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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Mapping the Geography of Student Persistence at a Research University

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Douglas P. Easterly

Committee in charge:

Professor Claire Ramsey, Chair
Professor Hugh Mehan
Professor K. Wayne Yang

2012

The dissertation of Douglas P. Easterly is approved and it is acceptable in quality and

form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California

2012

Dedication

For their willingness to share themselves, to explore themselves, and to help me understand a bit of their world, this manuscript is dedicated to the students who have participated in this study, as well as the students who have been my guides, inspiration and teachers through the years.

For being my light, joy, and partner through all of this, I also dedicate this manuscript to my wife Sheri, without whose love and support I would never have been able to start, much less finish, this work.

And finally, to my mother, Maeda Misao, who always encouraged me to live a life of books and learning, even if she had no idea what I was talking about most of the time.

Epigraph

No one can deny that the school plays a crucial role in the distribution of knowledge and know-how, although a less important one than is ordinarily thought, but it is equally clear that it also contributes, and increasingly so, to the distribution of power and privilege and to the legitimization of this distribution. It is currently the school that has the responsibility for performing the magical action of consecration… that consists in effecting a series of more or less arbitrary breaks in the social continuum and in legitimizing those breaks through symbolic acts that sanction and ratify them, establishing them as consistent with the nature of things and the hierarchy of things by making them official through public, formal declarations in ceremonies modeled on the sacred….

Pierre Bourdieu

If people, as historical beings necessarily engaged with other people in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement, it would be (and is) a violation of their humanity. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

Paulo Freire

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me.

Michel Foucault

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

<div align="center">**Vita**</div>

Education

Doctor of Education, Teaching and Learning, University of California, San Diego. La Jolla, CA, June 2012.

Master of Arts, Teaching and Learning, University of California, San Diego. La Jolla, CA, September 2008.

Bachelor of Arts, English Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz, CA, June 1990.

Publications

Easterly, D. (2012). *Mapping the Geography of Student Persistence at a Research University* (Doctoral dissertation). University of California, San Diego.

Easterly, D., Pérez, M., Ayala, J., & Manjarrez, L. (2011). Making room at the table: Validation, belonging, and membership in the university. In Lin, J. & Wastal, C., *Teaching diversity: Proceedings of the UCSD Teaching Diversity Conference*. San Diego, CA: University Readers.

Easterly, D. (2008). The new transfer student portal: Understanding new transfer students' transitions to the research university (Master's thesis). University of California, San Diego.

Presentations

Easterly, D., Pérez, M., Ayala, J., & Manjarrez, L. (January, 2011) *Making Room at the Table: Validation, Belonging, and Membership in the University*. Presentation to the Muir College Teaching Diversity Conference, La Jolla, California.

Easterly, D. (September, 2009) *The first two years of college: Designing an advising program for STEM*. Presentation to the Council for Opportunity in Education Annual Conference, San Antonio, Texas.

Joseph, C., Head, G., Easterly, D., Cain, T. & Whitman, J., (May, 2008) *TritonChat Advising: Using Real-Time Instant Messaging to Support Academic Advising at UC San Diego*. Presentation to the University of California Academic Advising Conference, Monterey, CA.

Professional Experience

University of California, San Diego,   2010 – Present
John Muir College

Dean of Academic Advising

- Manage and oversee academic advising program for John Muir College, a residential college with 4000 undergraduate students, seven academic advising profession, and six student employees.
- Participate in senior management team for college.
- Oversee review of student standing of Muir students in academic difficulty, including academic probation and academic disqualification.
- Participate in outreach, orientation, and training activities for the college.
- Participate in campus-wide committees and functions overseeing implementation, modification, and development of policies and procedures for undergraduate students.
- Develop and review publications for general catalog, college publications, and university outreach.

University of California, San Diego   2003 – 2010
John Muir College
Academic Advisor

- Provide diverse educational counseling, career and vocational guidance, and curriculum planning and facilitate students' decision-making skills.
- Work with student veterans and active-duty military, overseeing certification of veterans' benefits, representing the college in campus committees for veterans, and participating in campus outreach.
- Oversee transfer orientation programs, develop publications, and work with Admissions office on outreach activities.
- Support Dean of Academic Advising in review of students in academic difficulty.

University of California, San Diego   2000-2003
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Undergraduate Affairs Coordinator

- Provide academic and career advising to over 900 undergraduate majors in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.
- Coordinate curriculum planning, submission of course descriptions and catalog copy, and planning of course schedule under direction of Vice Chair for Education.
- Oversee daily administration of undergraduate program, including submission of grades and grade corrections, course approximations, and course wait lists.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mapping the Geography of Student Persistence at a Research University

by

Douglas P. Easterly

Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Claire Ramsey, Chair

After events in 2010, students at the University of California at San Diego
staged a series of protests to address the social climate of the campus, and differences
in retention rates between historically underrepresented students and other students on
the campus. This study addresses the complexity of retention by comparing reality—
students' perspectives on their experiences on campus—to theoretical models—
existing literature on capital, integration and resiliency models. I reflect on the value
of understanding student agency as a way of understanding the ways in which students
produce retention, and discuss needs for further research to explore this model.

Chapter 1: Whose House? Our House!

In February 2010, members of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity at the University of California, San Diego posted an invitation on Facebook to a "ghetto-themed" party called the Compton Cookout "in honor of" Black History Month (Gordon, 2010). Rumors regarding the party and the invitation quickly spread among students, staff and faculty.

The Chancellor quickly responded with a statement denouncing the off-campus party. However, the Chancellor also argued that because the party occurred off-campus and was sponsored by individuals rather than the fraternity itself, no disciplinary action could be taken. Campus tensions increased after an incendiary campus television broadcast by a controversial campus paper, *The Koala*, led to a shutdown of all campus media funding by the Associated Students, pitting supporters of free speech against students protesting for a change in campus climate (Chen, 2010a). The UCSD Black Student Union (BSU) released a press release responding to the situation with a set of 33 demands (UCSD Black Student Union, 2010) in response to both the Compton Cookout and the Koala broadcast. The BSU response addressed not only recent incidents, but also larger issues of campus climate, curriculum, structure and use of public university spaces as part of larger social problems on campus.

Campus teach-ins, walk outs, and incidents in which a noose and a hood were found on campus all added to the atmosphere of unrest around issues of campus climate, which combined with state-wide student protests in March. They finally

ended when the Chancellor agreed to meet with the BSU and signed a negotiated set of demands (Chen, 2010b).

The protests of 2010 exposed vast differences in the perceptions of students, staff, and faculty regarding campus climate, exposing divergent perceptions of safety, belonging, ownership, and trust on the UCSD campus with deep historical roots. During the protests, the BSU pointed to climate concerns that they had already reported on as part of their "Do UC Us?" report (The Black Student Union of the University of California, San Diego, 2010), and used the occasion of the protests to hold the University accountable to act on the situation. I observed several protests, including those on March 4, in which students chanted "Whose house? Our house!" These protests revealed a strong need for students to affirm legitimate ownership of the campus, and to present their agency in claiming the campus for their own.

The Campus Concept and Evolving Plan

UCSD is a public land-grant research university located in La Jolla, California in San Diego County. The campus recently enrolled over 22,000 undergraduates. This group was 44% Asian, 27% White, 10% Chicana/o, 5% Filipino, 3% Latina/o, 2% African American, 11% other or decline to state, and less than 1% Native American (Office of Student Research and Information, 2009a). The university is organized around six undergraduate colleges, which the campus promotes as providing a sense of community and personalization:

> The colleges provide their students with many of the advantages of a
> small liberal arts college plus the opportunities and resources of a large
> research university. The colleges are small communities within the

university as a whole. Each one is home to a diverse group of students from all majors and backgrounds. (UCSD Admissions, 2011)

The conflict between narratives of personalization and support promoted by the University and of disenfranchisement on the part of student activists provide very different visions of the campus. These conflicts are rooted in the history, context, and very design of the University itself.

The original campus master plan of 1963 proposed a university comprising twelve semi-independent undergraduate colleges. The twelve colleges would be distributed along a pedestrian mall along the area now known as the Ridge Walk, with the colleges forming four clusters of three colleges. Each college would have connections to faculty, graduate students, and academic departments as well as its own central courtyard, classrooms, laboratories, housing, and administrative offices. (Aguilar, 1995) The original Master Plan of 1963 proposed ambitious goals for infrastructure, communication, and a mix of independent colleges connected by unified landscape architecture, building materials, and general institutional plan.

The introduction of a new architect to plan the campus library led to a revised campus plan in 1966 that moved the campus library east of the Ridge Walk, and created a roughly parallel north-south walkway, along which the new campus center would be built, referred to as the University Center with administrative and teaching rooms along the new pathway. At the same time, the new architect built Mandeville Center, an arts building for the second college, across the path of the main campus promenade. (Aguilar, 1995) Thus, the 1966 revision of the Master Plan began to

fragment the unified vision of the campus, introducing physical barriers between the colleges and divisions between student and institutional life.

The second disruption to the Master Plan came in the early 1970s with the founding of Third College. The campus and local community saw the activists involved in the foundation of Third College as radicals and revolutionaries associated with such figures as Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis (Anderson, 1993). This led to efforts by the existing colleges to distance themselves from Third World activists and by the activists to seek independence (Aguilar, 1995). As a result, Third College was relocated from its original planned location just east of Muir College, to a location further away and to the north of its original site (Aguilar, 1995), further disrupting the flow and connection between the colleges, and introducing an intentional disruption into the campus plan by physically creating distance and disconnection between third college and other colleges in the community.

Other changes in the state of California starting in the 1970s slowed the growth of the University of California system. Decreasing high school populations, a national recession, and changes in California's tax laws led to both perceptions of decreased need for students and decreased funding for campus growth. By the 1980s, the campus began issuing 15-year Long-Range Development Plans (LRDPs) to replace the Master Plan with a more flexible, short-term vision. The plans in the 1980s focused on building local neighborhoods with shared administrative functions and organizing the campus into academic corridors with shared research interests, abandoning the original vision of independent cross-disciplinary colleges. The LRDPs also reduced the

number of colleges from 12 to five. Finally, economic realities of fund-raising left

campus physical development focused on short-term opportunities for growth, leading

to the construction of buildings based on corporate or research grants with very

specific research purposes rather than buildings that would contribute to a strongly

defined and planned community (Aguilar, 1995). Through the nineties and into the

present day, the University that had been conceived by Roger Revelle as offering the

resources of a large research university combined with the community of a small

college had transformed into a setting with less attention to the experience of

undergraduates and much less intimate learning communities.

The Current Physical and Social Environment

The main University of California, San Diego (UCSD) campus now sits on

1200 acres of land (University of California, San Diego, 2011), encompassing six

residential colleges, six academic divisions, a medical school, a pharmacy school,

medical and research facilities, and a wide variety of student support and student life

facilities. The western edge of the campus lies within walking distance of beaches,

while the eastern edge spans Interstate 5. The northern edge of the campus includes

large stands of green space, largely eucalyptus forest, while the western and

northwestern sections of campus lie close to biotechnology firms and the Salk Institute

and to expensive ocean-view homes.

The main undergraduate campus includes six residential colleges with a central

administrative and academic core as shown in Figure 1. Four colleges lie along the

Ridge Walk, a north-south footpath running through academic and living centers of

those colleges. Library Walk, a parallel foot traffic corridor to the east of Ridge Walk, runs from the School of Medicine to Geisel Library, and is lined by academic and administrative buildings. Further east lie the two remaining colleges, Warren and Sixth; "Town Square," a blocked-off former turnabout converted into an open space for student and campus events abutting both the student services center and the student center known as the Price Center; and a recently-built student services building. Further east lie portions of campus beyond the main college residential spaces including sports fields, the campus services complex, a hospital, and the Mesa Housing complex for married students, students with children, and graduate students. The campus thus presents a distinct center of official administrative, teaching, and student services building connected to library walk connected to a periphery of colleges, with a distant periphery of services that are usually less central to the academic life of undergraduates. This presents at least two separate "cores" – the Ridge Walk that formed the original core of the campus, and Library Walk, which has developed since the original revision of the Master Plan— with a mix of peripheral spaces.

Transfer
Housing

Thurgood Marshall
College

Eleanor Roosevelt
College

John Muir
College

Old Student
Center

Revelle
College

Ridge Walk

Faculty
Center

Athletic
Center

International
Center

Career
Services

Health
Center

School of
Medicine

Library Walk

Main
Library

Center
Hall

Center
Hall

Chancellor's
Complex

New Student
Center

Town
Center

Warren
College

Student
Services
Center

6th
College

N

Figure 1. *Simplified Map of the UCSD Campus*

A variety of shuttles and busses connect the campus core and periphery, but also provide transportation to and from the outlying neighborhoods of La Jolla and, to a lesser extent, to Hillcrest (where the campus maintains a medical center), Old Town, and downtown San Diego to the south. First year students are encouraged to avoid bringing their own cars and since the campus's location is twenty or more minutes north of San Diego by car, students tend to remain on or near the campus.

Local Context

Though the UCSD campus is a very notable presence in La Jolla, the local community is physically and socially isolated from the campus. The community surrounding the campus is affluent, highly educated, and predominantly White. According to 2000 census data (which uses federal census categories for race and ethnicity), La Jolla has a median household income of over $80,000; is predominantly

(91%) White; has few Hispanics (12%); predominantly consists of monolingual

English speakers (78%); and more than half the population has completed bachelors'

degrees or higher (SANDAG, 2003a). By contrast, the San Diego region is only 67%

White, 53% Hispanic, 67% monolingual English speakers, less than a third have

bachelors' degrees or higher, and median household income is just over $47,000

(SANDAG, 2003b). It is notable that unlike campus data, federal census data

"Hispanic" is treated as an ethnic category, while "White" is a racial category. Thus,

individuals may be White and Hispanic in Census data, or Black and Hispanic, but not

just Hispanic as a single racial category.

Furthermore, downtown La Jolla and the La Jolla Village are physically

isolated from the main UCSD campus. The portions of La Jolla close to the campus

include industrial parks, research firms, hotels, and shopping centers. The housing

around the campus is off the main bus routes, and the streets in the residential areas of

campus are zoned so that anyone parking in these areas must have a residential

parking permit. Thus, the areas of La Jolla surrounding the campus are not shared

space between students and local homeowners. Students only walk through

neighboring residential spaces on the way to the beach or, in the case of graduate

students, on the way to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The separation

between campus and local community only further reinforces the campus's insular

feel.

The current demographics at UCSD have been shaped by larger ongoing

political and social events. In particular, the passage of California Proposition 209 in

1996 eliminating the use of race in and admissions decisions led swiftly to declines in populations of African American, Chicano, and Latino student enrollments in both the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems (Contreras, 2005), despite promises by the leaders of the state's public colleges to work to assure access and diversity. The elimination of affirmative action programs restricted the ways in which universities could construct merit; by eliminating the consideration of race, the state eliminated many of the ways that students, communities, and admissions officers could discuss strategies for access and representation.

History, community, reputation and campus climate connected on the UCSD campus, creating enduring problems recruiting and enrolling African American students. Critics have long pointed out that UCSD's comprehensive admissions policies have been less advantageous to African Americans than holistic admission policies used at other UC campuses. However, the campus has countered that many qualified African American students have been admitted to UCSD each year, but the acceptance rate for African American students is lower than twenty percent, less than half the acceptance rate of UC Berkeley or UC Los Angeles. (Alpert, 2010)

The climate for African American and Chicana/o students is further complicated by differences in retention rates and time to degree across different ethnic groups on campus. Between 2000 and 2008, Asian, White, African American, and Chicana/o students have had a mean one-year retention rate of approximately 90% or higher in all four groups, as noted in Table 1 (Office of Student Research and

Information, 2011a). All categories of students experience lower retention rates at the end of the second year, suggesting changes in circumstances with regard to retention between the first and the second year of college.

Table 1. UCSD Retention Rates by Ethnicity (Office of Student Research and Information, 2011a)

Year of Admission	Asian		White		African-Am.		Chicana/o	
	1-yr	2-yr	1-yr	2-yr	1-yr	2-yr	1-yr	2-yr
2000	97%	91%	93%	84%	96%	89%	90%	83%
2001	96%	92%	92%	84%	97%	85%	89%	83%
2002	96%	92%	93%	85%	94%	88%	87%	78%
2003	96%	93%	92%	83%	92%	77%	88%	79%
2004	97%	92%	93%	85%	93%	83%	94%	86%
2005	96%	92%	92%	86%	93%	86%	91%	85%
2006	97%	93%	92%	83%	96%	82%	91%	85%
2007	97%	92%	92%	85%	93%	88%	90%	83%
2008	96%	92%	93%	87%	98%	96%	92%	87%
Mean	96%	92%	92%	85%	95%	86%	90%	83%

Differences in student outcomes by race appear when reviewing four, five and six year graduation rates. As noted in Table 2, Asian and White students average over 50% four-year graduation rates, and over 80% five- and six-year graduation rates. African-American and Chicana/o students, on the other hand, have four-year

graduation rates in near the 40% range, and five- and six-year graduation rates in the seventy percent range.

Table 2. UCSD Graduation Rates Compared by Ethnicity (Office of Student Research and Information, 2009b, 2011a)

Yr. of Adm	Asian			White			African Am.			Chicana/o		
	4yr	5yr	6yr	4yr	5yr	6yr	4yr	5yr	6yr	4yr	5yr	6yr
1998	46%	79%	84%	55%	79%	83%	42%	67%	73%	33%	76%	80%
1999	53%	82%	86%	59%	80%	84%	52%	79%	79%	35%	67%	75%
2000	51%	83%	87%	58%	82%	86%	32%	64%	75%	41%	70%	78%
2001	55%	82%	87%	60%	80%	83%	52%	73%	79%	42%	67%	74%
2002	54%	82%	87%	60%	82%	86%	46%	71%	75%	38%	66%	72%
2003	57%	84%	87%	60%	81%	84%	36%	55%	70%	36%	65%	69%
2004	56%	85%	8%	62%	81%	85%	49%	74%	83%	42%	72%	77%
Mean	53%	82%	87%	59%	81%	84%	44%	69%	76%	38%	69%	75%

However, as noted in Table 3, mean time to degree is nearly identical by ethnicity. Thus, the differences in graduation rates seem to higher attrition rates rather than longer time to degree.

Table 3. *UCSD Average Time to Degree in Years by Ethnicity (Office of Student Research and Information, 2009b, 2011a)*

Yr. of Adm.	Asian	White	African Am.	Chicana/o
1998	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.5
1999	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.5
2000	4.3	4.2	4.6	4.5
2001	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.4
2002	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.4
2003	4.2	4.2	4.5	4.5
2004	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.4
Mean	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.5

Clear explanations for these differences are not apparent in the data. Astin (1997), using national survey data, has argued that the most powerful predictors of student retention and graduation are individual student traits rather than institutional traits. Most of the predictive power comes from looking at students' previous academic achievement, but environmental factors such as students' major and campus residence also have an influence. Astin's study suggests that differences in retention by race may, in fact, be more influenced by co-factors, such as the associated academic achievement of students in high school. Likewise, Bowen, et al. (2009) stress the importance of student initial traits, particularly GPA, in predicting success, but also note national trends in which historically under-represented students and

students with lower socioeconomic status (SES) also show differential outcomes in degree attainment.

As noted in Table 4 and Table 5, Asian and White students at UC San Diego do have higher entering GPA and SAT scores than African-American and Chicana/o students, which may provide a partial explanation for the achievement differences between White and Asian students and African-American and Chicana/o students. However, even if differences in high school GPA and test scores may help predict some of the differences in student achievement by ethnicity, by themselves they do not capture the complexity of students' retention on the campus. Are initial student traits the major or sole determinants of differential achievement, or do student aspects of life as a student and the institution itself play a role in student retention? If so, how do student experiences at the institution interact with retention?

Table 4. HS GPA by Ethnicity(Office of Student Research and Information, 2011b)

	Asian	White	African American	Chicana/o
2005	3.89	4.00	3.88	3.88
2006	3.89	3.99	3.73	3.86
2007	3.91	4.02	3.85	3.86
2008	3.90	4.03	3.88	3.88
2009	3.95	4.03	3.88	3.88
2010	3.95	4.04	3.90	3.96
Mean	3.92	4.02	3.85	3.89

Table 5. *SAT by Ethnicity(Office of Student Research and Information, 2011c)*

	Asian	White	African American	Chicana/o
2005	1267	1285	1149	1119
2006	1258	1276	1130	1089
2007	1266	1286	1149	1101
2008	1277	1282	1150	1082
2009	1283	1293	1127	1104
2010	1290	1302	1157	1108
Mean	1274	1287	1144	1101

Because of the highly competitive nature of UCSD, the median GPA and SAT scores across ethnic groups do not show very large variance, particularly in terms of high school GPA which Bowen, et al. (2009) cite as having much greater predictive power for student attainment. Given the minimal variation in high school GPA and the less reliable predictive power of SAT scores noted by Bowen, et al., the lower retention rates of historically underrepresented students warrant an exploration of the complexity of student experience, including factors of institutional structure and campus environment.

Even if we accept previous academic preparation as the most important factor in differential outcomes, we are left with the university as a sorting system, eliminating and excluding students without providing sufficient support for them to develop beyond their initial level of preparation. Are developmental activities

occurring on campus that yield different outcomes for students from historically underrepresented communities than for others on campus? Are Black and Chicana/o students interpreting their experiences differently than White and Asian Students, and thus interacting in different ways with the campus, other students, faculty and staff? Observing the events on campus in early 2010 suggests that perceptions of the social climate on campus are divided, and that underrepresented students feel a desire to assert their agency on campus. There is growing evidence that undergraduates' perceptions of campus climate do not coincide with the institution's view of its role in supporting students' engagement and sense of belonging in the university.

Research Question

In order to persist to graduation, students must negotiate a variety of social and academic barriers in a space that may be alienating, exclusive, or even hostile to them. Those that do persist draw on a variety of resources and strategies from home, school, and membership to affinity groups to develop the agency to overcome challenges that threaten their completion of an undergraduate degree. How do UCSD students navigate the physical, cultural, and social space of the university to persist to a degree? And can we begin to see ways in which these processes differ for under-represented students?

Chapter 2: Retention and Students' Lived Experiences

Three broad categories characterize the literature on pathways to higher education: capital models, alienation models, and challenge models (Cooper, Domínguez, & Rosas, 2005) propose that college access occurs on structural, cultural, and developmental levels. Each of these models provides useful tools for understanding, but each also poses potential challenges to understanding the full complexity of college access. In this chapter, I will discuss three analogous models for undergraduate retention and describe their contributions to and weakness in capturing the complexity of students' lived experiences.

Three Retention Models

Where Cooper, Domínguez and Rosas present capital models, alienation models, and challenge models as the basis of their review of literature on university access, I see three similar models for understanding student retention: capital models, integration models, and resiliency models.

Capital models present a model for understanding opportunity systems.

Bourdieu (1990) theorizes that differential success within schools is the result of differences in the general fit between the dominant pedagogical systems and the social understandings and home culture that students bring to the classroom. Bourdieu argues that structural elements of schools themselves prevent certain students from integrating into the university unless they share specific cultural traits. The success or failure of a student to integrate is thus not a matter of individual student adaptation, but of structures of society and of society's institutions of education. Although it

16

appears that students are sorted on the basis of merit the process actually reinforces existing social inequities (Bourdieu, 1996). By doing so, the power relations that allow these sorting systems to exist is concealed, reinforcing and reproducing the existing power structure, and thus maintaining class inequality in the name of democracy and opportunity.

Bourdieu (1986a) suggests that in order to understand sorting systems, we must consider the exchange of capital and the effects of these exchanges. Bourdieu extends the Marxian idea of capital to look at *all* accumulated labor, both in material and symbolic forms, as well as how groups or their agents acquire exclusive rights to certain types of capital, granting them institutional and social monopolies.

Bourdieu defines three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. The first includes money and property rights. The second includes knowledge of "high" culture and qualifications such as degrees. The last includes social obligations, connections, and title. Further, each of these forms of capital may take three different forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied capital can be found in dispositions of body and mind. Objectified capital takes the form of cultural goods that embody the theories and practices. And institutionalized capital takes the form of socially accepted credentials or markets that confer special properties on those who hold them.

Academic success is thus less a function of a student's natural aptitudes, but of a student's access to sufficient capital to develop an embodied state of cultural capital or *habitus* appropriate to the academic and social settings in which they find

themselves. While a student's achievements may be interpreted as signs of innate

ability or academic qualifications, Bourdieu argues that the qualifications that allow a

student to have the appropriate *habitus* are actually the product of accumulated labor,

and that differential achievement across groups reflects differential access to capital.

In higher education settings, then, differences in admission and retention rates result

from uneven distribution of capital among students. From a capital perspective, a

student's ability to form a *habitus* in tune with that of the institution would be a major

determinant of student retention:

> Those students who lack the requisite cultural capital may have a hard
> time or be unable to fully integrate because their frame of reference is
> just too different from the organizational *habitus* and the *habitus* of the
> dominant peer group on campus. (Berger, 2002, p. 108)

The inability to acquire the appropriate *habitus* can be applied to a wide variety of

issues from admission to graduation. McDonough (1998) and Pérez and

McDonough(2008), document ways in which cultural capital affects college-going,

college choice, and retention. Other studies document how capital affects students'

academic planning (Farmer-Hinton, 2008) and the distribution of information and

achievement among Latina undergraduates (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, &

Allen, 2009).

A central problem with the cultural capital model is that its focus on structural

barriers often diminishes the ability to see individual agency. One reading of

Bourdieu's theories might suggest that the reproductive forces of larger society, acting

through symbolic, economic, and educational means of social reproduction provide

little room for individuals or groups to combat, address, or engage with systems of

oppression. In fact, acts of individual success or achievement that seem to challenge those structures might in fact be part of the very processes that conceal acts of symbolic violence and help to reproduce existing structures of social power.

Bourdieu's model is almost deterministic in its descriptions of both the socially reproductive nature of institutions and in the ability of such systems to present subjective criteria for distribution of power as objective standards. However Bourdieu's capital theories should be understood as embedded in a larger model in which systems of capital, habitus, field, and symbolic violence are relatively fluid and ambiguous. His theories provide a means for allowing for resistance and social change within those structures, even if those forms of resistance and change are limited by the power of the existing social structure.

Integration models present retention as a process of cultural adaptation.

Beginning in the 1970s, researchers began working to develop an understanding of college dropout based on the claim that student persistence is contingent on the extent to which students integrate into social and academic communities of the university. I refer to these models as *integration* models, focusing on their reliance on the ideas of academic and social integration to understand how students persist in the university.

In his (1970) review of literature on voluntary dropouts in higher education, Spady argues for a theory that considers student traits (such as family background, personality, gender, and interpersonal relationships) through the lens of Durkheim's

(1966) theory of suicide. He argues for understanding the phenomenon of dropouts in terms of students' integration into the culture of academia. Spady says that:

> According to Durkheim, breaking one's ties with a social system stems from a lack of integration into the common life of that society. The likelihood of suicide increases when two kinds of integration are absent: insufficient moral consciousness (viz. low normative congruence) and insufficient collective affiliation (viz. low friendship support). (Spady, 1970, pp. 77–78)

Spady claims a parallel between suicide and dropping out because he sees a common connection:

> …a lack of consistent, intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations that are dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity, and lacking a sense of compatibility with the immediate social system. (Spady, 1970, p. 78)

Spady calls for a model that incorporates both students' initial and personal traits and those acquired in their college experience. This model, as represented in Figure 2, ties students' retention directly to their ability to become culturally aligned with the university:
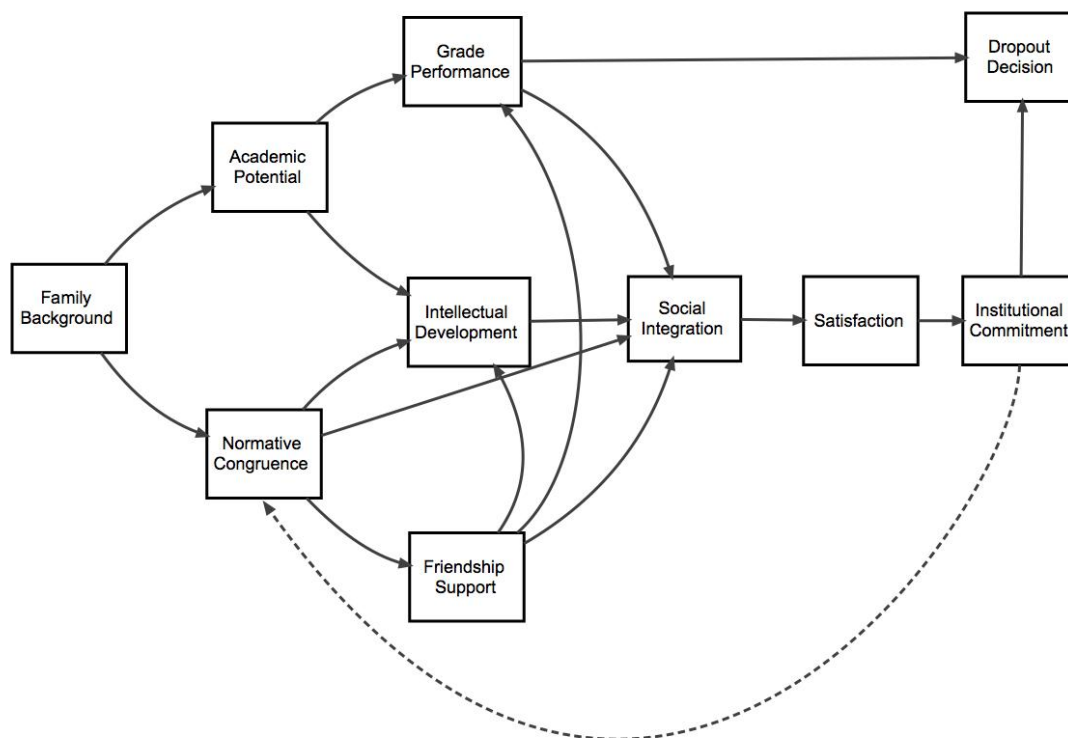
Figure 2. *Spady's (1970) explanatory social model of college student dropout.*

This model is based on individual psychological adaptation, where the lack of personal

integration into the larger social structures of the university leads to a *figurative*

suicide in which students depart from the school. Dropping out, in Spady's model, is a

dysfunctional coping mechanism when a student is unable to find membership and

connection.

Building on Spady's work, Tinto (1975) focuses on dropout processes as they

occur over time. His theory expands on the interaction of students with the college

environment, which he divides into academic and social realms. Integration builds or

diminishes over time, with several internal and external factors guiding the decision to
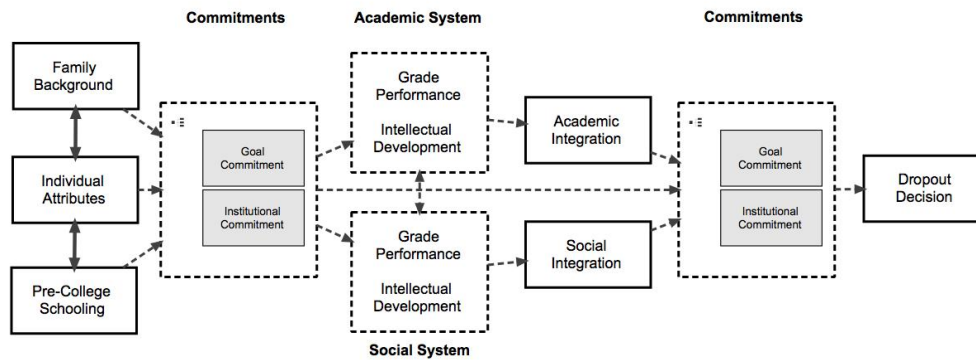
dropout, as illustrated in figure 3:

Figure 3*. Tinto's (1975) model of dropout from higher education.*

Tinto's (1975) model adds complexity to Spady's (1970) conception of dropout, and

places greater dependence on social processes. In addition, two (1987, 1993) revisions

of his model add two new claims. The first is that college can be analyzed as a rite of

passage in which students move from a home culture to a school culture. The second

is that he adds complexity to his theory of integration by saying that students may

integrate into one of many cultures or sub-cultures rather than connection to a singular

campus culture.

Rendón, Jalomo and Nora (2002) characterize Tinto's model as taking an

essentially assimilationist stance. They argue that the integration model builds a case

that students must break away from their home cultures, traditions, values and

languages to find full membership in a college environment that has a strong affinity

for the dominant culture. However, the assumption that home culture and local context

are deficits to retention is challenged by several studies that show the importance of

home culture and cultural identity in student retention (Nora, 2000; Nora & Cabrera,

1996; Nora, Kraemer, & Itzen, Richard, 1997). As Tierney (1992) points out:

> a model of integration that never questions who is integrated and how it
> is to be done assumes an individualist stance of human nature and
> rejects differences based on categories such as class, race and gender"
> (p. 611).

Indeed, one critique of integration models is that they assume that the process of

integration is functionally identical for all students, and do not allow for the possibility

that some students may face significant barriers to integration that stem not from the

student but from institutional traits that serve to alienate students or to sort them out of

the institution (Rendón, 1994).

Nora's (2003) model reorganizes Tinto's theory to includes precollege and pull

factors, personal and cognitive traits, and environmental factors as part of the path to

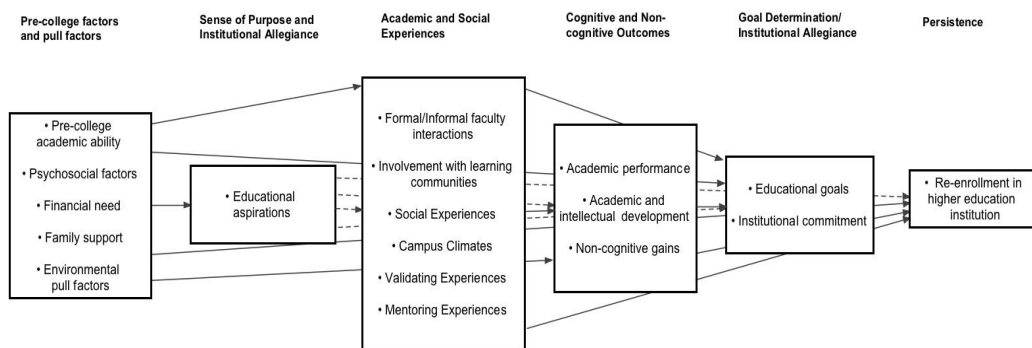persistence, as noted in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Nora's (2003) model of Hispanic student persistence.

Nora attempts to preserve useful elements of Tinto while acknowledging how

integration is mediated by social experiences, family support, environmental factors,

and relationships that provide validation and mentorship. While this model adds

complexity to Tinto's, it still grounds the process of student persistence in individual student engagement with academic goals and institutional culture.

Resiliency models focus on successful adaptation. Resiliency theories move away from looking at student retention issues through the lens of dropout and achievement deficits, and examine successful student adaptations. Such studies identify risk factors for poor achievement, and seek to discover how students adapt to risk though community supports and their own personal resources. Resiliency models are used to understand the adaptations of historically underrepresented minority students in colleges and universities.

Resiliency theory postulates that the interaction between risk and protective factors explains variations in outcomes for students facing societal or personal pressures that may lead to negative outcomes. In a review of developmental literature, Compas, Hinden and Gerhardt (1995) group resiliency theories into three general integrative models: biopsychosocial models, developmental behavioral science models, and context-person match models. These models allow for the development of cross-disciplinary descriptions of students who are adaptive or maladaptive within the multiple contexts of their lives.

In their review of literature Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), define resilience as "the process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks" (p. 399). Based on their definition, resiliency requires both risk and promotive factors, and specifies that promotive factors either result in a positive outcome or

reduce a negative one. This model focuses on strengths rather than deficits to understand healthy development.

Promotive factors may either be personal *assets* such as self-efficacy, competence or coping skills; or social *resources* such as personal, family or community relationships. The inclusion of both personal and social factors moves resilience from being seen as an individual trait to understanding resilience as part of a larger social ecology that can support students at risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005),

Fergus and Zimmerman use this framework to present three models of resiliency: compensatory, protective, and challenge. The three models present different ways in which promotive and risk factors interact to help students develop resilience, as noted in Table 6.

Table 6. *Three Factors of Resiliency*

Model	Summary
Compensatory	Promotive factors directly counter risk factors and act independently of risk.
Protective	Promotive factors moderate or reduce negative outcomes of risk.
Challenge	Promotive factors and risk are the same variable. Exposure to risk that has real but manageable consequences can help teach ways to cope with risk by developing assets or learning to use resources.

Resiliency models have been used to discuss the college attainment pipeline for historically underrepresented students, such as the college-going aspirations of

Chicana students (Ceja, 2004) and the retention of American Indian college students (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). These studies focus on valuing the cultural and home contexts of students and their families, rather than pathologizing them, and provide useful insights into the students' experiences. Because resiliency theories focus on individual adaptation in a social context, they allow a focus on individual student agency in response to social pressures, and allow the possibility of affirming and understanding students' lived experience.

While the resiliency model allows analysis to focus on function rather than dysfunction, it is still largely individualistic. It operationalizes structural or social systems such as relations between power, access, language, and cultural barriers on one hand and access on the other in terms of risk factors. While such an analysis allows room for affirming students and their home and cultural contexts, it allows less room for critique or understanding of the structural and functional capacities of the university that may inhibit or enable students to make a cultural and social place within the institution.

Current models of retention do not necessarily provide a way for articulating students' experiences. Capital, integration, and resiliency models all provide ways to see how students engage their environment, and act on it and within it based on social, cultural, or developmental factors. Capital theories focus on structure, but tend to move the agency of individuals to the background. Integrationist theories provide some room for understanding agency, but the focus on integration into the campus may hide important acts of individual resistance or innovative adaptation.

Resiliency theories allow a way to see student agency, but do not necessarily provide a way to see agency outside of specific risk factors.

To accurately implement and evaluate retention efforts, we need to understand the processes by which students understand, navigate, and define their experiences. We need to build a model of how students perceive their experiences, how they name them and how they manage them. And in order to do that, we need see how students develop the agency to engage the structural, social, and personal levels of the university.

Space as a Metaphor to Locate Culture, Structure and Development

I am using Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space as a framework to examine the ways students interact with social structure, peer and institutional culture, and individual experience. Lefebvre argues that space exists on three levels: conceived, perceived, and lived, all produced by activity within physical locations. Social structure produces a conceived space, which defines what a space is, who "owns" that space, and the kinds of activities that are officially intended to occur there. Cultural systems create the perceived space, including the ways that people attach meaning, mood, and emotion to a space. Finally, personal meaning is attached on the lived level, as part of individual development and history. This model is presented in figure 5:
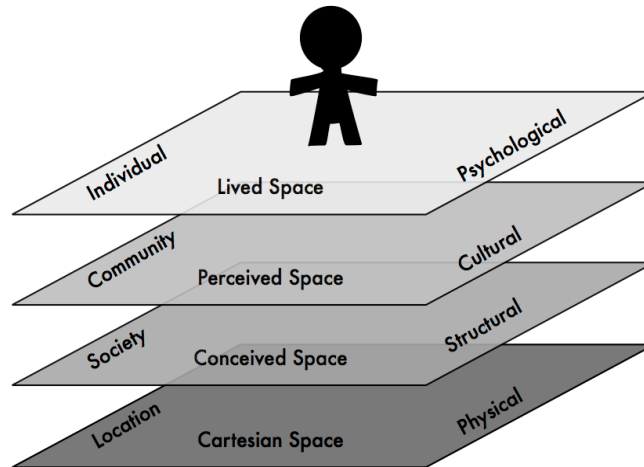
Figure 5*. Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space in terms of social interactions.*

Space is a useful conceptual framework because it encompasses the physical, social and cultural artifacts embedded in it, from buildings to language to the equipment used in that space (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, a classroom space includes the room, the desks, the chalkboards, the academic language, the division of labor between students and teacher, and the curriculum tied to that space. Because spaces are constructed around social ideals, they lack clear boundaries (Lefebvre, 1991) and because many groups may share a space, their multiple conceptions and lived experiences create different spaces that share the same location. Different groups and individuals construct different spaces, experiences, and meanings in the same space based on differences in personal, cultural and historical contexts.

This discussion of space may seem on its surface to be a heavily abstracted way of understanding students. But people define, encounter, and process their activity in specific contexts and produce different meanings. Accordingly students' talk about

space provides a way to expose different levels of interaction. Students' talk about their experiences at the university can be a way to learn the ways they produce conceived, perceived, and lived spaces and generate their understandings of structural, cultural, and personal experiences at the university. Ultimately, students' talk reveals the way they define their position in and roles in the university, engage in academic and social activity, and navigate the spaces of the university and gives us clues to how these activities affect their ability to persist.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this study is to describe the ways in which undergraduate students at a large public research university create, find, and maintain physical, social, and psychological spaces to support their persistence within the university. I used both focus groups and individual interviews to explore how students' lived experiences in the multiple spaces of the university challenge or support persistence, and how students' narratives support or challenge existing models of student persistence. Previous literature suggests that there is a cultural distance that students must cross to find membership in and make meaning of the college experience. Using this distance metaphor, I sought to understand the university as a metaphorical social landscape, and to describe the ways in which students learn to move between these social spaces.

Uncovering Lived Experiences

Quinn (2005) argues that in order to understand the shared experiences of people, researchers must explore relationships through talk. In particular, she finds three key areas of ordinary speech particularly compelling in understanding the development of shared schemas of understanding: key words, metaphors, and reasoning. These three areas are important because they occur frequently, are culturally mediated, and tend to be largely outside of speakers' conscious awareness and control. Such elements of speech thus offer insight into how individuals have built up meaning over time within cultural settings, and thus provide a strong insight into the development of their lived experiences.

This research project was designed to elicit talk, particularly the discourse of students with regard to their experience of the university, and their lives within the shared and private spaces of the campus. In developing a study of the lived experiences of students, I informed my methods by consulting major traditions of qualitative research: portraiture and phenomenological research.

Portraiture

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) present a method of qualitative research that stresses representing human experience. Their method, portraiture, focuses on building theory through observation, interpretation, and representation, stressing the importance of relationships between the research and the informants, clear expressions of the researcher's theoretical frameworks, and discussion of how those frameworks shape and are shaped by the research experience; and setting the context for the observer and observed.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe the process of constructing emergent themes as using five methods to show harmonies and dissonance between research informants' testimony and observations by the researcher. The first is to note repeated language that express commonly held views. The second is to look for metaphors that help express the complexities of how individuals symbolize their lived experiences. The third is to look for rituals that help maintain continuity of institutional or group culture. The fourth is to use triangulation from multiple sources. The fifth is to look for dissonance voices to help reveal potential conflicts, contradictions, or complexities. Through these methods, portraiture provides a way of

looking for personal, social, and cultural experiences to provide a collective description of a group of individuals in a shared setting.

Like ethnography, portraiture eschews rigid schemes of coding, and instead finds emergent patterns holistically and through reflection, journaling, and dialog with participants. Those patterns are expressed through a strong sense of narrative, a focus on the particular traits of the setting and the participants, and the search for structure and resonance in the stories of research participants.

A challenge in using this method is that portraiture tends to strongly privilege the voice of the researcher in developing the aesthetic and representational qualities of the portrait. My own goal, however, was to work to represent student experience as authentically as possible. In order to do this, I turned to phenomenological research for tools and perspectives on representation. Though phenomenology focuses on first-person narrative from the perspective of the subject and portraiture assumes an narrative based on the position of the researcher, I borrowed philosophical approaches and organizing principles from phenomenology to help me better maintain a perspective focused on representing students' own experiences as authentically as I could.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research focuses on representing the lived experiences of those studied, and in representing their beliefs and practices in a way that is authentic to those being represented. In phenomenology, "human society is seen as a process rather than as established structure. Group life is built up out of social interaction, out

of constructed meanings in action in which individuals jointly engage" (Psathas, 1989, p. 6). In exploring the complexity of experiences in the perspectives of those studied, phenomenology is able to find ways to identify and represent agency over structure, presenting an actor's activity and meaning-making systems as central to study.

Phenomenological study thus relies on three major processes: bracketing, horizontalization, and clustering of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). These methods heavily emphasize the need of the researcher to identify and set aside his or her preconceptions, be receptive to the experiences of the individuals with whom the researcher is co-constructing knowledge, and be able to develop strong themes from research data that represent the essential experiences being described.

Using bracketing to address researcher assumptions. Bracketing is a process of the researcher setting aside his or her assumptions and dealing with phenomena from the informant's perspective as much as possible. The purpose of this process is to allow the data to be interpreted from the point of view of research participants. To achieve this interpretation, qualitative data is treated as autonomous, and no effort is made to externally verify statements made. Rather, they are treated as true, even if they contradict other data in the same study, and it is the perception of the research participant that is emphasized. Further, phenomenological interpretation does not attribute hypotheses or interpretations beyond those granted by informants to uncover underlying causes and meanings (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

The practice of bracketing creates a bridge between researcher and participant, allowing the researcher to enter the lived experience of the participant and understand

his or her practices. For the researcher to enter open his perceptions to those of the

research participants, certain assumptions must be bracketed:

> Two main categories of presuppositions should be bracketed: those to
> do with the temptation to impose on the investigation of the life-world
> claims emanating from objective science or other authoritative sources,
> and those to do with the imposition of criteria of validity arising outside
> the life-world itself. (Ashworth, 1999, p. 709)

The process of bracketing involves documenting one's own beliefs and practices,

considering the positions of researcher and participant, and assumptions made by all

participants to enable a transformation of the conscious processes of the researcher.

The goal of this transformation is to focus less on hypothesis, interpretation, causation,

and verification of the testimony of participants, and more on sharing and representing

the research participant's experiences and internal world. (Moustakas, 1994)

Using horizontalizations to address hierarchical thinking. Once the

researcher is able to bracket his or her experience, the next step is to create non-

hierarchical lists of all significant statements in the transcripts. This "horizontal"

listing removes any emphasis among significant statements, which the researcher

looks at holistically to seek hints of structure and essential experience. This is an

inductive process of data reduction and elimination, during which the researcher

writes structural descriptions and imagines the varying frames of reference of research

informants. (Moustakas, 1994)

Clustering meaning. The final phase of the phenomenological method is to

cluster the reduced data into themes. The researcher reflects on the data through

journals, analysis memos, conversations with informants to develop essential themes

describing the data collected (Moustakas, 1994). Often, this involves the work of multiple researchers, who collaboratively and dialogically review the data to develop themes in order to support greater internal validity (Hycner, 1985; Thompson et al., 1989).

Sampling

I used purposeful sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1992), focusing on a single site (the UCSD campus), with a goal of building groups to include diversity across gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class. To conduct my first round of recruitment, I sent emails to the campus accounts of 323 continuing students Muir College students enrolled in the first summer session 2011. Students were asked to complete an online survey to help select groups for diversity in major, gender identity, ethnicity, and family socioeconomic background. Using this information, I selected smaller subgroups that provided a demographically diverse cross-section. This led to two focus groups in the initial round of study that included a total of 5 students.

Because the first sample included only transfer students, I made a second round of recruitment similar to the first. This focused on students in the second summer session 2011, and was limited to students with sophomore or junior standing to eliminate continuing transfer students (who would have senior standing after one year of school) from the pool. This yielded another three students in my third focus group.

I conducted a final focus group in early October 2011. To make sure that my sample included students with strong involvement on campus and to make sure I could identify students from unrepresented or underrepresented groups in my previous sample, this focus group involved a hand-selected group of student leaders. This final group of five students was asked to fill out the same survey the previous groups had completed, and participated in the final focus group.

Because of my interest in developing a broad cross-section of experiences, these methods of sampling combined elements of criterion sampling, critical case sampling, and chain sampling (Patton, 1992) in order to construct groups that might develop information–rich narratives from which I would be able to construct thick description of the experience of students' college experiences. Initially I looked broadly at all continuing undergraduates in the college, but my sampling became more specific and intentional in order to fill gaps in experience that I wanted to represent. This sample of students was intended to serve less as a bellwether case for student experiences than to create a setting to identify ideal cases that suggest directions for further research.

The sample of students participating in focus groups comprised twelve students. As noted in Table 6, the students represented a mix of genders, ethnicities, income levels, and residential experiences. The group included mostly students admitted to UCSD as freshmen, but did include several transfer students. The sample did not exactly correspond to campus demographics, but these differences represent an intentional attempt to make sure that voices of a variety of students were represented

in an effort to see if a variety of demographic factors might play a role in students'
perceptions of the campus and their sense-making around their experiences.

In order to focus on the complexity of student experiences I invited three
students to participate in individual interviews. Two of the three agreed to participate.
These students were chosen not as exemplars, but to provide extremes of experience.
The two students were very involved in campus; one as a house advisor, the other as a
student activist. The two students were also chosen to provide experiences that
challenge typical stereotypes of student experience, to illuminate some of the
complexity of student interactions in the campus space.

Interview participant one identifies herself as multi-racial Black, Caucasian,
and Native American. She expressed no affiliation with campus Cultural Centers or
student groups affiliated with ethnic identities, but strongly identified with her major
and spoke about her strong sense of individuality.

Interview participant two identifies herself as Asian American, and is strongly
affiliated with student cultural groups, particularly the Student Promoted Access
Center for Education and Service (SPACES), a student-initiated program for
promoting diversity and community on campus as well as having a strong academic
identity.

Both are female, come from low socioeconomic status (SES) families, and
have majors in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.
Both expressed strong awareness of their experiences on campus, a strong sense of
personal identity and community membership, and a complex relation between family

and individual. The two of them provide complex pictures of their motion through a typical day on campus, and help illuminate the ways in which student experiences on campus may challenge the assumptions that staff and faculty make about students, the kinds of resources on which they rely, and the way they make use of the space of the university.

Table 7. *Participants (n=12); (Office of Student Research and Information, 2009a)*

Gender	Sample %	n=	Campus %
Female	67%	8	52%
Male	33%	4	48%
Ethnicity (allowed to choose more than one)	**Sample %**	**n=**	**Campus %**
African American	8%	1	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander American	42%	5	44%
Chicana/o	25%	3	10%
White/Caucasian	25%	3	27%
Native American	8%	1	1%
Parental Income	**Sample %**	**n=**	**Campus %**
Low (less than $32,800)	25%	3	26%
Medium Low ($32,801 - $65,600)	33%	4	21%
Medium High ($65,601 - $98,400)	25.00%	3	10%
High ($98,401+)	16.67%	2	27%
Residential Experience	**Sample %**	**n=**	**Campus %**
Never lived on campus.	25%	3	Not avail.
Lived on campus one year	25%	3	Not avail.
Lived on campus two or more years.	50%	6	Not avail.
Major	**Sample %**	**n=**	**Campus %**
STEM	47%	5	49%
Non-STEM	53%	7	51%
Admission Type	**Sample %**	**n=**	**Campus %**
Admitted as freshmen	58%	7	70%
Admitted as transfer students	42%	5	30%

Data Collection

Initial data collection involved both semi-structured focus groups and individual open-ended photo-elicited interviews. The former served to describe the general climate of the campus. The latter provided individual case studies that focused on how students made sense of their experience.

Focus groups. I chose to use focus groups for the first stage of the research process for two reasons. The first was to create initial data to reveal themes and shared and contrasted experiences and perceptions within and across focus groups. The data were then used for dialogical data creation (Carspecken & Apple, 1992) when I shared transcripts and initial analysis of themes with participants for their feedback, critique and response. The second reason was to identify particularly interesting students who provided strongly representative, divergent, or illustrative cases for the second stage of research. Focus groups were semi-structured, with the goal of gaining a broad understanding of shared experiences within the focus groups. They began with artifact-elicited questions using a tour map of the campus to elicit talk about students' perceptions of important areas of the university.

Individual interviews. The second stage of the research involved open-ended photo-elicited interviews to reveal the individual experiences of two students through a day at the university. Rather than observing students throughout a day, I asked students to take photographs of places they visited throughout the day. I used these photographs to elicit responses and to discuss students' experiences through the day, highlighting the places they visited, the activities they were engaged in there, and the

meaning they made of these spaces. Questions also focused on typicality, the people with whom they shared these experiences, and students' emotional states and responses in these spaces.

Follow up. Throughout the process, I contacted participants in person and by email to follow up on focus groups and interviews, to verify transcripts and my reflective writing, and to ask follow-up questions. The follow-up served both as a mechanism for data collection and for validation. It also allowed me to continue to build and reinforce the relationships with the participants.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all focus group and individual interviews, and shared the transcripts with the participants involved. I used their feedback to review and revise each transcript. After this, I began to work on transcripts through a process of journaling, reflection, and coding.

Before I began analysis, I wrote a series of analysis memos as journal entries to reflect on my perceptions of the campus, the student body, and key issues in the study. Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) method, I dated each memo, included a title, and made particular notes of concepts observed, summaries of the setting and events, and questions for future follow up. I wrote my memos by hand in a journal, and I made notations in printed copies of the transcripts highlighting and commenting on themes that I had noted. Each entry was written to help in the process of bracketing— identifying my own perceptions, assumptions and perspectives to help me separate those assumptions from the perspectives of the students. My goal was to develop the

sense of focus, empathy, and connection that is stressed in heuristic and

phenomenological research (Ashworth, 1999) in order to build the kinds of

relationships central to portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Before developing an interpretation of students' experiences on campus, I

developed a portrait of the space as students experience it. To describe students'

perceptions of the physical environment, I did three reviews of each focus group

transcript, identifying recurrent references in the transcripts to the campus and to

places on campus. I applied these emergent codes to the transcripts in HyperResearch,

and used HyperResearch to develop counts of codes, which I organized in a mind map

to identify emergent patterns, as noted in Figure 6:
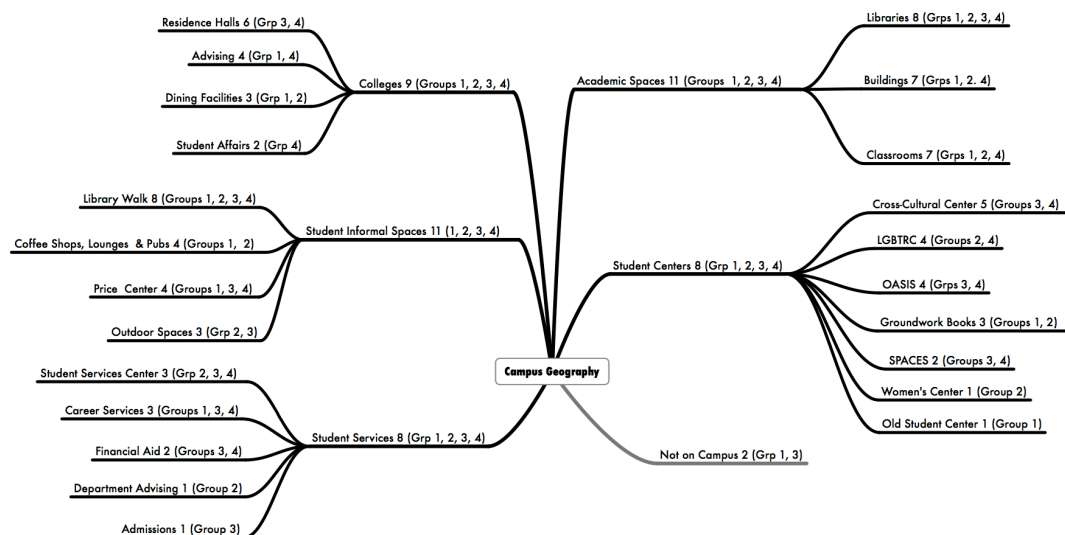

Figure 6. *Organizing transcript codes of spatial themes.*

I tabulated students' statements associated with each code to provide illustrative

examples of each major area and to assist in developing a portrait of the campus as it

was described by focus group participants. Using the mind map as an organizing tool, I reviewed students' comments on the geography of the campus to create an abstract representation of the campus as they described it and asked the students for their feedback to clarify and correct my description to match their perceptions.

I reviewed each transcript at least three times, comparing my memos and transcripts for internal agreement and disagreement then shared my analyses with participants, allowing them a chance for feedback, clarification, or dissent. This feedback was used to revise the analysis incorporated into the analysis, or used to identify contrasting and dissonant perspectives in my ongoing analysis. The participants in this study each affirmed the content of the transcripts and analysis, and only one student added more detail to stress points made in his focus group.

Validation

The scope of this study does not allow for a consensus process among multiple researchers reviewing participant testimony, a method of internal validation used in many phenomenological studies (Hycner, 1985; Thompson et al., 1989). Instead, validity was developed through review of data and analysis with research participants. By asking the participants to review and validate the transcripts, analysis memos, and actual analysis section of the study, I focused on validating the voice and experience of students in a way they would support as essentially true to their experience.

Limitations of the Study

Hycner (1985) notes eleven key issues to phenomenological studies that apply to this study. These include lack of randomness, limited number of participants, generalizability, accuracy of descriptions, subjective influence of the researcher, validity, replicability, absence of control groups, absence of hypotheses, absence of prediction, and absence of interpretation and comprehensive theory. Some of these issues reflect basic epistemological stances that place phenomenological studies in opposition to experimental research in terms of sampling methods, experimental design, and knowledge claims.

The issue of generalizability is a particularly notable limitation. However, while the insights of a small, qualitative study may not be generalizable, the goal of this study is not to provide universally generalizable data. Rather, a study of this type may provide data that is valid, reliable and transferable (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). By providing a model design for study and identifying theoretical constructs that may be extended to other contexts, my study provides a framework for comparison with other student populations and for consideration of an intentionally complex picture of student success at the university level. My study is not replicable and involves no control groups.

The position of the researcher is another key concern, as is the role of the researcher in influencing data and the accuracy of students' accuracy of descriptions. I am a Dean of Academic Advising and a long-time academic advisor with one of the six residential colleges at UC San Diego. I work with orientation programs for the

college, advise students individually, and have worked on the university's Summer Bridge Program as well as with the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS). I have existing professional advising and mentor relationships with students on campus, including several students in the focus groups, and interact with them regularly. While this sort of relationship may present challenges to validity in a study of this sort, my level of familiarity with students can also help build the relationships emphasized in portraiture, allow me to work with students to understand them to greater depth, and with more trust than I would have as an outsider.

Chapter 4: A Personal Tour of the Campus

Anthropologist Cathy Small, writing as Rebekah Nathan, reflected on her year

of ethnographic fieldwork among undergraduates at a large public university, noting

that:

> …College is at once an affirmation and preparation for the world *and* a
> creative response and innovative challenge to that same world…. For
> the university, this means that, just as society will affect the future of
> our universities, what happens in student culture—or what doesn't
> happen—helps forge the shape of our society (Nathan, 2005, pp. 147–
> 148)

Small's observation captures a key insight into student lives— that their experiences

in the university are active, agentive, and creative— and that their responses to the

university are responses to the larger social world in which they live.

This chapter consists of a visit to campus as students in the focus group

described it, their personal tour. Academic spaces, the first spaces to become part of

their regular routine, took a primary role in students' descriptions. The undergraduate

colleges, where most participants lived for at least one year, emerged as important

places where students could feel a sense of belonging in an official university setting.

As students explored the campus more, many became involved in the campus

Community Centers, where they engaged in identity development and community

building. Finally, even though the university conceives of student services as

providing support to students, the focus group and interviewed students viewed

student services as a barrier to their lives in the university.

As noted in Chapter Two, the three general models of retention in the literature

provide useful insights, but each has their own shortcomings in explaining the lived

experiences of students. Though students described elements of each of these models, they also described how they were able to engage the space of the university, define the space and their role within it, and navigate the spaces they produce. These kinds of effective human action or *agency* (Sewell, Jr., 2005) provide a way of understanding social change and resistance. I will use my analysis to begin developing a new model of student retention. While I cannot make strong claims about retention with this data set, the students in this study are all currently in the process of persisting at the University, and by looking at their experiences I will explore how students develop agency by engaging, defining and navigating their experiences at the university to suggest a way of understanding student retention and identify gaps where additional research is needed.

Academic Space

Academic spaces are universal to students' lives, so they become part of daily routines and landmarks for navigating the campus. One focus group participant commented:

> I think that as a freshman, I knew where Center Hall was and Geisel,
> and Library Walk, because I passed through them every day, but it
> wasn't until I became an Orientation Leader that I even knew there
> were community centers on campus, and I still don't go to the Student
> Service Center unless I need something from there.

Academic spaces are the basis for students' knowledge of campus geography. Not only are they the first spaces that students encounter, they are spaces that have a clear, instrumental purpose for their basic educational goals and expectations. Only as

students become more connected to the campus do they expand their experience

beyond academic space.

     Students attribute meaning to experiences in academic spaces. The

physical characteristics of the space, peer interactions, instructional activity, and

students' perception of classroom hierarchy all contribute to the qualitative experience

students have in academic spaces. Students' perceived and lived experiences infuse

academic spaces with meaning, mood and climate. One transfer student noted that he

thought large lecture courses were cold and impersonal. He explained that for him,

that was largely due to his perceptions of himself in the space of the classroom:

> …when you're in a classroom with 200 people, you're just a number. If
> you don't show up, no one knows. You know your T.A., and that's who
> you become acquainted with, and are told that's who you go to. And so
> the interaction with the teacher definitely declines.

The size of the class, the fact that attendance was not kept, the hierarchy of teaching

assistants and professors, and the level of interaction between students and faculty all

shaped his perception of his position in the learning space, making him feel like a

number and disconnected from faculty. This transfer student had had classes of no

more than 40 or 50 students in the community college, where it was common to know

professors by name and speak with them after class. But this large class became

impersonal, cold, and hierarchical, leaving him feeling distanced and invisible to the

faculty.

     But students' relationships with instructors or classmates can transform the

solitary meaning students attribute to large academic spaces to a sense of belonging.

This same student took the initiative to engage with the instructor, based on his intuition that the instructor was approachable and empathetic:

> … we're in this lecture hall with like 120, 130 people and I made it a point to go to office hours because I was like, this guy is really cool. And meeting cool people like that who have done all this research or who really understand student life, who aren't necessarily like this is my class I'm going to give you so much work that it's only about my class, a teacher who knows that, "look, I know you were up last night doing a paper, we're going to go home early today," I thought that was the coolest thing.

Some of the student's sense of the instructor's approachability was based on the professor's personality, but some of the student's intuition was based on comments on class in which the professor expressed awareness of the needs of students to balance life and school. These simple comments made the professor seem more human, and in the process, gave permission to the student to be human as well, and to connect on a human level, rather than reducing classroom interactions to instrumental transactions. The validation of his humanity enables this student to act, to interact, and to have agency over his educational experience.

Pedagogical or instructional methods can also affect students' perception of academic spaces. Another student began to connect with her peers in group work when she changed her major to one that emphasized courses structured to encourage peer interaction:

> I mean, I'm trying to be more interactive in class, and I'm really fortunate that the classes I'm taking recently have encouraged group participation. So it forces you to have to get up and have to meet with people and exchange phone numbers and have study groups.

This student had come to UCSD as a transfer student majoring in biology. Though she

had succeeded academically through high school and community college, she found

herself overwhelmed and isolated in large lecture classes. By completing assignments

alone and anonymously, she quickly found herself disengaged from peers and

instructors. Her classes left her feeling that she the object of mass teaching methods

that she did not understand as well as her peers, and she only regained a sense of

connection, humanity, and agency by changing her major and, in the process,

changing her approach to school.

Other students in the study developed a strong association of a particular space

with their academic or disciplinary identity. This was particularly true of engineers,

who spoke almost fondly of their experiences in required engineering laboratories. As

one student noted:

> … because I'm an engineer, Warren College is really somewhere where
> I feel comfortable. After you have to stay up until four a.m. in the EBU
> 2 labs, you know where things are, freshmen are like, "I have to go to
> EBU 2, I don't even know where that is," and it's like, "oh, I can take
> you... I have to go to 471... oh, that's at the rear, so that's 4R. Well,
> what does that mean? It means it's 4, through the rear door, near the
> elevator door. I know everything about EBU2.

This student developed a strong sense of identity connected to feeling a sense of

mastery of the physical domain of the engineering labs. This leads her to a sense of

ownership of that space. The definition of an engineer encompasses a shared

experience—staying up late with peers in the lab to complete assignments, for

example—that implies a relationship to the space, to the course tasks, and to each

other. While tasks such as staying up until 4:00am to complete an assignment seem

objectively unpleasantly, her description of the experience was a description of a rite of passage, and her pride in showing freshmen where the labs was the welcoming of an experienced community member to the new members still going through the rites of passage.

Each of these students provides an insight into different ways in which undergraduates take advantage of opportunities to engage, define, and navigate academic spaces. The characteristics of classroom organization and pedagogy shaped the ways in which some students defined their roles in class and the ways they engaged each other and their faculty. Perceptions of faculty as human and accessible provided an invitation to engage faculty on a personal level. And for some students, the ways they feel ownership of space are also connected to their identity as students.

Students see libraries as study spaces rather than research spaces. Eight of the twelve focus group participants talked about their experiences in the campus libraries. Of the eight students, however, only two spoke of the library in terms of research; most students spoke of the library as a place to study.

From a campus perspective, libraries are a central place for research and teaching. The staff of librarians, book stacks, electronic journal subscriptions, and access to databases, newspapers, and magazines provide a central resource used in all levels of the academic function of the campus. The UCSD library web site cites its strong ranking nationally and the large information resources it provides across the campus.

> The UC San Diego Libraries, ranked among the nation's top 25 public
> academic libraries, play an integral role in advancing and supporting

the university's research, teaching, patient care, and public service
missions. The world-renowned research for which UC San Diego is
known starts at the UCSD Libraries, which provide the foundation of
knowledge needed to advance cutting-edge discoveries in a wide range
of disciplines, from healthcare and science to public policy and the arts.
("About the UCSD Libraries," 2012)

Student perceptions of the library, however, grow out of their use of the spaces. Unlike graduate students or faculty, undergraduate students' lived experiences seldom involve individual research, consultation with resource librarians, or access to special collections. Studying for exams rather than conducting original research becomes their defining task in most courses, while the espoused purpose of the library may not be at all relevant to their work or experiences. Encountering the libraries as study spaces produces perceived and lived spaces that deviate from the design underlying the physical environment of the library. Students shape lived spaces through social and personal factors, such as their academic performance, the social interactions that take place in the libraries, and their own sense of identity They may attribute different moods to the library, let the space influence their sense of belonging, or even transform library spaces into areas where they may or may not find belonging or a sense of ownership. For example, one student expressed her preference for studying at Geisel Library:

I walk into Geisel and I feel... it just feels really home. I feel like I can
stay there until late at night studying, the times that I do stay on
campus. I don't know, I have a really odd connection with Geisel,
rather than at CLICS. Whenever I go into CLICS... I feel like I'm alone.
It's kind of isolating. I guess it's because everyone has their little groups
that they're studying in... whereas if I go to Geisel, everyone is kind of
spread out and I feel like I fit in more.

Though this student sees libraries universally as study spaces, she points out that one

library feels like home, but another does not. This perception of Geisel illustrates how

students' lived experiences of the libraries differ in each individual learning space.

She, for instance, feels comfortable in Geisel, while other students do not. Other

students talked about their negative experiences with Geisel Library, some due to the

general dread they associate with studying:

> And I also feel really uncomfortable in Geisel Library because all my
> experiences with Geisel are like I forgot to study for something or I
> forgot to finish my paper, and I spend like eight hours in there playing
> catch-up. So my experiences with Geisel aren't the best.

While others discuss specific environmental factors:

> Geisel, no that doesn't work for me. I can't deal with the quiet…. If I'm
> doing math problems, like most of my engineering classes… it's like
> read the information around the equation to understand where the
> equation comes from and how to use it, but you don't have to
> necessarily read the entire chapter…. I can't do that in complete silence.
> I get distracted, so Geisel Library is uncomfortable for me.

While another student described an evolving relationship with the library as a study

space:

> At first, my first year here, when I was living in the dorms, the library
> was a place that I wouldn't go to. I never, ever touched the library till
> barely this past year. So that was definitely not on my tour at all.
>
> …now I use it all the time, like, all the time. For the books, and I love
> going to study there, especially when it's lonely because it's nice and
> quiet. It's a really good place to study. Before it was like I was allergic
> to going there.

Unlike classrooms, the campus libraries are spaces that students have a level of choice

in both how and whether they use the space. Because of this level of choice, students

can build a strong sense of ownership of particular libraries because of environment,

location, or even the idea that they have found a small library no one else uses. This ability to choose gives them in the ability to shape their own experiences in these spaces in a way that they may not be able to do in the classroom. They engage, define, and navigate libraries by finding spaces or alternatives that allow them to engage in individual or group study, to define how those tasks take form, and to build a sense of ownership of particular library spaces that match their self-defined learning needs.

The Colleges

The colleges provide a first opportunity for many students to have a sense of social engagement in the university. From the founding of the university, the colleges were conceived as providing some of the sense of connection found in small liberal arts colleges within the framework of a large research university (Aguilar, 1995), though changes in the implementation of the master plan have greatly altered the level and nature of contact between students and their colleges. In the focus groups, nine of the twelve participants referred to the colleges in terms of academic advising, student affairs, and residential life experiences.

The colleges are often the first place where students feel belonging in the university setting. The residential colleges are where most of UC San Diego's undergraduates live for at least one year. The stability and smaller setting of residential halls and apartments provide a community setting in which social membership is easier to attain than it may be on the campus as a whole. One student noted that the one place she felt a sense of belonging in her first year was in her

residence hall, even though she struggled with developing a sense of belonging in general :

> So it was mostly the dorm, or when I moved to the apartments, the apartments. Eventually, the library just because it's a very quiet space where you are working alone. So it's not like you're going to interact with other people, as we were talking about before. I haven't really explored enough to find a place that I'm comfortable in yet.

Another student who lived off campus built a sense of belonging by spending his mornings in the college dining hall. For him, personal interactions, the music and media, and the routine helped him feel a sense of belonging:

> … I used to get here... because I have about a 45 to an hour drive… so I used to get here relatively early, around seven, and I would always go to the Pines. And the nicest people there, they always say good morning, and everyone's really friendly. And that was the best place for me. I mean, it's large, they have good music going on, they have the televisions on mute, so I could see the news. Sometimes they had the Spanish channel on, music videos, so I get a variety there, and that was my thing… to go there because it's comfortable to go there.

Routine, familiarity, and social connection form an initial link that helps students develop a social identity as belonging to the university. As one student remarked, "It wasn't until I started getting to know my house and people in Muir that Muir really started being a home for me." But the fact that this membership is built *within the college* is important. The college is at once familiar and official, making it a foundation for identity as a student *in the college* and, by extension as a student *in the university*. One student noted that getting involved in the larger campus grew out of his involvement at the college level by building his confidence:

> …it was easy for me to get involved because it was a smaller community and my friends would join orgs to, so it was easier to get that initial confidence and involvement. I guess it wasn't until after that,

then I joined campus-wide orgs. I definitely think that Muir was a big part of this.

But the connection to peers and routines is only part of the impact of college membership. College membership also provides a way for students to build a community that includes college staff who are connected to their lives.

Working with college staff provides students an opportunity to feel connected to the institution. Students who worked at the college in a leadership capacity spoke about their relationships with academic advisors, deans, and student affairs staff as shaping their experiences at the university. For student leaders, the opportunity to work with and mentor other students as Orientation Leaders or House Advisors also led them to build relationships with university staff. And students noted having these relationships made them feel comfortable with staff rather than intimidated by those same staff members. This helped them feel comfortable and accepted throughout the college. As one student noted:

> I know a lot of staff, I work for Residential Life, so I know everyone at Res Life. I know people in Academic Advising, and so I feel comfortable walking around in Muir, even though I don't know everyone and that can be intimidating sometimes, I know a large proportion of people. I mean, I could walk into any space and feel accepted here, pretty much.

Because these students saw themselves in a collegial relationships with staff, this transformed college staff into resources rather than challenges .

The colleges allow students the opportunity to engage, define, and navigate residential spaces and social relationships with peers and staff. The colleges also provide defined roles for student leadership with positions in college student

government, House Advisor positions, or acting as a college Orientation Leader.

Through these roles, students gain opportunities to build confidence in leadership

roles, get positive attention and guidance from college staff, and test the kinds of roles

that they can take larger campus-wide organizations and campus student government.

Though these connections are clearly not universal, they demonstrate another potential

pathway for student development in the university.

Campus Community Centers

Eight of the students in the focus groups made reference to community centers

on campus, including the Women's Center; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

Resource Center (LGBTRC); and the Cross Cultural Center. Students also referred the

Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service (SPACES) and

community support and transition programs in the Office for Academic Support and

Instructional Services (OASIS). These centers became an important space for students

to work on issues of identity within their educational setting.

Community centers help students define their identity through community

membership. Like disciplinary identity or college membership, membership in the

communities affiliated with each center offers a sense of belonging. A sense of

validation and connection in one community can even result in connection to other

allied communities. One student noted that involvement in the OASIS Summer Bridge

Program led her to connect with the Cross Cultural Center, SPACES, and with the

OASIS academic support programs:

> For me, the past two years, Center Hall has been a place I go to,
> especially to OASIS. I went to Summer Bridge 2009, so I really learned
> a lot of things from that, and all the other orgs that come with it, like
> the Cross Cultural Center and SPACES.

The ways in which students interpret their experiences in these centers are important in shaping the affiliations that students make. Students invest themselves in the centers based on shared experiences, personal preferences, and how they see their position in each community:

> [At] SPACES I feel like I'm comfortable because I went there my first
> year after I read part of their activist newspaper. So every time I went
> there the students that work in there, they're so nice and they also have
> a background in social issues awareness and activism, so I feel like I
> connect with them that way. And also some of them are alumni of
> Summer Bridge, too. So we talk about Summer Bridge, this and that.

Building these community relationships creates a sense of security and resilience for students who may feel at risk in the larger university. One student described the way her interactions with staff and peers in the LGBTRC made her feel comfortable in the center despite incidents that might otherwise have made her feel unsafe:

> I also feel very accepted in the LGBT Resource Center… and that took
> a while. But I think… that I feel very safe there, even though… it isn't
> always the safest space anymore. There were incidents last year where
> people came in and kind of verbally attacked interns, but… I still feel
> that I can walk in that space and talk to any of the people that work
> there or anyone who's just in there and feel comfortable.

Her sense of security in this space allows her to find a place in the space of the university where she is accepted as part of the campus, even in the face of challenging interactions in that space. The integrity of community boundaries and provide this student with a protective value greater than the risk that arises from negative interactions instigated by outsiders to that community.

Students' experiences in the centers reveal the complexity of their multiple

identities. The Centers provide settings for individuals to engage themselves and

others in a process of developing their identities. Students who find membership in a

particular center often develop an activist identity that enables them to feel

empowered to act, to express their identity, and to engage in community activity. But

the feeling of empowerment to act and to express one's identity may not be

immediate. One student noted that her current role as a principal member at the

LGBTRC developed only after experiencing an initial sense of marginalization in the

very same space:

> I talk about the LGBT resource center as being one of my favorite
> spaces on campus, but when I started out here, the first time I went into
> a QA meeting, all of the PMs... so, we don't have execs, we have
> Principal Members, and I'm a Principal Member now, but I remember
> freshman year the first and only time I went in my freshman year,
> everyone who said they were a PM identified as male and gay and I felt
> like I wasn't represented in that space even though I was represented in
> that acronym.

Another student reported that she didn't feel comfortable in the Cross-Cultural Center

because she felt other students were judging her. This student perceived an insider-

outsider relationship that welcomes some students into a sheltering community on

campus, but which may make other students feel excluded if their process of identity

development is not in sync with community members:

> I can't do the community centers, like I've never felt very welcomed in
> there. I think it comes from the fact that I grew up differently as a
> multi-racial woman. And growing up with a multi-racial mom, but who
> appears to be White, just sometimes I fell like my experiences may be
> judged and I feel like I'm judged in those communities. Which is
> definitely, I don't think, their intention. But it's always come across that
> way to me.

The centers provide a potentially powerful tool for promoting membership for students who engage in those communities, but a close-knit community with a strong identity also has the potential to exclude students who feel that their identity does not align well with other community members. While it would be easy to dismiss this as a matter of individual fit, it is also important to acknowledge that the dynamics of membership in any tight-knit group with a strong identity also provide a potential problem for newcomers who perceive community boundaries and cohesion as barriers to membership.

Interestingly, by choosing not to be a member of the community, this student demonstrates a strong sense of agency, identity and independence, all part of the goals of having such centers. By choosing to make her own way by walking away from a group she perceives as judging her, she is able to clarify her identity and her place. Because issues of identity are complex, the Centers should not be seen as a panacea for helping empower students, but rather as one of several tools in which the campus can create spaces where students can build a sense of belonging in the larger community. However, it is important to recognize the need for students to have several spaces and directions for building their identity.

The Centers allow students opportunities to engage, define, and navigate identity within the university. The fact that they are officially sanctioned activities legitimizes engagement in these communities as part of their identities and activities as students, rather than being a purely peripheral and personal process.

Student Services

Participants in focus groups talked about student services as barriers rather than as supports. The discussion of student services reflected issues of agency as students talked about services that they need, but feel little control over. One student, for instance talked about avoiding the Student Services center, where student billing, financial aid, and records are all located:

> There is one place I'll admit that I do avoid, and that is right by whatever that yogurt place is called, where they have the Dean's office and all that. I will go around there, I will never cut through it and I see a ton of people... you know, it's a straight path to go straight across, but I will see a ton of students walk around the entire facility. I don't know what it is about it, but I will walk around. I just don't want to walk through it.

Some of the issues students had with the space may be architectural. Though newer, the building maintains the same mid- to late- 20th century concrete architecture of the rest of the campus, encompassing a large building with multiple purposes. Such a structure was common in early building plans for the campus (Aguilar, 1995), but this building evokes very negative responses, despite the fact that it integrates dining space, large areas for public gathering, and close proximity to the student center into its design. Much of the negative response stems from students' perception of power dynamics. The Student Services Center houses Admissions, the Registrar, Student Billing, and Financial Aid, all offices that control student access, enrollment, and finances. Students' experiences with these processes affect their perceptions of the space, especially when bureaucracy and impersonal procedures characterize their interactions:

>I had the worst time at Financial Aid. Oh, my gosh. They have always messed up my financial aid, three times already. Once because they lost my paperwork for an appeal, so I had to go back there and submit another copy. The thing is, I'm a first generation college student, so my parents have no clue. I have to be on top of everything.

But such concerns aren't limited to financial aid. They include issues in the admissions process, student billing, posting of transcripts, or questioning enrollment appointment times. Despite the fact that all legally required notifications are included in the online general catalog and on the campus' web site, students perceive campus regulations and the steps needed to get help as opaque and frustrating:

>Also, I think it goes back to Student Service Center, too. So, during the time when Admissions decisions came up, my application said that I had requested a withdrawal. And I was thinking, "is this a rejection letter?" I'm the first one to go to college, so I don't know what that meant. So I actually Yahoo answered it, and someone was like "This is not a rejection letter, you have to go and call them." So I called them the following Monday, and they were like "oh, just email this email and tell that that you didn't request a withdrawal of your application." So I'm thinking, "okay, so one email is going to decide everything for me?"

For this student, the process was so distant from her life experience that her only recourse was to seek aid in extended online social network, to seek the expertise of unknown peers rather than using the student services staff as a resource. This is compounded by the fact that the centralized services at a large university tend not to be based on personal relationships. The staff is perceived as faceless, and the students feel faceless to staff. However, students wish for caring, interpersonal relationships, and see the lack of them as a barrier to overcome. Worse, when students do interact with staff, they are not seen as empathetic or focused on student needs. As one student described her interactions at the Financial Aid Office:

> …when I went there to talk to them about my parents' income tax papers, I remember that there was this one staff who was really rude to me. He was giving me attitude and making me feel like I'm so stupid asking this question. So, after that, I decided that financial aid is really not that helpful.

Another student noted her frustration finding academic advising support to help her with academic planning and advice at UCSD.

> …I want to know which ones I should take, and it took me a while to find out about the CAPE reviews, which has been a great guide since I found out about it. But also not knowing when classes are going to be offered. You see all these course listings, and have only two years, you are going to have to plan ahead when you are going to be able to take the class. Sometimes, everything you want is offered in one quarter, and then absolutely nothing even pertains to my major is offered the next quarter. And that's been really frustrating, and not having anywhere to go to plan out.

This student found the advising system frustrating: she felt confused about when she should go to her college or her major, and was frustrated that her major only offered drop-in advising and relied heavily on printed an online information for graduation. Her frustration included not only the difficulty of finding services, but also the fact that the kinds of services that she were offered were not geared to what she felt she needed, but rather to what the advising offices felt were pertinent to offer.

When students do not see student support services as centered on *their* needs (as they define them), they learn to work around them by sharing information among peers, seeking short cuts, or finding caring institutional agents who advocate for them. As one student noted:

> I go to my friends because, since they've been here longer than I have, they have tips on everything. Like, the biggest issue I have is parking. I didn't know that there was like a million little parking lots everywhere around campus…. We can go on the web site, but there is a million

> things on the web site. You type in parking and there's 50 more links and you're spending an hour clicking and it gets really confusing. So it gets easier to ask, "do you know this?" and have someone answer, "yeah, do this" than scroll through a million things.

Because of the conflict between what students define as their needs and what the university defines as their needs, student services become potential institutional *barriers*, even if the campus *conceives* of these offices as providing institutional *support*.

Concluding Our Tour

Students described the campus in terms of academic spaces, the colleges, the community centers, and student support services. This version of campus begins with the familiarity of classroom and study space, moves to the familiarity of residential community, and moves on to communities where students engage in identity development, and ends with spaces that students find difficult to navigate.

In discussing the ways that students talked about each of these kinds of spaces, we can see that each space caused students to engage the university on academic and social levels, define the space and their role in it, and navigate the university and its systems. The active nature of these processes is important to note. Two of the twelve students in the study noted that they had begun their careers at the university in academic difficulty. One described how she had had difficulty feeling engaged with the campus community, avoided libraries, and did not feel connected to her school work. Another arrived as a transfer student, and did not succeed in her first major because she felt disconnected and lost. Both expressed that they were not very

engaged with their studies or with peer groups, had no defined role for themselves on campus, and did not successfully navigate the university and the barriers they encountered.

The first student talked about feeling at home only in her dorm room, and avoiding the library. She went on to describe how she moved back to her home community in San Diego while developing a regular habit of using the library and identifying classes she liked to find a way to define herself as a student and engage the university. The other student changed her major to one which stressed a pedagogical style that helped her engage her peers and feel more connected to her academic work. Both described themselves as taking charge of a difficult situation and making choices about how they approached school, their identity, and their relationship to the university.

Students were not asked directly about their retention and persistence, and direct discussion of their retention and persistence did not explicitly arise in their talk. Rather, processes of retention appeared indirectly throughout the interviews as students discussed the ways they approached their lives as students. Some of the ways that students' interacted in the space of the university resemble the process of an individual using capital to navigate his or her position in the field. (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1996) Still more resemble the processes of academic and social integration (Nora, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993) which often result in the development of relationships and resources that resemble the promotive factors noted in resiliency literature. (Baldwin et al., 1993; Compas et al., 1995; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005)

The kinds of experiences students describe include adapting to the culture of the institution, developing identity, and both developing a sense of belonging to the university and cultivating an understanding of spaces where they did not belong. The acknowledgement and naming of spaces of non-belonging was not precisely the development of spaces of resistance— rather those spaces seemed to be part of the development of an identity separate from but embedded in the university. These processes of producing spaces where student found belonging and non-belonging were deeply intertwined with issues of identity development common to adolescence and early adulthood (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and embedded in networks of personal relationships.

In their own experiences, students are not *persisting*. Rather they are doing, relating, and becoming. An individual student does not see him- or herself as being retained from the first year into the next; the student is instead becoming a sophomore, becoming an engineer, becoming a future doctor. Thus, the process of retention from a student perspective is less about the larger social factors of retention, and more connected to more personal developmental processes. In the next chapter, I look in depth at the lives of two individual students to explore how their experiences on campus express the ways in which these students' daily interactions in space help produce activity and relationships that help them produce their retention processes.

Chapter 5: My Day on Campus: Phoenix and Angela

The portraiture method stresses the importance of including dissonant voices (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), to illuminate and challenge the details of the larger portrait. For the purposes of this study, I chose two students from the focus groups both because they were vocal and articulate, and because they challenged some of the common stereotypes of UC San Diego students. Phoenix is an Asian student activist on a campus that focus group participants described as politically uninvolved. She is frequently of the campus administration and of other students' lack of involvement in political movements, and she feels out of place because of others' perceptions of her level of involvement compared to other Asian students. Angela, on the other hand, is a multi-racial African American woman who feels marginalized from the campus African-American community and does not find feel like she is accepted on her own terms in the campus resource centers. She is very connected to her job in residential life and to her studies, but eschews the involvement in clubs and undergraduate research that student life professionals encourage student leaders to do. Aside from her work as a House Advisor, she might *appear* to be uninvolved, but she sees herself as very connected to her academic identity. Using Phoenix's and Angela's descriptions of day on campus as a starting point, I will look at ways their activities help them engage with elements of the campus, define their roles and relationship with the university, and navigate through their daily lives to help illuminate the processes by which students are able to have these agentive responses to their environment.

Phoenix's Day on Campus

Phoenix was a participant in the third focus group. A biology major with a strong interest in social justice issues, Phoenix's life revolves around her academic life and her student activism. Her activist identity is tied to her search for a sense of voice and identity. Her sense of having an unresolved sense o identity begins with her home life, but took shape as she attended Summer Bridge and developed a vocabulary and framework for her identity:

> …going back to my family history, because I think that's where motivation comes from the most… I don't know much, and they don't want to tell me about our family history. So the farthest I can go back is just, okay… Dad, born in Vietnam, in a village with their own dialect, which I don't even know what the name is in English…. Escaped the Vietnam War at the age of 13. I don't know the village name, and I don't know what happened to my dad. I don't even know when his birthday is because they don't want to talk about it. It's to that point. So I feel like my parents, they kind of made me think, oh yeah, perfect family, we've got everything settled, we're stable, yeah. But then, coming to UCSD and going to Summer Bridge, and realizing more about institutional racism and how that affects people opened my eyes about, okay, yeah, my family, I'm the first to go to college, of course I'm not perfect, okay, what else?

Finding her own history is an important project for Phoenix, but she ties the process to her role in the university. From her early experiences in the Summer Bridge program, she has seen herself an activist, working on an activist newspaper, working with SPACES, and advocating for an Asian American Studies program on campus. To Phoenix, this is important to her relationship with the campus. She notes that despite the large Asian student population on campus, the university does not acknowledge the culture, contexts, and voice of Asian identity. Students carry their identities with them, but the institution does not reflect them. Her student activism and provides a

framework for the production of her own identity. She has struggled to move from

internalizing her emotions and experiences to finding a way to voice and act on them:

> I think that's how I usually deal with my problems, I feel like I have to
> vocally say it, I can't internalize it, because I internalized most of my
> life already, and it went really bad. I exploded, made a girl cry. So ever
> since then, I was, okay, I need to be more vocal, not like I think of the
> Asian model minority myth, you know, that Asian girl, the
> stereotypical one, passive and quiet. I always think about that and I try
> to break that.

She is not only taking action to form her identity, but she is actively trying to reject the

stereotypical identity of Asian American women.

Phoenix's day moved between academics and activist work — school and

laboratory work on the one hand; student organizing and events on the other. When I

noted this division in her day's activities, Phoenix remarked:

> It's like two different worlds in a way. I feel like that's why I want to
> minor in Ethnic Studies. Honestly, I would want to double major in
> Asian American Studies, but we don't have one here, so I'm also in the
> coalition to work for it.

When I asked how she kept these two parts of her life in balance, she responded:

> This week I started thinking about that too, honestly. Because going
> into this year, I was like, how am I going to do it. The past two years I
> was already stressed with just having classes and org meetings, but not
> so much a commitment there. But it's like now, this year, I have so
> many things to do. Somehow it works out for me…. I realize that I
> know how to compartmentalize… my emotions…. It's not like I forget
> about it, I pull it out later and deal with it then.

Phoenix maintains several identities, each laden with different purposes and outcomes.

While I saw these roles as distinct and not integrated, she sees these identities as part

of a larger picture of her that connects different identities into a single cohesive self:

> …the reason why I'm a Human Biology major is because I want to be a
> doctor. And why do I want to be a doctor? It's because I want to put the

> lines of privileged knowledge with underprivileged patients at an
> equilibrium. So I want to educated underprivileged patients of mine
> about their bodies so they can know their own bodies and that's how
> they become self-empowered…. So I feel like that's how it all
> interrelated to each other….

For Phoenix, her work as a student activist is tied to building personal and community empowerment, and so is her career goal of being a doctor. She brings those together to an idealized vision of herself as a doctor-activist. Even if achieving each of these ends requires compartmentalizing the different parts of her life, she does not see these identities as occupying separate compartments of her life. Instead, there is an overarching theme that pulls the elements of her life together, tied to her process of uncovering her family identity, developing a political and ethnic identity, and building her sense of herself as an activist:

> And then what's my identity of trying to find out what is my family
> history, who I am as an Asian American/ A/PI woman? And I feel like
> at the end everything relates to each other, so I feel like all the work I
> do in class or out of class all goes toward me trying to grow as a person
> and learn as a person and be a strong A/PI woman for the future.

This process of producing an identity out of seemingly disconnected goals, dreams, activities, and identities is where Phoenix finds her sense of agency, though that sense also derives from the roles she takes on in the spaces she inhabits as moves through the campus. Phoenix works to produce a coherent identity not only from her activities and her own personal history but also through her membership to communities within the university. Networks of peers, mentors, and caring institutional agents help her define her membership in, connection to, and sense of self within the spaces of the

university. This comes in the form of peer and paraprofessional support in her research

and student activist roles.

> And the thing is that it's kind of student-run in a way, because the supervisors are fourth-years, and I feel like because they are fourth-years, they know that all of us are students and I really appreciate how every week they ask me…. do you have a test coming up or anything? Remember, school first, school first…. And also at SPACES, too, they always ask me, oh, did you eat yet? Do you have a test coming up? How's class? And I feel like research and SPACES, they keep me grounded.

Her connection to others provides a set of checks and balances that help her navigate

her roles as student, researcher, and activist. Older students, paraprofessionals, and

staff at both the lab she works in and her job at SPACES help her feel both cared for

and able to balance and navigate the tasks and demands of her multiple roles. Whether

this takes the form of helping remind her of priorities ("remember, school first") or

helping her care for herself ("did you eat yet?") or reminding her work schedule

around school ("do you have a test coming up?"), the contact she has with lab and

SPACES peers, paraprofessionals, and staff keep her in balance. The characterizes

such care as keeping her grounded, but what they keep her grounded in is a sense of

navigating her work in both SPACES and the lab within the context of being a student.

Phoenix engages in both the academic life of the campus by seeking out

undergraduate research opportunities and the social life through her activist work. She

uses her academic and activist identities as a way of create definitions for herself and

her multiple activities as part of a larger project of putting her learning to work for a

community purpose after graduation. She uses the relations that result from her

engagements to navigate the challenges and structures of the university. These show a

set of relationships that hint at the ways that agency may be playing out in students'
lives.

Angela's Day on Campus

Angela participated in the fourth focus group. A multi-racial woman of African
American, Native American, and Caucasian ancestry, she graduated from a north San
Diego County high school and came to UCSD as an engineering student. While
Angela is very involved as a House Advisor, her expressions of identity stress her
independence, individuality, and academic work. I chose her because her
socioeconomic background challenged assumptions behind cultural capital theories;
because her independence challenges notions of student engagement; and the
complexity of her home relationships and her lack of connections to faculty mentors
adds depth to notions of the supports and challenges that contribute to a student's
resiliency.

Angela's day carried her between the residence halls and class, with some
personal errands in between. She noted that this was a busier day than most, but that it
was not very different from a typical day:

> On a more typical day, because like, I don't always have the doctor's
> appointments. Like in between the one Music and Center Hall class I
> didn't take a picture of. That's an hour and a half so I might study or
> might take a nap between the Center Hall class and MGT class. That's
> about an hour, so I might nap or do homework but a lot of it is at the
> end of the day for the 2 AM stuff or going to bed at 2 AM.

However, Angela conceded that "I don't know if I ever have a typical day because of the HA position." Thus, part of her day typically involves adjustments around the needs of her work, her supervisors, and her residents.

Angela's primary identity is as a student. She takes her work as a student very seriously, and that dedication served her before she became a college student. Despite other options, her life was school, which helped her advance to the university:

> Life before college was very dry. I didn't do much. I got into music in fourth or fifth grade, playing the clarinet. Once I got into middle school it was singing. Singing was the thing that I could do. And do well…. I wasn't allowed to do sports because of my asthma so I was very closed off. It was typically like... I can remember. It was go to school, come home, do homework, in bed by 8:30-9:00. It wasn't until senior year when I joined our version of like the mathletes….

Part of her focus on class work is based on adapting to her strengths and challenges as a learner. Angela noted during her focus group interview that:

> … I struggle with reading. I've never been diagnosed with a learning disability but I can't read… well, I can read, but I can't read things one time through and, if it's a one-page document, I can't read that super fast like most people can, and I don't know why… I always have to find those reading tips, like, you know, read the first sentence and the last sentence and read the intro and conclusion first and then go through and read just the topic sentences, so I always feel like I'm missing that key stuff because if I try to read the entire thing, it's going to take me hours at a time and I get sleepy from reading, like I think most people do….

However, her dedication also comes from her academic identity as an engineer. As an engineer, she faces a highly rigorous and structured curriculum with a larger number of required units than non-engineers. In addition, for her, engineering has a personal value: she dreams of becoming an engineer working for NASCAR. When I asked her where that goal came from, she explained:

About ten years ago my mom... was dating someone who was into NASCAR. And he really took me in as his daughter and up until he passed away in May…. It was like dad and daughter…. And so 10 years ago, I would sit down and watch with him. I think at first it started off as something to do with a dad figure like, "Oh, I'm going to go watch NASCAR with my Dad." And then, let's be honest. I fell in love with a lot of the drivers because they were cute.

After the death of Dale Earnhardt, Angela started looking at the issues around safety and how cars are built and engineered:

So I started getting really interested in the way that the cars were built. And then throughout the past 10 years, I would, before college I was able to watch every single race. I had notepads and I was writing stuff down. If you showed me a car after a crash, I could pretty much tell you what happened to the car. I was getting really good at understanding how racing worked and how the cars were working and it was just like, "I want to do that."

Over time that interest evolved. Angela considered new issues and problems while maintaining her interest in the engineering behind vehicles:

And then, I was talking to someone, and they were like, "Well, NASCAR's a waste of gas and stupid," and everything like that. I typically get the stupid thing but I didn't... I don't want to say I didn't understand, but it didn't come to my mind, "Oh, yeah. You're racing 500 miles every weekend." That is sort of like a lot of gas that we're using. So then I started thinking, what if NASCAR built a fuel-efficient engine or an eco-friendly engine that put out the same output. So that's now my goal is once I get into NASCAR is to help them create a fuel efficient or eco-friendly engine.

Angela's academic focus is personal, adaptive and purposeful. In many ways, it is compartmentalized and protected in her life in order to help her meet and overcome academic challenges and pursue her goals.

The role of student, though, is always balanced with the demands of being a house advisor. This is Angela's second year working as a House Advisor. On the one hand, this means that she is constantly engaged and connected to others—residents,

former residents, staff, and fellow HAs, even when walking across campus back to the

college:

> … I'm passing everyone…. I typically can't walk more than like 10 feet
> without saying hi to someone, whether it's a resident, an HA, a friend,
> an old resident. Like that's just the place that you pass people on. [The
> dining hall] is typically like residents and friends, and HAs too. [The
> college coffee shop], I'm hanging out with friends and HAs.

But the HA role leads to challenges in balancing academic life and the requirements of

the job. The balance between school and the HA position becomes part Angela's

negotiation of school in general:

> So, there's always a day that you are going to have a program, but then,
> or there's not always going to be a day that you have a program, So
> then the days that you do have programs are those typical or atypical
> days. So, I feel this day is a more typical day. There's class and there's
> parts of the HA position which it may not be a program but I'm still
> doing something for it.

Work becomes pervasive as a House Advisor, with HAs feeling that they cannot easily

be off-duty. This becomes a challenge in the job, and HAs turn to their fellow House

Advisors to manage stress and maintain personal focus, believing that only other HAs

can understand the demands of the job:

> I think the thing that is less typical in this day is having time to do just
> the HAs and not necessarily talking about work. Even though it is
> horrible, you always do something…. We're always doing something to
> de-stress. In the back room, there used to be the custodial shop back
> there but they moved to Tamarack so it's now our HA lounge. You can
> go in and typically find at least one HA. And if they're studying and
> they'll take a break and talk to you for a little bit and you just hang out.
> We have a white board that has four or five like would-you-rather
> questions and like taking polls of what people would do so just having
> a fun time with the HAs is not depicted anywhere in the study.

For Angela, the roles of student and HA are distinct, living in balance with each other,

and serving different needs and purposes. The HA role, in many ways, builds a sense

of community, connection and belonging that are separate from her work as a student.

But for Angela, a third role seems to work in her life, too—her role in her family.

Angela's family lives in northern San Diego County. Though there are many

students on campus who come from local communities, the vast majority of UC San

Diego students come from outside of San Diego County (Office of Student Research

and Information, 2009a). She maintains a close relationship with her family, checking

on them regularly. Part of this is motivated by concerns for health issues her family

members face and part of it is focused on maintaining ties:

> whether sending money to help with something or talking to my sister
> after a doctor's appointment that upset her or my mom going through
> some crazy business idea…. I don't like going home that often, but I
> still like talking to my family.

While she does not express any anger regarding this situation, Angela does note that:

> I feel like [my mother] didn't necessarily raise me to be a kid. I feel like
> a lot of the times I was raised as a second adult to like bounce ideas off
> of when things were upsetting her.

She explains that "I take care of a lot of people but I feel like I don't get taken care of

at all. I'm the one that's forgotten." Thus, her relationship with her family is a mix of

affection, connection, concern, and responsibility. While her family grounds her and is

central to her identity, her family relationships bring with them a combination of

obligations, expectations, and interpersonal politics:

> I don't know if my mom would ever agree with the statement of like,
> she raised me as like another adult. But, it definitely felt like it because
> I feel like, you know, a husband or a boyfriend is the person that you're
> going to talk to about, "Oh, let's do this business plan, lets like invest
> this money." And it's like, no, it was me that she came and talked to
> that about. She'll call me like once a week or once every two weeks,
> like, "Hey, I was thinking about investing this money into like a

property in Indiana." And I'm like, "Well, what are the pros and cons of doing that?" And like going through her ideas and I'm just like, sometimes I don't think that this is a typical mother-daughter relationship.

At the same time, Angela's relationship with her mother is at the heart of her identity as a strong, independent woman. Her history and her experience as the daughter of a single mother, her ability to take care of herself, and her ability to develop resiliency in the face of her challenges all contributed to a family narrative of personal responsibility from an early age:

> … all of us like learned from an early age… my mom's not gonna hold our hands for everything. So, we were cooking and doing our own laundry by like 8, 9, 10, 11. I think I was the youngest in having a job with babysitting at like 14, 15. So, I think having a single mom, it definitely had its hardships, but I honestly wouldn't change it for anything. Because my mom... And my mom also taught me and my sister as well, like, "If you can fix it, do it yourself because mechanics, plumbers, they're gonna take a little bit advantage of you. So get it done yourself and you'll be fine."

In Angela's case, this value touches most of what she does. Her sense of self-reliance also means that she isn't focused on study groups or other collaborative study methods. Instead, she is keenly self-reliant in her approach to school:

> I, in all honestly, do a lot by myself. I've never been keen on study groups. If I need help it's going to be going to office hours and talking to a TA and then they know how much help they can or can't. So, working with other students is not one of the ways that I like to study. So, I'm just like, "Oh, you want to do a study group?" "I don't have time this week but I'm going to be in office hours and we can talk with like the TA so I can meet you then." So, a lot of time by myself and a lot of time with the TAs….

However, this also means that Angela is not engaged in faculty relationships. Integration theorists would argue for the value of student-faculty connections to

produce academic engagement and to serve as a means of connecting students to the

culture and expectations of the institution. Angela, however, states that:

> I've never found a professor as a mentor. I wanted to go to office hours
> to talk to them but there's always been a teacher that I liked that I go
> that, this is a really good professor that you teach the material so well. I
> understand what's going on. And then, there are those professors like
> the one that falls asleep in class and you're just like, "Why are you
> teaching? Please stop, go away. I don't want to take your class because
> you're the teacher." But, yeah... I find my TAs to be more mentors
> because they're... I think because of the lack of an age gap.

Learning to move from a sense of independence to finding ways to rely on peers and

adults has been a struggle for her on a personal level as well. She admits that she has

had to work on sharing with others her personal struggles:

> Yeah. I think that I've sort of "grown as a person". I typically didn't
> handle things, because of the way I was raised. It was like, "Oh, this is
> going on, well, whatever you need to do work, you need to do your
> homework or schoolwork, homework and schoolwork, work, work.
> You have to get other things done. So don't worry about that".

As with Phoenix, Angela's personal project is one of identity production, of building a

cohesive sense of self that incorporates her personal integrity and sense of

independence with membership in a community, and all the vulnerability and risk that

involves.

Angela is also engaged in building an identity that reflects how she wishes to

see herself and to be seen by others. Her project is being able to express herself in

terms not dictated by others. One way Angela works to create a personal sense of

identity is in her relationship to her racial and ethnic identity. Angela is perceived as

African American, but her own identity is more complex. In the focus group

interview, she identified herself:

> …I grew up differently as a multi-racial woman. And growing up with a multi-racial mom, but who appears to be White, just sometimes I feel like my experiences may be judged and I feel like I'm judged in those communities. Which is definitely, I don't think, their intention. But it's always come across that way to me.

Her identity is tied to accepting a complete sense of her history and background. She struggles to define herself against what the assumptions of what that means about her experiences and sensibilities that others attribute to her based on her appearance.

> I don't necessarily get judged because I'm African American, I get more judged because I don't act like I'm stereotypical Black. And sometimes that comes out in conversations when I'm talking to people who hang out at the Cross [Cultural Center] that are African American and are, oh, I've been through this and I'm like, oh, I don't really know what that feels like because I haven't gone through it. And it's like, oh, you're just not Black enough and it's like, no, it's just a different experience as being a Black woman.

What Angela expresses is more than a need for validation or respect, but to be the author of her identity, her experience, and her voice. The sense of being silenced, marginalized, makes her feel stripped of the ability to define herself.

Another way Angela shows her need to produce and express her identity is the way in which she pursues her dreams of becoming a NASCAR engineer. She notes that others are confused by her goals, and even mock them:

> I typically don't get someone that's... No one's ever like, "Oh, that's so cool!" They're like, "NASCAR? Interesting" And then, some people are like "Oh, tell me more," and other people are like, "I'm done. Let's move on with the next part of the conversation. I don't want to hear anything else about NASCAR". So it's a very split group of how interested they are in that idea of NASCAR.

But rather than adjusting her desires to meet expectations, she maintains a steadfast focus on them, incorporating her dreams into her identity as an engineer as part of her vision of her future self.

Angela's focus on defining herself also is apparent in her relationships with her family. Though she still remains close to them, she notes that "I still don't see the world the same way that they do…. So we clash on a lot of things…we just have different views especially politically." But more importantly, she already talks of moving away to pursue her goals, which hints at a growing identity away from the family.

Angela's identity as an independent and self-sufficient person allows her to choose when and how to engage with the campus, choosing very specific roles and contexts. She chooses to limit her roles as a student on the curricular and co-curricular level, with very clear outcomes planned out and a strong desire to control her identity. Her identity seeks to define those roles be defining her outcomes (NASCAR engineer), work (House Advisor), expressions of her ethnic identity, and her family roles. By having a tight and limited focus rather than seeking to explore multiple identities, she is able to anchor herself in those identities and identify touchstones to help her navigate the university. This guides her in choosing classes, choosing where to commit her time, and how to manage her money, even if it brings her into conflict with others' expectations.

Navigating the Campus

Both students' descriptions of their days moved them through multiple roles. Each had an academic life that carried her through the day, but each also had another role that helped define her role on campus. For Phoenix, this revolved around her identity as a student activist; for Angela, this revolved around her role as a House

Advisor. These identities provided specific navigational points to each student's day.

For Phoenix, those points were the SPACES office, classrooms, the research lab, the

Women's Center, and the Cross Cultural Center. For Angela, these points were

classrooms, the Muir Residential Life Office, and the residence halls. The roles that

helped them develop a sense of belonging and identity created important landmarks

about which both students organized their activities. Both students built spaces where

they felt a sense of belonging, home, and membership, often in multiple roles. But

both students also found ways of defining places of non-belonging, where they were

able to define themselves against institutional definitions. Phoenix's identity as an

activist is a position of resistance, but an institutionalized resistance as part of a

student–run, campus–funded organization in the form of SPACES. Angela's identity

is defined in part in her desire to form a personal ethnic identity defined against the

identity she feels is imposed on her, and her identity as an engineer in a field

(NASCAR) that is not respected by peers or faculty. The balance of belonging and

non-belonging provides a powerful set of factors in identity formation, and in

producing a space filled with productive tensions in the university.

The importance of identity to both students is unsurprising, since the body of

literature on adolescent and young adult development includes very prominent

discussions of identity formation as a central principle (Chickering, 1969; Chickering

& Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1978). But where student retention may be found is in these

students' process of identity development, which is both connected to the space of the

university, and to the ways in which they relate to the campus and their roles as

students. In looking for a way to connect existing models of retention and identify the ways in which student agency is built, these issues of membership and identity may provide key elements for understanding persistence and dropouts, framed in terms of student experience. By looking holistically at students in and out of the classroom, their social contexts, their cultural transitions, and their personal adaptive processes, we can develop a fuller picture of how students construct or fail to construct retention within those contexts.

Chapter 6: Summary of Findings and Implications

Participants in the study included students who have never faced academic challenges, and those who have struggled with academic difficulty. It included students at a range of grade point averages, and from a variety of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Focus group participants described a campus defined largely by academic spaces, colleges, community centers, and student services offices. Academic spaces shaped the ways in which they participate in academic activities and engage both peers and faculty. Experiences in colleges provided a connection to a manageably intimate community that could help them connect to larger campus communities, while their experiences in Community Centers shaped their sense of identity. Student services left them feeling subjected to university procedures and opaque rules. While none of these by itself provides a clear insight into how students develop a sense of agency or how retention occurs for these students, there are hints of processes at play that involve ways students' sense of identity and their ability to develop a sense of being in control of their experiences at the university.

Interviews with two students brought issues of identity to the forefront in their descriptions of a typical day in the university. The strong focus of both interviewed students on identity was not surprising given developmental literature regarding early adulthood, but suggest that development and identity may provide useful tools in developing a theory that connects the social, cultural, and personal experiences of students.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Elements of several theories of retention are valuable. The effect of agency on retention may be similar to Bourdieu's (1986b) discussion of individual's position in the field. The development of belonging and membership may be accounted for by integrationist theories like Nora's (2003) model of engagement, or by Rendón's (1994) theory of validation. And models of resiliency may provide useful tools for understanding the kinds of resources students may have to overcome challenges. However, understanding the interplay of structural, cultural, and developmental factors on persistence will require understanding both the complexity students' perceptions and actions in the university as well as the way that the university acts upon them.

Many institutional factors also influence retention. Currently, UC San Diego enjoys an overall high rate of retention influenced by its selection criteria. Like most highly selective institutions, UC San Diego is able to select students with a history of academic achievement and effectiveness in their studies. The structural effect of highly selective admissions already selects for students who are likely to be retained.

However, this also means that where there are differences in previous academic preparation, resources, and supports—often along socioeconomic and racial lines—the likelihood of success and retention will tend to decrease as well. This is already visible in the existing differences in four–, five– and six–year graduation rates on campus.

Areas for Future Research

In doing this study, I became keenly aware of the complexity of students' lives. While faculty and staff frequently find ourselves counseling students that they are students first, this study reminded me that for these students, the identity and tasks of being a student are actually much more complicated that that. Being a student requires engagement with multiple types of activities and multiple groups — social, pre-professional, political, athletic, and so on. Balancing demands of family, school, mentors, and future employers or graduate programs add complexity to academic and personal choices. For students, engaging with the systems of the university often involves quietly tolerating enduring interactions with institutional actors who do not understand the multiple demands that students balance.

The complexity of being an undergraduate student means that retention is also a complex problem, engaging all of those educational, personal, institutional, and historical contexts, too. While from a researcher's perspective it may be convenient to treat retention as a single, homogeneous variable, the truth of the retention process is that it is often complicated, multi-faceted, dynamic, and tied to very particular and personal details. A complete understanding of retention must acknowledge that the students being retained or not retained are part of very complex and locally-grounded contexts. The value of any model must be tempered by understanding that the differences between generalized theories and particular circumstances are of great consequence to the students we study.

Building a model of retention that focuses on agency and identity. This study was designed to test the validity of three existing models, but to leave room to look for other possible explanations. Though I have seen hints of student agency in their talk, the study was not focused on eliciting talk on how students find the ability to affect their setting. Additional study of whether, and how, students feel agency in the university setting could help define ways in which that agency is limited or enabled by social structures of the university. This could look at the role of official campus activities (Community Centers, Colleges, student government, etc.), student organizations, family, religious institutions, and other factors in building agency. It could also provide a way of looking at how much of a sense of agency they have as they arrive at the university, and how much is developed in the university.

How do students who do and do not persist compare in their sense of agency? This study focused on students who were persisting in the university, though the students in the study showed a range of levels of academic success. A comparison with students who dropped out, stopped out, or have been academically disqualified might provide useful comparison data and further identify where students develop a sense of agency, or where they fail to do so.

How do retention and agency differ across different groups? This study did not provide sufficient data for cross-group comparisons. Looking for differences across different ethnicities, socioeconomic groups, and even transfer and freshman admits might provide more insight into areas where groups are more or less able to

develop membership, navigate systems, and develop a strong sense of agency within the university to help identify specific group needs.

Implications for the UC San Diego Campus

Since the events of 2010, the UC San Diego campus has engaged in a number of projects to look at the differences in retention rates by ethnicity and to find ways to improve retention for groups that have historically had low retention rates on campus. Efforts from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have looked at admissions and academic support, and have begun setting up focus groups to study the issues of retention.

As these efforts lead to implementation of new programs and interventions, my experiences with the students in this study suggest that interventions and programmatic changes must be done with an eye to increasing student membership and involvement, promoting student agency, and making interventions student-centered and student-driven. The large level of ambiguity and negativity students felt for student support services showed that students felt a need for services, but felt excluded and alienated when those services seemed to be directed at them and not by them. Involving students in decisions, providing opportunities for them to be part of the solution, and seeking their feedback can provide opportunities to feel involved, to develop a sense of identity that promotes agency, and which reduces the sense of services being directed at them.

This is not to say that elements of such support do not already exist. The campus provides many leadership and involvement opportunities; committees do

involve students in many aspects of campus life; student-directed retention programs have an ongoing role on the campus. And yet, much of the daily governance and activity on campus occurs outside of the gaze of students. Decisions seem to be implemented by a distant administration, and students still see faculty and staff as distant figures in their lives.

As shown in the stories of Phoenix and Angela, students do not need to have a sense of agency in all aspects of their lives. Rather, they must have some portions of academic and non-academic life where they feel able to make decisions and take actions that affect their success and their future. While relationships with institutional actors could promote such sensibilities, the students in this study largely built their sense of agency through relationships with peers, while distant relationships with institutional actors played a more secondary role. This suggests that building more opportunities for paraprofessional students to act as liaisons between students and services, to connect students with resources, and to help students find representation within the systems of the university might help provide more opportunities for engagement, membership, and agency.

Building identity, agency, and membership. One possible way that campus service offices can use this information is to look at ways to incorporate students into their practices more directly. For example, an office such as the Muir College Academic Advising Office could look to revising the ways in which students interact with the office. The college Peer Advisor program could be expanded to develop a system in which the Peer Advisors work as paraprofessional apprentices, who then act

as mentors and guides to other peers. This process would allow students to be part of a developmental experience, mentor students with the possibility of becoming Peer Advisors themselves, and provide a stronger sense of community and relationships. The development of greater engagement, membership, and agency on the part of students who become legitimized in the system can be an effective way to support identity and interpersonal relationships.

Do we really want students to have a sense of agency? On June, 2011, the campus closed several libraries in response to budget cuts, including the campus' Center for Library & Instructional Computing Services (CLICS) Library ("CLICS Closure Information," 2011). The campus libraries focused their staffing and resources on their central mission rather than supporting a space that existed primarily as study space. In December 2011, students staged an occupation of the closed library to re-open it as a study space during final examinations (Flynn, 2011). In response, campus officials began compiling information on existing study spaces on campus, and allowed students to keep CLICS library open for two quarters until the campus began renovations on the building. A fundamental difference in perception between campus administrators and students lay at the heart of this conflict. Students who had a strong sense of ownership and membership in a particular library and saw having a study space as the key function of a library felt stripped of agency by the elimination of their study space.

This conflict illustrates the importance of understanding that students attribute meaning to spaces that will differ from those of the administrators, staff, and faculty.

This also illustrates the symbolic importance of space to protest movements, whether they are the student protests of 2010 or the occupy movement of the recent past. Ownership of campus space connotes legitimacy and power; and the power to occupy spaces or deny others access to spaces is an expression of agency.

Ongoing student protests show us that student agency is inevitable. But how it is developed and expressed can change the ways in which that agency shapes students and the institution. Protests reveal the differences between institutional perceptions of the space of the university and students' roles within it. While conflicts between the institution and its undergraduates are inevitable, how those conflicts play out and the ways in which the university shape are important matters for the campus to consider, both for their influence on the campus and for their influence on our students.

Appendix I: Online Survey Form

Campus Climate and Student Experiences

The purpose of this study is to explore and depict the ways in which students at a public research university identify formal and informal resources from their home, community, and campus to support their persistence and retention in the university to support their persistence within the university. My goal is to have a broad cross-section of students who can discuss both shared experiences and differences in their experiences. These questions are designed to help me select a group that has diversity in gender, ethnicity, academic disciplines, socioeconomic background, and campus experiences to help me assemble productive focus groups.

Name : _____

Gender
- Male
- Female

Ethnicity
Check all that apply.

- African American
- Asian or Asian American
- Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicano
- Filipino
- Latino
- Native American
- Other: _____

Major Field of Study
Check all that apply.

- Arts
- Biological Sciences
- Engineering
- Humanities
- Math or Science
- Social Sciences
- Undeclared or Undecided
- Other: _____

Parental income
Please give a broad indication of your family wealth as a measure of socioeconomic background.

- High (greater than $98,401)
- Medium High ($65,601 - $98,400)
- Medium Low ($32,801 - $65,600)
- Low: (Less than $32,800)
- Other: _____

Residential Experience
Choose one.

- Never lived on campus.
- Lived on campus less than one year.
- Lived on campus one year.
- Lived on campus two years.
- Lived on campus more than two years.

Admission Type
Choose one.

- Admitted as a freshman.
- Admitted as a transfer student.

Focus Group Times
Which of the following times would work for your schedule?

Email Address:_____
If you are still interested in participating in a focus group discussing your experiences on with campus climate and

sense of belonging, please leave your
email address.

Appendix II: Focus Group Interview Questions

Thank you for taking time to be part of this study. My name is Doug Easterly, who is a doctoral candidate in UCSD's Education Studies Program and the Dean of Academic Advising at John Muir College. I am collecting information as part of my doctoral dissertation on the factors that help students stay at and graduate from UCSD. In particular, I am interested in academic climate, student perceptions, and students sense of belonging or ownership.

My goal is to try to capture your experiences and your voices and to try to find ways to encourage this university and others to look at the kinds of experiences, resources, and communities that make a difference in the academic and personal lives of students.

You've been selected as a Muir student who is currently enrolled in summer session and who I believe will contribute a unique perspective to the discussion.

Because I want your experiences and opinions, there are no right or wrong answers to my questions. In fact, it's perfectly okay to disagree with others or even with the questions I provide. I am are interested with both positive and negative responses, and want to hear your honest perspectives.

I will be audio- and videotaping this focus group in order to have an accurate record of what was said and who said it. I will be using the footage in my analysis of what was said in this group. All information in the final report will be anonymous—I will use false names in the discussion, and will ask you for feedback on my final descriptions of the focus group and group interviews.

Remember that participation in this focus group is completely voluntary. Does anyone have any questions before you begin?

Now that we have described what will be happening today and afterward, let's start with some introductions. Please tell us your name, your major, and why you chose to attend UCSD.

1. In front of you is the handout UCSD Admissions uses for its self-guided tour. Would you say that these places represent the campus?

> *Probing questions:*
> - Why or why not?
> - Why do you think that the Admissions Office chose these places?
> - What would be the stops you would choose if you were giving someone a tour of the campus?

- What would be the stops you would choose if you were giving someone a tour of the campus

2. Do you have any places that you feel particularly comfortable, accepted, or welcomed at UCSD? Where are they?

    Probing questions:
    - Why these places?
    - Where else do you go?
    - Places away from UCSD?

3. Do you have any places that you feel particularly uncomfortable or out of place at UCSD? Where are they?

    Probing questions:
    - Why these places?

4. When you have questions or problems with school, where do you go for help?

    Probing questions:
    - Why?
    - What kind of help do they provide?
    - Probe into family, counselors, church, community, etc.

5. What has been your biggest challenge(s) at UCSD?

    Probing questions:
    - How did you deal with those challenges?

6. What has been your most positive experience at UCSD?

    Probing questions:
    - Probe into how they got there.

7. Our discussion today has really helped us get a basic sense of your experiences at UCSD. Do you think there's anything important that we missed in our discussion?

Thank you for your cooperation and help. I will follow up with you once we have transcribed this discussion and begun writing about it. We will want you to at least have the chance to review and respond to the things we write about our

conversations here, and will want you to have an opportunity to be part of the ongoing process.

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