern community college. The objective was to determine if there was a difference in academic success between Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those Hispanic students not engaged in any community college. To compare these two different groups, three research questions were examined.

1. What difference exists between Hispanic students' GPAs for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

2. What difference exists between Hispanic students' retention rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

3. What difference exists between Hispanic students' graduation rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

Chapter IV examines the findings to the three research questions regarding self-identified Hispanic students' engagement in community college student organizations and academic success. The implications shared in this study will guide the impact of the

research. The objective of this study was for community colleges to adopt the recommended procedures to direct more Hispanic students toward academic success, and ultimately, to graduation. Finally, recommendations will provide information to assist future researchers to replicate and improve the current study.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

Grade Point Average Comparisons

In evaluating GPA score means between Hispanic community college students engaged in student organizations versus those students who were not engaged in any student organizations, two specific groups of students were assessed. Group one consisted of a sample size of 506 self-identified Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student organization. Group two consisted of a sample size of 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any community college student organization. To compare these two groups of students, the researcher asked, what difference exists between Hispanic students' GPAs for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged?

After the data was entered into the SSPS database (IBM Corp., 2016) and the analysis was run, the independent t-test indicated highly statistically significant results that meant there was "less than one in a thousand chance of being wrong" ("StatsDirect," 2013, para. 9). The outcome for the first research question showed that self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one community college student organization had a higher GPA mean (M) or average score of 2.98 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.72. Thus, 0.72 was the average amount each individual score varied from the mean set of scores (Salkind, 2017). Self-identified Hispanic students who were

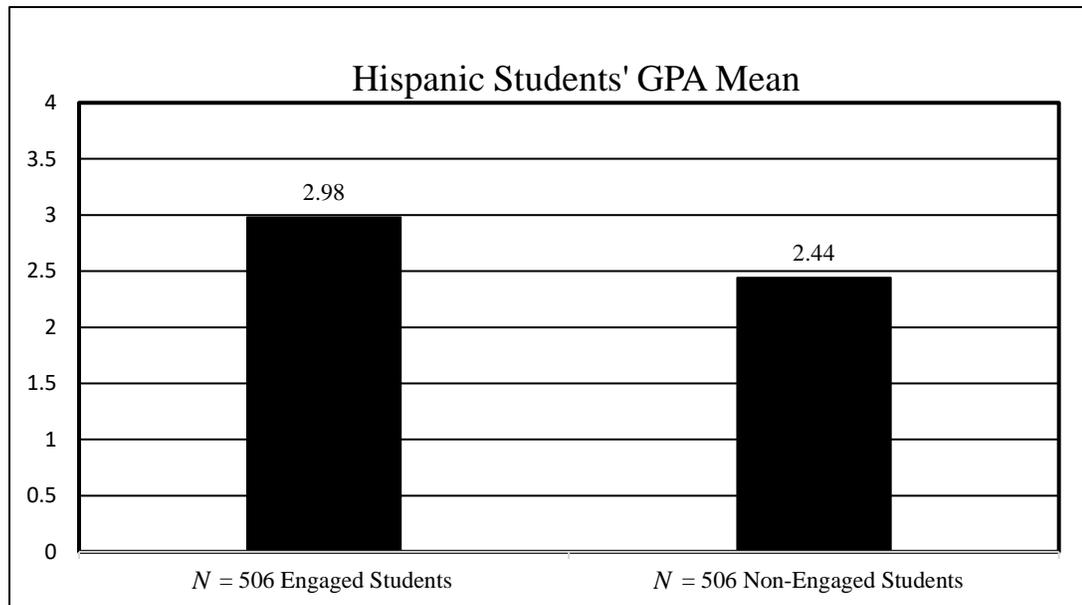not engaged in any student organization had a GPA mean of 2.44 with a standard deviation of 1.0. See Figure 1.

Hispanic Students' GPA Mean

Figure 1. GPA means between two groups of self-identified Hispanic community college students.

After conducting the analysis, the t value within the equation equaled the difference between two sample means, divided between the standard error of the difference between the two means. With 506 participants, the degrees of freedom (*df*) were equal to 504 (total number of participants minus two), with a corresponding *p*-value of less than .001. Because the *p*-value was less than .001, it was concluded that results were statistically significant. Self-identified Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student organization had a higher GPA mean than self-identified Hispanic students not engaged in any student organizations. A medium effect size of 0.619 showed that the two self-identified Hispanic student groups were 0.619 standard deviations apart. The findings suggested that self-identified Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student organization had a $M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.72$, while

self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any community college student organization had a *M* = 2.44, *SD* = 1.0, *t*(504) = -9.85, *p* < .001, d = .619.

Retention Rates for Hispanic Students

Retention rates were measured for this study by keeping track of self-identified Hispanic students who attended the Midwestern community college during the fall 2017 semester and returned to the same college in the fall of 2018. To answer the second research question, what difference exists between Hispanic students' retention rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged, retention rates between two specific groups were investigated. Again, groups one and two, each consisted of a sample size of 506 self-identified Hispanic students. However, the first group of students was engaged in at least one community college student organization, while the second group of students was not engaged in any community college student organization.

Because the researcher wanted to know if there was a relationship between student engagement and retention rates and because nominal data was produced, a chi-square test was selected to analyze and answer the second research question. Nominal data was information measured in terms of units or categories (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). To analyze the information, the nominal data was then entered into the SSPS database (IBM Corp., 2016). Results suggested that among the 506 self-identified Hispanic students involved in at least one student organization, 19% or 96 of the students were retained from the fall 2017 semester to the fall 2018 semester. Of the 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any student organization, 0% or none of the students were retained from one fall semester to the next. See Figure 2.
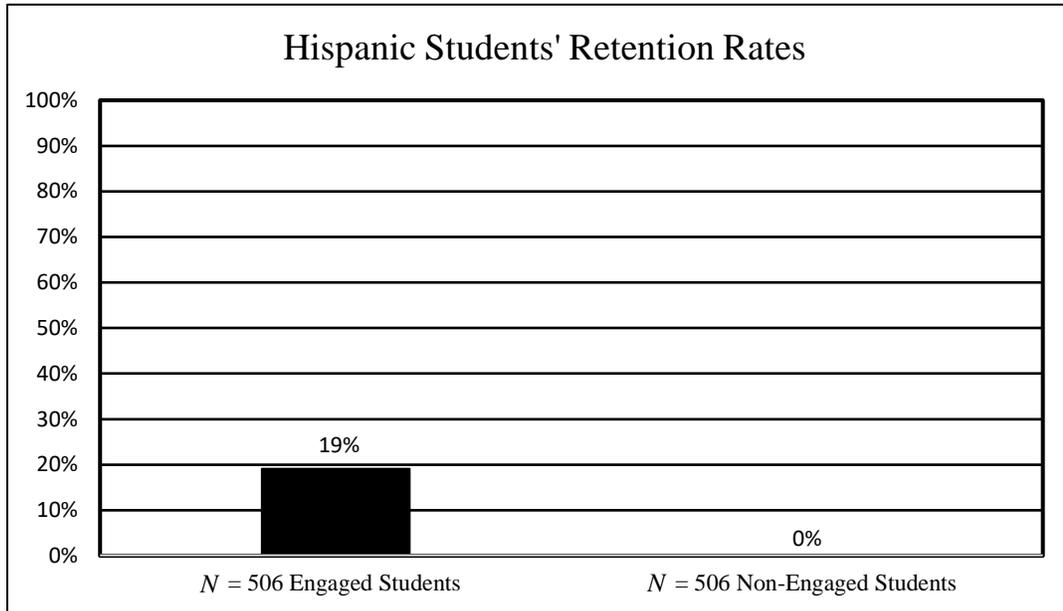
Figure 2. Retention rates between two groups of self-identified Hispanic community college students.

The differences between the two groups of self-identified Hispanic students were highly statistically significant, and meant there was, "less than one in a thousand chance of being wrong" ("StatsDirect," 2013, para. 9). The formula for the Pearson Chi-Square statistic was χ^2 equaled observed frequency minus expected frequency squared, divided by the expected frequency. There was one degree of freedom with a sample size of 1,012 participants. The *p*-value was less than .001 and meant the differences were highly statistically significant. The Cramer's V formula was a commonly used measure for the effect size of the chi-square test. Because of the medium effect size of .33, there was a moderate relationship between the two variables compared. As a result, there was a highly statistically significant relationship between Hispanic students engaged in at least one community college student organization and retention rates as $\chi^2(1, N = 1012) = 109$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .33$.

Community College Hispanic Students' Graduation Rates

For the third and final research question, what difference exists between Hispanic students' graduation rates for those engaged in at least one community college student organization versus those not engaged, graduation rates were compared for two distinct groups. Each sample size was made up of 506 self-identified Hispanic students within each group. The first group consisted of self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one community college student organization. Whereas, the second group consisted of self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any community college student organization.

To learn the difference between the two groups, and because the researcher wanted to know if there was a relationship between student engagement and graduation rates, a chi-square test was selected to analyze and answer the last research question. The nominal data was then entered into the SSPS database (IBM Corp., 2016). After the analysis, the chi-square results indicated that the difference was not significant. Of the 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one student organization, 37% or 187 students graduated. However, of the 506 self-identified Hispanic students not engaged in any student organization, 32% or 162 students graduated. See Figure 3.
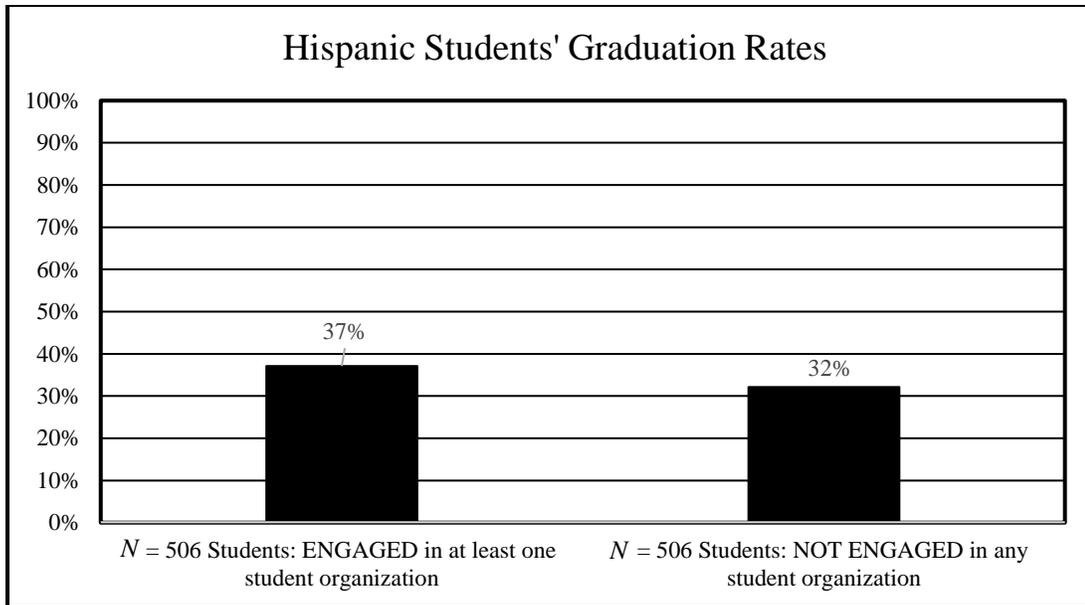
Hispanic Students' Graduation Rates

Figure 3. Graduation rates between two groups of self-identified Hispanic community college students.

As a result, the differences between the two groups of self-identified Hispanic students were not significant. Because the *p*-value was greater than .05, this meant there was not a significant relationship between engaged students and graduation rates. The formula for the Pearson Chi-Square statistic was χ^2 equaled observed frequency minus expected frequency squared, divided by the expected frequency. There was one degree of freedom with a sample size of 1,012 participants. The *p*-value was greater than .05 and meant the differences were not significant. The Cramer's *V* formula was used to measure the effect size of the chi-square test. Because of the small effect size of .054, there was a weak relationship between the two variables compared. The outcome of the Pearson Chi-Square statistic was $\chi^2(1, N = 1012) = 2.95, p > .05$, Cramer's *V* = .054.

Conclusions

As the current study revealed, overall findings indicated that Hispanic community college students engaged in at least one student organization had higher GPAs and greater retention rates than those Hispanic students not engaged in any student organization. Two of the three research question results were highly statistically significant, that demonstrated the importance of Hispanic students being engaged in at least one student organization while in college. The first two research question outcomes confirmed that students who were involved in student organizations on a community college campus benefitted academically. The researcher's conclusions were further supported by Hanover Research (2014) and indicated that when Hispanic students and other underserved populations were faced with difficulties, social support was equally as important as academic support.

Because the results of the first research question were statistically significant, community colleges should strongly consider the important findings of this study. Findings indicated that engaged Hispanic community college students had greater GPAs when compared to the Hispanic students not engaged in any student organization. Self-identified Hispanic students who were involved in at least one student organization had a mean GPA score of 2.98, while self-identified Hispanic students who were not involved in any student organization had a lower mean GPA score of 2.44.

Regarding retention rates, the researcher's outcomes indicated statistically significant results for the second research question. Hispanic students engaged in at least one student organization were more likely to continue attending college, compared to students who were not engaged in any student organizations. Within the sample size of

506 self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in student organizations, 19% or 96 of the students continued from one fall semester to the next. Of the 506 self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any student organizations, none of the students continued; this was a 0% retention rate. The researcher's outcomes were comparable to a study by Goncalves and Trunk (2014) and confirmed that student engagement was positively correlated with student success and retention.

Although results within the retention rate findings revealed that not a single self-identified Hispanic student was retained from the fall 2017 to fall 2018 semester, there were nevertheless students who graduated. Students may have attended the Midwestern community college from fall 2017 semester to the spring 2018 semester or fall 2017 semester to summer 2018 semester. In some instances, students may have attended college from fall 2017 to spring 2019. For some unknown reason, self-identified Hispanic students were not retained from one fall semester to the next. However, some of the self-identified Hispanic students returned at some point to continue their studies so they could graduate.

For the third research question, findings were not considered significant, however, self-identified Hispanic students engaged in at least one student organization had higher graduation rates than students who were not involved in any student organization. For the self-identified Hispanic students who were engaged in at least one student organization, there was a 37% graduation rate, with 187 of the 506 students graduated. The 37% graduation rate was compared to self-identified Hispanic students who were not engaged in any student organization. Unengaged students had a 32% graduation rate, and only 162

of the 506 students graduated. Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) also acknowledged that student participation on college campuses contributed to higher graduation rates.

Implications and Recommendations

The outcome of the current study showed there were positive benefits for the engaged, Hispanic community college student. Within this investigation, involved Hispanic community college students showed greater academic success for GPA means and retention rates, with statistically significant results. These findings meant that Hispanic students who were in at least one student organization had higher GPAs and were retained in college more often than students who were not involved in any student organizations. The researcher's outcomes matched an investigation by Tovar (2015) that revealed Hispanic students who participated in support programs offered by the college both increased their intention to continue college through to degree completion and positively impacted their GPA.

Even though the results did not show significance in graduation rates for engaged Hispanic students, there were still valuable outcomes to share. According to the researcher's findings, of the 506 self-identified Hispanic community college students who were engaged in at least one student organization, 187 or 37% of the students graduated. In comparison, only 162 or 32% of the students graduated from the 506 self-identified Hispanic students not engaged. While these outcomes were not significant, they were favorable for the engaged student and should encourage community college educators to offer student engagement as part of the college curriculum. Examples of student engagement as part of curriculum could be educators requiring students to attend various campus events and write about the experience. It could also mean attending relevant

cultural events during class time and allowing time for profound class discussions. Faculty could get creative on how to offer student engagement opportunities if this information were shared with college personnel who were charged with creating courses within each program.

While post-secondary institutions struggle to understand how to assist Hispanic college students, the researcher's conclusions demonstrated how to better support these students through assistance and reassurance. Specific supports for Hispanic students could include detailed explanations regarding financial aid in a language easily understood, showing students the different services available to them, and persuading students to join campus clubs or student organizations. College educators could better assist Hispanic students if faculty and staff understood the type of encouragement and guidance these at-risk students needed. The extra assistance could come in the form of intentionality. Intentional support from college personnel would include walking students over from one department to another, reminding students to ask for assistance, and simply displaying authentic curiosity in how the students were doing. To retain and recruit other student populations, the current study could be replicated to understand the underserved and at-risk groups, such as African Americans and other ethnic minority students.

To reproduce this investigation, one recommendation concerned the use of the community college's student life portal. The student life portal was a database where student organizations' pre-existing, quantitative data was stored. Although the portal only had one-year worth of student engagement data during the time of collection, future research should include at least three years' worth of data on student engagement.

Future research should also include more information regarding the number of student participation hours that would benefit students. Student participation hours were recorded by keeping attendance at the on-campus activities and then entered into the student life portal. If a student was engaged in too many participation hours, that involvement could be detrimental to a students' GPA. For example, in a study by Zacherman and Foubert (2014), participation in 11 to 20 hours per week of out-of-class activities began to negatively affect students' academic performance. More than 30 extracurricular hours per week were detrimental to a student's grade point average. Having a specific number of required participation hours could better assist student organizations, as there would be more consistency if there was a required number of membership hours.

Additional research to build on the information already gathered could include determining the reasons Hispanic students were initially attracted to join a student organization. Learning why students joined student clubs or organizations would be beneficial to understanding if being engaged comes from intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. The research on rationales for students becoming involved on a community campus could further help Hispanic students, their families, and community colleges recognize how to better engage Hispanic students on campus.

Throughout the researcher's study, several limitations may have affected the results of the researcher's investigation and findings. The first limitation was within the pre-existing data, where students were asked to self-identify. Some students left the race and/or ethnicity sections blank and meant the data had incomplete information. The recommendation was for the researcher to create a disclaimer for the collection of future

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data. The disclaimer would be required for students to read before completing the race and ethnicity section. Students would be informed that any information collected would be analyzed and used to better understand how to assist specific student populations so they would be successful in college.

A second limitation of the study was the lack of defined membership requirements. Specific conditions for each organization would have allowed the researcher to know how engaged the student was, rather than just a name on a membership list. Although membership lists had been collected within the student life portal, some basic questions needed addressed. Was the member in good academic standing? Was the student an officer? Had the student truly been involved? The answers to these questions were important to understanding the level of student engagement. The researcher recommended that the community college itself define the stipulations to membership in student organizations. The outlined obligations should also be based on information most academically beneficial to students. Defined requirements would allow consistency among each student organization.

A third limitation that may have affected this study was human error. Because there were two different databases where pieces of information were manually entered, it was easy for the researcher and paid assistant to make mistakes during the transfer of data. The researcher recommended that more time be set aside to comb through the data. More time to review and examine the information would not only help the researcher reduce human error, but it would also avoid the need to hire a research assistant.

Even with the limitations presented, the overall research provided insight into the growing Hispanic population whose low college retention and completion rates continue

to plague the educational system. This research may prove beneficial and serve as a guide for post-secondary institutions to better support and assist Hispanic students who want to attend college. The goal should be for Hispanic students to enter college and be academically successful, so they will continue their studies through to graduation. Intentional support and assistance of Hispanic students could make a difference as to whether students achieve academic success and build the confidence needed to graduate from college.

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APPENDIX A

Permission to Use Pre-existing Data

From: Molly Chamberlin <mchamberlin5@ivytech.edu>

Sent: Monday, October 14, 2019 7:42 AM

To: JoAnne Alvarez <jalvarez21@ivytech.edu>

Subject: RE: Data results

Hi JoAnne,

Yes, it's fine to use data results in the dissertation, so long as individual human subjects

could not be identified.

Molly

Molly Chamberlin, Ph.D.

Ivy Tech Community College

From: JoAnne Alvarez <jalvarez21@ivytech.edu>

Sent: Sunday, October 13, 2019 10:09 AM

To: Molly Chamberlin <mchamberin5@ivytech.edu>

Subject: RE: Data results

Hello Molly,

I am reaching out to you one more time regarding my dissertation. As I write the final

chapter, I am writing to request permission to include data results within my dissertation.

Thank you,

JoAnne