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College and Career Aspirations: Identity Pathways

Longitudinal Case Studies of Latinx Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Ana Yessica Guerrero

Committee in charge:

Professor Richard P. Durán, Chair

Professor Melissa Morgan-Consoli

Professor Rebeca Mireles-Rios

December 2020

The dissertation of Ana Yessica Guerrero is approved.

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Richard P. Durán, Committee Chair

December 2020

College and Career Aspirations: Identity Pathways

Longitudinal Case Studies of Latinx Students

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This dissertation is a product and sacrifice of many people. First, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Patricia Guerrero Tello and Isaias Guerrero, who left their life in Mexico to provide more life opportunities for my siblings and I. It was their courage, strength, love, and dedication that propelled me forward day after day. Muchas gracias, ama y apa, por todos su sacrificios. Los quiero mucho!

Second, I want to give a heartfelt thank you to the students in the study who trusted me with their narratives and let me in their world. I saw myself in each one of them, and it was their experiences that kept me grounded throughout this journey. I truly believe their inner drive and resilience will lead them to their goals.

I would also like to thank the Access Program (pseudonym) for three things. First, for introducing me to college through campus trips, workshops, and Latina role models as a high school student. As a senior in high school, they asked me what school I wished to attend, I said UCSB, and here I am 13 years later. Also, for their cooperation in the data collection process. Lastly, for the work experience and insights I gained in my time as a program co-coordinator that helped inform this research. I will be forever grateful.

Further, a big thank you to my advisor, Dr. Richard P. Durán, who guided me through the process with his wisdom and for the many letters of recommendation to support my funding in graduate school. Also, the members of my committee, Dr. Melissa Morgan-Consoli and Dr. Rebeca Mireles-Rios, who helped guide my research with their expertise and encouragement. Thank you, all!

Lastly, I acknowledge those who walked before me, advocated, and opened opportunities for others like me to walk through and continue to do work for our community. It has been an honor to do this work on behalf of my family and Latinx community.

In honor of all the immigrant families looking for a better life through the education system, this dissertation was realized with you in mind.

VITA OF ANA YESSICA GUERRERO
December 2020

EDUCATION

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2015: Teaching Assistant, Department of Chican@ Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara
2013 & 2015 Instructor/Facilitator/Driver, Girls Incorporated of Greater Santa Barbara

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American Education Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting (cancelled), San Francisco, CA
 "I want to show people like, yeah, we can": Case Studies of Latinx Students
American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), Costa Mesa, CA

2019
"Programs for Students, by Students: Empowering Student Leaders to Build Inclusive Support Systems"
Alliance of Hispanic Serving Institute Educators (AHSIE), Riverside, CA

2018
"College and Career Aspirations: Identity Pathways Case Studies of Latinx High School Students"
UC Berkeley Education Research Day, Berkeley, CA

2016

"Providing Higher Education Guidance to Adolescent Latino Immigrant Youth: An Intergenerational Narrative"
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ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS/INVITED TALKS

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"Como la Monarca: A Journey to a PhD"
Criminalizing Immigrant Families: Race, Gender, and Family Separation at the U.S.- Mexico Border Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara
Invited Presenter

2018
"My 'Pathway' to Graduate School, En Comunidad"
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Inaugural keynote speaker

RELEVENT EXPERIENCE

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2019-2020, Chicano Studies Institute, Graduate Dissertation Award
2018, Hispanic Scholarship Fund
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2016, Office of the President Community College Research Assistantship

ABSTRACT

This study helps advance the understanding of how school experiences relate to Latinx students' college and career aspirations and self-perception. It used a longitudinal, narrative, multiple case studies design to document changes in nine students' academic, social, and identity pathways as they progressed from high school to college and what factors influenced that change.

Results from this study determined that the dominant factor that influenced college decision in high school was financial realities. Background characteristics and experiences that influenced college transition and first year in college were AVID, emotional distress, and campus engagement. After their first year in college, students continued to envision themselves in successful careers and "making a difference" as they did in high school. The case studies further showed that the understanding of the steps needed to achieve their career goal and post-graduation aspirations generally varied according to the institution type they attended. Further, the challenges the students encountered during their first year in college were the amount of time dedicated to work and being unprepared for the new academic college culture, and the resources they utilized to help move them towards achieving their future goals were cultural brokers in and out of their school world. From these challenges and resources, the student narratives demonstrated they had developed a community-centered identity and high-achieving student identity even more by the end of their first year in college.

This project has value in that it can help HSI practitioners, support and outreach programs, and administrators have a better understanding of how to *serve* their student population at the two-year and four-year college level to foster a thriving student population.

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Chapter 1: Background and Introduction

Orienting Paragraph

This dissertation document is divided into six chapters. The first chapter contains a review of terms, my positionality, the Access Program and reflexivity, a description of the problem, and purpose of the study. The second chapter includes a review of the literature. The third chapter covers the theoretical frameworks. The fourth chapter explains the methodology, which includes a summary, the overarching research questions, and the methods used. The fifth chapter reports the single-case and cross-case findings of the study and the sixth and final chapter covers the cross-case analysis, discussion, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

Review of Terms

Before stating my positionality, I will provide a brief explanation of important terms used in this paper: Latinx, two-year college, minoritized, and aspirations.

Although data sources and the literature use various terms to reference people who come from Latin American descent, such as "Hispanics," "Latino/a," "Mexican-American" or "Other Latinos," I use the term "Latinx" throughout the paper. However, if the study is on a specific Latinx subpopulation, such as "Mexican-American" or "Latinas," I kept that terminology in the paper. I adopted this activist and relatively new academic gender-neutral to acknowledge inclusivity and intersectionality. Cristobal Salinas, Jr. and Adele Lozano (2017) summarize that multiple authors define *Latinx* as a "term that recognizes the intersectionality of sexuality, language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and phenotype;" further, this term was constructed "to create awareness, resistance, and liberation" (Salinas & Lozano, 2017, p. 10). Alike, Latinx is used as a form of resistance in this paper. Resistance to imposed labels.

Also, it was noted that scholars use "community college" or "city college" to refer to institutions that grant associate degrees, certificates, and transfer routes. Although not always the

case, they are presented as two-year colleges; therefore, to keep uniformity and consistency, the term "two-year college" is used throughout this paper.

Further, different sources and fields use different terms to refer to the students with the same background and characteristics. Throughout this piece, "racially minoritized students" will be used to refer to under-resourced, underrepresented, Students of Color, first-generation students, etc. As explained by Stewart (2013), "the term 'racially minoritized students' as opposed to students of color or minority students is informed by Benitez's (2010) use of 'minoritized' and similar to this usage is intended to refer to the 'process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization'(p. 131)" (p. 184). In other words, these student identities are inherently underserved by social institutions; thus, a large number are filtered out of the academic pipeline, leaving a small amount in higher education institutions.

In addition, the construct of aspirations used in this paper is based on Chavira, Cooper, and Vasquez-Salgado's (2016) and Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla's (2004) research parameters to understand how students' school experiences influence their goals and how their actions connect with those aspirations. Career and educational aspirations are "the desires or hopes" (Chavira et al., 2016) or "are abstract values" (Ibañez et al., 2004) for an ideal future, which is different from expectations, or "the realistic beliefs in one's likely attainment of a career goal) (Beal & Crockett, 2013; Erikson, 1968; Mello, 2008)" (Chavira et al., 2016); or the "concrete reality" based on schooling experiences (Ibañez et al., 2004, p. 566). Ibañez et al., (2004) measured students' academic aspirations with the following question: "If you could do exactly what you wanted, how far would you go in school?" (p.562). The range of options in their survey varied from high school to doctoral degrees. For this study, academic and career aspirations are constructed by using similar parameters to examine how past and present school

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experiences influence students' abstract goals and how their concrete actions connect with those aspirations.

Positionality

It is important to state my positionality as an insider in this qualitative dissertation research. I am a self-identified Chicana who grew up and attended the education systems in the city where this study was conducted; therefore, I had similar, yet distinct, educational experiences, resources, and challenges as the students in the study. As a high school student, I was a member of the college preparation program (which is referred to as the Access Program in this paper) through the local university that this study covers. I became eligible for admission and was later admitted to seven four-year universities; despite these opportunities, I decided to attend the local two-year college. As I advanced through the higher education system, things increasingly became more unfamiliar to me: the students, the university culture, and the expectations. Thirteen years later, I realized that this observation was more than an individual experience based on my personal situation, but a recurring pattern among Latinx students in the local community.

Later, as a co-coordinator of the Access Program, I saw this pattern in the high school students I worked with. Like me, these students are provided college admissions information, guidance, and resources, and are admitted to one or more four-year universities, but nonetheless, still enroll in the local two-year college. This drove me to better understand this pattern beyond individual choices by using a macro systematic lens. In addition, as a graduate student mentor at an academic student support center funded by a Title V Hispanic Serving Institution grant, I can personally attest to the critical challenges and needs the current student population face. Further, the lack of Latinx representation in leadership positions in society was a strong motivator for me to examine issues concerning Latinx students. Drawing from research, practice, and lived

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experiences, it is important for me to explore Latinx students' college and career aspiration development, preparation, and self-perception by tracing their past and present educational experiences.

Given the literature and patterns I've noticed along my academic journey, I believe my gender, first-generation immigration status, local resources, and opportunities influenced my experience by motivating me to break the cycle of oppression, silence, and expectations for Mexican women. My family immigrated to escape poverty and search for new opportunities. In being forced to leave our culture, extended family, and ancestral knowledge in our home country, I am motivated to create a better life for myself, my family, and the Latinx community that share similar experiences.

My research aligns with the work of Sugely Chaidez-Ubaldo (2008, 2011). I met Dr. Chaidez-Ubaldo as a high school student in the Access Program when she was collecting data for her research, which emphasized the importance of understanding relationships between students' worlds (family, peers, community, government, and schools) and the way these factors influence students' adjustment and transition to college given their past, present, and foreseeable future. Though the focus of both research projects aligns, I have modified the interview protocol, undertaken different frameworks, and examined different literature. Further, the social and academic context the informants belong to has changed, as can be seen in the data provided by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Census Bureau, and the University of California educational attainment data.

Along with Chaidez-Ubaldo's (2008, 2011) research, I borrow from Cristobal Salinas, Jr.'s (2017) concept of *voces de poder* and *voces perdidas*. In his work, Salinas highlights "*voces perdidas,*" as stated in his title "Transforming academia and theorizing spaces for Latinx in higher education: *voces perdidas* and *voces de poder,*" (2017) which "characterizes the unheard

and lost voices, the narratives that have been forgotten and rejected by a system that often only recognizes *voces de poder*, or powerful voices that overshadow those with little to no political, social, economic, and academic capital" (p.747). He emphasizes including *voces perdidas* in academia because "*voces perdidas* and *voces de poder* mirror different, if not opposite experiences and values in higher education" (p. 747). For Salinas, social change for the Latinx population can happen when "*voces perdidas*" of Latinx faculty, staff and students are shared and listened to in higher education. I borrow his concept of *voces perdidas* in my work to make visible the narratives of Latinx students and for the ultimate goal of contributing to social change through equity in educational preparation, practices, and opportunities.

In addition to being unheard, those with little social, economic, and academic capital, or in other words, minoritized, first-generation college students and Students of Color (e.g. African-American, Latinx, Asian, Native American, and/or a mix of those racial identities), have been historically unseen and invisible in higher education (Means & Pyne, 2017). The practices and policies in place marginalize this student population (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) use a Critical Race Theory (CRT) methodology known as Counter-Storytelling to analyze marginalized student narratives and challenge dominant "racial privilege" stories. Similar to *voces perdidas*, counter-stories highlight the lost, invisible, distorted, dismissed, and unheard student experiences and reframe them as stories of resilience and resistance.

The Access Program and Reflexivity

For the purpose of confidentiality, the college preparation program discussed in this research has been renamed using the pseudonym, "Access Program." The Access Program is an outreach program from the local four-year research university that partners with junior high schools and high schools throughout the county. It is an intensive academic and college preparation program for underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students that

provides resources for the participants to become competitive college applicants and that guides their aspired career preparation. One component of the program is a voluntary after school tutoring program referred to The Access Program After School Program, where students received additional academic support from university students and a program coordinator. Though all students participated in the Access Program, not all students participated in the afterschool program (See Appendix A).

As mentioned above, my connections to the program come from two angles: first, as a past student participant, and secondly, as a former co-coordinator for over three years at a different site while I was a graduate student. At the time of the research data collection, I had a professional relationship with the program coordinator at the research school site and worked side-by-side with the coordinator who had helped me become a college bound student in 2007. I came full circle in this program and the community that I conducted my research in. Although I am connected in several ways, it is important to emphasize that I am self-aware and reflexive in my research agenda and acknowledge that the context, expectations, and pressures that students currently face are different than the ones I faced 13 years ago. However, I am still able to relate to the students, while maintaining a professional distance from the place, events, and people.

Description of the Problem

New Traditional Student Profile.

According to the Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends (2018), "Post-millennials," people born after 1996 (ages 6-21 in 2018), are the most racially and ethnically diverse and the oldest are enrolling in college at a higher rate than previous generations were at a comparable age. People of color, or "nonwhite," are projected to become the majority in 2026, and while many are still in K-12 level education, they will be entering college soon; thus it is

crucial we examine institutions preparing them for citizens in our multicultural society (Fry & Parker, 2018).

"Rising Giants"

A considerable amount of work has been done on a national, state and local level to open college access to minoritized students. As a result, in the past 10 years, we have seen an increase in overall college enrollment across the nation, "fueled almost exclusively by an influx of students from low-income families and students of color," including Latinx students (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). In fact, the year 2012 marked the first time more Latinx students enrolled in higher education than white students immediately following high school (Lopez & Fry, 2013). However, the increase in college-going rates may be a misleading indicator of success because enrollment has not translated to equitable outcomes; Latinx students are lagging behind in retention, graduation, and graduate school enrollment rates compared to other ethnic groups (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2018).

Though Latinx are a fast-growing population in the nation (Krogstad, 2020; Martinez & Santiago, 2020), this growth is not reflected evenly in levels of college enrollment, degree attainment, or representation in higher paying jobs (Martinez & Santiago, 2020). In 2019, Latinx made up 18% of the population (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020a; Krogstad, 2020; HSI Fact Sheet, 2019), yet, made up 25% of the K-12 Population *(Excelencia* in Education, 2020a). The Pew Research Center states that Latinx made up more than half (52%) of the nation's population growth in the past 10 years (since 2010) with a concentration in California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. In fact, California (15.6 million) and Texas (11.5 million) account for 45% of the nation's Latinx population (Krogstad, 2020).

While Latinx student enrollment and degree completion continue to increase across the country, they are still falling behind their counterparts. Looking at the education data, the

National Center for Education Statistics (2020) data for 2018 reports Latinx immediate college enrollment rates increased in the last decade. As a result, Latinx students greatly contribute to the very changing landscape in student demographic overall in higher education (Fry & Parker, 2018). However, while Latinx postsecondary degree enrollment has grown, attainment has not increased at the same rate (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020; Martinez & Santiago, 2020; Gaxiola Serrano, 2017). Further, Latinx students' college degree attainment rates are not evenly distributed in the education systems. *Excelencia* in Education gathered enrollment and degree attainment data from the US. Census Bureau, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and *Excelencia*'s most recent analysis of public data (2014-2020). This data demonstrated that national graduation rates at the two-year college level are 2% lower for Latinx than for White students (33% Latinx vs. 35% White), yet, at the four-year level, they are 12 % lower (51% Latinx vs. 63% White) (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020a). In comparison to other ethnicities, individuals age 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2019 were 40.1% of non-Hispanic whites, 26.1% blacks; 58.1% Asians; and 18.8% Latinx, according to the United States Census Bureau New Educational Attainment Data as of March 2020 (United States Census Bureau, 2020b).

2019 Educational Attainment in the U.S

For a visual representation of the degree level disparity between enrollment and college completion for Latinx students, the bar graph below represents the educational attainment in the United States in 2019 for Latinx of any race in thousands, both sexes, 18 years and older, according to the United States Census Bureau (2020a).

Figure 1

Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Latinx

Origin in the U.S.
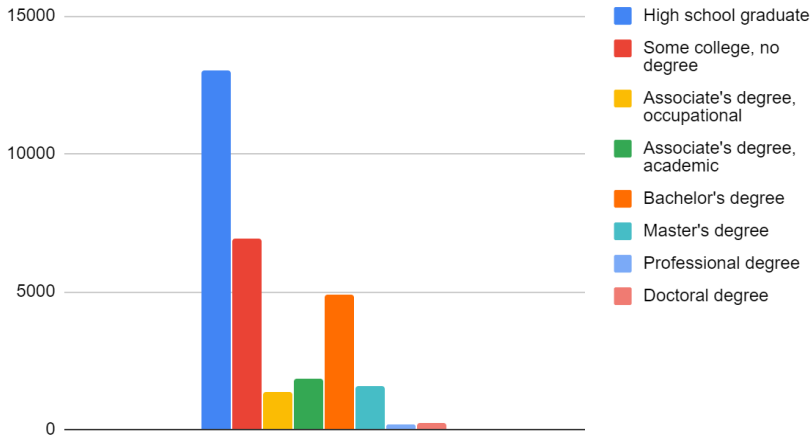
Note: Data from the United States Census Bureau: Educational Attainment in the United States: 2019. Numbers in thousands. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html

Figure 2

2019 Educational Attainment of Latinx (of any race) 18 Years and Older by Sex
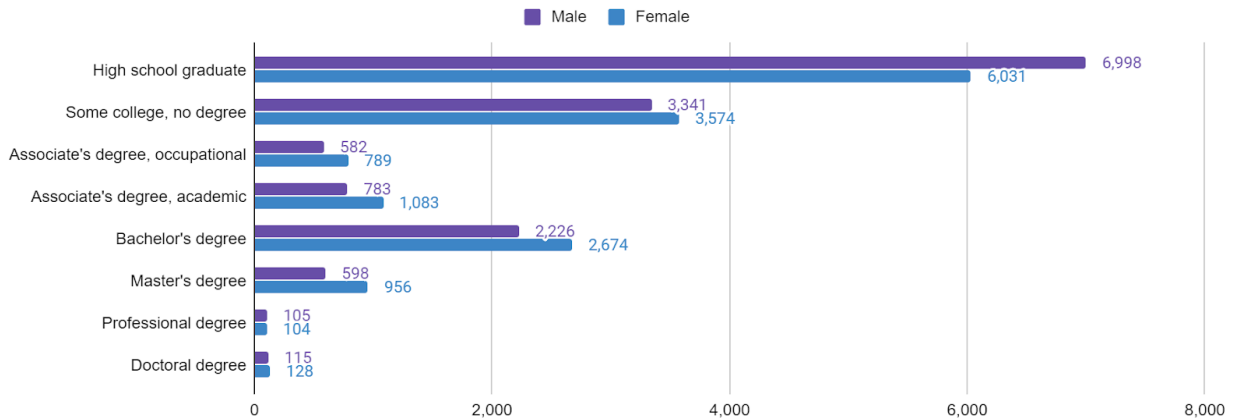
Note: Data from the United States Census Bureau: Educational Attainment in the United States: 2019. Numbers are represented in thousands.
https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html

Though there has been an increase in higher education degree attainment for Latinx students nationally, *Excelencia* in Education (2020) argues we need a plan to *accelerate* college degree attainment to close the equity gaps, not simply to *increase* degree attainment rates. I argue we need to focus on preparing students to thrive in college and beyond. Further, this discrepancy between Latinx increasing demographics in the school system and college attainment requires an examination of the school to workforce pathway because Latinx workforce "participation is expected to increase 3 percent every year, while participation is expected to decrease for non-Hispanic Whites" (Martinez & Santiago, 2020, p.8); thus, Latinx success is directly tied to the success of the nation.

Undergraduates are more likely to be enrolled in public four-year institutions and private for-profit institutions compared to 20 years ago. According to the Pew Research Center (2019), under-resourced and students of color, primarily Latinx students, are enrolled in higher education institutions at higher rates than ever before; however, they are concentrated in public and private two-year colleges and other minimally selective four-year institutions. Enrollment changes have been less pronounced in more selective institutions where students often come from more resourced backgrounds, with white students still being the majority at four-year institutions (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019).

Where Latinx student enrollment has increased nationally is in "less selective tiers," particularly in two-year colleges and minimally selective and open admission four-year institutions (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). According to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), 46.0% of Latinx undergraduate students attended two-year institutions (compared to 34% of all white undergraduates) in 2019 (HSI Fact Sheet, 2019). For scholars, students, and practitioners, two-year colleges have been considered an "opportunity" for Latinx students to access higher education due to their open access and low financial cost, despite that it

is well known transfer rates are low (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017). One important factor to consider in future enrollment data is the educational challenges COVID-19 brought in 2020.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

To further contextualize this study, research shows that the majority of Latinx students begin their academic career in two-year colleges in an attempt to obtain a baccalaureate degree (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019; *Excelencia* in Education, 2018; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Zell, 2010;) or attend other broad-access four-year institutions, specifically, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). Defined by the US Department of Education, a HSI is a degree-granting higher institution with at least 25% full-time equivalent Latinx undergraduate enrollments (Definition of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, 2016). This does not consider Latinx students enrolled part-time, which leaves out a large number of Latinx college students. Under federal recognition, 1992 was the "official 'birth'" of HSIs, others state the HSI concept began in 1979 (Garcia, 2019, p. 2).

HSIs can produce a significant shift for Latinx students' mobility. They are an integral part of the higher education system in the United States and to Latino student success… [and can be] key drivers to economic and social mobility for students" (Martinez & Santiago, 2020, pp.10-12). The increase of Latinx students in higher education proliferated the number of HSIs. 2017-2018 data shows that most undergraduate students enrolled in HSIs are 66% Latinx comprising, followed by 40% Asian American, and 29% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Fact Sheet 2017-18).

In the past 10 years, the number of HSIs has increased by 93% (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020d). Recently, between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, based on the most recent federal data available, there were 16 more HSIs (539) and 24 more emerging HSIs (352) in the nation (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020c). As of April 2020, HSIs represent 17% of higher

education institutions and they enroll 67% of all Latinx undergraduates. Unsurprisingly, 69% of HSIs are located in California, Texas, Puerto Rico, and New York. (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020d). This reflects how fast Latinx students are enrolling in higher education, and although the distinction of HSI is just one identity of an institution, it is an important one.

The rapid increase of designated HSIs is important to examine further because of the institutions' eligibility to receive federal funding to support Latinx success, even though these institutions have not reached the educational equity or prestige of dominant white institutions. Additionally, although the federal commitment to HSIs is important "symbolically and economically," Latinx students are still not graduating at the same rate as their counterparts (Garcia, 2019, p. 7). It is predicted that the number of HSIs will continue to increase, which indicates the importance of understanding these systems, "*striving* to serve underserved populations" (Garcia, 2019, p. 3). Given the demographic changes and higher Latinx enrollment rates in higher institutions, understanding the role HSIs play in how Latinx student experience and outcomes in college is crucial (Garcia, 2019).

Latinx in California

For a macro context of the study, California's Latinx demographics and academic attainment are examined. Data compiled from *Excelencia* in Education (2020b) states Latinx individuals represent 39% of the state's population, which is the largest Latinx population in California to date. However, Latinx individuals make up an even larger portion of the California K-12 population at 52%. At the college level, California contains the largest number of designated HSIs in the nation with 163, followed by 90 HSIs in Texas (*Excelencia* in Education, 2018). As this data indicates, the Latinx college-bound population is drastically growing, so much so that, for the first time in history, the University of California (UC) system admitted more freshman Latinx than other race/ethnicity in the 2020-2021 school year (University of

California, Office of the President, 2020a). University-wide, Latinx students represented 36% of admitted students (data includes waitlist offers), which was just over Asian Americans with 35% admitted and followed by White students at 21%. Latinx student admission was concentrated at UC Merced with 54% of all students admitted. The other UC campus' admission Latinx admission rates ranged from 23-37% (University of California, Office of the President, 2020a). However, despite the increased admission rates, the number of enrolled students from the Latinx community represented 25% of the UC student population as of February 2020, whereas White students represented 31%, and Asian American students 33%. Of this student population, first-generation college students represented 40% of the total enrolled (University of California, Office of the President, 2020b).

At the Bachelor's degree level, California has three schools in the top five public institutions awarding Latinx degrees nationally for the 2017-2018 school year: Cal State University Fullerton (40% Latinx), Cal State University, Northridge (41% Latinx), and California State University Long Beach (40% Latinx). The other two institutions were one in Florida (66% Latinx) and one in Texas (89% Latinx) (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020a). Though Latinx students graduate at higher rates in California than other states, they are still not graduating and attaining degrees at the same rate as other demographics. The degree attainment for Latinx students in 2018 at a two-year college was 32% vs. 41% of White students, or 9% points lower. At the four-year level, graduation rate was 57% vs. 67% White students, or 10% points lower (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020b).

The success of the nation's future depends on its population's preparation for the demands of the 21st century. Not only do we need an educated workforce, we need a workforce with skills required to live in a multicultural world (Hurtado, et. al., 2012); thus, monitoring

students' progress through school to careers can help us understand areas of improvement and opportunity to support these students thrive in college and beyond.

Purpose of the Study

Although much is known about the variables that influence Latinx students in the education system, there is a lack of deep understanding of the challenges, resources, and experiences that influence their aspiration and identity development in an academic context. Few studies have examined the association between perceived school experiences and aspirations based on narrative longitudinal data. Thus, more work is needed to have a deeper understanding of the academic landscape that Latinx students must negotiate and to better understand these students' navigational challenges, their resources, and their decision-making processes needed to reach their academic and career goals (Ubaldo, 2011). In hopes of contributing knowledge to inform a more equitable education system through policies and practices for the benefit of the students, their families, their communities, and society at-large, I document the students' past and present educational experiences and make their often invisible everyday lives visible by entering their life worlds to educational research.

Thus, the objective of my research is to examine the narratives of students' college preparation, transition, and first-year college experience and how they relate to their college and career aspirations development, progress, and identity. Centering on the student identity and institutional culture, this study examines the narratives of nine Latinx college students through longitudinal, multiple-case studies research design. The main purpose of this study is to learn more about perceived school experiences linked to aspirations development within a sample of first or second-generation immigrant students from Mexican descent, who are first-generation college students from a well-resourced high school and community. Understanding the schooling

within the Latinx culture can help academic institutions better utilize existing cultural assets to promote achievement and produce culturally tailored interventions for these "rising giants."

This project has value in that it can help practitioners, support and outreach programs, and administrators have a better understanding of how to serve their student population at the two-year and four-year college level, especially for HSIs to foster a thriving student population. By asking the student participants to make sense of the trajectory that led to their enrollment in college after high school, I was able to highlight the pathway and experience of attending a two and four-year institution. Also, I gained a more in-depth understanding on how to better meet the needs of this group by improving their educational experiences. Students' emerging identity is impacted as they navigate college, confront new challenges, and adjust to their new educational journey to achieve their college and career aspirations.

Summary of my Master's Degree Study

This study is an extension of my master's project, which explored how 12 (6 females, 6 males) Latinx students developed their college and career aspirations and self-perception as juniors in high school. I interviewed 9 of the participants (5 males and 4 females) again after their first year in college to examine their college transition and first-year college experience and how it impacted their college and career aspirations pathway. This study is a longitudinal, narrative, multiple case studies design (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013) that documents changes in students' academic, social and identity pathways as they progressed from high school to college and what factors influenced that change using the Bridging Multiple Worlds Framework (Cooper, 2011) and the Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012)--social justice and identity centered frameworks. Also, using a triangulation analysis (Yin, 2014) of the informants' high school and college semi-structured interviews, facilitation prompts, and academic records (unofficial transcript), data was thematically coded and compared across

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informants. Single-Case and Cross-Case findings and analysis (Yin, 2014) were then reported centering on the voices of the students using the *voces perdidas* concept (Salinas, 2017). This study helps advance the understanding of how school experiences relate to Latinx students' self-perception in college. Specifically, the findings help inform higher education institutions, especially Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), how to better serve Latinx students to thrive in college and beyond. This project advocates for inclusive learning environments for student outcomes beyond retention and graduation rates.

A quick summary of the Masters' Project is presented for context and student background. The literature review and conceptual frameworks of this study center on the way Latinx students' college experiences are influenced by their social identities and campus culture using diversity asset-based multi-contextual social justice approaches.

Although the informants' individual histories and experiences were unique, there were similar shared experiences in all 12 case studies. Data revealed that all participants were preparing to attend college immediately after high school by challenging themselves with college-preparatory courses, being involved in school and community extracurricular activities, and by looking forward to their desired careers. Seven out of twelve students self-reported putting a lot of effort in their academics to "advertise" themselves for the opportunity for admission to a four-year institution. Furthermore, in addition to the required PSAT at their school, two students had taken an SAT II subject test and four students had taken at least one AP test in a variety of subjects by the end of their Junior year in high school. Interestingly, of those four students, all were male. However, the scores they received were either two or three out of five points. Three points is the lowest passing score for college credit. For a summary of the students' characteristics, see Appendix A.

In congruence with other studies, these students had high academic and career aspirations: 6 of the 12 aspired for graduate degrees in a variety of areas (including law, engineering and in the health field), 6 of the 12 envisioned professional careers, and 4 of the 12 had non-professional goals (e.g. artist, photographer). Their goals stemmed from the desire to repay their immigrant parents' sacrifices and "give back" to their community. Driven by their parents and community, their long-term goals influenced their actions in high school, and as a result, most became strong college applicants via advanced courses, leadership positions, and school involvements. Seven out of ten students shared "working hard" in their academics as preparation for college.

With further analysis of their college preparation trajectories, the students experienced multiple levels of challenges and resource needs that influenced their development of self and aspirations. Seven expressed discomfort in their advanced courses and not being viewed as academically qualified by others, which they attributed to their Latinx ethnicity. As a result, students felt low levels of confidence in their academic abilities and greatly feared academic failure in high school and in the future. Although these students reported feeling not understood or disconnected as significant classroom experiences in their advanced courses, they also felt empowered for themselves and their "people." Additionally, data revealed that students had a clear understanding of how to become competitive college applicants. However, the next steps for their desired major and career were not as clear to them. The students reported a lack of knowledge and confidence to successfully graduate college and transition to their desired career. As a result, nine of the twelve students reported a need for career and skill related preparation and additional guidance from their school. These students relied on cultural brokers to provide college and career information since their parents did not go to college. This gap in knowledge overwhelmed Latinx students, who as children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, feel

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pressure to be college graduates and have financially rewarding careers. As a result, the informants expressed a need for greater emotional support in and out of school. The findings suggested they did not understand the implications and potential connection between their day-to-day success in school and the attainment of their long-term aspirations.

Interviews, academic records, and facilitation prompts revealed five major themes that informed first-generation Latinx pathways to college and careers among the 12 respondents:

1.) Outreach programs have a positive effect on students' identity and skill development and path to college. 2.) Parent reciprocity is a significant motivation for high aspirations and a strong work ethic. 3.) Lack of diversity in advanced courses relates to their negative self-perceived academic abilities. 4.) College and career development from their school is integral for their success. 5.) The need for emotional and moral support in school for a quality learning environment.

There is a limited amount of literature on the importance of the students' junior year experience and decision-making process and how that impacts their aspirations and future opportunities after high school. This master's project study helped advance the understanding of how school experiences relate to self-perception for Latinx high school students. Specifically, the findings can help inform high school career centers and advanced courses to become more culturally proficient and address Latinx needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Before covering the literature pertaining to this research study, it is important to note a concern found in the work of educational equity and Latinx students in higher education. The primary focus of this work is on college "success;" however, the definition of success is obscure in the literature. Success is not clearly defined by many scholars in their research, and yet, most definitions are quantifiable measures. Some studies imply "success" as high retention rates and others as high graduation rates. For the sake of social transformation through education, it is essential for the definition to be streamlined by administrators, practitioners, and scholars working with this population. I argue that it is important to define "success" beyond retention and graduation rates and conceptualize it as a thriving population beyond college graduation.

In my literature review, I found that there is no cohesive definition of what it means to thrive in the education setting. To conceptualize the college student experience and outcomes, the definition I use for this study will be the one developed from a three-year national study of college students by Schreiner (2010), which comprises intellectual, social, and emotional engagement on campus. It is defined as the following: "thriving college students not only are academically successful, they also experience a sense of community and a level of psychological well-being that contributes to their persistence to graduation and allows them to gain maximum benefit from being in college" (p. 4). This definition of thriving is linked to multicultural and social justice models in higher education for student success in college and beyond. Like Garcia's (2019) *Latinx-Serving* concept, this definition goes beyond the traditional sense of student success composed of GPA and graduation rates and extends to holistic student development. More precisely, this concept consists of "(1) engaged learning, (2) academic determination, (3) positive perspective, (4) diverse citizenship, and (5) social connectedness" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 4). As the rate of Latinx students' and other students of color's enrollment

continues to increase, it is crucial that institutions not only generate a campus assessment for a culturally diverse learning environment, but work together to create a thriving, culturally diverse learning environment.

In creating learning environments, academic institutions have the power to mold society by replicating inequalities or can "emancipate and empower" diverse students (Hurtado et al., 2012; Yosso, 2005; Conchas, 2001;). These institutions have this power by fostering a thriving student population through the "development of a perspective of themselves, the world, and their future that equips students for success not only in college, but, more important, in life" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 10). Only when we extend the definition of student success and the expectations we have for colleges, can we begin to analyze systematic structures and question the dominant narrative that has continued to perpetuate educational inequalities.

Pertinent Literature Review

Although there are considerable advances in the literature and the understanding of Latinx students in higher education, there is still much to be learned. In this literature review, I examine Mexican descent Latinx student characteristics, academic and career aspirations, college choices, the transition and integration to college life, adolescent identity development in the school world, institution-student culture clashes, institutions commitments to equity, Hispanic Serving Institutions, first-generation Latinx Asset-oriented Narratives, Latinx heterogeneity, and the gap in the current literature. In addition, this research examines several theories that recognize the way social institutions impact diverse students' ability to perform (Garcia, 2017; Hurtado, et. al., 2012; Cooper, 2011; Yosso, 2005). By examining the existing literature, this section identifies the important work that has been done, what can be applied to current Latinx student experience, and what gaps currently exist in the field.

Latinx of Mexican Descent Student Characteristics

To help understand the Latinx student school pathway, it is important to understand their unique characteristics. Students and families who come from Mexican backgrounds are a "special interest [for] issues of culture, identity, and pathways to college" (Cooper, 2011, p. 100) given their large presence in the United States. The literature states that for children of Mexican immigrant families, success is the achievement of the "American Dream" by going to college and doing "college-based work" (Cooper, p.112, 2011). However, merit-based academic and career success is not truly possible for these students due to institutional obstacles and other restrictions they face (Cooper, 2011). For example, policies, pedagogies, and capitals within the academy limit these students, and, thus, their self-agency and efforts to advance and succeed can only go so far without the support of the institution.

Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla (2004) discuss the Latinx generational significance for student school experience. To adapt to their new environments, immigrant adolescents bring "distinctive ways of perceiving and making sense of their reality (cultural attributes), but they also create new ways of understanding their surroundings (cultural adaptations)" (pp. 559-560). Cultural attributes (such as traits and values) stay consistent even during the cultural acculturation that often happens when students attend college, whereas cultural adaptations refer to student traits and values that change in order to adapt to U.S. culture. The cultural attributes that the students bring to college and the adaptations they create in response to their new environment (world) will be discussed in the identity development section, particularly in relation to the students who participated in this study and who are first or second-generation Mexican immigrants. These cultural attributes and adaptations are crucial for understanding students' later academic success and career aspirations.

Academic and Career Aspirations

As Chavira et al (2016) note, academic and career aspirations "play important roles in adolescents' career identity development as well as in their later career and educational attainment (Beal & Crockett, 2013; Erikson, 1968; Mello, 2008)." (p. 214). The overall low Latinx college graduation rates are not attributed to the lack of desire or determination. In fact, scholars on educational attainment state that Latinx students have high academic and career aspirations (Chavira, Cooper and Vasquez-Salgado, 2016; Cooper, 2011; Ubaldo, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Chaidez, 2008; Conchas, 2001; Kao & Tienda, 1998) and that these students are highly motivated to succeed in school (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Other studies have found that though low socioeconomic status Latinx students have high educational aspirations, they have "modest" educational expectations based on the "concrete reality" of their school experiences (Ibañez et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the disconnect between aspirations and "reality" leaves many of these aspirations unmet. Furthermore, research has also shown that Latinx students frequently do not know how to achieve their goals (Conchas, 2001) given the lack of academic and career guidance at home and inadequate support in their academic institutions (Martinez & Cervera 2012; Ceja, 2006).

Similarly, there is a discrepancy between career aspirations and career expectations. Career aspirations are defined as the "desires or hopes for one's ideal future career," and career expectations are "the realistic beliefs in one's likely attainment" (Chavira et al., 2016). Career aspirations may not indicate career-based decisions (Mertz et al., 2009), but the ability to make career-based decisions, referred to as career decision self-efficacy, is known to be important in career development (Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010; Gushue et al. 2006;). This is especially important for first-generation college students, who will soon be first-generation professionals. It is clear from this research that Latinx college and career students' aspirations attainment require

more attention. To support students to reach their aspirations, it is important to understand what factors are correlated to high aspirations for Latinx students and understand how college choice and experience is affected by that.

College Choice

The high aspirations and academic trajectory of Latinx students discussed above have encouraged scholars to examine college choice at the secondary level. The literature indicates that college choice is directly associated with student outcomes and ultimately has long-term effects for the student's education and beyond (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Perez & McDonough, 2008). For example, a study by Pew Research Center reports that 39% of students who begin their college education at a public two-year institution earn an undergraduate college degree at the two-year or four-year level within 6 years. On the other hand, 67% of students who begin their college education at a four-year institution finish within 6 years (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). The discrepancy between the outcomes is related to the financial complications that occur when enrolled in college for a longer period of time, as many Latinx students come from low socioeconomic status and have other financial obligations. In part, the significant contrast between two-year and four-year institutions is due to academic resources each system type uses to support student education, such as hiring faculty with higher qualifications. Thus, more selective institutions with more resources available are associated with better student outcomes, significant higher retention rates, and students who often have greater financial earnings post-graduation (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019).

These two different types of college resources determine important outcomes for the students enrolled in them. Historically ethnic minoritized students at a two-year college tend to be first-generation to college students, enroll part-time, and come from under-resourced backgrounds (Nuñez & Hernandez, 2011; Fike & Fike, 2008; Landen, 2004). Additionally,

studies have found many students of color are academically underprepared, not considered

"college ready," and in need of developmental courses (Fike & Fike, 2008; Tinto, 2006) to catch

up with their peers due to the lack of resources in their communities. Not having the academic

capital at home and occasionally lacking the appropriate resources can significantly prohibit

students from reaching their aspirations. This is especially concerning for Latinx students

because of their increasing enrollment rates and growing population. However, a newer

quantitative study done by Nuñez and Hernandez (2011), which examines Latinx students in

two-year HSIs, found that these same students were likely academically successful high school

students. Nuñez and Hernandez (2011) also found that these students plan to take their education

further compared to other groups of students: roughly 75% of them intended to earn a bachelor's

degree and those enrolled for the first time planned to receive a graduate degree. As this research

shows, the aspirations of these students differ dramatically from the actual graduation outcomes.

College Decision-making Process.

To further understand the Latinx educational trajectory, the decision-making process is

important to understand. Studies have found that the college decision-making process for all

students is influenced by multiple variables, such as family, social capital, and secondary

institutions, but primarily is determined by financial concerns. For Latinx students, it is well-

known that in addition to those factors, family is central to their motivation to attend college and

their college planning-process (Zell, 2010; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Perez & McDonough,

2008). Although they do not necessarily help with concrete college guidance, Latinx parents

influence Latinx students' motivation to attend college by narrating family hardships (Kimura-

Walsh et al., 2009). Similarly, Zell's (2010) study also found that although Latinx students did

not feel prepared to succeed academically based on past academic experiences before enrolling

in college, their will to succeed for themselves and their family was strong. Additionally, the

college planning process is influenced by the expectation of maintaining proximity to family, including extended family (Perez & McDonough, 2008). As a result, scholars highlight the need to include and educate Latinx parents in the college decision process (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Although Latinx students are highly motivated to attend college, qualitative research findings indicate that lacking social capital during the college preparation years, especially during the decision-making stage, may have negative consequences on student outcomes (Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Since first-generation Latinx students often lack college preparation, college application knowledge, and guidance outside of school (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin & Allen, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012), it is common for many to perceive two-year colleges as the only option to access higher education (Salas et al., 2018), and more so, they expect to attend two-year colleges at significantly greater rates than other populations (Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

Furthermore, secondary level institutions play a critical role in the college decision-making process for Latinx students (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Studies report academic aspirations and college choice decisions for low-income first-generation to college "Chicanas" are heavily formed by the college preparation resources and opportunities available to them in high school (Ceja, 2006). It has also been found that Latinx high school students are receiving less access to information and opportunities by higher education institutions compared to any other ethnic groups (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Similarly, in a study on college preparation, Kimura-Walsh et al. (2009) found that, although critical for Latinx college access, secondary schools provided college preparation resources mainly to the highest achieving high school students, leaving out motivated students who needed additional support and college preparation opportunities. Therefore, with minimal college guidance and resources from family and

institutions, research implies that although they are extremely motivated by their aspirations, Latinx students are left to fend for themselves (Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Ceja, 2006). Understanding the influences and challenges Latinx students' college choice process can help institutions be better equipped to serve their diverse student population to thrive and achieve their goals.

Transition and Integration to College Life

Further, to address low graduation rates, monitoring the transition adjustment process can help academic institutions serve students. Students go through a college transition and adjustment process where they learn how to be a college student and find ways to negotiate demands and losses of their pre-existing worlds (i.e. home, friends, culture, community) and new college world (social and academic) (Ubaldo, 2011; Rendon 1994). Simultaneously, they must find ways to cope with old and new challenges along their path towards their academic and career aspirations (Ubaldo, 2011). For minoritized students, factors that impact their college transition are the "pull of home, academic adjustment, belonging, and financial realities" (Bradbury & Mather, 2009).

Most recent research on the college transition experience of minoritized students focus on the successful comprehensive college transition programs (e.g. Cole et al., 2020; Hallett, et al., 2020; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020; Strayhorn, 2011). Comprehensive college transition programs often include financial support, peer mentoring, tailored transition courses, social and academic programming, residential and common spaces, and staff support "for a cohort of students" (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). However, "comprehensive and integrated programs represent an opportunity to structure or coordinate an environment within the larger university community that is explicitly oriented toward the particular needs and success of these student populations" (Kezar & Kitchen, p. 223, 2020). The successful student transition experience requires

institution-wide efforts across units and departments and beyond transition programs. More research needs to be done on the larger campus community effort to assist students transition to college.

Few studies have examined the way the second-year adjustment college experience for Latinx students. One study that did address this adjustment, "Latino Student Transition to College: Assessing Difficulties and Factors in Successful College Adjustment" (Hurtado et al., 1996), examines the transition and subsequent academic, social, personal-emotional and college attachment and experience for Latinx students in their second year at a four-year college. The study found that college experiences affect Latinx students' adjustment significantly more than their background characteristics. For example, the student life experience (e.g. counseling and residence halls programming) provided in their first year directly related to student retention rates. Hurtado et al. also found that Latinx and non-Latinx peer relationships (knowledge-sharing and peer mentors), especially with upper-class students and resident hall advisors, was important for social and attachment adjustment. In addition, interactions and relationships with cultural brokers, such as peers, family, faculty, and counselors, were influential for the college adjustment during the first year. The impact of the first-year student's control over time, schedules, workload, rigor, and finances influenced the academic and "personal-emotional" adjustment in a student's second year.

Scholars have identified the intrinsic transition challenges minoritized students face and ways to address those challenges, though the complexities are exacerbated for Men of Color. In a qualitative study by Bukoski and Hatch (2016) on Black and Latino men transitioning to a two-year college found that they begin college highly motivated to reach their goals and eager to take advantage of the educational opportunity two-year colleges offer. However, they lack the skills, such as fostering social relationships, time-management, and balancing multiple responsibilities,

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needed to reach their goals. As Men of Color, their struggles with identity, multiple responsibilities, and social expectations complicates developing the skills needed to successfully navigate college, such as sharing struggles and seeking help, due to the pressure to perform the "cool pose" in the Black community and "machismo" in the Latinx community. Men in this study did not express their emotions or vulnerability, even though it became a challenge while trying to reach their personal goals. As a result of the socialization of Men of Color, the study found the men's ego, pride, fear, and confusion outweighed the stakes involved in asking for help. Further, the men put their college achievement on their own shoulders, but the academic and social structures prevent them from achieving success in college.

Bukoski and Hatch (2016) explain that understanding these challenges provides the institution the opportunity to intervene and facilitate intentional spaces and services to meet their needs, such as spaces to "discuss and air their challenges" as it pertains to gender and race, and challenge masculinity and mentoring programs and services like tutoring and networking workshops to help them develop the skills necessary to reach their high aspirations. Bukoski and Hatch conclude by stating, "meeting men where they are is something community colleges are uniquely positioned to do...given their regional ties and smaller learning communities" (p. 113-114). Literature on college transition experience for Latinx and other minoritized students emphasizes the critical role programs and institutions have in supporting the academic and social transitions of students. Higher education institutions need to identify and center on the implications of students' intersectional identities in order to effectively increase student retention and graduation outcomes.

Adolescent Identity Development in the School World

Identity development is directly correlated to academic and career success. The adolescent years are a period of identity exploration (Gandara & Contreras, 2009), and as

Catherine Cooper explains, "identity development can be seen in terms of personal exploration and commitment in domains such as careers, gender role, sexuality, political ideology, and religious beliefs, and as part of a collective process of categorizing one's membership in social groups" (2011, p. 11). However, society has a large role in the identity development process: "it is important to be critically conscious of the real power and privilege attached to these socially constructed identities such as race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation and how they interest one another" (Hurtado et. al., 2012, p. 73). For example, most Latinx students struggle to "construct an identity as a good student and an aspirant of the American middle class," and as a result, either their ethnicity or role as a good student is excluded, which consequently leads to their academic achievement and aspirations being affected (Gandara & Contreras, 2009, p. 79). However, because academic institutions highly influence adolescents' identity development positively (Cooper, 2011, p. 11), educators must understand "how social identities are created, reacted and manifested in diverse college environments," (Hurtado et.al., 2012, p. 73). As these researchers indicate, social identities are connected to academic achievement, given social fit, in multiple ways.

In 2017, Reyes examined how the college racial climate influences Latinx students' identity formation using the Critical Race Theory perspective, and found that through "campus arrangements" and student interactions with their Latinx and non-Latinx peers, students gain information about how their racial identity is understood and where they belong on campus. "Students construct what it means to identify as a Latino within that organizational space" according to the campus environment and its characteristics (p.19). Latinx students experience college and learn according to the racial climate, which is constructed by the student demographics and diversity programming and policy. These experiences also include negative

experiences, such as racial microaggressions, tokenization, or exclusion, as part of the campus environment.

The perception of others has been widely studied by scholars and repeatedly the concept of imposter syndrome (i.e. "imposter phenomenon" or "Perceived Fraudulence") has been found in higher education for college students and faculty (Kolligian & Sternberg, 2010; Kumar & Jagacinski, 2006). As imposter syndrome illustrates, "imposters think about their level of ability relative to others and are concerned about their relative standing. Yet they seem to be uncertain about their ability level" (Kumar & Jagacinski, p.148, 2006). This essentially makes students feel like imposters, Kolligian and Sternberg (1991) explain that "perceived fraudulence is a subjective experience of perceived intellectual phoniness that is held by certain high-achieving adults who, despite their objective successes, fail to internalize these successes." As a result, it is common that these individuals experience negative emotions such as "anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to an inability to meet self-imposed standards or achievement" (p. 309). Kolligian and Sterberg further state that these individuals highly control the impression they make to not be discovered to reduce anxiety. This research helps us understand how the minoritized student population navigates the education pipeline while forming their identity and aspirations, and that as minoritized students, Latinx students often feel as if they do not belong within the academic institution.

Institution-Student Culture Clash

Expanding on the impact identity has on educational experiences, several scholars whose work focuses on Latinx academic success in higher education use an ethnic/race and culture centered approach (Garcia, 2019; Naynaha, 2016; Hurtado et al., 2012; Cooper, 2011; Rendon, 1994). Navigating the academic institution is a cultural act; thus, culture is an institutionalized gatekeeper or barrier to students' journey towards their aspirations for those who do not belong to

or understand the institutionalized culture, such as Latinx students. The dominant culture is reflected in the dominant norms, messages, rules, roles, and models of ways of beings (Cooper, 2011).

Students bring cultural frameworks, values, and a sense of reality to school, and many times, these frameworks and values don't align with the institutions' culture. Not having the dominant culture can consequently influence students to disconnect from their course material and campus (Cooper, 2011). To succeed, "non-traditional" students are forced to adapt to the new culture (Rendon, 1994), in which they "are faced with unlearning past attitudes and behaviors and are faced with learning new attitudes, beliefs, and values that are quite removed from those of their cultures" (p. 34), such as independent work and classroom competition. The misalignment of culture encompasses competition over collaboration in learning spaces, passive teaching pedagogies, and assessment methods focused on outcomes rather than learning (Rendon, 1994). Though this argument was made over 26 years ago, similar statements have been made recently and demonstrate its ongoing relevance.

Institutions of higher education were "designed by and for the privileged" (Rendon, 1994, p. 3), and this embedded "group based privilege and oppression" and allocations of resources often go unquestioned (Hurtado et.al., 2012, p. 60). Colleges and universities do not favor the experiences or the needs of first-generation college students and other post-traditional students. Thus, it is not surprising that students who do not fit into this profile struggle to have a sense of belonging and experience the imposter syndrome in college (Rendon, 1994). As a result of the increasing multicultural student population, scholars advocate for a systematic diverse learning campus environment that creates diverse student success (Garcia, 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012). In the context of Latinx college students, the Eurocentric cultural norms of college are unfamiliar to most, placing them at a disadvantage the moment they enter the college doors (Naynaha, 2016).

Their college experience may result in dissonance as they "inhabit the space between these two disparate cultures in values" (Moreno, 2016), or between their school and home worlds (Cooper, 2011; Hill & Torres, 2010). This culture clash affects students in profound ways and Naynaha's (2016) criticism in *Assessment, Social Justice, and Latinxs in the US Community College* argues that Latinx students do not find their needs and interests addressed most of the time. Instead, they find an institution for the White student population, where "they are neither in nor out; they gain access to college but remain blocked from advancement" (Naynaha, 2016). Even in minority serving institutions and institutions where great efforts to become more diverse and inclusive are being made through curriculum, student life, classroom, knowledge, ideologies, voices and the history passed to all students, Whiteness and Eurocentric culture continues to be valued (Garcia, 2019; Rendon 1994).

In the attempt to highlight cultural diversity in school campuses, it is important to stay away from "tokenizing" the Latinx culture, and instead, engage in culturally diverse programs and pedagogy efforts (Kiyama et al., 2015) and cultivate culturally engaging practices to best support their success (Garcia, 2019). Having disconnects within institutional culture matters because it makes students disengage and drop out; however, "understanding cultural differences and similarities can help to create" safe spaces where youth can build a positive sense of identity and belonging (Cooper, 2011, p. 116).

Institutions' Commitment to Equity

To truly promote educational equity, institutions must celebrate cultural diversity reflected by systematic changes. Research has found that simply promoting a friendly environment, such as programs and activities that appreciate and promote diversity on campus (Lau, 2003) is not enough for educational equity. Hurtado et al. (2012) states that "as society becomes increasingly diverse, colleges and universities are responsible for providing students

with an educational environment that will ensure success in a multicultural world" (p. 52). The responsibility is placed on the institution to prepare students for a culturally competent society, which consists of systematic administrative, programming, and pedagogical practices that truly incorporate cultural diversity into the college environment. Scholars assert that in order for students of color to succeed, an embedded multicultural approach is essential—an institutional effort deeper than holding minority heritage month or "fiesta nights," especially in predominantly white institutions (Kiyama et al., 2015; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011).

Part of Hurtado et al.'s research on campus climate examines structures and processes that perpetuate identity-based privilege and oppression that are often seen as "status quo," or unquestioned in the institution (practices and policies). Hurtado et al. state that "these [practices] often are based on agreed upon procedures implemented by dominant groups of faculty and administrators. On the surface, they may have neutral facades but work to maintain inequity among groups" (2012, p. 60). However, though organizational practices can create challenges for underrepresented groups in higher education, they can also reverse inequality for all students through an institutional commitment to diversity. One major organizational practice that impacts students' college experience in college and their outcomes is the implementation of diversity in the classroom curriculum, "an enduring social structure" (Hurtado et al.). What is included in the curriculum is what the institution values as "legitimate knowledge" (p. 62). The authors explain "monocultural institutions may be less likely to value the lived experience of non-western ways of knowing" (p. 62), refusing to shift to a diverse curriculum, is a refusal to be a more inclusive institution.

Similarly, holding the institution accountable for a diverse learning environment and student outcomes is Gina Garcia (2019) who argues in her book, *Becoming Hispanic Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities*, the importance of understanding HSIs

as organizations "*striving*" to *serve* underserved populations. Using two years of empirical data collected at three HSIs in Chicago, she developed an organizational identity typology: *Latinx-enrolling* (enrolls at least 25% Latinx students), *Latinx-producing* (enrolls at least 25% Latinx students and produce positive outcomes), *Latinx-enhancing* (enrolls at least 25% of Latinx students and has a culture that enhances the Latinx college experience, but no positive outcomes), and *Latinx-serving* (enrolls at least 25% Latinx students, produces positive outcomes, and has a culture that enhances the college experience). Although all typologies are valuable, a Latinx-serving institution produces the best outcomes for Latinx students and the entire campus.

Based on her findings, Garcia compiled recommendations for campuses to strive for to become *Latinx-serving* institutions using an asset-based social justice model: provide culturally diverse and relevant curricula and programs grounded in social justice and tools for civic engagement and activism; hire diverse school agents committed to social justice; be open to diverse narratives, including the underserved; embrace the Spanish language to maintain students' cultural and linguistic ways of knowing; provide active learning and involvement in their education and career development; and provide students with a comprehensive financial aid package. She advises that these considerations be applied as appropriate as each institution has various contexts and student composition (i.e. perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, challenges, and resources).

Scholars suggest a diverse learning environment that not only supports Latinx students' academic success, but involves everyone. The responsibility cannot fall on people of color as academic achievement for all should be an institutional effort. Overall, an institution committed to diversity and educational equity requires an effective and rich learning environment, which includes diverse social identities, curriculum, practices, and ways of knowing from multicultural

perspectives (Garcia, 2019; Lundberg, 2014; Hurtado et al., 2012; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011; Rendon, 2009; Yosso, 2005; Lau, 2003; Milem, 2003).

The learning environment is directly correlated with students' sense of belonging. According to Strayhorn (2019), sense of belonging "refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (pp. 28-29). The importance of a sense of belonging in academic spaces has been emphasized by many scholars for first-generation, under-resourced students, and students of color (Strayhorn, 2019; Means and Pyne, 2017; Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Ibañez et al., 2004; Rendon, 1994). A sense of belonging is a basic human need, drives behavior, and leads to "achievement, engagement, wellbeing, happiness, optimal functioning in a particular context or domain, to name a few" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 39). Several factors have been found to influence sense of belonging: context, frequency, and quality of interaction between social identities (behavior dimension) in formal and informal curricular and cocurricular context (Hurtado et al., 2012); feeling valued and mattering have been highlighted by scholars to directly influence feel a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019; Rendon 1994); and sharing identities with instructors and inclusive pedagogies are critical for diverse student success in the classroom, and ultimately, a sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Egalite and Kisida's (2018) article, "The Effects of Teacher Match on Students' Academic Perceptions and Attitudes," examined the importance of student and teacher identities in elementary and middle school and found sharing the same racial and gender characteristics between student and teacher showed to have positive school experience, such as "feeling cared for," school engagement, higher academic aspirations, and student effort in their academics. The impact was more prominent when they shared both gender and racial characteristics. This study

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emphasizes the importance of closing the teacher and student divide in schools, especially when considering the demographic shift in schools and the nation.

Similarly, the importance of having similar identity characteristics between instructors and students at the college level was found in Fairlie et al.'s (2014) work. At the two-year college level, performance (class retention and grades) was related to race/ethnic and gender identity match or mismatch between the student and instructor. Minoritized students sharing the same race/ethnicity result in better performance in class, long-term college retention, and degree completion. It was also found that sharing race/ethnicity influenced the probability of enrolling in the subsequent courses in the same major. The degree of influence was significantly greater than the impact of sharing the same gender. These findings are especially important to examine that correlation in the STEM field where students are required to take a sequence of courses in a STEM major and the retention rate for Latinx students is especially low. To address the implications of their findings, the authors suggest that hiring more minoritized instructors would help close the academic achievement gap. The increase of students of color enrolled in higher education makes it critical to have an equal faculty representation, particularly in HSIs.

In sum, students' identities and intentional practices (content, pedagogy, practice, and programming), "advance both diversity and learning to achieve essential outcomes," and institutions need to include either "socialization or re-socialization, validation, and building a sense of community" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 83) for the increasing diverse student population to prepare them for a diverse future workforce.

Validation.

Rendon (1994) posits the importance of the active role institutions have in validating culturally diverse students especially in the first week of college, considering many are "consumed with self-doubt or expecting to fail" and don't see themselves as "college material,"

if the institutions are to transform diverse students' college experience and student development. Without validation, Rendon found "students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate, and/or mistrusted" (p. 44). Her Validating Theory (1994) postulates that institutional agents (faculty, counselors, coaches, administrators, tutors, teaching assistants, and resident advisors) are key players to transform the student through validation through affirming students "abilities to succeed and sense of belonging." Validation "is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development;" in other words, when someone reaches out and affirms the students "as being capable of doing academic work and that supported them in their academic endeavors and social adjustment" (p. 44). Over 25 years after Rendon's (1994) argument about the critical need for the culture of academia to recognize diversity and change to "better meet the needs of today's rich, diverse student population" is still an area of discussion with a lot of room for improvement. She stresses the adjective "active" throughout her research to emphasize the role school agents have.

During their first year in college, it is critical for students to have academic and social engagement through validation from school agents. Academic and social involvement in college is crucial for student success, though it is challenging for nontraditional students. However, curricular and co-curricular academic and interpersonal validation can transform students' experience and identity. Through validation, student involvement, such as going to faculty office hours and attending student clubs and organizations, can occur.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

Institutions' responsibility to commit to serving diverse populations is especially important in Minority Serving Institutions, and for Latinx students, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). The rapid growth of HSIs in the last several decades is attributed to "a confluence of social, political, economic, and demographic factors" (Landen, 2004, p. 187). Despite this

increase, limited peer-reviewed research in Education dwells deep in HSIs' identity and effectiveness of *serving* the historically marginalized group (Garcia, 2017). For the first time in academia, Garcia (2017) grapples with the organizational identity in higher education research by conducting a qualitative single-case study composed of student, administration, faculty, and student affairs staff interviews on the identity of their four-year HSI. From the data collected, Garcia provides the following typology to classify HSI identities: *Latinx enrolling, Latinx-producing, Latinx enhancing, and Latinx-serving*. The HSI identity that provides the most effective support for Latinx students is "Latinx-serving," as it "produces an equitable number of legitimized outcomes, and enacts a culture that is educationally enhancing and welcoming" (pp. 120-1S). This organizational identity asserts that *serving* Latinx students not only includes successful student outcomes, such as high retention and graduation rates, but equally focuses on the "deeply embedded assumptions and values (organizational culture that facilitates outcomes for Latinx students)" (p.121S). Similarly, Laden (2004) highlights the need for HSIs to consider factors other than academic skills when *serving* Latinx students: "greater rather than less attention and sensitivity will have to be paid to the curricular, social, economic, and cultural expectations and needs of Latinos and those from other racial and ethnic groups who also attend HSIs" (p. 195). Considering Laden's conclusion, a Latinx-*serving* institute should therefore enrich the educational experience of Latinx students, from culturally relevant curriculum to faculty connecting with students who have historically been in the margins or invisible in the system (Garcia, 2017; Laden, 2004; Conchas, 2001).

Given the importance of HSIs, Gina Garcia (2019) explains that HSIs and other minority serving institutions are undervalued and generally not considered prestigious because they are compared to "white normative standards," meaning "all institutions of higher education are valued and gain status based on indicators of prestige and effectiveness that are grounded in

whiteness" (p. 3). Thus, her work centers on countering the dominant "whiteness" narrative used to evaluate colleges and universities. She argues that "indicators of excellence and greatness are subjective" (p. 17). It is important to examine who sets parameters of what success means and the implications for that for minoritized students. For Garcia, being conscious of issues facing minoritized communities, building allies, looking beyond test scores, and demonstrating care for their students is *serving* minoritized students.

College transition: first-gen and nontraditional students may not be accustomed to taking advantage of opportunities to be involved in academic and social activities; however, validating agents in and outside of class which include faculty, peers, parents, and staff can turn that around for the student (Rendon, 1994).

First-Gen Latinx Asset-Oriented Narrative

HSI practitioners genuinely care for the success of their students through practice and policies, "yet they struggle to find models and empirical research to draw from" (Garcia, 2019, p. 115). Scholars have identified asset-based models and culturally relevant pedagogy to support diverse students' learning and success (Garcia, 2019; Rendon, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Reflected in the case studies, first-generation Latinx college students meticulously maneuver a new, unknown space making sure they complete all required tasks for the opportunity to reach their aspirations for many years; nonetheless, they are confronted with systematic gatekeepers hindering their progress towards their goals. By not possessing the dominant institutional culture, Latinx students may be seen through a distinct lens: "educators most often assume that schools work and that students, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Literature on Latinx students in higher education have traditionally framed their experience with a deficit-based perspective; however, these students

possess many strengths, values, and different ways of knowing that should be highlighted and recognized (Garcia, 2019; Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Yosso, 2005).

It is important to not only pay attention to the challenges that these students face and the "distorted" deficiency perspective when narrating the experiences of Latinx students, but to also recognize the "assets, the hopes, and dreams that are central to these students' experiences" (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Drawing from sociocultural perspectives (Garcia, 2017; Cooper, 2011; Rendon, 2009; Yosso, 2005) to examine how minoritized students utilize cultural capital to navigate their college pathways successfully, we can flip the rhetoric and "view culturally diverse families as having expertise or cultural capital rather than lacking it" (Cooper, 2011, p. 64), "in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). We must reinterpret other's cultural context and norms as strengths.

Gina Garcia (2019) and Tara Yosso (2005) challenge dominant white culture and ideology (norms, values, knowledge, skills, abilities) in higher education to center on the experience and identities of students of color in higher education to enhance student outcomes. Tara Yosso (2005) utilizes a critical race (CRT) theory framework in education to discuss the community cultural wealth minoritized students hold to challenge traditional cultural capital in higher education. CRT is used and defined as a theoretical and analytical framework that "challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses," shifts the focus from the value of white middle class norm, and highlights cultural wealth of students of color (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Marginalized communities possess a plethora of "cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" and the cultural capital students of color inherently carry to the classroom include "aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). These form all build the community cultural wealth and this knowledge is valuable to the students and their families, outside of the school context. Thus,

deep classroom learning happens when community cultural wealth is leveraged on (Yosso, 2005).

In the academic context, aspirational capital identifies "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future" despite facing challenges and lacking resources. Linguistic capital is the skill students of color have to express themselves in different languages and art platforms, whereas familiar capital refers to a commitment to community and family, including extended family wellbeing and connections. Social capital explains the social networks and community support (practical and emotional) to navigate the nuances of higher education. Navigational capital includes the skills to navigate the academic institution that does not have their culture embedded. Lastly, resistance capital refers to knowledge and skills gained by challenging inequality (Yosso, 2005).

For Latinx students, institutions and their policies must openly and deliberately value first-generation Latinx characteristics and strengths and celebrate their contributions as the first to earn a college degree. They bring different life backgrounds, ways of knowing, perspectives, values, practices, high motivation, and strong work ethic. They are also institutionally savvy because of their ability to navigate a new environment with structural limitations, making them all experts in a facet of life. Leveraging the assets and strengths of the Latinx community is an approach that can culminate positive results for Latinx students academically and their careers (Martinez and Santiago, 2020).

Latinx Heterogeneity

To adequately meet the needs of the Latinx student population, it is important to understand that we cannot treat them as a homogenous group because there are complicating variables. Most Latinx student literature is on Mexican American/Chicanos, but we know the Latinx umbrella encompasses a widely diverse population. There are multiple dimensions and

social systems that influence the students' lived experience and world views. For example, Latinx who come from different countries (Cubanos, Mexicans, Argentina, Dominicans, and Central Americans, etc.), have different political and economic situations, class differences, skin colors, immigrant generations, assimilation levels, different geographic locations upon settling, and immigration experiences at different stages in life. The interplay of all these factors require different forms of support. Further, intersectional identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, biracial (e.g. AfroLatinx), and immigration status, also impacts the educational navigation of Latinx students.

It is important to recognize the heterogeneity within the Latinx population and not assume that *Latinx-serving* "looks one way, when in reality, there are multiple ways that could look and feel, depending on the diversity of the Latinx population within different institutions in different regions of the United States" (Garcia, 2019, p. 97). As such, different factors should be considered to meet the needs of this population more effectively in each institution, such as the association of gender and educational outcomes within the Latinx student population.

In sum, it is clear institutions have a vital role in Latinx students' college experience and outcomes (Garcia, 2019; Salas et al., 2018; Hurtado et al., 2012; Nitecki, 2011; Fike & Fike, 2008). First-generation Latinx students rely on academic institutions to reach their college and career goals, and the institutions are in a position to systematically meet these "rising giants" where they are (Garcia, 2019) with culturally inclusive policies and practices to generate an overall *thriving* student population beyond college graduation for real lasting success for the student and the nation.

Gap in Literature

After examining the literature on student success in higher education, it was found that unless it is specifically a Latinx focused study, Latinx students, particularly males, are

significantly underrepresented in general empirical studies. To date, the findings about white women dominate peer-reviewed research articles on higher education; therefore, the findings should be questioned when examining the experiences of Latinx students. As a result, valuable data, such as the narratives, student voices, and longitudinal student development of Latinx and other students of color, is left out and should be considered when addressing the academic pipeline problem. Given the societal and higher education demographic shifts, models centered on student diversity are ever more important (Hurtado et al., 2012). Although scholars have begun to consider the diversity within the Latinx student population, more work should account for these gaps.

This research study provides insights on Latinx students' college academic and social transition and adjustment for the literature on higher education. Specifically, this study examines the college decision-making process, challenges, resources, and the identity development process using two years of qualitative data. College adjustment and navigation analysis is centered on the narratives and voices of first or second-generation students from Mexican descent. The study further contributes information about Latinx students' educational experiences; their past, present and future aspirations; how they manage challenges and resources; and how all this informs their emerging identity development.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

As an extension of my master's project, I continue to apply the Bridging Multiple Worlds Framework (Cooper, 2011) as the main grounding framework. As I focus on aspirations and decision-making during emerging adulthood, this framework allowed me to conceptualize how Latinx students navigate between worlds, resources, and people to reach their academic and career aspirations. This study also uses the Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012), a comprehensive multicontextual campus climate model, to examine the students' experiences as an underrepresented ethnic/racial group and their multiple identities in their college transition and navigation.

Parallels

These models have overlapping considerations and approaches. Both models are driven by the concern of a just multicultural world, collaboration work, and identity centered approaches to student success in and beyond college. For research and practice, both models center on students' social identities and examine how different spheres of interaction affect their experience. They focus on a multilevel set of dimensions and look at the interplay of social structures and student outcomes. Also, both consider key brokers as central to the student experience. Further, they are influenced by the ecological and sociocultural approaches and are grounded in the idea of enhancing culturally diverse students' academic attainment for social transformation using multiple social justice epistemologies, dimensions, and frameworks. They allowed me to conceptualize the whole student (background, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) and link multiple contexts that influence their college experience centering on their social identities. The Bridging Multiple World Framework focuses on the individual students' navigation and decision-making process (an internal perspective) whereas the Model for Diverse Learning Environment focuses on the campus environment and larger sociohistorical forces (an

external perspective). Both approaches help us contextualize the relationship between institutional structures, students' performance, and students' development.

Bridging Multiple Worlds

Developed from the work of the educational anthropologist Patricia Phelan and her team (1991), Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory (BMW Theory) examines how culturally diverse, minoritized, immigrant, and under-resourced youth navigate across their cultural worlds and identities on their pathway towards college and careers and focuses on bridging the students' worlds (Cooper, 2011). Phelan et al. (1991), chose the metaphor "worlds" to refer to different contexts in students' life, such as family, school, peers, clubs, and work; each world contains different cultural knowledge and behaviors, such as values, skills, beliefs, expectations, emotional responses, and actions needed to effectively navigate it. The concept of worlds will be used throughout my proposed research project, including the data collection facilitation prompts and the analysis and report of findings. The "navigating" metaphor is used to describe students' cultural knowledge, "actions and experiences as they try to move across the borders among their worlds" (Phelan et al., 1991, p. 10). Cooper (2011) built on that model with the purpose of bringing researchers, practitioners, and policymakers together with a common language and tools to best address the school pipeline problem. This framework closely examines how institutions and socialization processes interact and impact students' school achievement and aspiration development.

For over 50 years, Cooper (2011) has worked with different school agents, students, families, and communities in multicultural societies to refine her theory. It consists of five interrelated dimensions that influence students' school experience and performance: (1) family demographics; (2) developing college going aspirations and identities; (3) math and language pathways; (4) resources and challenges across multiple worlds (families, peers, schools, and

communities); and (5) cultural research partnerships. She draws from qualitative and quantitative research on a wide range of cultures to explore these dimensions. This theory also builds on Erik Erikson's (1968) identity development theory that considers the influence of "histories of individuals, families, cultural communities, and societies" (p. 36). Although this paper does not dive into the specific theories of identity, I do examine the development of self-perception as it relates to college and careers.

Further, Cooper explores five core questions in multicultural communities that impact the school "pipeline problem" by inquiring about culture, identities, and pathways to college. While there are various interrelated dimension in the framework that impact the school "pipeline problem" for multicultural communities, this study focuses on three of the five questions: what resources and challenges exist across multiple worlds, who the brokers and gatekeepers are, and how identity development and opportunities influence one another. More specifically, Cooper asks, "What factors lead youth along academic pathways towards or away from college and college-based careers?" (p. 49); "How can youth bridge their cultural worlds?" (p.63); and what are "the obstacles that limit adolescents' opportunities to explore their identities and pathways to college and effective ways to open institutional opportunities along the academic pipeline" (p. 118).

With this framework, I will examine the three areas that will be briefly covered. Cooper's second question explores minoritized students' pathways to college and urges further examination of when students walk away from or are motivated by an obstacle. Learning from the way students navigate their day-to-day tasks, expectations, and self-perception will help all those who work with Latinx students to better serve their needs. The next question identifies the key people, or cultural brokers, who link adolescent's worlds, such as family, peers, and teachers as they navigate their worlds. Cultural brokers encourage and advocate for the student in college,

an unfamiliar world, where, on the other hand, gatekeepers discourage the student in an implicit and/or explicit way. Cooper encourages a deeper understanding of the resources and challenges students experience while navigating between worlds as it can help bridge the students' worlds and facilitate a better understanding of student motivations. The last question here explores the institutional opportunities for minoritized students "to explore their identities and pathways to college," and ways to provide more opportunities as they navigate school (Cooper, 2011, p. 118). For example, what opportunities are available? How is the student taking advantage of college preparation opportunities? In what way and who facilitates this process? Through her expansive experience in the field, Cooper (2011) has found that knowledge about available opportunities for a student has is not enough, and that researchers, practitioners, and administrators should also recognize students' obstacles to better *serve* them.

This theory helps advance the field in several ways. It provides a framework that brings findings from different levels of analysis to identify effective systematic practices and policies. Culturally diverse students' challenges and resources are integrated into one framework. It also helps to provide insights into how students' experiences influence their college and career aspirations and identity development. More importantly, it shows "how ethnically diverse youth build their pathways to college and careers without giving up their ties to their families and cultural communities" (Syed, Azmitia and Cooper, 2011, p. 100).

In sum, the new research done in this study uses this perspective, accompanying instrumentation, and qualitative data analysis methods to examine how some Latinx students navigate educational and career pathways and identity development given challenges and resources they encounter across their multiple worlds. More broadly, it considers what plays a role in the development of their aspirations as first-generation Latinx college students.

Model for Diverse Learning Environments

The Model for Diverse Learning Environments (Hurtado et al., 2012) is a conceptual multidimensional campus climate model that emphasizes *serving* students and their multiple social identities (race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation) in a diverse learning environment. A diverse learning environment in higher education institutions has the potential to transform society by investing in diverse students through inclusive and intentional practice for a more equitable society. Students are the best investment for an equal and just multicultural society; thus, school agents must be reflexive about their role in perpetuating or transforming inequality.

Developed and revised from Hurtado's et.al. (1999, 1998b) climate for racial and ethnic diversity model, and other multidimensional and "multicontextual frameworks" centered on social justice, the DLE model is a climate, practice, and outcomes model. This model brings social identity theory in spheres of interaction in the classroom (curricular) and school activities (co-curricular), and examines multiple contexts—macro, exo, micro and mesosystems—that influence student experience and success.

Using more than three decades of qualitative and quantitative research in a wide range of scholarship and multiple conceptual models in higher education that informs conditions for student success and social justice guides this diverse learning environment concept to develop the model for research, practice, and policy with concern for diverse students at the center. The model is supported by multiple theories that consider multiple contexts and influences, such as theories of human development (e.g. ecological theory), organizational theory, identity development, feminist and inclusive pedagogies—which all share a paradigm of transformation. This holistic model is used to frame studies that link across contexts and inform legal and political decisions in higher education to improve conditions for student success beyond

enrollment, retention and graduation rates. Hurtado et.al. (2012) argue student success in a diverse learning environment leads to social transformation.

It is argued that social transformation is achieved by optimal learning and preparing students to live and work in a complex society, which requires educating the whole student in a diverse learning environment. Student success in a diverse society for long term social equity and economic benefits require three broad student outcome categories: "habits of mind/skills for lifelong learning" (p.50) competencies for a multicultural world, and achievement, retention, and degree attainment. Habits of mind/skills for lifelong learning refers to the way students process information and what they do with it in college and beyond, independently. These skills include "inquisitive nature and critical thinking, willingness to accept critical feedback and adjust accordingly, ability to handle ambiguous learning tasks, to express oneself orally and in writing, discern the relative importance and credibility of various sources of information, reach conclusions independent, and to use technology as a tool to assist the learning process…" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 51). The model argues every school agent has the power to perpetuate inequality or transform society. With this finding, the authors encourage scholars to examine how institutional structures and pedagogies support or don't support acquiring these skills and make the most out of diversity in the classroom.

Habits of mind and skills for lifelong learning and competencies for a multicultural world can be achieved by developing intentional and inclusive curricular and cocurricular practices. This institutional outcome has potential to develop every students' full potential. Competencies for a Multicultural World refers to skills and abilities needed to interact with individuals from different social identity groups, and to make ethical decisions in a society marked by inequality and conflict. This includes civic and political involvement, engaging in social justice work, cross-cultural competencies, equity minded individuals, and having the

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larger society's well-being in mind. Achievement, retention, and degree attainment refers to the different areas measured to understand the number of educated citizens in the U.S., which is important for the country to stay competitive in the global market. Here, the authors critique the definition of retention used in academia. Instead, they state there are different definitions and types of retention, such as institution, major, and courses. When discussing these quantifiable outcomes, we must be mindful of the definitions we use.

Another key feature of the model is that it centers on student, faculty, and staff social identities. Socially constructed identities such as "race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation, and how they intersect with one another" hold power and privilege (Hurtado et.al., 2012, p.73). Therefore, the achievement gap should be examined based on these socially constructed identities. It emphasizes the fact that knowing the student is vital in order to create an inclusive learning environment for educational equity outcomes. The DLE model relies heavily on the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1989), where identity is socially constructed in relation to others, emphasizing the multiple social identities students embody and how others influence their sense of self. Hurtado et al. (2012) hold the role and social identities of faculty and staff, or actors in the institution, accountable for student and societal outcomes, "the assumption is that diversity is embedded in the daily practice or actors within the institution, and students' social identities are at the center of inclusive and exclusive practices" (p. 103). In addition, other social identity development theories that emphasize the various contexts diverse students navigate and how they intersect are used in the DLE model to understand how campus climate influences diverse students' learning experience.

The campus climate is crucial to examine because it influences student experience and social and academic adjustment, which are connected to student persistence in achieving aspirations, and ultimately "constrain or lead to an institution's role in producing social

transformation or the reproduction of inequality" (Hurtado et al, 2012, p. 103). Through their

literature review, the authors found campus climate is "not only pervasive, but also palpable,

documentable, and measurable at the organizational and individual level with real consequences

for individuals" (p. 104). The DLE model, therefore, argues for inclusive and intentional

practices and pedagogies as an investment for all. The model considers multiple contexts that

influences college and universities and student outcomes.

To examine campus climate, the model links contexts that interact and influence each

other. According to the DLE model, campus climate for diversity is made up of multiple

dimensions: the microsystems (individuals and roles), mesosystems ("spheres of interaction"),

exosystems ("external communities and associative networks"), macrosystems ("larger policy

and sociohistorical change context" (p. 48). All levels have equal influence on student identity

and school experiences.

Figure 3

Multicontextual model for diverse learning environments
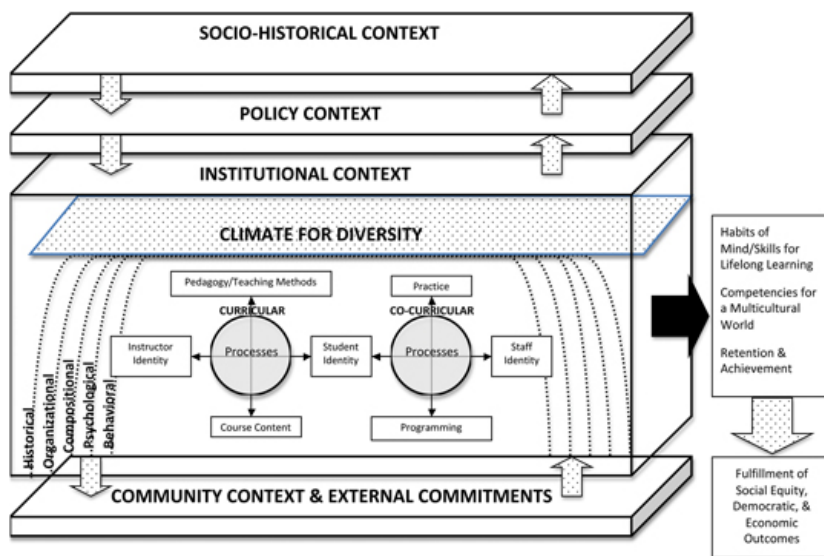
Note: Hurtado S., Alvarez C.L., Guillermo-Wann C., Cuellar M., Arellano L. (2012) A Model
for Diverse Learning Environments. In: Smart J., Paulsen M. (eds) Higher Education: Handbook

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of Theory and Research. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, vol 27. Springer, Dordrecht. p. 48

The macrosystems and exosystems share the external institution context. The macrolevel context refers to larger sociohistorical events and contexts, such as the state and federal policy, cultural expectations, historical trends and events, and social forces that impact campus climate. Students are nested within institutions and institutions are nested within a larger context. The exosystem- an added context from previous models- involves community contexts and relationships outside of the institutional in hopes of fostering more civic engagement, civic learning, and diversity initiatives for a common benefit. The authors provide the example of faculty who generally do not engage with the local community and whose research is done on the national or international level. These external contexts are important because they influence campus decisions and can lead to cultural competency for a diverse society. This is an area that needs further research as more is known about student characteristics than the climate, institutional policy, resources or broader macrolevel influences on student success, especially in broad access schools.

The within institution context, or practices and pedagogies, include the microsystems and mesosystems. The microlevel emphasizes *intentionality* in curricular (pedagogy/teaching methods and course content) and cocurricular (programming) to educate the whole student. Microsystem includes students' "classes, jobs, friendship groups, and roommates" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 74). The mesosystem refers to the spheres of interaction between those microsystems and the dynamic of teaching and learning within institutions. Student educational outcomes are directly linked to the quality and frequency of interactions between staff, faculty, and diverse students in the mesolevel.

Work has been done on the connection between macro and microlevel forces in society, "however, few higher education researchers have incorporated this perspective in the study of

institutional-level contexts where diversity dynamics play out" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 41). All contexts shape and are shaped by the institution, and so the institution context of the microsystem influences the community context and external context in turn also influences the institution context. Keeping student diversity at the center, colleges and universities across the country, especially broad access institutions, can use this model to assess their role in campus climate to advance social equity.

In sum, the goal of the model is to help research, practice and policy support diverse students develop competencies for a multicultural world for social equity, democratic and economic outcomes, and ultimately, social transformation. More Latinx students graduating from college now must examine how prepared for society in a multicultural world. Much more information is needed about students' experiences during college. Institutions must have a deep awareness of their student population, and with new case studies, my study will help contribute to a greater understanding of those student identities, challenges, and resources. This model will help me conceptualize the academic and social adjustments that impacted the students' academic well-being in college, the challenges the participants encountered during their first year in college, and the resources they utilized to help move them towards achieving their future goals.

To support student success in college and beyond, the multiple contexts and identities should be examined as these two frameworks have larger societal impact. Given the societal and higher education demographic shifts, models centered on student diversity are ever more important (Hurtado et al., 2012). Also, more interrelated elements and connections across contexts should be considered in research, practice and policy decisions. Furthermore, who is taught (student identities), who teaches (professor identities), and what is taught (content) is another important area to analyze to understand identity formations in an academic setting.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Summary

I replicated the case studies with the same procedures, data collection, and analytic procedures with each individual case as I did for the master's project (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013). As mentioned before, the approach I took is heavily influenced by Sugely Chaidez Ubaldo's research. My method of acquiring knowledge was through a longitudinal narrative, multiple case study design to understand the patterns and uniqueness of the students' experiences and perceptions that happen inside of school and as influenced by other worlds. It covers two years of the students' educational development journey—the college preparation and college transition experience—containing a summary of student development since their junior year in high school. In-person semi-structured interviews and facilitation prompts from both high school and college, high school academic records (unofficial transcript), and archival data were evaluated in a single-case and cross-case analysis after finishing their first year in college. The data was coded, analyzed, and reported individually first, then developed cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

Based on the literature, recent Latinx student data, and my master's project findings, this research examines the following questions:

1. What were key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced the transition from high school to college and first year in college of the students?

2. How did the students envision their future selves after they attended college, and how does this compare with what they envisioned for themselves during their junior year in high school?

3. What challenges did participants encounter during their first year in college and which resources did they utilize to help move them towards achieving their future goals?

4. How did the challenges and resources found in response to Question 2 and 3 impact the identity development pathway of students?

The purpose of the questions was to help me "draw narrative accounts of students past and current academic experiences, and how these have shaped their conceptions of future self and present actions" (Chaidez, 2008). Using the interview protocol (see Appendix B) and facilitation prompts, my research questions are answered in the following ways: Research questions 1 and 3 were answered using the "What Are My Worlds" elicitation prompt and the interview protocol questions in section II "What are My Worlds." Question 2 was answered by comparing the responses to the "Career Pyramid" elicitation prompt and section III "Future Aspirations." Lastly, questions 4 was answered by questions in all sections "Who am I," "New Worlds," and "Future Aspirations."

Methods

To examine the students' academic and identity pathways, my method of acquiring knowledge was made by multiple case studies (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013) using the semi-structured ethnographic interviewing approach (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987) and the cognitive interviewing approach (Novak & Gowin, 1984). Creswell (2013) defines case study research as a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded system (cases) over time, though detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information…and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97). Further, case studies explore and describe the phenomena in detail by answering why and how questions (Yin, 2014; Arthur et al., 2012, p. 102). This form of research also explores a phenomenon through various sources to demonstrate the themes associated with the case or cases (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Therefore, case studies were the best way to answer my questions because it allowed me to explore the uniqueness, as well as the similarities, of students' school experiences through their own voice and understanding of their academic and

career aspiration development. I captured "the reality as experienced by the participants" (Arthur et al., 2012, p. 80), beginning with students in the Access Program during the 2016-2017 school year through the end of these students' first year in college. The informants are the experts in their life, so there is no better way to understand their education journey than through their own words. We learn about students' resources and challenges by asking them, "who or what helps you?" and "who or what causes you difficulties?"

Also, we are able to explore a deeper understanding of experience and event implications or circumstances about human activities through interviews (Yin, 2014; Arthur et al., 2012). The way stories are told by the individuals show us how they see themselves in their identities (Creswell, 2013). I used semi-structured case study interviews as it allowed me to stay focused on my research protocol and open-ended enough to allow a conversational flow (Yin, 2014). This method of inquiry allowed me to enter the informants' life worlds to best answer my research questions. Their narrative allowed me to explore their world views, self-perception and future self-projection. It further allowed me to acquire a deeper understanding of their experiences as they navigate towards their goals.

Procedures

My data collection methods, management, analysis, and write-up conformed to the University's human subject guidelines. Once I received Human Subjects Research approval and my research proposal was approved by the university and my dissertation committee, I contacted the students via email. I began scheduling interview dates immediately and finalized interviewing the students during the Summer of 2019. As an extension of my master's project, the student participants were aware and familiar with the follow-up data collection procedure involving interviews and facilitation prompts. In the follow-up invitation email, I described the study, procedures, what would be asked of them, and the compensation for their participation. By

now the students were not only familiar with the research project, but also with me. The students received a $50 compensation in cash at the end of the interview and a receipt was signed and dated by each participant.

The semi-structured in-person interviews were digitally audio recorded (lasting between 1-1.5 hours with each participant), promptly uploaded to Transana, and transcribed carefully word-per-word exclusively by myself. The audio recordings and transcripts were saved to a flash drive and UCSB Box. The facilitation prompts were scanned and uploaded to the flash drive and UCSB Box. For student safeguard, pseudonyms were used in the student interviews, facilitation prompts, and archival data to construct the student case studies. All students in the study chose pseudonyms at the time of their first interview in high school and all data was handled by that name immediately after.

I chose to interview students in their junior year in high school since it is an important year where students are faced with big decisions for their future, for example, taking the PSAT/ACT, standardized subjects tests, enrolling in AP/honors courses, and narrowing college and major options. It is also the year students usually take the most challenging courses and take on leadership roles that will be imputed in their college applications. These decisions are significant for their future because it can affect the opportunities they are offered when they apply to college. If students are serious about attending a four-year college after high school, it is in the junior year that they show their college-bound determination (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Also, I decided to interview students at the end of their first year in college to have a fresh account of their college transition and adjustment experience. Research indicates the importance of the first year for first-generation minoritized college students (Hurtado et al., 1996; Rendon, 1994). The students had the option to withdraw from the study at any point, however all chose to complete the study.

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Data Collection

Data collection was interactive and engaging through multiple sources. There were three types of data collected:

1) In-person interviews

2) Facilitation Prompts

3) Achievement Records (e.g. grades, standardized test records)

All instruments were adapted from E. Dominguez C.R. Cooper (2001) and revised from my master's project and Dr. Chaidez-Ubaldo' dissertation to tailor to the current college student experience and my research questions.

1.) The interview protocol (see appendix B) used to elicit information from the participants for this study consisted of 26 open-ended questions and sub-questions which were designed to draw narrative accounts of students past and current academic experiences and how these have shaped their conceptions of future self and present actions. The protocol is organized into three areas: Self Concept (Who I am), Worlds (the "worlds" they engage in), and Future Aspirations. See Appendix C for a comparison of my master's project and this new revised interview protocol.

2.) Along with the interview prompt, I used the "What Are My Worlds" and "Career Pyramid" facilitation prompts, which are a visual representation to help the students identify their goals, challenges and resources. The purpose of the prompts was to facilitate thinking, interaction, and talk about their academic journey and future plans. The prompts allowed students to think more deeply and organize their thoughts about their experiences before answering the interview questions verbally. The "What Are My Worlds" prompt (See Appendix D) is a visual representation to help the students identify the main worlds that affect their school experience in a positive or negative way, as well as listing challenges and resources in each.

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They were also asked to identify key people in those worlds and note down whether key individuals had a positive or negative influence on their school experience. In the "Career pyramid" (See Appendix E) elicitation prompt, students identified their emerging career goal, goals in college, and academic goals beyond their bachelor's degree. They started by noting down their current career goals, as well as the resources and challenges they face in achieving those goals in the form of people, experiences, programs, environment, etc. They then wrote down their personal and academic goals beyond an undergraduate degree. Again, for each goal, the students listed their perceived challenges and resources they foresaw in reaching them. Here, the student also had the opportunity to reflect on the factors that play into their educational trajectory and their future aspirations.

3.) Further, achievement records were asked of the students in order to help identify students' academic performance history to situate their past and present experiences as they plan for their future aspirations (Ubaldo, 2011). Transcripts were collected from every student in high school (up until their junior year); however, not every student shared their college transcripts. It may be as a result of feeling vulnerable. This was not a topic to be explored in the interview protocol. However, those who did turn in a transcript performed very well academically in their first year in college. Also, Standardized test records such as AP, SAT, and PSAT scores were collected from the students in high school.

Coding

Data was thematically coded manually on Transana, a qualitative data organization software, where I was able to trace connections between the data. I added the preliminary codes manually on Transana by creating "libraries" to organize each case study and "collections" to organize the themes. Themes were identified and classified with an emphasis on their college transition experiences, challenges and resources, present actions, and future ambitions. Interview

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data was coded within each case first, then compared across informants in order to make meaning of it using In-Vivo (Creswell, 2013) Grounded Theory analysis approaches (Yin, 2014).

All interview data was divided, grouped, synthesized and linked using a qualitative analysis approach for multiple case studies. I looked at the data closely, splitting the transcripts line by line in the first cycle of coding. To center on the students' voices, I applied in-Vivo methods, the "actual language found in the qualitative data record" because usually students' voices are marginalized and this is an opportunity to have their voices prioritized and honored in order to enhance and deepen our "understanding of their cultures and worldviews" (Saldaña, 2016, pp.105-106). My intention is to report through their perspective, not to impose my choice of words to describe their narratives. Also, I chose Grounded Theory, a theory "rooted" in the original data" to code because I wanted to develop codes from emergent categories I found (Saldaña, 2016, p. 55) and it helped me avoid applying pre-existing codes to my findings to answer my research questions. After the initial cycle of coding, I developed larger and more abstract codes (See Table 1).

To process the data more effectively, I first coded the transcripts by questions and answers for each case study. I kept the research questions in front of me as I coded to make sure I kept the codes focused. Also, I authored memo notes at the end of each interview section to help me classify, prioritize, synthesize and conceptualize the data (Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Further, I underlined insightful or key statements as I coded the interviews. Follow-up questions were asked of some students for clarification during the coding stage. Once the individual cases were coded, I looked for repetitive, consistent data that appeared more than once. I sought for patterns across cases to create my cross-case coding to explore the participant actions and perception of what is important in their daily life. I built patterns from the bottom up "by organizing the data inductively into increasingly more abstract units of information"

(Creswell, 2013, pp.43, 83). When there were no more codes to create, I developed a codebook

(See Table 1) that lists all the main codes that emerged.

Data Analysis

From the development of codes, formation of themes, then the organization of concepts

"into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data," I made interpretations (Creswell,

2013) and developed my assertions. The cross-case data analysis process (Yin, 2014) was

interactive as I used multiple strategies to interpret the data. First, I conducted within-case

analysis of informants' themes by looking at the individual case, followed by the cross-case

analysis of informants for a broader and comparative analysis. After reviewing the transcripts

and codes, I made note of interesting finds and patterns across cases (Creswell, 2013). Themes

were synthesized and concepts were developed (Yin, 2014).

The analysis process was intended to be cocreated. With my stance as a researcher with a

similar background and school experiences as the student informants, there was a relationship

between the researcher and informants; thus, I cocreated an interpretation of their life

interpretation. The triangulation of archival data, interview data, and facilitation prompts helped

check for accuracy of my interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analyzed.

Interviews, facilitation prompts, transcripts, and test scores were analyzed to answer the

research questions. High school and college audio recording of the interviews were analyzed to

keep the participants' native language and terms in the study, examine changes in aspirations,

and to analyze their common and differentiating stories. Also, high school and college

facilitation prompts were used as visual representations of the data and as a compliment to their

responses. In addition, high school and some college transcripts were used to help identify

students' academic performance history and how it relates to their present experiences as they

plan for their future aspirations. Further, high school test scores were used to help examine their college preparation and present experiences as they plan for their future aspirations.

Student Profiles

The participants of this research study are Latinx students who were enrolled in the Access Program for at least one year prior to their junior year in high school; however, not all students were enrolled in the Access Tutorial After School Program. Also, all students shared similar backgrounds: city environment and resources, similar demographics, and attended the same distinguished high school. I chose those participant characteristics because I intended to explore the experiences of first-generation Latinx college students with similar backgrounds preparing for college, the college transition and first-year experience. From this shared culture, I was able to develop an analysis of the individual and across all cases. They reflected a variety of academic performance based on their transcript in high school.

From the initial twelve student participants in high school, ten (83%) were Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP); three were reclassified English Proficient in high school and seven in elementary school. One was English Only (EO) and another an Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP). In addition to the Access Program, seven of the twelve participants were enrolled in AVID, six were in the Access After School Tutoring Program, and half were enrolled in both. All students came from parental non-college backgrounds since the requirement to enroll in the Access Program was that students be first-generation college-going students

All twelve students from my master's project were invited to participate via email. Out of the initial twelve student participants, nine responded and were part of the longitudinal data collection. Student participants included nine college students (5 males, 4 females) who were either 1.5 generation, those who immigrated to the U.S.A at a young age, or second-generation Mexican immigrants. One student came from a Mexican-Guatemalan background. Further, six of

the nine of the students were enrolled in AVID in high school and three of the nine were both in AVID and the Access After School Tutoring Program. During the dissertation data collection time frame, students were between the age of 18-20 years old. All applied and attended two or four-year California Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Unfortunately, as of the 2019-2020 school year, the Access Program no longer exists due to lack of funding. Like many college-prep programs for minoritized students, these programs struggle for funding and many times depend on private donors, as a result, these programs also struggle with enough staff and ultimately, longevity.

High School Profile

Understanding the educational context helps put the experiences of the informants in perspective. The students attended a high school recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School, California Gold Ribbon School, and California Distinguished School, and sits in a small city between the ocean and mountains in California's Central Coast. This distinguished school offered many advanced courses, high impact activities opportunities, and college support programs for students. The 2019-2020 school year academic profile is as follows: the school offered 19 open-enrollment Advanced Placement courses (AP), 19 International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, 12 Honors courses, an internationally recognized Engineering Academy, English learner services, Regional Occupation Program courses, and two-year college courses offered on the high school campus.

Students had the opportunity to receive college credit by taking the AP and IB tests and taking dual enrollment courses in the nearby two-year college. Additionally, the school had strong partnerships with the three main local colleges college support programs: a UC, private university, and two-year college. Gandara & Contreras (2009) noted that school quality and college-going culture are interconnected: schools with "well organized, compelling programs

designed to involve students" send many students to college, such as the school in this study. The high school also offered Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program to support underrepresented, first generation to college "motivated students to advance beyond high school and into a four-year university." In the students' AVID graduating class of 2016-2017, 71% of first-generation college-bound seniors were accepted to a four-year college (School Profile 2017-18).

Also, the average high school SAT and ACT scores were higher across the board than the average scores in California for the 2019 graduates. The student population was composed of a majority of Latinx (46%) students, followed by "White" (42%) students, and 38% were identified as "socioeconomically disadvantaged." Further, 50% of 2019 graduates enrolled in a four-year institution, 41% in the local two-year college, and 9% work/military/gap year/other. The school profile explains that due to the local [two-year college] Promise Program, there was an increase in students enrolling in the two-year college (School 2019-2020 profile).

Reporting

In order to answer the research questions, the data is organized by: a) looking at each student case individually and then b) by comparing themes across cases.

1. Individual Case

    a. Summary of student development

    b. Answer to research questions

2. Cross-case

    a. Summary of findings across cases

    b. Dominant themes across cases

The reporting of findings highlights the voices of the students using the *voces perdidas* (Salinas, 2019) concept with educational equity as a goal. The analysis and discussion of the findings are discussed in chapter six.

Chapter 5: Single-Case and Cross Case Results

Overview

Interpretation of the empirical data collected in their junior year in high school and the end of their first year in college (interviews, facilitation prompts, and academic records) guided the answers to the research questions and other key findings (See Appendix F for a comprehensive table of the data). Student narratives informed the construction of their emerging identity in this chapter. The claims made in this chapter were inferences drawn explicitly from the data and interpreted by me as a researcher with the same background of the students. Ultimately, entering the students' world was the goal of this research project; thus, although facilitation prompts and guiding interview questions were used to inquire about information to answer the research question, the themes discussed in this section come from topics the students elaborated on without prompting, which indicated importance or significance to the student. As mentioned earlier, for the protection of the students, all identifying information, such as names, school names, program names, and locations, have been changed to pseudonyms.

This chapter is divided into three sections: (a) context, (b) summary of single-case findings, and (c) cross-case results.

Context

Before I report the results, I will briefly provide context by covering important terms used to answer the research questions: academic institutions, AVID, and Ocean View Promise Program. The schools discussed in this chapter are all public California higher education institutions: the University of California schools will be discussed as UCs; California State Universities as CSUs; and the community college/city college as two-year colleges. Although the students referred to their school as "CC" in their responses, short for community college, as in the literature review, the local community college the students enrolled in will be referred to as a

two-year college in the results. All students enrolled in a two-year college attended the same local institution, Ocean View City College (pseudonym). Also, as used in the students' high school case studies (my Master' project), the local UC college preparation program has the pseudonym of the Access Program and the national college and career prepare program Advancement Via Individual Determination is referred to as AVID.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a national college readiness program for under-resourced and/or underrepresented students. Their goals include college graduation equity, teacher effectiveness, school leadership, and creating a student self-agency. This program is embedded in the high school and the school schedule. From the student interviews, it was learned that AVID in that particular high school required students to take one advanced course (AP, Honors, IB) every semester and apply to at least four four-year colleges using the federal application fee waiver; thus, all the AVID participants in the study received college preparation and application support (AVID, 2020).

In addition, the Ocean View Promise Program, an Ocean View Foundation project that began in Fall 2016 in the local two-year college, provides local high school students with free full-time tuition, required books, and materials for two-years through private donations. The project was created as an effort toward education equity by making college accessible to all students in the community. The Program caters to "traditional" college students; to be eligible, students must be enrolled full-time "uninterrupted" immediately after high school or GED graduation according to their website. However, this may complicate support for nontraditional students (e.g. student parents, those that work full-time, or returning students). This opportunity became significantly attractive for the local youth, Rek explained that most students were introduced to the program within a few months, "everybody knew because this idea that you could go to school for free is very comfortable for a lot of people." Also, once students enrolled

in the program, Daniel explained that they are required to meet with an academic advisor every semester and make a detailed academic transfer plan, which allows students to stay on track academically.

Single-Case Results

To answer the research questions, each student narrative is reported individually first. In this section, a summary of each students' development in high school and the answer to each research questions are reported in the following way:

1. High School Case Results Review

2. First Year College Case Results

     a. College Choice Process

     b. College Transition and First Year Experience

     c. Future Self

     d. Challenges and Resources

     e. Identity Development

The case studies of the students enrolled in Ocean View City College are reported first, followed by the students enrolled in a four-year college. See Appendix G for a table of the single-case data and Appendix H for a table of the single-case research questions results.

Rek's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

Rek's parents originate from Mexico and Guatemala. He grew up in the local community, moving around several times in subsidized housing units, he remembered "before I was 14, I lived in …12 different rentals." In high school, he had the overall goal of living a luxurious life, but did not know how he would achieve that. Although he was not affiliated with AVID nor the Access After School Tutorial Program, he had a strong college-bound path. Rek consistently

challenged himself academically, beginning the Summer before his Freshman year through the

end of his junior year, he had a total of 14 advanced courses (8 AP or Honors and 6 dual

enrollment college courses), the most by the other students in the study by far, and was enrolled

in the internationally recognized Engineering Academy where students have hands-on project-

based curriculum. Further, he had taken two AP tests, though, received one passing score. He

ended his junior year with an unweighted GPA of 2.79 and weighted GPA of 3.35. He was

motivated academically by his intrinsic drive for learning and future humanitarian aspirations,

yet he understood he needed the opportunity provided by the institution to pursue them.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

As a junior in high school, Rek valued formal education, though, a prestigious institution

did not appeal to him because of the high stress and competitive environment, rather, he

preferred a rich learning environment, he explained "I think that in our education system there's

a big disconnect between educating and academics and learning and acquiring knowledge."

Rek's priorities drove his interest to private institutions; he aspired to attend a small liberal arts

private college that offers a lot of extracurricular activities and an environment where everyone

collaborates towards a common goal to get the "best product, the best idea." Collaboration

towards a common goal was also how he envisioned his ideal real world. However, as a senior in

high school, he decided not to apply to four-year institutions and instead attend the local two-

year college because of the Promise Program and "it's a good school." Though in high school,

his goal was to leave town for college, he ultimately reflected on the "financial burden" and

thought it was not worth it. Unlike the other students in the study, it was a "very easy" college

choice decision for him.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Two key factors influenced Rek's transition and first-year college experience, his value on present happiness and being "naive" in his college courses. His value on present happiness versus delayed happiness was highlighted throughout the interview. It was influenced by his senior year experience where he "gamed" his last year in high school by taking an online course, a dual enrollment college course, and a zero period in order to be done with school by second period in order to work many hours Monday through Friday (sometimes weekends) in his engineering internship. However, he later regretted investing that much energy and effort into that internship and instead spent his extra free time, or at least half of it, having "a good time" during his last year in high school. As a result of sacrificing a lot for work, he developed a "present happiness" mindset, he explained that while others make their life "difficult, very arduous for a certain amount of time for the ideas that after that amount of time they can do the things they want to do," however, it is "not worth sacrificing present happiness for something in the future because that happiness isn't necessarily worth more than the what I can be doing now." This view also influenced his decision to attend the local two-year college for free and have a life balance that includes academics, work, hobbies, relationships, family, and a healthy lifestyle. Rek was very intentional about being happy in the present while also working towards a healthy and balanced future.

He aspired for a job that would allow him to spend time outdoors "doing stuff, so walking back and forth or moving" and not in an office all day, to have freedom. He made sure to choose an area of study that he enjoyed, in which going to class for his required and elective courses was something he looked forward to. Thus, he planned his semester schedules carefully, actually, he planned out every part of his day "in the various types of days I like having and what I want to do and like [to] see how it would fit there," he explained. He made sure his schedule

included both what he wants to do and what he has to do. Which also meant, he was content with earning As, Bs, and Cs in his courses.

Rek experienced a learning experience in his History course his first semester in college; he shared he was "not very realistic," rather, he was "naive." His professor told the class that they were not required to attend class and would not mind "if you don't want to be here, if you think you don't have to come, maybe you don't, then just stay home," she said, and Rek took that literally. He did not show up to class, but read the assigned chapters in the book at home and only showed up for the exams. He received As on all three exams, however, at the end of the semester, he realized what the professor had said was not actually the case, on the contrary, the class grade was made up of additional assignments, assignments Rek was not aware of by not attending lecture. He felt embarrassed for being "so out of touch with the class." He reflected on the situation and explained it was not an intelligent decision and was being too "idealistic," that experience was a hard learning experience for him and was aware that he would continue to learn about the college culture during his time there. This experience is an example of first-generation college students navigating college without prior insights and guidance.

Future Self.

In middle school, Rek aspired to become an engineer since it was associated with "more money making," and his family encouraged that career path as he was "exceptionally good at math." However, this aspiration changed in high school when his life values became more deliberate. In high school Rek's career goal was in the public service; he became very active in public service and his academic goal was to earn a bachelor's degree in political science and was open to the idea of a master's or doctoral degree. Graduate school was not necessarily a goal of his, but being open to the idea of it was. He hoped to stay in public service, such as a politician or in a non-profit organization as a career, but did not want to limit his possibilities; thus, his

main aspirations were to "continue being empathetic, a politically, and civically engaged student." Further, having a balanced, healthy lifestyle mentally, physically, and emotionally in the present and in the future was also important to him in high school.

By the end of his first year in college, Rek changed aspirations due to exposure through the Engineering Academy, his internship, and paid work during his senior year in high school. He decided to pursue his aspired field of study in middle school, Mechanical Engineering. In high school, he had invested a lot of time in public service and realized,"it's not for me, I think I'm out to do things for different people in different ways," he shared, though he still deeply cared about and followed politics. By the end of his first year in college, Rek envisioned himself as a mechanical engineer after being further exposed to the field. It made him realize "yeah, this is it, this is what I want to do." Further, the internship he had as a senior in high school further exposed him to the engineering environment significantly. It was a small environmental research firm where he did junior engineering work which allowed him to gain experience and skills in the field. In addition, his job in college was also mechanic-oriented; he worked for a bike shop, and fixing bikes became a major component of his paid work, he said "I really like the mechanical part of bikes and with cars, too." His academic goal and mentality remained the same, he planned to earn a bachelor's degree and not a higher degree; yet, he was open to going to graduate school after a few years of work experience.

Challenges and Resources.

Rek only identified one challenge that affected his progress towards his aspirations, working many hours. He moved out of his parents' house and became independent requiring him and his girlfriend to cover rent and other bills, in addition, the hobbies he enjoyed doing were "very expensive," which as a result required him to work many hours to cover the financial cost of his new independent life. Further, Rek realized "how big of a deal money actually is in

people's lives." He saw how debt by pursuing a higher education was normalized, however, he resisted that fate and decided to stay in the local two-year college and transfer to an "inexpensive school," possibly a California State University. School debt was not "worth it" to him when there are other avenues to receive an education. Rek worked many hours after school, consequently, he was generally not on campus after class and did not integrate much to the campus socially or academically. In the future, he foresaw the academic rigor in his field of study to become a challenge for him.

Like the other students, Rek identified more resources than challenges, he utilized mentors and himself to help him make progress towards his future goals. Mentors, such as his parents, grandparents or other family members, though not about academic specifics, had always encouraged doing well in school in order for him to have the opportunity to attend higher education "even if they didn't know the steps necessary for that," they instilled the value of education. His parents helped him plan his schedules and other life considerations to help him "figure things out" in his process of emerging adulthood.

Rek also relied on himself to move towards his goals, especially since becoming independent after he moved out of his parents' household. For his academic and career preparation, he did his own in-depth research on things before making decisions, such as college plans, "so, I come up with a pretty comprehensive plan on my own," he stated. He confirmed his plans with a counselor, but generally he stuck to his plan. In high school, Rek understood that he only needed an opportunity as a resource to help him reach his future aspirations, "the opportunity to make something out of myself, I will do it." He believed he could achieve his goals if the opportunity was given to him, "and if I don't have the opportunity, (pounds on table) then I'll strive to make sure I have that opportunity for myself and others, especially just the way

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things are going." In college, however, Rek's focus was on adjusting to the new independence

and demands he was navigating in college as he emerged into adulthood.

Identity Development.

Rek's identity development stemmed from his critical consciousness about the tension

between his love for learning and the academic culture in public schools. His actions in high

school aligned with his core values of learning and growing, although they did align with the

academic expectations. His vision of an education clashed with the school system's vision and

measurement of a good student. For him, positive school experiences were in courses where the

focus was learning, not satisfying a curriculum or doing busy work, he did not value busy work

as he felt he would not learn from it, rather it is to satisfy a requirement. As a result, he either

turned assignments in late, last moment or "haphazardly." Therefore, he shared that his grades

did not reflect his understanding of the subject.

Similarly, in college, for him earning high grades was not the "only defining

characteristic about a class," rather it was to get "better" which was not always reflected by the

grade. His college goals were to improve his academic skills and ability to learn, not earn high

grades, though he did prioritize doing well in his courses. He also wanted to improve his soft

skills that would help him in the future, such as speaking. He saw college as a great opportunity

to grow and shape yourself into who you want to be, he shared, "I think that the really unique

part of college is the fact that you're able to improve these skills in an environment where people

are there to support you to learn those things." Another goal he had was to be happy; after

college, he continued to aspire to achieve work-life balance that included work, hobbies, family

and school.

Rek ended the interview with this reflection on his first year in college: his college

experience "got better" when he figured out that "I just need to chill out, I think if everyone just

chilled out a little bit about college that they would enjoy college more. I think that going into college with a mentality that it's supposed to be a good part of your life... because the thing is you're always stressed out in school." The pressures of doing well in college and figuring out your future is reflected in this statement. He believed that education is very important, but the fact that it's so close to the beginning of our lives "makes it seem like it's like the most important thing," which he does not think is necessarily true; thus, Rek's critical lens of his emerging adulthood, the tension between institutional expectations and his idea of learning, was reflected in both high school and college.

Octavio's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

In high school, Octavio described himself as "a low-income," "first-generation college Latino male," who is highly involved in school and the community. He was the eldest of four brothers and came from a "line of hardworking people," alike, he worked hard to push himself to leave his "mark" in his community and family. He believed he would become successful if he truly strived for it. As a student, he described himself as hardworking, pushed himself beyond the average student to excel, "on track to go to college," an "AVID student," and a member of the Access Program.

To prepare for college admissions, Octavio had taken eight rigorous advanced courses (beginning in his freshman year) and an AP test by his junior year, and as a result, he felt a buildup of stress and pressure. He worked hard in school in order to attend a four-year college immediately after high school and was seriously considering Sacramento or San Francisco State University. He had a strong academic record earning an academic unweighted GPA of 3.36 and a weighted academic GPA of 3.84. Octavio looked forward to "getting those successful moments" when he feels accomplished, when all his hard work pays off.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

As a senior in high school, Octavio applied to four CSUs and four UCs. He was accepted to three schools, 2 CSUs and 1 UC, and deliberated his difficult decision with his parents, peers, and teachers before making his college-choice. Many encouraged him to attend a four-year college, but considering all the implications of attending a four-year versus the local two-year college, he ultimately decided to attend the local two-year college, primarily to support his parents and for financial reasons.

As the oldest son of four, Octavio deeply respected his parents and took his family responsibilities seriously. Financially, he did not want to further create a burden on his family and instead decided to stay to help provide for his family, "because it'd just be an even bigger struggle for us because you know coming from a low income background has always been very difficult and uh I think you know kinda in a way been humbling," he shared. He additionally considered the fact that he was "needed at the house," and going far from home would leave his younger siblings unattended while his parents worked. His respect for his parents weighed heavily in his college choice decision, "I really pay homage to my parents and respect them in all these different ways and so I guess all that I do is because of them," he exclaimed.

Also, though, Octavio worked hard in high school to attend a four-year college, after talking to professors and friends planning to attend the local two-year college, and campus representatives, he saw the resources available to students and came to the conclusion, "you know, I thought it wouldn't be too bad of a school to go." Thus, the local two-year college with the Promise Program was the best option for him at the moment. Octavio did not regret his decision by the end of his first year in college. It is interesting to note that throughout both

interviews in high school and in college, Octavio code switched between English and Spanish during his responses, and in return, I did as well.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Octavio described his college transition as "downhill." Like the other students in the study, Octavio struggled in his academic adjustment, especially with time-management and writing long papers, however, he used past and new resources to adjust. He shared, "I wouldn't be able to track time, I'd show up to events late, I'd forget about dates for like specific assignments." Not being able to prioritize and have a good handle on his responsibilities, significantly hindered his first semester. Yet, during his second semester, he went back to previous resources in high school, the time-management skills introduced to him in AVID, such as creating an agenda and using it, he then understood those skills were introduced to him to help him succeed in college. He began to apply those time-management techniques, which allowed him to organize and complete his academic and community involvement commitments.

Also, the academic adjustment was tough for Octavio. Writing long papers, such as ten-page essays, was new to him, he recalled, "I was like are you serious? (laughs)" Seeking out writing support had a "stigma" for him and was hesitant to reach out. In high school, he did writing assignments on his own, but "usually do like all-nighters, spend a lot of time just like trying to focus on like what I needed to write. It wouldn't be the best writing that I knew it could be," he said, but he never reached out for help. He had to challenge that mindset when he realized his old habits were considerably harming him in college. He accepted he needed support and even began using more resources offered by the college, such as the Learning Center, the tutoring, and academic support center. Again, AVID further provided academic support for him in college. He developed effective note-taking techniques in AVID, "I was able to look back at my notes and I was able to take the most important things that I needed to take out," he shared.

The "downhill" first-year experience as Octavio described, made him decide to step down from a few roles next school year, though he still planned to stay involved by running for student body and student government.

Future Self.

In high school, Octavio aspired to become an Engineer and aimed to earn a sport scholarship in order to have the financial means to attend college and ultimately, receive a master's degree in engineering. He enjoyed math and science, and as an engineer, it would provide a great financial reward. However, he expressed uncertainty about the steps necessary to achieve this goal and stated his need for guidance.

After his first year in college, Octavio's future goals were to become an educator or a community organizer. The change in aspirations was influenced by Latino role models, his Latinx community, and exposure. Though he had not considered those career goals before college, after interacting and talking to people who "are like [him]," he could "see" himself in those careers, he realized they were "dope," and where he could make the "most difference." After interacting with his Latino professor, he hopes to become "a Chicano Studies teacher, Ethnic Studies, a Spanish teacher, just any position I'm able to influence a lot of the students," he stated. He also considered becoming a community organizer as a result of being inspired by the leaders in the youth leadership organization he has been a member of since high school, Future Leaders of America. He said, "all these other people that come into my life and I've been able to see the amazing work... you know I just want to be a part of that." Further, he was exposed to those careers through a local program that pairs students' interested in working in the education field with internships in the community, "they had people come in and talk about, you know, their roles and what they're doing to make a difference, and just having that allowed me to see this was a reasonable and very doable," he shared.

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He majored in sociology and planned to double major in chicanx studies when he transferred to a four-year institution. He hoped to finish his coursework with As or Bs and transfer to UC Santa Barbara, Davis or Berkeley by the end of his second year in college. After his B.A., he still planned to earn a master's degree, however, in an undecided area of study or enroll in law school. Ultimately, he hoped to be able to "look back" and be proud of his work. He realized personal fulfillment by making a difference in his community was more important than money.

However, Octavio still had vague knowledge on how to achieve his future goals, "I'm still working on it," working on being familiar with the steps to achieve his career goals. He hoped to develop a plan "at some point" and reach out to the people he needs to connect with. His immediate focus was on fulfilling the necessary requirements to transfer, such as taking the courses and expanding his network. He shared he was recently offered an intern position in Future Leaders of American where he hoped to develop relationships with community members.

Challenges and Resources.

 As a first-generation college student with responsibility to support his family, many involvements, and lack of career guidance, Octavio experienced tremendous pressure. That put him in a situation where time-management was a vital skill to possess, however, unfortunately, that was not the case. His responsibilities included: academic commitments; younger siblings to look after at home; college and community involvements; paid work; track practice and competitions; and help coach a high school track team. Managing these responsibilities was very difficult, but he "was able to survive," he shared. Octavio downplayed his pressures as a first-generation college student with high aspirations and motivation, "other people have it even more difficult too, and you know it's just something you have to deal with in order to get through college." This reflects his humble nature, in fact, that is not the typical college experience of

most — most students do not have this amount of responsibilities and pressure on their shoulders. Also, since high school, Octavio struggled with the lack of mentors. Once again, he asked for guidance, "the school can be a lot of help by you know just connecting us with people who are already doing the work and you know can show us like the way they're doing it like ways that connect like connect us to other people so we can like like just learn from them."

The resources that helped him move towards his goals were a safe space on campus and educators he identified with. The Equity Room was a safe space on campus for Octavio to do schoolwork and hangout, it's just a little room...they put like music, they put movies at times, and they have food right there. That was a big thing, food (laughs)," he shared. It provided a welcoming space where he did schoolwork and met "really dope" people that helped each other.

In addition to a safe space on campus, educators served as cultural brokers in his academic journey. In high school, he claimed what kept him motivated were people who understood his difficult journey as a minoritized student taking challenging classes. In college he learned minoritized students are not as "privileged as other people... like people get put down and they don't envision themselves as such a person. I know I used to feel like that, but through these resources and facing these challenges I've seen I can do it." He referred to being able to envision himself in a leadership position. As a result, he continued to work hard for his "people and family" with the support of understanding male mentors he identified with. He hoped to be an example for others and show that people like him can achieve great things.

His sociology and chican@ studies professors were particularly influential in his transition and first-year in college experience. During office hours with his sociology professor, she walked him through resources, helped him realize the local four-year university was a "really good option" for sociology, and even provided him with a book from a Latino professor in the university, "it just got me more motivated to pursue sociology" and connect with the professor he

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identified with in his area of study. Also, his Chican@ Studies professor was a vital resource to support his academic and career journey. His professor not only provided a fun experience and current relatable information pertaining to the Latinx population in the United States, but was also the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán (MEChA) advisor, who helped the MEChA leaders, including Octavio, arrange trips to a national conference pertaining to Latinx issues, Chicano Park, museums, and MEChA state and nationwide meetings. Learning about his roots through was integral for his positive and confident self-perception.

Most importantly for Octavio, this professor was "also a Chicano, so he understands, you know, the experiences that we go through and he's ... also gone through a lot of hardships throughout his life so he's able to understand you on that level." Having a male role model he can relate to, characterizes Octavio's case study in high school and college. He finally had exposure and access to them in college.

Identity Development.

Both challenges and resources utilized, had an influence on his proud "Chicano" identity pathway and his desire to create change for his Latinx community as a leader. The value placed on honoring his family and Latinx community were at the center of his motivation and actions. He was very involved as a leader in his community and stayed dedicated to his academics steadily from high school to college. His motivation was his parents' life-long financial struggles, and he wanted to "be able to provide them with that support later on." His parents constantly reminded him to prioritize school and to do his best because they escaped poverty and violence to provide him and his siblings a "better life," which stayed in the back of Octavio's mind constantly, "wherever I go it just reminds me of the purpose and the reason why I'm here, you know I'm doing it for the people that I love," he shared.

Octavio described himself as a Chicano from the local city, "a student of life" with ambitions of graduating from a four-year university and "coming back to my community and doing amazing stuff. Just to create a better world, you know, I wanna make a change," he stated, something he aspired to do since his junior year in high school. In high school, he hoped to "create a safe environment for the incoming generations of Latinos in higher-level classes." He hoped that over time, more students like him would be taking advanced courses and that he could be an "example that people like us can do it." In congruence, Octavio pursued leadership experiences in his first year in college, he was an involved and concerned student for the wellbeing of his Latinx community, especially other "young first-generation Latinos."

Octavio saw significant growth in himself through exposure to different ideas, cultures and people "through talk and through educating myself through like you know about my people, about my culture." He attended board meetings, created relationships with his professors and reached out to different cubs on campus to create connections. In fact, he and other students restarted the MECHA chapter on his campus because "we realized that that was needed there you know just that group between Chicano students who need a safe place on campus especially during a time of like this political climate and all the social issues that we see have become a lot more present around the world...we want to give back to the community and we want to do some dope stuff." Octavio's initiative to support his community requires courage and commitment to give back and leadership skills.

His leadership skills were first nurtured from his involvement in high school through AVID, the Access Program, and Future Leaders of America. They helped Octavio step outside his comfort zone, boost his self-esteem, and increase his confidence as a student. Feeling safe in academic spaces by being around people with similar backgrounds and experiences, particularly made him more willing to participate because he did not feel judged or criticized. The sacrifices

he has made to become a leader have been worth it for Octavio because he has become "well-rounded... although it takes some part away from you, it's still worth it I guess in the end," he explained. He shared, "I feel like I'm becoming the leader that I want to be in my community," and planned to continue growing.

Erick's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

As a high school student Erick was dedicated to consistent progress. His interview and academic records demonstrate a solid pathway to college reflected in grades, courses, school involvement, and extracurricular activities. By the end of his junior year, he had an academic unweighted GPA of 3.12 and a 3.87 weighted GPA. Even more impressive was the fact that although Erick was not enrolled in the Access Tutorial After School Program nor AVID, he had one of the strongest academic preparation records that began in middle school. By his junior year in high school, he had a total of 13 advanced courses, AP Biology and World History tests, one dual enrollment course, and was one of the two students who had taken SAT II exams, Biology and World History. Not only did he position himself to be exposed to rigorous academic material early on, he strived to do well in them and hoped to graduate high school with a 4.5 GPA and receive a high ACT and SAT score.

He worked hard to reach his goal of attending a UC immediately after high school, he was especially interested in the local university, he stated "I kind of went on multiple tours there and just really fell in love with the UC vibe so, visiting different UCs that also help kind of build that kind of passion towards them." Exposure to the university environment impacted his enthusiasm of attending a university-- he looked forward to the idea of being independent, living in dorms, meeting new people, and living in a nice city. Erick's academic accomplishments reflected his dedication to his aspirations. His drive and actions stemmed from his strong desire

for more life opportunities, "to be at the top," he said. He hoped to reach his goals by "going for it," using the resources available to him the best way possible, being open to new things, and researching the best plan to get there.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

As a senior in high school, Erick did not apply to a UC institution, rather, he applied to more than 5 CSUs. He was admitted to 3 and his college choice was a long, stressful, and emotional process. Erick initially planned to attend CSU East Bay, but once he saw the financial aid packet and realized it was not "financially feasible" for him and his family, he then submitted his intent to register to CSU Fullerton and paid for orientation, but he had not received the financial aid packet yet, so it was a situation where students "accept where you want to go and then hope you'll get the money," he recalled.

However, he was offered mostly loans and again, it was not financially feasible for him and his family, "I was like 'oh no, what am I going to do?!,'" he weighed the pros and cons, "I was left with the decision 'uh, do I go to CC and do the financially responsible thing, or go to Fullerton and then maybe things can work out, uh but then if they don't then I can be in large amounts of debt,'" he recalled. Finally, "it came down to me just knowing now becoming an adult, I should make the most important decisions and I did, and I went to CC, ultimately." Though Erik had a strong academic preparation which began in middle school, ultimately, it had no influence on his college choice after high school. He decided to attend the local two-year college due to financial reasons.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

The college transition for Erick was difficult; he navigated his perceived two-year college "stigma" while adjusting to the fast-paced college culture, however, he took full control of his

learning experience during the second semester. His first-year experience was also full of inspiring cultural brokers who influenced and helped shape his high future aspirations. He shared "it's definitely difficult to get adjusted to the schoolwork... I wasn't prepared and so I kinda kept my old high school habits that weren't the best." Then, during the Spring semester, he took initiative and control over his education, "I began picking up on what some of my classmates were doing or what I would see from my friends that works for them, I would try to do them, and if it didn't work for me then I wouldn't continue it and try something else, ... and then um just focusing on what as a person I can do to change for the better and not listen to what you think you want." Erick's desire to succeed drove him to engage and continuously improve his habits and skills needed to navigate college. Though two-year colleges tend to be commuter schools, Erick was highly engaged and spent most of his time on campus. On non-workdays, he would be on campus from 8:30am to 7:00pm at the library, the Transfer Student Center student, and participating in social clubs such as the Ping Pong Club.

As discussed above, Erick had been preparing to attend a UC institution since his freshman year in high school and resisted being a two-year college student due to the idea that only "dumb" students go there; however, it was there where he met people and opportunities that formed his high academic and career aspirations. In college, he interacted with other bright students who changed his negative perspective on two-year college students and inspired him to pursue opportunities he never imagined were possible for him. Thus, he did not regret the decision to enroll there because "I would have never met them but they're incredibly smart, they have big dreams and they kinda helped me forge my own," he explained. For example, one student who was transferring to Colombia University, "really instilled the idea that I can do it," that he can aim high and achieve those goals. Another peer who supported him to navigate the "stigma" was a good friend who also planned to and envisioned attending a four-year college

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after high school, they shared the experience of "transitioning abruptly to CC life ... we just help each ... from learning how to build character and be more confident in ourselves and not let what some of our classmates say about going to CC," he shared.

Further, Erick's professors had a significant influence on his first-year college experience. Through them, he acquired passion for his area of study, developed a growth mindset, and was motivated to aim high/push himself. The passion Erick noticed from his sociology professors teaching their courses, made him become passionate for the subject as well. After taking sociology courses for the first time, he felt motivated to continue learning, talk to his sociology professors, and ask questions.

In addition to instilling a passion for sociology, his professors gave him the confidence that he can "handle schoolwork at a four-year university." Some also teach at the nearby UC and expressed to their students that they have the same expectation for students in both institutions, "I thought that was pretty inspirational," he expressed. From earning an A in that class, he realized he can "handle" four-year college courses and thought, "this is a great first step." Better yet, his professors influenced him to pursue a doctoral degree, his new academic aspiration. Peers and professors served as strong cultural brokers for Erick's college transition and first-year experience after diverging from his original goal of attending a four-year institution immediately after high school.

Future Self.

In high school, his parents encouraged him to work hard in school to achieve higher education and choose a career that is "beneficial to everyone," for example, a lawyer, doctor or another prestigious career. He kept his parents' words in mind every day in school, thus, he challenged himself academically to keep those possibilities an option. However, he expressed interest in doing something more creative as a career, like a videogame designer. He liked the

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idea of being paid for his creativity and becoming very popular, "everyone gets to know who they are and then kinda admire the work," he shared.

Also, in high school Erick wanted to "just do something easy," work the ordinary nine-to-five shift, but once in college, he aspired for a more fulfilling life, he shared, "I saw people doing things they loved" which inspired him to "really get in depth in my field, I really want to know everything that I can and then become something ... or just have cool adventures or open myself to new experiences," he expressed. This passion for an area of study or career was not apparent by staff and teachers to Erick in high school. He was not taught how to truly engage with curriculum, but once he was exposed to the passion, it changed his future outlook. His new academic and career aspirations were influenced by the exposure to people passionate about their work and more areas of study options. He wanted to strive more than the "ordinary person."

By the end of his first year in college, he envisioned his future self as a Sociology Researcher for NASA. He developed an interest for space, and since becoming an astronaut was not something he believed was realistic for him, he combined both his interest in space and society, such as building a society on the moon, however, he was open to any research related to society. He was introduced to this aspired career by a sociology professor during office hours who shared it is a relatively unknown area and "doable" for Erick. He also learned about the wide range of fields that work with Sociologists, "obviously some companies need to work with people and Sociologists are really good with people or understanding them at least," he stated.

Academically, he aimed to transfer to UC Berkeley, his dream school, or to UC Los Angeles, then, he hoped to enroll in a sociology Ph.D. program. Again, he was open to transfer to other four-year colleges and enrolling in other graduate programs that might interest him. He planned to apply to transfer in the Fall of his second year in college as he had completed most of his general education courses in high school. Like the other students enrolled in the local two-

year college, his focus was on the immediate transfer requirements, "figuring all the dynamics," such as the requirements for the Transfer Admissions Guarantee, financial aid, doing well academically, and preparing for the transition; thus, he had vague knowledge on the steps needed to accomplish his career goals. The focus at the time was not on preparing for his career goal, he stated, "I do know how to get to a four-year and stuff like that, I do know about all that, but I really haven't looked into much depth into the post graduate. I will definitely once I'm able to say I'm gonna transfer and stuff like that and then we'll take it from there." This could leave Erick as a transfer student, with a short amount of time (two to three years) to plan and prepare for life after college graduation once he transfers.

Challenges and Resources.

Unmotivated peers, a critical professor, and work were challenges Erick faced in his first year in college, however, they ultimately shaped his experience positively. Erick was confronted with the social tension of navigating old and new friendships. In high school, Erick was highly influenced by his peers and often "followed the crowd," but in college, he recalled, "a lot of people that I knew that I was close with that went to CC did drop out" during their first or second semester. This had a significant impact on Erick because he became concerned "maybe it'll impact [him] too maybe [he'll] drop out." He explained his friends were not doing well academically and were not as motivated to make progress towards their goals as he was. He attempted to maintain friendship with these old high school friends in the first semester, but their lack of motivation was a hindrance because not only would it make him start to questions his own goals at times, "maybe these dreams are too big or I can possibly not do it," he shared, but also put in a position where he had to navigate staying loyal to his friends or putting his success as a priority, "I was put in a position where... I could continue going with them who weren't

necessarily focusing on transferring..., they didn't exactly have big aspirations, they didn't want much else in life," he remarked.

Erick struggled to break away from his high school friends and other peers though they negatively impacted his progress towards his goals. Though, the fear of dropping out of college like peers and family members gave him motivation to stay focused on his goals and use resources to help him make progress towards them. He remembered, "those are definitely big obstacles...having to move away from that and instead kinda going my own way 'cause if I don't I'll just go this other way that it will just ruin this perceived second chance at school." He ultimately decided to put his aspirations as a priority and sought out peers that aligned with his mindset and goals. He was proactive and reached out "and with that I made many new friends and they make me happy every day," he shared.

Another negative influence was his professor in his original area of study interest. It was a professor in graphic design that negatively influenced Erick's first-year college experience and future aspirations, "he was very critical... sometimes he'd be very harsh about it so then he made me question myself too and wanting to pursue video games which I thought it was something I was really interested in which I was," he recounts. In addition, this professor was not passionate about teaching, "so I kinda decreased my interest in video games," he shared. But now looking back, he believed it was a good thing because he was then able to focus on sociology, his new major.

Further, though he enjoyed his job and gained inspiration from his coworkers, work considerably interfered with his schoolwork, especially during Fall semester. At that time, he had not found the "perfect balance between school and work." He was working long hours and making more money, but it impacted his schoolwork negatively as he could have used that time

to do schoolwork and study. As he became more motivated to achieve his goals, he decided to significantly decrease the number of hours he worked at the cost of struggling financially.

Despite his challenges, Erick had strong resources that supported his social and academic adjustment. As first-generation college students, they rely on campus resources and cultural brokers to help them navigate the school system and progress towards their goals. The Transfer Achievement Program was a critical resource for Erick, it provided exposure to four-year institutions and caring cultural brokers. Through the program, students have the opportunity to attend fully funded college trips (i.e. transportation, housing, and food), he explained, "[the program counselor] took us to all these schools that most of us couldn't afford to go even if we tried." During these campus visits, the program counselor asked them to prepare questions, visit their major departments, and approach professors, if available. Those opportunities influenced Erick's focus on his goals of "going to higher schools," in other words, enrolling in prestigious institutions. Further, the program counselors supported Erick with financial aid concerns.

Also, similar to his high school case study, educators and peers significantly influenced Erick's school experience and motivation. Physical Education courses (e.g. Karate and Boot Camp) supported his progress towards his goals by increasing his self-confidence in his abilities. For example, his "[Karate coach] really instilled a good deal of just knowing that I can do things that I want and, then he kinda pushed me to strive for more in life," he shared. His instructors encouraged Erick to push himself and reach goals he did not know he was capable of reaching, and translated that mindset to academic and career goals. By growing confidence from those physical challenges, he turned to challenging himself in school and stopped "second-guessing" himself.

Further, his co-workers served as college cultural brokers who further motivated him to aspire to greater life goals. The majority of his coworkers attended the local UC, and at first, he

thought they would belittle him for attending a two-year college, instead, he was pleasantly surprised with encouragement and support from them since many began their college education at a two-year college. His mindset began to shift to "I can do it, too," meaning, attend institutions he never imagined possible. From the encouragement and experience of his coworkers, he began to "view CC as this new opportunity." In the beginning of Fall semester, he shared he went into college with the mentality of transferring to a non-competitive UC and dismissed their comments, but they continued to encourage him to take advantage of this opportunity and during the Spring semester "I finally like kicked myself in the butt and like went for it," he shared.

Identity Development.

Although Erick did not attend a UC as he had aspired to in high school, his college experience at the two-year college allowed him to grow as a person and student that may open up many life opportunities for him. From the challenges and resources found in the previous two questions, Erick's identity development pathway was impacted by the self-confidence he developed as a student. In high school, Erick expressed his shy and quiet nature, but as a junior in high school, he decided to start "getting out of [his] shell," and hoped to continue that trend in his senior year. Erick reflected on his growth in character in college, his college experience "reshape everything" about himself, she shared. He still came into college as a shy and timid person, unsure of his academic and career goals, but after his first-year in college, he felt confident in himself and determined to achieve his goals, he explained "towards the end of my Fall semester, I began to realize I needed to focus more on what I wanted for myself instead of I guess focusing on what others wanted the ideal self to be, and from there I just kept growing." Thus, his predominant value was his ambition. Before, he was never fully 100% committed to his goals, but by the end of his first year in college, he had a clear vision and excitement about his goals. His challenges and resources, "sparked something in me knowing that these are now

possibilities...definitely has shaped me to actually start working for my goals instead of just dreaming about them instead of just saying it I put action toward it," he shared. The groundwork for Erick's identity shift came from finding something he was passionate about and knowing he had resources to get here, he explained, "because before that I didn't really have a foundation I was just kinda going here and here and here and here, instead of going straight," straight towards his goals. It was a shift that happened gradually, one event after another.

His first year in college was academically and socially enriching. Though Erick was excited for his academic journey and all the possibilities available to him, and working diligently towards them, it was a fairly new phenomenon. At the moment, he did not know what area in sociology he would concentrate in and had only taken the introductory sociology course, but planned to take two over the summer.

Daniel's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

In high school, Daniel enjoyed sports, animals, the outdoors, and seeing people he cared about happy. He described himself as friendly, "sometimes funny," and tried to "stay happy as much as possible." As a student, Daniel perceived himself as "lazy at times," but when he started to see his grades dropping, he would "step on the gas pedal and bring them back up," he remarked. He decided to take school more seriously when he realized how close he was to graduating, "if I don't do what I have to do in school to get good grades, I might not go to college," he said. He looked to outreach programs for academic and college guidance that he had been part of since freshman year, such as the Access Tutorial Afterschool Program and AVID. Daniel wished to graduate, make people happy, and more importantly make his parents and family proud. With these goals in mind, he attempted to ignore distractions, work hard in school, and reach out for support to complete his schoolwork to be eligible for college.

By the end of his junior year, Daniel had an academic non-weighted GPA of 2.76 and a weighted GPA of 2.82. He had taken one advanced course, Chemistry Honors, and planned on taking AP English Language his senior year. Although he explained that every academic year was getting more difficult academically, especially in math and science, he was confident in his abilities, he said, "but you know, I'm capable of completing all that and go to college." He planned to attend college immediately after high school, "I just wanna go into a college. I don't think it matters for me, but I would like to go into a UC or Cal State <Um> but if that doesn't happen, I'm for sure gonna go to CC for two years and then transfer." Ultimately, his goal was to earn a degree in marine biology or zoology to become a veterinarian, he stated, "I know it will be hard and I know it's gonna take a lot of time, but um I think I'm capable of accomplishing those goals." Daniel's positive outlook and flexible trajectories fostered resilience.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

Daniel was one of four students who was enrolled in both AVID and the Access Tutorial After School Program. As required by AVID, he applied to four four-year colleges: three CSU schools one UC school during his senior year in high school. He was accepted to CSU Channel Islands and Northridge, and decided to attend the local two-year college for the Promise Program which gave him free tuition for two years; however, when asked about his decision without the Promise Program, he responded, "I would have gone straight to a four-year."

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced Daniel's transition from high school to college and first year experience were the fast-pace academic college culture, his older brother's college experience, and the desire to make his family proud. Daniel experienced a rough college transition and had to make quick academic adjustments in order to

do well in his first year, especially in the required science courses for his major. When asked what he would like to share about his college transition and first-year experience, he shared he expected college to be similar to high school, however, "it was a lot different for me... it's just a lot harder." His older brother's college experience helped inform his knowledge on the college culture, specifically, the academic fast pace; however, "I didn't really expect it to go that fast," he added, "so it's either you gotta go 110% or you're just gonna end up failing the class," he stated. Although the college academic expectations and pace were challenging for Daniel, he had a strong inner drive to persist and do well; thus, he dedicated more time to his studies. He "managed to stay focused and determined and push through my first year in college," he explained. In the end, he persisted to progress towards his goals.

Daniel's older brother had a large influence on his motivation and dedication to graduate from college. As a junior in high school, his brother was attending college, and seeing his older brother attend a four-year institution made him realize he "really" wanted to follow his footsteps. Daniel looked up to his brother, "he is the first person on both sides of my family to go to a university… it made me proud that he did it," and he wanted to be the second person to make his family proud. However, before Daniel began college, his brother dropped out, which significantly increased Daniel's dedication to his future goals. Daniel shared:

> He decided school wasn't for him and I saw how much that made my parents feel bad, like they realized that you know he's going to end up going through what they're going through right now and I think that obviously hurts my parents because they want the best for their kids. So just seeing that my brother decided to drop out, I don't want to one-up him, but I want to prove that I can. I can do what I say I wanna do. I don't wanna you know make my parents feel bad as well by doing what he did and you know I haven't had

a thought of dropping out even though how hard it is ...and I don't plan on doing it at all even though how hard school may be.

Though Daniel had a challenging college transition, his brother's decision to drop out, further motivated him to work hard in his academics in order to prove to his loved ones that he was able to accomplish his goals and make them proud, a motivator that was consistent since high school. The perception his loved ones have of him is important to him and as a result, it fueled his work ethic.

Future Self.

Daniel's career aspiration was consistent since high school; he continued to aspire to become a veterinarian and majored in biology during his first year in college. He hoped to transfer to UC Davis and later enroll in their veterinary program. As a junior in high school, Daniel's motivation to achieve his long-term goals was fueled by others. His cousin's dream and proving his friends wrong were strong influencers for his dedication to his college and career aspiration.

 Daniel had always loved animals and when he realized there are doctors for animals, he knew he wanted to become a veterinarian, however, one event made him realize that he "needs" to be one. His cousin also wanted to be a veterinarian, "but he died of cancer. So just knowing that he wanted to be one, makes me feel like you know I want to do it for him…I want him to know that I want to become a veterinarian because of him," he exclaimed with determination. Though Daniel shared this two years ago as a junior in high school, it was clear his inner motivations continued to be strong and guided him through his college experience.

Another motivator that stemmed in high school was proving his friends wrong. They would jokingly tell him he will not become a veterinarian and other put down comments, he remarked "I gotta show them, I gotta prove to them that I'm gonna become a veterinarian."

Daniel felt the need to accomplish his goals as a result of social relations. He saw himself through the reflection of others in the present and in the future, which fueled his motivation to engage in his schoolwork to fulfill his life project.

In college he stated he wanted to accomplish those goals for his family, but mainly for himself, he shared "I feel like that will make myself proud and I know making my family proud is important but I feel like making yourself proud is also very important, so I feel if I were to complete these goals, that will just make me a happy camper." Daniel's motivation to make his family proud remained, though his drive to accomplish his goals for himself arose as he developed a stronger sense of independence and identity.

In his junior year in high school, he had vague knowledge on how to achieve his career goal. After his first year in college, he had a clear UC Davis academic transfer plan and was taking the required courses, however, the career and professional development steps were still vague. There were many ways Daniel could have been preparing for a veterinarian program, such as networking, internships, joining career-related student organizations, etc. However, in addition to being a full-time student, he also worked which took up most of his time outside of school, which limited his opportunities to engage in those activities.

Challenges and Resources.

Most of Daniel's challenges and resources were consistent from high school. During his first year in college, he encountered challenges, such as old procrastination habits and the academic rigor, yet, he felt he had control over those challenges. He clearly understood his study habits significantly affected his progress towards his goals. He used institutional academic support, moral support from his loved ones, and self-determination to help him move forward to achieve his future goals.

Although he was intrigued by science, the academic rigor challenged his academic path. After taking college-level biology courses, he began to question a veterinarian career choice, he shared, "I love science, I think it's very interesting, but for some reason my brain doesn't... It's a lot of different um molecules and atoms, all that glucose, whatever you can think of in science." Fortunately, protective factors that supported Daniel towards achieving his future goals were supportive networks and self-determination. He had a strong family support at home, they often encouraged him, "you can do it, you can do it," which made him feel he could, "I know I'm capable of doing it, but then people telling me I can do it makes me feel like even more capable of doing it," capable of going to college and graduating. His parents' words were frequently in his mind, which motivated him to work hard in his school.

Further, self-determination was also a theme found in Daniel's longitudinal case analysis. Daniel described himself as "dedicated," "when I start something I'm dedicated to finish, push through it no matter how difficult it is. I'm very determined," he stated. Though his science courses were challenging, he was dedicated and reached out for support, he said, "I have a mindset that I'm gonna pass, and if I can tell if I'm struggling you know, I go seek for help, whether it's the professor or whether it's a tutor center, or you know math center, or science lab, or something just to ensure that I'm getting all the material or understanding all the material." As a result, he continued the path to become a veterinarian. It is important to note that he was also considering changing his major to Criminal Justice to become a crime scene investigator or a lawyer if he continued to struggle academically in biology.

Overall, he believed his resources outweigh his challenges. When he struggled, "nope I gotta finish what I'm doing and forget about the challenges because those aren't important, what's important is finishing what I started," he stated. It is interesting how Daniel's challenges and resources went hand in hand and fed into each other, procrastination and self-determination,

and academic rigor and supportive networks, which ultimately shaped and remained consistent in his educational trajectory.

Identity Development.

Family was the only value Daniel identified during the interview and it was clear how it guided his development as a determined and resilient first-generation college student. Not only did his family's economic hardship deeply influence his motivation, the support and encouragement they provided influenced him to stay dedicated and prioritize school in order to follow his goals. He explained:

> Both of my parents didn't get a degree or anything, I know my mom went for like two years or something, but um they didn't finish through you know. So, I can see how much they struggle with finances and all that and I don't want to be rude or anything, but I don't wanna have a family and be struggling with money issues or anything you know....
> [his parents] don't want any of their three kids to go through what they're going through, so they've always pushed us to go to school.

Daniel honored his family and their family economic situation by working hard to graduate from college and become a veterinarian. Further, since his older brother dropped out of college, he felt the additional motivation to graduate. Knowing his support system was there for him unconditionally allowed him to "push through." He ended the interview by stating, "you gotta struggle to succeed I guess, nothing comes for free, nothing is easy but after you climb that mountain of going to school, you get the job you want. And after that, you're done with school and after that you just thrive." For him, to thrive ultimately means to live a healthy lifestyle and own a "nice house" in the future.

Sophia's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

In high school, Sophia described herself as a determined, organized and responsible student, and her academic records reflected that self-perception. She had a 3.45 unweighted academic GPA and 3.74 weighted GPA by the end of her junior year, and was enrolled in AVID and in the Access Tutorial After School Program since freshman year. She began taking advanced courses as a freshman and planned to continue to do so her senior year. She was also one of the two students who had taken an SAT Subject test. Sophia aspired to live away from home to develop independence, "if I get lucky, I'll immediately enroll myself to a university if I get accepted." Although she had a strong academic college preparation and was involved in sports and leadership positions, by using the term "lucky" to describe college acceptance, demonstrates the lack of association between her well-rounded college preparation and the opportunity to enroll in college.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

Unfortunately, the college choice process for Sophia was quite complex, she even described it as a "crisis." As an AVID student for six years (junior high school through high school), she prepared to attend a four-year institution, such that she anticipated attending one immediately after high school for many years, "I was pretty stoked about the idea that I was gonna attend one of these prestigious high class schools," she shared. As a senior in high school, she applied to four CSUs and four UCs, and was accepted to five out of the eight schools, both CSUs and UCs. Her top school choice was San Francisco State University, one she was accepted to, however, since the cost of attendance was high and the financial aid packet did not meet her financial needs, she then considered attending CSU Fullerton. However, she explained:

> It seemed impossible for me to attend any of the schools I wanted to go to or the ones I
> got accepted to, and I did get to a point where I was applying to scholarships but... I

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thought that my chances were pretty low and at some point in my high school career, I

kinda lost hope where I wasn't gonna go to a four-year university.

Unfortunately, perceiving her chances of receiving scholarships as low deterred her from

continuing to apply broadly for financial support; thus, with the insufficient financial aid packet,

Sophia weighed out her options carefully, she elaborated, "I gave up everything and I decided to

step on that journey to go to city college." Perhaps a greater scholarship application support and

encouragement would have allowed her to attend her dream school. She further shared her

father's suggestions and talking to various cultural brokers during the decision-making process

made her realize the local two-year college was the best option for her at the moment.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Consequently, during her college transition, Sophia navigated the two-year student

"stigma" and deep disappointment of not attending a four-year college, which deeply affected

her mental, social, and emotional wellbeing, which ultimately resulted in a tension in her identity

development. The pressure she felt from people around her to attend a four-year college, the

perceived "bad reputation" two-year college students have, along with the lack of financial

resources, resulted in the "crisis" Sophia referred to in her decision-making process. She

received comments from peers, her AVID teacher, and others about "making the right decision"

by attending a four-year university. Further, the idea that attending a four-year institution is

"better" than attending a two-year for her came from the assumption that "students who attend

city college ...they haven't put enough effort;" thus, students attending those institutions have a

"bad reputation" in her perspective. However, she found herself in a position where "it's not that

I was lazy, it's just that there was a reason why I didn't go to a four-year university and so here I

am attending [Ocean View City College] going into my second year," she explained.

After preparing for more than 6 years to attend a four-year college, Sophia was faced with the perceived two-year college stigma from her friends and others. In high school, she would tell her peers "just watch, I'm gonna go, like Imma be out of here" to attend a four-year college; thus, it was difficult for her to announce that she was ultimately going to attend the local two-year college and stay in the area for. She remembered receiving many disappointed faces and comments. That experience took "a toll" on her because "I didn't want to be seen like that kind of person where I had so much aspiration and hopes to go to a four-year university and for them, unfortunately, I ended up staying here and going to this school," she shared, while most of her high school peers went off to a four-year college, as she had also planned for. As a result, the transition from high school to college experience was extremely impactful "emotionally, psychologically, and socially," which led to isolation and ultimately mental health issues during both semesters. The "impact" of her high school friends enrolling in a four-year college, made her isolate herself from her friends and delete her social media applications. Yet, she remembered, "at the same time I did yearn for that," she "needed" socialization, but did not reach out to others to avoid feeling judged.

Those experiences resulted in a tension in her identity. Her identity in high school as a "very powerful woman" was challenged in college. Before, she was vocal and active in political and social committees, organizations, and clubs, trying "to fight for what's right," which gave her a "really good reputation" and positive self-perception. In college, due to the college choice "crisis" she faced, she was afraid to lose what she was recognized for in high school; thus, she was hesitant to reach out and have people realize the emotional state she was in and think, "oh, I thought she was a very brave and courageous person...she can't handle it herself." She wanted to keep her strong woman image and restrained herself from reaching out for help.

Future Self.

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In high school, Sophia aspired to enter law enforcement to "protect [her] community," however, her career goal changed to a school counselor (or possibly a program coordinator or teacher) in college. Her career goals changed as a result of the recent focus on police brutality she saw on the media, and did not want to partake in "mistreating people of color...brutalize or demonize people from [her] same community," she added, "I didn't want to be influenced where I would want to target my own kind, you know?" Consequently, she disassociated from law enforcement and transitioned to the education field.

She aspired to become an academic counselor in college after making many visits to her counselor's office and seeing the impact of their work on students like herself, "I wouldn't know what to do without her," she recalled. She hoped to be able to motivate students to reach their educational goals as others have done for her. Also, through the diverse staff in an academic support center for underrepresented students, she was able to picture herself as one of them. However, similar to her peers attending Ocean View City College, Sophia demonstrated little understanding of how to reach her goals at the moment, she shared, "I haven't really looked into it, I do know that, (pause) I actually don't know (laughs)." She did not have "much time to look into it," but planned to connect with people in that profession for guidance and mentorship soon to help her reach her career goal. She also planned to major in ethnic studies in her dream school, San Francisco State University, the college she was accepted to in high school.

Challenges and Resources.

Sophia experienced mental health issues due to the rough college transition, in addition, her family's financial situation presented further challenges. The impact significantly damaged her well-being; she lost the value and enjoyment in things she previously loved. She stopped working out, everything drained her, "slacked off at work," did things last minute, and dug herself in "a pit." She ultimately lost "motivation and hope" in her life, however, eventually, the

time came when she realized she needed to "take the step and reach out to people," including her old high school friends and mental health professionals. From there, she was able to recognize the potential in himself that others saw in her. After connecting to people, she ultimately did not regret attending a two-year college, she even felt "lucky" to be there and "on the right track" to achieve her goals. Her plan was to start the application process soon to transfer to a university that upcoming fall.

While navigating her mental health issues, Sophia's financial situation required her to work two jobs, as a tutor at a high school and as a cashier at a restaurant, which in time interfered with her schoolwork, "but I manage to get it out of the way, whether I get home late or early," she shared. The long hours invested in work hindered her ability to engage on campus. Yet, Sophia managed to utilize her campus resources and develop a new career aspiration, highlighting her resilience and dedication to her future goals.

Sophia's biggest resources in college were institutionalized college brokers and ethnic diversity on campus. Sophia went into college "very clueless" about how to navigate colleges and the resources available, thus, she frequented student support centers such as the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and Transfer Achievement Program (TAP). There, cultural brokers not only guided her through the college system and culture, but also influenced her career aspiration. During her meeting with counselors and advisors, she was attentive and took mental notes, then by her second semester, Sophia became very familiarized with the school system and felt confident in helping other students enroll and navigate their first year in college.

Sophia's narrative demonstrates the positive impact campus diversity has on students' learning experience. In high school, the lack of diversity in her advanced courses affected her perceived academic abilities, as the majority of her classmates were White, "I felt a lot of anxiety and pressure out of it and I thought to myself 'oh, I'm going to have to meet a lot of expectations

around here and a lot of trouble,'" she remembered. She perceived herself as inadequate due to coming from a different background than the rest of her classmates. On the contrary, her college campus and courses were widely diverse in gender, race, and age, she explained, "everywhere I look I have people that look like me in those classrooms that are engaged in the same topic as I am." The diversity created a sense of belonging for her, "I really enjoy that classroom environment that I feel welcomed and I feel like I belong there," consequently, it allowed her to feel "comfortable" to engage in her courses, rather than focus on her doubts and feel vulnerable as a student. It is well known that classroom engagement fosters learning for all students, thus, Sophia was able to gain more from her diverse classrooms in college, than she did in her advanced courses in high school.

   Identity Development.

   Sophia had a deep awareness of her identity development as a student. In high school, Sophia had developed a strong Latina and community leader identity, "I am who I am as a Latina and I think it's important for me to empower my voice," and was proud to demonstrate how her culture shaped who she was, "its features, its aspects, its traditions," she stated. Sophia further shared her "existence" was important to her Latinx and school community because she spoke out "in order to spread a message to clear out a debate, and I think it's the reason why we're given a voice to you know to utilize it," she stated in a firm manner. The importance of speaking up and being civically engaged may have developed as she navigated high school in preparation for the future during times of microaggressions in policy and beliefs towards the Latinx community under the Trump administration. That strong sense of identity was challenged in college due to the "crisis" that came from pivoting from the path she had worked hard for and looked forward to for six years.

As a result of her isolation and mental health issues, Sophia became even more self-aware and learned to value genuine relationships with others, she reflected:

> I think that what life has provided us with people that love one another and I think that that's valuable in life and that people truly care about you...see the beauty of it and how this exchange of feelings and emotions can heal a person's mental and wellbeing and I think that's what I value the most out of life where people that actually care.

She realized the importance of connecting with others for one's well-being in the college transition process, and even aspired to have a career where she can provide support to others. She became passionate about becoming someone who others can approach for support.

Sophia was able to overcome her "crisis" and navigate her first year of college successfully by using the resources and cultural brokers she identified with. Further, after her first year in college she was intentional about increasing her social life and being more active on campus. She ended the interview with this, "I think after this interview I will focus more on my identity development and how I will be looking at myself after two to three years, you know, I know that we will probably meet back again I'm sure, right?" The interviews provided an opportunity to unpack her identity development experience and become more aware how experiences have shaped her.

Annalise' Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

In high school, Annalise described herself as an honest, caring, lovable, "really weird," kind, "funny, apparently," and a generous person who enjoys supporting others. Annalise was born locally, then moved to a more affordable "ghetto" area about an hour away due to her family's financial situation. There, she witnessed violence, gangs, and drugs, which made her realize she wanted a different life for herself, she explained, "it made me what I am today." That

lived experience made her aware of the impact school decisions made in her life in the present and in the future, which influenced her motivation to work hard in school and "stay away from negative influences" that would hinder her academic performance.

Her number one goal in high school was to graduate, then she promptly clarified "no, to pass my classes and to make my family proud of me." Her goals also included finding a job that would allow her to support her family financially, such as helping them pay rent. After high school, she planned on attending the local two-year college to "…be prepared for college." She anticipated the two-year college would teach her "basic skills," before she moved onto a four-year institution. These statements suggest her perceived lack of college preparation at the moment, saw two-year colleges as a learning opportunity, and her resilience to reach her aspirations. By the end of her junior year, Annalise had an academic unweighted GPA of 2.36 and a weighted GPA of 2.4, and had taken AP Studio Arts Drawing. She was not enrolled in AVID nor the Access Tutorial After School Program.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

As she had planned in her junior year in high school, Annalise was one of the two students in the study to not apply to four-year institutions. Her college decision was influenced by academic and personal college transition concerns. She wanted to "processing everything" and "taking it slow" as she had heard of "so many things about people going straight to university," such as dropping out or "sometimes it can lead to horrible things;" thus, she decided it was best for her to adjust the college culture slowly in her hometown near her family and friends.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Reflecting on her first-year college experience, Annalise shared, "I felt like a kid going into the big world and I was not prepared for anything," which resulted in an "overwhelming and intimidating" experience. Immediately, on the first day of the school year, she realized the workload was more than she anticipated and prepared for, she was especially unprepared for the rigor of the writing assignments. One of her professors was particularly a "hard grader" and she felt overwhelmed attempting to "impress" that professor with her course assignments.

When asked what would have helped her feel more prepared for the "college world," she responded that attending the college orientation, visiting the classroom, and getting a feel for the college environment would have helped. Also, visiting a counselor more often would have supported her transition. Those statements indicate the lack of college engagement and disconnect during the initial college transition. As a result of the first-semester culture shock, she decided to take things slowly, though what she meant by that was not explored during the interview. Perhaps, college preparation support in high school (e.g., Access Tutorial After School Program and/or AVID) would have also supported her transition.

However, though Annalise' first year in college was challenging, she enjoyed certain aspects of it. It allowed her to grow as a young adult by having more responsibilities and independence that she did not have in high school. She felt restricted in high school, educators and staff "were trying to make me something I'm not," Annalise explained. Versus in college, she felt responsible for herself, which initially scared her, but later learned to appreciate it. She also explained that in college, "it's like you know what you're gonna do even though you don't know." In other words, she knew her career aspirations, yet, did not understand how to achieve them at the moment.

Future Self.

Annalise' career goal began in sixth grade when she was introduced to photography by her computer lab teacher, a photographer, who became her mentor for six years. She had always been interested in the field of art and began to consider photography as a career because it was an adventurous art form that she could travel with. Her long-term academic goal was to receive a bachelor's degree in photography and possibly a master's degree if she found it necessary in her career. She looked forward to "seeing the beauty" in the world and dreamt of having a studio and galleries with big photos of street fashion, buildings, food or "normal things" in Korea, "everyone would be amazed," she exclaimed.

In college, Annalise continued to aspire to be a photographer and travel the world. Her academic goal was to transfer in two years to California State Fullerton or California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, for their strong photography program, to earn a B.A. degree in photography. She explained she understood the academic steps to achieve her goals from making an academic plan with her counselor through the Promise Program, though the academic and career knowledge answers she provided were ambiguous and vague.

Annalise's college and career aspirations were shaped by her passion for art and her parents' socioeconomic background, values, and hopes for her. Given her family background and her future aspirations, it is clear why Annalise was a "very hard worker" and it is also clear why she felt overwhelmed. Her path exemplifies the pressure first and second-generation immigrant students face in pursuing college to reach their career goals. Children of immigrant parents have the weight of their parents' high expectation since they left their home country for educational opportunities for their children, however, navigating the education system and preparing for careers with a lack of guidance can be overwhelming for the students.

Challenges and Resources.

Her first-year college experience came with significant challenges outside of her control that further complicate her journey towards her goals, including work, lack of basic needs, the political climate, and slower learning process. Annalise' family financial struggles forced her to work two jobs while in college to cover basic needs. Her extensive work commitment took away time from her studies and she worried about not doing well academically and ultimately, not reaching her career goal. Consequently, that would mean not having health care and not being able to provide her parents with what they "need medical wise." As a college student, she did not have health insurance, which further created stress for her, so having one has become an immediate priority for her.

Also, the political climate played a major role in her college experience. The uncertainty of the policies, law, and financial constraints caused significant stressors for her as she emerged into adulthood. She felt the pressure to succeed for a secure future that involved financial aid and a stable income for her and her family; thus, her priorities in her first-year in college were to graduate with an associate's degree and transfer to a university, "and then be able to hold down a job that can help me financially with what is going to happen in the future for me, like housing," she shared.

Further, Annalise explained she has a slower learning process, though she did not like to label it as a "learning disability," as others would, she added "but it's the cold hard truth and it does slow me down a lot and it's a little hard to focus." She chose not to receive services from the Disability Services and Programs for Students (DSPS) because she liked to challenge herself, it helps her "become a better person," and she felt DSPS would further slow her down. This gives us a better understanding of why she decided to transition to college slowly.

The challenges Annalise faced were significant, though she remained resilient and persisted for better life opportunities for her and her family. Annalise compared herself to other

students and downplayed her challenges, she shared, "I think the way I see it, I wake up every morning go to school, and then after school, I just go straight to a job. So, the way I see a college student is the way I've always seen it, they work way hard, I work way hard as well, we all work hard for something in life."

Though Annalise navigated significant challenges, she also had strong resources that helped her move towards her goals, for example, the drive to support her family financially and the guidance of cultural brokers. Annalise believed she could accomplish her goals with her positive mindset and optimistic outlook in life, even if there are times where she felt discouraged. During those times, she motivated herself by saying "no, you have to do this, you can do it," or there was always someone motivating her. Her strong inner drive stemmed from the desire to make her parents proud and give them the life they have always dreamt of, "they always tell me like 'in the future we're gonna to do this and this,' and I'm like 'you know what? Imma give you that future, I wanna give you that." She was referring to the financial resources needed to live out their dreams, such as buying a trailer and traveling. Being able to help her immigrant parents financially to live a life they always imagined, was a driving force in her educational pathway. Additionally, overcoming all her obstacles and reaching her goals to live the life she imagined for herself would also make her happy.

Further, cultural brokers played a significant role in her college experience. Her older brothers, two college students, encouraged, guided, and believed in her. One of her brother's had earned a graduate degree, thus, they understood how to navigate the higher education system and provided Annalise with information and insights about how to succeed in college. Also, her counselors, boyfriend, tutors, and professors, supported and encouraged her when she felt like giving up in college.

Identity Development.

Annalise experienced significant identity development during her first year in college as a result of her challenges and resources. By working two jobs while being enrolled in college, it forced her to grow as an independent, responsible, and confident person. Annalise felt fortunate about having the opportunity to attend college, but she saw transferring to a four-year college as taking a risk "especially like applying to college that I know I can't get into but willing to try it out anyways," she explained. Though Annalise experienced a rough college transition academically and financially, her family situation and hope for a better future kept her motivation and resilience strong and had matured into a confident and optimistic young adult at the end of her first year in college. She prioritized and valued her family and herself, "becoming the person who I am and knowing what I want to be," she shared.

Z's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

In high school, Z's self-perception connected to her core value of education, hence, she linked her identity to academic success. When asked to describe herself, she promptly responded, an "AVID student, that really defines me because I think AVID is mostly based on people who strive in their schoolwork…my whole life really revolves around my schooling." This value guided her academic determination and self-advocacy through high school. Z began preparing for college freshman year and by the end of her junior year, she had taken seven advanced courses and planned on taking three more her senior year. Z's efforts resulted in an impressive 4.0 unweighted academic GPA and a 4.41weighted GPA, the highest from the 12 original participants. After high school, Z planned to go directly to a private or a University of California. As an AVID student, having taken multiple advanced and dual enrollment courses, and having a sibling in college, she was introduced to the college culture early on.

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Z also exemplified the pressure first-generation college students face as they prepare for college and how their inner drive helps them overcome those challenges. She narrated the frustration of meticulously working in her junior, "this homework is due tomorrow and I can't, and I don't know how to do it." Additionally, it was noted that she felt high school did not nurture her need for personal growth, yet she worked hard in hopes of receiving a bachelor's degree in the future in order to find a job with a stable income. Z ended the interview in high school by stating she was determined to accomplish her goals, even if she got discouraged with self-doubt, she would challenge that belief, she concluded "I know that it's gonna be hard. I know that like I might get discouraged sometimes, but I really think I am gonna do it…You shouldn't ever lose that like that passion for something that you want to pursue." The resilience in her was the driving force in her academic choices and continued to drive her educational pathway in college.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

As a senior in high school, she applied to the AVID-required four CSUs and four UCs, plus, an additional private school; she was admitted to 8 out of the 9 schools. After a deliberate decision-making process, she decided to attend UC Riverside. Before making the ultimate decision, she consulted with several brokers, her older college-going sister, high school counselor, coordinator of the Access Program, AVID teacher, and friends. After in depth consideration, it was a large financial aid packet, making her own path independent from her older sister, and considering her parents' desire to stay relatively near home, that ultimately narrowed down her choice. Overall, it was an easy choice for her because she had envisioned herself there after a college trip with AVID and the amount of money awarded to her, she

explained, "I saw how everything was fitting into place being at UC Riverside," and was excited to begin her new life experience.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

With the strong college preparation in high school and the strong social and academic support she received in the residence hall, Z experienced a smooth transition into the college culture, in fact, "college was so much easier than high school," she expressed. She anticipated a rougher transition because of her older sister's college experience, "she was really like *deprimida*, she was like really upset 'cause she was so far away. She would like call my mom crying being like 'hey can you come pick me up?'" On the contrary, Z's transition was a smooth one academically, emotionally, and socially. According to Z, her high school courses were more academically challenging than her courses in college and she realized through the experience of her peers that her high school experience did a "good job" of preparing her for college.

The most significant influence in Z's transition and first year experience was living in the residence hall. The hall experience provided her with a network of people, resources, a community, and food stability. She was able to develop a close relationship with her hallmates and one of her roommate's was her high school best friend, thus, she was "never alone," they attended many school events and activities together, ate together, and navigated college together. This fostered a deep campus involvement, always surrounded by other students.

Z was mostly positively influenced by the diversity of her friends; she met highly motivated peers, who in turn motivated her to work hard, it also provided her the opportunity to learn about different backgrounds and perspectives during late night talks. This enhanced her own life perspective, "that's when people actually start talking about like their life (chuckles), so I feel I wouldn't have known anything about their lives if I would have just met them in a class." If she had decided to live with her aunt that lived near UCR and be considered a "commuter

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student," she would have had a significantly different first year college experience, missing out on building deep relationships with her peers and missed out on the mentorship of her resident assistant that guided her. Further, the residence hall gave her access to the dining hall which gave her food stability throughout the year.

Also, Z was very involved on campus her first year in college. She regularly visited the Chicano Center and the Women's Center where she was exposed to information, events, internships, volunteer opportunities, free exam materials, and rented textbooks. She said, "because your tuition is paying for all of them, so it's just those that I identify with and there's people in there that look like me, so that's why I decided to go." Z took full advantage of the opportunities provided to her and sought out individuals she identified with to support her college experience.

Future Self.

Z's academic and career aspirations changed after her first year in college, however, her overall life aspirations of being a resource for others remained. As a junior in high school, Z planned on going directly to a private university or a UC to become a speech therapist. She became interested in that career after going to her disabled father's therapy sessions and seeing the work he did with the speech therapist; she began to work with her father alone and taught him how to read in her free time. By becoming a speech therapist, she felt she would be able to help society, as others are doing for her father.

Given her strong academic preparation and dedication, it was a surprise to learn she did not aspire to earn a graduate degree:

I know that *right* now in this country like the only way to have that stabilized income is to have the more education that you *can*, but I don't want to pursue a master's …I know that I'm really good at school, [but] I want to reach out to different things, I wanna do

new things instead of doing the same thing for all throughout like after high school okay more education, more education, more education.

This gives us insight into Z's unfulfilled personal growth and satisfaction with the school system, or another possibility is that she may have felt burned out from school as she was taking several advanced courses in her junior year, but understood she needed a bachelor's degree for a stable income to provide for herself and her family. However, in order to become a speech therapist, a graduate degree or certificate is needed. At that point in her life, there was a disconnect between her career goal and information on how to attain that goal.

However, during her first year in college, she decided to major in political science in order to attend law school, but if that option did not work out, Z also considered becoming a paralegal or a social worker, "maybe I want to follow down the foster kids route or just helping people like who are low income just finding the resources they need," she explained. Her major and aspirations to attend law school was influenced by a residence assistant (RA) in her hall. From conversing with her RA, who planned to attend law school, Z became interested in that area of study, from there, she further researched the discipline and attended a law school workshops and realized law school was "actually a possibility."

Though she understood that maintaining a good academic standing and enrolling in graduate school are required, by the end of her first year in college, Z had relatively vague awareness of the additional steps she needed to take to reach her career goals. She planned to reach her goals "step by step," she said "first, I have to get a good grade in the class, then it would have to get a good grade in the quarter, then it would have to get a good grade in the year, then get a good grade in the full four years, and then just apply to schools." She further planned to create networks and not isolate herself from others because she realized people are "great help" to move towards achieving her academic and career goals.

Challenges and Resources.

Z's everyday life and future aspirations were impacted by her father's disability in high school and family's economic situation. Her father's disability required constant care, therefore, Z had to take up many family responsibilities, "you kinda have to face reality, kinda have to grow up faster," she explained. Her family situation made her consider attending the local two-year college and influenced her aspiration to have a stable income for the security of her own future family and not depend on anyone else. Further, though in college her financial aid packet allowed her to buy textbooks and living expenses, she stated "I'm also low income, so that also hurts opportunities like 'oh, I need this book' but then I saw that it cost a lot of money, so I was like 'maybe I'll just change my courses,' so I just changed courses based on that." Based on her financial situation, she could have missed out on several opportunities to learn and expand her career preparation. Further, it considerably limited her family visits. She took the train, an expensive travel option, back home because her mother did not have the time to Sgo pick her up since she worked weekdays and weekends. As a result, she went up to three months without seeing her family who lived roughly two hours away.

Cultural brokers, such as her older sister and school peers, served as protective factors by not only making her feel understood, but also providing college information and motivation. Having someone at home whom Z could relate her academic experience with and was familiar with the school system in the United States was a salient resource for Z, she explained "my mom wouldn't understand if oh like the difference between a B, a C I have to say like 'uh, *quatro contra un diez y algo asi,*'" a four versus a ten in Mexico's school grading system. Since her mother was not familiar with the school system in the U.S.A., Z believed her accomplishments may not have been valued by her mother as it would be by someone who was, especially one who understood the value and the "struggle" of a good grade in an honors class versus a regular

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course. Feeling understood in her college preparation journey as a first-generation college bound student was important for Z in high school.

Her older sister was key in Z's educational trajectory. She was a college student that was able to guide and introduced Z to college-readiness information. She explained the importance of AVID for their educational trajectory and it was there then that she understood college was "real." She stated, "having her as a resource to teach me like 'okay, this is what you should do, this is what your shouldn't do, these are the classes that you should take, these are the classes that you shouldn't take," including the process to test into the English dual-enrollment college course and AP test for college credit. Also, her sister's college experience served as a strong motivator, she was awarded a full ride to UC Merced, "what if I get a full ride? That'd be amazing," she exclaimed, in addition, Z noticed the life fulfillment her sister had in college, "I notice all of the passion she has behind her major, so it's like 'I want that in my life, I want to be excited for a subject, I want to pursue that.'" Also, her sister helped guide her through the process of becoming a competitive college applicant and further supported Z in college. In college, her sister continued to be a resource, though her family did not "fully understand what political science even means," she was "the one that actually knows what I'm doing, and she understands," she shared.

In addition, her peers in the residence hall were a major influence in her transition and first year college experience academically, socially, and in future aspirations. The halls provided a resident assistant (RA) and a program coordinator (PC), who lived in the halls along with the other students and served as mentors. She became especially close to her RA who was a fourth-year political science major. After several conversations, Z, who was undecided about her major and whether political science was the best thing for her in the long-term, learned about the resources for students in that major, how to research career options with that degree, and

additional steps to take for that major. Her PC further facilitated programs about the importance of networking along with other important college and career skills, such as financial aid and even helped her apply for a scholarship.

Identity Development.

Z's self-perception remained centered on academics, she described herself as a student "who really tries hard in it and that's it." She also highly valued family and God, which guided her actions, determination, and self-advocacy in school. She dedicated her time to earning good grades, connecting with her parents, and attending church weekly. Further, her goals in college were to gain work experience through an internship, obtain a high GPA, maintain friendship with her current hallmates, and join the Catholic Mentorship Program in order to open opportunities for herself in the future. She consciously chose her actions carefully, so that she will not "close a bunch of doors" on herself in the future instead of making decisions of present rewards.

Her case study gave us insight into the benefits of college-going siblings, financial support, residence halls, and a strong college preparation provide first-generation college students. Her strong academic college preparation through different sources of support got her a financial aid packet that allowed her to experience the dorm life, which in turn, provided Z with important college cultural brokers and social support her first year in college. The challenges her financial realities provided were overcome with these resources, the resources that influenced her identity development as an academic-centered individual. Z was aware of how "lucky and fortunate" she has been in college and is aware not everyone has the same positive experience she had her first year in college.

Jesse's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

As a high school junior, Jesse was navigating his most rigorous school year to prepare for college. He was balancing sports, leadership roles (president of two student organizations), and academics. Also, as an Access Program and AVID student, Jesse was preparing for college with a solid understanding of the qualifications of a competitive college applicant, including strong grades, extracurricular activities, networking, and sacrifices needed to reach his academic goals, such as taking "zero period" at 7:00am. He challenged himself and did very well academically; he took AP exams in Spanish Language and World History, six advanced courses (AP and Honors), and earned an academic unweighted GPA of 3.36 and an academic weighted GPA of 3.69. He decided to take on this workload because he carried the responsibility of a better life for his family, community, and himself through education and civic engagement on his shoulders. Though an immense sacrifice, this rigorous high school experience provided him with the leadership, academic, and social skills needed to reach his goals.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

For their strong Kinesiology Programs, Jesse applied to twelve colleges including UCs, CSUs, and private institutions to ensure he had options. From the twelve schools he applied to, he was accepted into seven, two private institutions and five CSUs. He had a complex decision-making process due to a failing grade his senior year that affected the initial acceptance and financial aid packet from some institutions; thus, his college choice was influenced by an empathetic school, a "school that cared," rather than a "prestigious school." Chico State and Point Loma "respected my situation," he said, they were understanding and did not take away his initial financial aid offer. An understanding school with a strong sense of community was the ultimate factor that led him to decide to enroll in Chico State University.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

Jesse's first year college transition was largely defined by loss and professors' support. He experienced an emotionally difficult transition to college due to a loss of a close family member. On his first days of college, his aunt passed away and decided not to share it with his new peers or professors, "I didn't really want to kind of give the impression to people that I, you know, I'm a sad person even though I am, like you know, not always in the best mood," he shared. She was one of the few family members who checked-in and provided support to him and his mother, especially after his father passed away. Mourning the passing of his aunt by himself away from home, having to process that "she's really gone," was difficult. That "just sucked," he shared.

Also, a characteristic of his case study is the significant role teachers and professors have played in his educational experiences and his deep awareness of that. In high school, he strongly believed that a teacher's empathy towards students' learning needs and life situation and connecting with them through conversation, significantly impacts the students' school experience positively. As such, in college, Jesse took initiative to speak to his professors during office hours or after lecture and felt they appreciated him for reaching out for support "and being willing to just converse as normal people at times, too, because life is more than just academics," he stated. He felt genuinely cared for as a student because they made an effort to understand what he was experiencing and supported him in their courses and beyond. They cheered him on, wanting him to succeed because although he struggled academically at times, his strong work ethic and dedication were clear to his professors, so they encouraged him to take senior level courses.

Future Self.

Jesse is another student who remained relatively consistent with his career and academic aspirations and motivation that stemmed from loss. Through extracurricular and community

involvements in high school, Jesse learned he "loves" working with people and loved sports; his sport's medicine elective introduced him to human anatomy, something he was fascinated by. Health education became important to him and aspired to be in the field of sports medicine, perhaps a sports trainer, gym trainer, or a physical therapist. Something where he can work with people and help them become the person they aspire to be. His ultimate academic goal was to attend a university that would make him happy, where the students "can all help one another," have a sense of community, and receive a master's in physical therapy or kinesiology.

After his first year in college, his goal was to become a physician assistant (PA), a slightly different career path than he originally planned for in high school, but still in the health field. He was exposed to that career after an internship with a chiropractor who incorporated physiotherapy, a similar career profession. In addition, his aunt's passing "pushed" him "to do more than just physical therapy." His major in college was exercise physiology, a bachelor's in science in the kinesiology department, and was minoring in nutrition. His ultimate career goal slightly shifted from a physical therapist to becoming a PA-as he referred to it- after his first year in college. However, his goal of attending a university where there is a sense of community remained a primary factor during his college choice process.

Jesse's strong motivation and drive to reach his goals have also remained consistent through the end of his first year in college. In high school, the center of Jesse's actions and future aspirations were his immediate family; he hoped to one day be a leader in his family in order to become a more unified family again. His aging mother and step-father worked labor-intensive jobs, which concerned him greatly as they do not have a retirement plan, therefore, he aspired to financially support his family in the future to "take the burden that they have of trying to keep us all like alive onto myself," he explained. The only way Jesse saw he could do so was by attending a four-year university, receive a master's, and have a career that pays "better than

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average." In addition, the loss of Jesse's father several years ago, also influenced his current actions and high aspirations. Jesse's father had high hopes for him and passed away before he was able to see Jesse accomplish anything, he explained:

I just want to do these things even though he's gone, it's like 'you know what? The important thing is that I live off for him' not just to live a boring life that I hate, but live a life that I can actually love in which one where I exactly live a life that he was never able to have because of the opportunities he was not given because of discrimination and all these other things where it limited him to what he was and how he died young and one day I'll pass onto my kids.

As a result of his deep loss, Jesse was an extremely dedicated student in order to reach his goals for himself and his father.

Stemming from his inner drive, Jesse took control of his education and actions that would help him reach his goals. He developed an in-depth knowledge on how to reach his goals through his own research in college, he learned the specific steps to become a PA on his own because he noticed counselors "have too many students to worry about and the reality is that they're not going to know exactly what I have to do just because the PA route is a really unorthodox route." He learned he needs to attend PA school, "a condensed version of medical school," and will take a "hybrid" of the requirements for nursing and medical school. This means Jesse will be taking more courses than most of his peers. Similar to Rek, though he will be taking advice from professionals, he believed he would be "doing things" for himself.

Challenges and Resources.

Just as his family's financial situation was a motivator, it was also a challenge in Jesse's first year college experience, in addition to a lack of community his first semester. As he had expressed in high school, he continued to feel a great "pressure" to achieve academically and

professionally, he stated, "my step dad, since he is the breadwinner, he's older, he's 62 at the moment and he (chuckles) works in the fields and I'm just like 'yo I need to try to get through this.'" Jesse believed he could help provide for his family as a PA and "I can make sure that we're fine, you know, that we're stable," he stated, where there is money for rent and food on the table. He intended to help avoid his younger sister going through what he did when his father passed away, moving around a lot and extremely financially limited, he shared as he cleared his throat. The "pressure" Jesse felt is clear in the academic workload and extracurricular activities he committed to in high school and college. It drove him to take many challenging courses outside his four-year plan, "where I'm like 'I have to do this,'" he shared. He attended tutoring sessions, or "supplemental instructions," regularly and spent a significant amount of time in the library "figuring things out," especially during the second semester when he had more challenging courses. He welcomed the challenge to become a better student and "learn how to navigate college" early on.

Further, the lack of community his first semester was also a significant challenge for Jesse. Though he lived in the dorms, he experienced isolation because he could not identify with his peers due to his family situation and background; he realized there are many students who were not very focused on their studies in the dorms, at least not as focused as he was. He shared, "I found myself kinda isolated 'cause like shoot there's not a lot of people that I know that are having to make the same sacrifices that I do." Also, as mentioned above, he kept to himself after the death of aunt the day after he arrived at college. As a result, he spent a lot of his time at the gym, without a sense of purpose and did not have friends, which in turn affected his academic performance. Jesse believed he could have earned a 4.0 GPA his first semester if it were not for the lack of support. However, Jesse managed to be on the Dean's List and by the end of his first year he shared, "I feel that I found my place and I'm pretty happy with it.

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Though Jesse's transition to college was difficult his first semester, he ultimately found community on campus, "I just adapted and just kinda took the time to learn how the system worked," he said, he also became involved with student programs. Since high school, student programs tailored to his needs turned Jesse's life around. They led to community and school engagement with a bigger life purpose, he went from lacking self-confidence to being a leader both in high school and college. For example, Men of Chico, a "minority male support group" at Chico State was a vital resource for Jesse, there he felt understood and supported by other males on campus who have also gone through challenging life experiences. In that group, they are introduced to male staff members on campus, "from the financial aid office to academic advising," who make an effort to support and mentor them as "individuals." From his involvement in that group he learned the following, "you dictate what you want to do and there's chances and choices ...where ultimately it's up to you to how well you want to do in school because no one is holding your hand anymore." This group gave Jesse male role models and mentors as he emerged into adulthood.

Further, he found connection with the other members of the group as they too were motivated students who had come from similar backgrounds of "hardships…beyond first-world problems," such as having lost a loved one, he shared, "we were trying to build a better future for ourselves, our communities or families." He adds, "a lot of us were very motivated, I very much admire that, and we also talked about social aspects of being a male in you know just our society within our cultures and such." Here, he found community, a sense of belonging, and felt understood, a vital factor for college success, especially for Latinx males. It is important to note that Jesse expressed he felt isolated from his Latinx community because he felt he had experienced deeper "hardships" than the "first-world" Latinx struggles. He shared "I struggled a lot more and I don't always talk about that with people" because he felt it makes things

"awkward" and not constructive. He identified a lot more with other male students who experience deeper hardships, "this is just their normal. I was like 'yo, you're like me.'" Jesse found a community he could identify with beyond ethnicity or skin color. Jesse further found community through cheer, which will be discussed below.

Identity Development.

Jesse's challenges and resources influenced his identity development as a highly motivated, genuine, and community-oriented student. As a result of his experiences, Jesse describes himself as a person who "wants to serve others" because as he gained fulfillment from what he can do for others, including helping his family. Jesse described his identity as a college student as "arrogant" for taking on a heavy course load: nineteen units in the Spring semester; challenging science courses with labs; and an upper division course both semesters. However, in reality, he was well aware his circumstances were different than most of his peers and knew he had to work harder, take more units each semester, and stay focus because of his family situation and to reach his future goals. Jesse did not intend to stop challenging himself, even if he had to make sacrifices in order to help make progress towards his goals, just as he has been doing since high school.

Further, the difficult and isolating first semester, led Jesse to value and actively build a community. He explained that "life is very hard to go through" and he "went through first semester kinda feeling alone," he shared, especially being so far from home. As a result, he understands the importance of "people who have your back or you know can share your experiences with," he said. From his life and school experiences, he learned the importance of networking and connecting with his peers because it could lead "a great friend," a "potential partner," or a "potential resource for later on."

In addition, as a result of his life challenges and resources, Jesse valued being genuine with himself, to have the courage to show his "true colors" and not worry about being judged as he had been in the past. Especially his masculinity as it has been challenged since joining cheer. His masculinity was questioned based on an activity he chose to participate in, and he believed being judged for that is "pretty faulty" since there are many factors to consider, such is his search for a community; thus, he had to "learn how to manage" being judged and questions based on stereotypes. He increasingly became more comfortable with "being who I am and realizing that you know I know I don't have to be afraid," which resulted in a greater confidence and respect from people.

Jesse learned to become "very social" and "very confident" in himself, which people admire about him. He was able to walk up to people and begin a conversation, as a result, he had made many acquaintances around campus. He was proud to be a role model on campus as a male cheerleader, "I feel like I can do more than people expect out of me... I feel that it's a small program and it's still relatively young and I feel like I can make a difference just by being probably one of the hardest working people in the room."

Clearly, Jesse took control of his own education and emerging adulthood. He ended the interview by stating his ultimate intentions were to provide for his family and mentor kids in the future, "those are my only intentions." Since high school, his case study was characterized by his strong work ethic and dedication to his goals due to the financial pressure he felt to help support his aging parents and younger sister. There is no doubt that Jesse's inner drive, discipline, and focus, he will take him to reach his goals.

Edith's Narrative

High School Case Results Review.

Edith began preparing for college in her first year in high school; she was enrolled in the Access Tutorial After School Program and AVID since freshman year and had taken four advanced courses by the end of her junior year in college. Her top values in life were family and education, which were interrelated as her family had always encouraged her to do well academically and she did. She developed a strong academic work ethic and was disciplined in her studies that by the end of her junior year, she had a 3.17 unweighted GPA and a 3.38 weighted GPA. Her academic goal was to enroll in the political science program at the local university and then enroll in law school. To reach her goals, she planned to continue "staying on track," stay committed to her academics, and asking for support when needed.

First Year College Case Results.

College Choice Process.

Edith applied to four CSUs and four UCs as required by AVID; she received acceptance letters from one UC and four CSUs, and although she was not accepted into her top school, the local UC, she was accepted into her second top choice, CSU Sacramento, "but I think I had to pay 9k out of pocket," she explained. Consequently, due to the financial aid packet she received and considering the prestige of the UC system, she decided to attend UC Merced along with her twin sister.

College Transition and First Year Experience.

The college transition was "really hard" for Edith given the drastic structural and academic difference between high school and college. Not only were courses "a lot more intense," but there was a lot more independence compared to high school, "it's your decision if you want to go to the classes, it's your decision to put the amount of effort for you to pass the classes," she explained. The increased independence and academic expectations forced her to reason out her priorities on her own. She saw friends who failed courses due to a large social life

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and realized she could not afford to become too distracted since her parents had her and her sister in college, and financially, there was no margin for error. Appropriately, "I don't prioritize anything else; I just like have to stick to what I'm going to school for, and I don't let anything else get in the way like partying or anything like that," she stated.

As a result of her focused priorities, Edith's transition experience was characterized by her taking control of her education and identification with peers. The dedication to her goals was reflected by taking full control of her education. As she did in high school, Edith continued to make decisions that challenged her in order to succeed in school, such as reaching out for support when needed and understanding her learning style. After realizing college courses focus on exams more than assignments and the increased academic rigor, she quickly adjusted, "I really had to figure it out, how to study and how to approach the professors because it's really intimidating sometimes, but I still do it," she shared. As a result, with pride, she excitedly shared that in contrast to high school, she was perceived as the "smart one" with a high GPA, people came to her for support, and was in the National Political Science Honor Society.

Further, Edith's college transition experience was influenced by the prominent Latinx student population at UC Merced, she explained "the majority is Latino, so it's like, you get to talk to them and they have the same experiences as you do and the same goals," she shared. She believed that allowed her to identify with the student population and feel more confident in her courses as opposed to her high school experience, where she was a minority in her advanced courses. Identifying with her college peers and feeling understood made Edith feel comfortable on campus and thrive socially and academically in her first-year college transition and experience.

Future Self.

In high school, the recent hostile socio-political climate under the Trump presidency impacted her personal life and consequently influenced her future aspirations. She aspired to become an immigration lawyer because, "my aunt, she got deported when I was fourteen and like that really made a big impact, and then that's when I decided to study immigration law 'cause that is when I was like 'oh I want to help people to not get separated from their families,'" she shared. She looked forward to helping those in similar situations, especially under Donald Trump's government.

Her career aspiration remained consistent in college. Again, Edith mentioned how the 2016 elections, "heated up" social-political climate, and immigration policy influenced her commitment to attend law school to become an immigration lawyer. She stated once again, "I think I can be a person that can help those people actually have a voice, so that's why I really want to obtain my degree." She began to take steps to reach her goals in her first year in college by studying for the Law School Admissions Test since she was aware that it is a difficult test. She did not want to be in a situation where the lack of studying hindered her opportunity to pass, "I just want to be really prepared so when the time comes, I know what I'm doing and I know I'll be able to like succeed in it." However, in the case that she does not get accepted into law school, she decided to minor in business and economics in order to be prepared to apply to business school. She held in-depth knowledge and was specific about the steps required to reach her goals, including the GPA requirements, extracurricular activities, and the admissions exam for law school, "I'm already preparing for that, so I'm not that scared," she shared.

Challenges and Resources.

Edith did not elaborate much on the challenges she faced in her first year in college, though she briefly mentioned a rude roommate and unsympathetic professor. She shared a living space with what she perceived as a rude and entitled roommate, who made comments that put

Edith down, "I try to ignore it so it won't get to me, she's just the type of people where you're sitting down and you can feel the negative vibe from her," she explained. Also, Edith experienced mental health issues as the result of being far from home, and although she reached out for support and was seeing a school psychologist, the mental health issues affected her academics and recounted failing an exam that dropped her grade from a B to a C. She approached her professor, who was aware of her mental health issues, about improving her grade, "she was just kinda rude about me asking her questions and then at that point I felt intimidated 'cause I was like 'oh am I going to be able to ask them questions? How am I going to pass her class now?'" The unsympathetic interaction affected Edith, she felt unsupported and unvalidated from a key cultural broker during her emotionally hard college transition.

Her resources, however, greatly outweighed her challenges. Strong supportive structures, such as friends and family, helped Edith make progress towards her goals during her first year in college. Edith became more social in college because she identified with her peers, other Latinx students with similar background and future outlook, "my friends they influence a lot on my future aspirations, ….[her friend] is trying to go to law school, the same path I wanna go through, so we just help each other out and we kinda take the same classes," she explained. She further stated, "I think they all have their goals set up like 'okay, we need to do this in order to graduate so you guys have to join all these things with me, together.'" By walking similar paths, they became close and supported each other in their college transition to and career preparation, as a result, Edith was never alone in college, even "when we get sick and stuff, we're also always there for each other." Her group of friends ultimately became "more like a family" and planned to become roommates during her second year in college. Navigating college towards her goals with friends can help explain her positive college experience and academic success.

Also, her family was a vital resource. In high school, her family's economic situation greatly motivated her to pursue higher education in hopes of having a better quality of life for her and her family. Her immigrant parents' lack of opportunities and the sacrifices they made significantly impacted her actions in school; by seeing how fatigued they were after work and "how they want me to get that education, so like I don't have to be struggling like they are," she stated, she took full advantage of her college preparation opportunities. That motivation continued to influence her actions in college by staying focused, dedicated, and taking advantage of resources on campus in order to reach her goals.

Further, other family members were important supportive agents. Her older cousin had recently graduated from UC Merced and provided Edith with insights on how to successfully navigate the institution. Having access to institutional information, such as the culture, key school agents, helpful programs, and insights on how to succeed in the quarter system, is vital for first-generation college students. Also, her twin sister was enrolled and roomed with her, simply having her "always there," was of grat support for Edith, especially during the transition period where she experienced mental health issues. They both also supported each other academically, "I think she helps me make good decisions I guess 'cause she's like me and we both really focus on our schoolwork," she shared. Edith also mentioned professors, tutors and counselors as resources, though she did not elaborate on them.

Identity Development.

Family and opportunity were at the center of Edith's decision-making process. She valued family for the support they provided and the sacrifices they made to provide her and her sisters the opportunity to receive a college education; these interrelated values grounded her dedication to her goals and were the foundation of her resiliency:

Family is always in the back of my head, so every time I'm trying to achieve a goal like, let's just say to get an A in a class, I would just stick to that goal and think about my family how they're really hard working and I just think about that and I'm like 'okay I have to pass 'cause they're putting all this work into me and they believe in me.' So, like yeah that's what I think and same with friends, yeah, they really look up to me so like it's kinda like I need to, you know?

Rooted in important people in her life, Edith felt the need to succeed in college and as a result developed a strong dedication to her goals. She took ownership of her education and eventually felt confident in her abilities as a college student.

Further, she valued the opportunity to pursue higher education as she was aware many peers with similar backgrounds do not have the financial means to continue beyond high school. Overall, college was a positive experience for Edith, she described herself as a "very happy person, I think I'm happy most of the time you know like talk to people a lot. I feel like before I wasn't like that, but now I'm more open to things." She grabbed the opportunities UC Merced offered and leveraged on her resources to develop her full potential and thrive during her first year in college.

Cross-Case Analysis Results

In this section, I discuss the overview of the dominant findings that emerged in the students' narratives across cases for each research question. This paper focuses on the most striking themes found in the longitudinal case studies data, while also discussing themes elaborated on by the student without probing, which signifies themes impactful in their perspective, thus, these themes are worthy of attention. The wealth of data collected resulted in some findings not discussed in this paper due to page limitations. While they shared similar backgrounds and academic experiences, their pathways were unique across worlds. The students

either continued on their path towards their aspirations, altered their path towards their

aspirations caused by challenges, or redirected their aspirations as a result of positive or negative

experiences encountered in their senior year in high school or their first year in college. This

section provides: (a) college choice and (b) dominant themes found using a triangulation analysis

of the different data sources in high school and college.

Table # 1

Cross-Case Findings Summary Table

Research Question	Findings
1. What were key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced the transition from high school to college and first year in college of the students?	• College Choice: Financial realities • AVID • Emotional Distress: "stigma," mental health issues, isolation • Campus Engagement: 2 vs 4-year
2. How did the students envision their future selves after they attended college, and how does this compare with what they envisioned for themselves during their junior year in high school?	• Successful and "Making a Difference" • Factors in Aspiration Development: Exposure and Intrinsic motivation • Career Aspirations Preparation Knowledge: 2-year vs 4-year college students • Mentors Request
3. What challenges did participants encounter during their first year in college, and which resources did they utilize to help move them towards achieving their future goals?	• Challenges: Work and Adjusting to the College Culture • Taking Control of their College Education • Resources: Cultural Brokers in Multiple Worlds
4. How did the challenges and resources found in response to Question 2 and 3 impact the identity development pathway of students?	• Identity Development: Community-Centered and High-Achieving Student • Thriving in College: Excel academically while "not destroying you in the process, but instead building you" • Thriving After College: Financial stability, family and community wellbeing, and a happy and healthy lifestyle

This section provides a snapshot of the students' early college experience and identity development through their point of view. They viewed higher education as a way to reach their life goals and create better life opportunities not only themselves as first-generation Latinx college students, but for their families and communities as well. Their personal challenges were a source of motivation in their hard work ethic and persistence. The dominant factor that influenced their college decision in high school was their financial realities. Key background characteristics and experiences that influenced their college transition and first year in college were AVID, emotional distress, and campus engagement. After their first year in college, students continued to envision themselves in successful careers and "making a difference" as they did in high school. Some aspirations developed from exposure to career fields and others from intrinsic motivation; students whose future self-perception developed from exposure changed career goals from high school to college, whereas the students whose aspirations developed from intrinsic motivation had largely consistent career aspirations by the end of their first year in college. The case studies further showed that the understanding of the steps needed to achieve their career goal and post-graduation aspirations generally varied according to the institution type they attended.

Further, the challenges the students encountered during their first year in college were the amount of time dedicated to work and being unprepared for the new academic college culture, and the resources they utilized to help move them towards achieving their future goals were cultural brokers, including staff, professors, and peers. From these challenges and resources, the student narratives demonstrated they had developed a community-centered identity and high achieving student identity even more by the end of their first year in college. Lastly, it was found that their definition of thriving stemmed from challenging lived experiences as first-generation college students and coming from under-resourced backgrounds. In summary, by the end of their

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first year in college, all students in the study continued on their pathway towards college and envisioned themselves as successful professionals in the future, while also giving back to their community.

College Choice

During their senior year in high school, the majority of students (Sophia, Z, Edith, Jesse, Octavio, Daniel, and Erick) applied to at least four four-year California higher education institutions and all were accepted to at least two. Six out of those seven students were in AVID, which required them to apply to at least four four-year colleges. The seventh student, Erick, was the only student not enrolled in neither AVID nor the Access Tutorial After School Program, but still applied to more than four four-year colleges. Although all seven students who applied to a four-year college were admitted, four (Octavio, Sophia, Erick, and Daniel) decided to enroll in the local two-year college and three (Z, Edith, and Jesse) enrolled in a four-year institution; Edith and Z enrolled at a University of California campus and Jesse enrolled in a California State University. The two students (Annalise and Rek) who did not apply to a four-year college, were also the two of the three students not enrolled in AVID or the Access Tutorial After School Program. They both decided to apply and enrolled in the local two-year college because it is a great institution that provides free education for two years through the institution's Promise Program. In summary, although all anticipated attending a four-year college as juniors in high school, six of the nine students (Sophia, Annalise, Rek, Octavio, Erick, and Daniel) enrolled in the local two-year college and three of the nine (Edith, Z, and Jesse) enrolled in a four-year institution immediately after high school. It is important to note that none attended their top college choice; however, all were happy with their college choice by the end of their first year in college.

College Choice Dominant Factor: "Financial Reasons."

For the students in this study, college choice was based on one dominant factor, "financial reasons," although there were other influencing factors. Great financial concerns were reported by Z, Jesse, Octavio, Sophia, Rek, Edith, Daniel, and Erick in their college choice process; thus, what ultimately determined their choice was either the Ocean View Promise Program or a reasonable financial aid packet. The Promise Program attracted most of the students, including students admitted to a four-year institution, though not everyone agreed with their college choice. People did not understand how students' socioeconomic status directly influenced academic opportunities, such as was seen in Sophia's experience, who was accepted into her dream school. She commented, "I would get a lot of comments like 'oh, you would make the right decision to go to a four-year university.'" Although external pressure affected her emotional well-being greatly, the financial constraints had a greater influence on her college decision: "I didn't have that much financial support... so last minute I decided to go to [Ocean View City College] where I was guaranteed tuition coverage for both years." Unfortunately, her meticulous work and preparation for six years so that she could attend a four-year university and reach her goals were altered due to lack of financial means.

Octavio's narrative represents a similar experience:

Even though I was accepted into most of the schools [I] applied to, I decided to go to CC because it was the ultimate decision for me and my family. We were doing it based off of financial reasons because I didn't want to create a burden on them and going far away and you know I was needed at the house... you know just provide for my family because it'd just be an even bigger struggle for us because coming from a low income background has always been very difficult.

Sophia's and Octavio's college choice processes represent most of the students' high school situation; academic opportunities and pathway to their aspirations are altered due to their socioeconomic status after years of preparation and hard work. For others like Rek, the financial accessibility of a two-year college provided an easy college decision: "That's kinda the obvious answer," he said, as attending college for free made more sense than going into debt at a four-year college. As under-resourced first-generation college students, financial limitations and lack of scholarship application support altered their pathway towards their goals. Having more financial groundwork by the institution in the form of scholarship support and financing college workshops in high school and even making higher education institutions more affordable or free has the potential to open possibilities and opportunities for all students.

Answer to Research Questions

As a review, the research questions of this study are:

1. What were key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced the transition from high school to college and first year in college of the students?

2. How did the students envision their future selves after they attended college, and how does this compare with what they envisioned for themselves during their junior year in high school?

3. What challenges did participants encounter during their first year in college, and which resources did they utilize to help move them towards achieving their future goals?

4. How did the challenges and resources found in response to Question 2 and 3 impact the identity development pathway of students?

Answer to Research Question 1: College Transition and First Year Experience.

This question was examined with the "What are my Worlds" handout and the following interview questions from section II, "What Are My Worlds," from the interview protocol: "What

are the "Worlds" that you participate in?, "How have these changed since high school?", "What academic adjustments did you have to make in college?", "Tell me about your positive and not so positive experiences in your classes", and "How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your school current actions and decisions?"

From the case studies, key background characteristics and experiences that influenced their college transition and first year in college were AVID, emotional distress, and campus engagement. AVID supported the students' college preparation and career exploration/information; navigating "stigma, mental health issues, and isolation [which] significantly impacted students' wellbeing and academic performance"; and campus engagement and social adjustment differentiated between types of institution.

AVID- "Helped Me See What I Gotta Do."

Although there were various characteristics that influenced the transition from high school to college of the students, the most significant and shared influence with the students was AVID in high school. It was clear how for the students enrolled (Daniel, Octavio, Edith, Sophia, Z, and Jesse) that the program was a significant influence on their college preparation, application process, college choice, and future academic and career exploration/information. AVID students are set with high expectations and rigor to prepare for college. In the high school the students attended, AVID students were required to take advanced courses every year, and as mentioned earlier, they were also required to apply to four four-year universities in their senior year. Also, of the seven students (out of nine total) who applied to a four-year college and got admitted, six were AVID students. Z, Sophia, Octavio, Daniel, and Edith mentioned how their AVID teacher supported them through important factors to consider in their college choice process and acted as a cultural broker available to them that understood their student situation and the college culture. Octavio, Edith, Daniel, and Z reflected on how AVID continued to

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influence them after high school, for example, Ocavio utilized academic and organization skills he was exposed to, such as how to use an agenda and effective note-taking techniques, to adjust to college. He also continued to stay in contact with his teacher as a resource to reach out to other students and advertise his MECHA involvement.

Not only did the program support their college preparation process, the students reported it also provided them with career exploration and career information. In high school, Edith felt AVID truly wanted her to go to college to be able to "be someone in life." Also, Daniel reflected on how AVID influenced his career goal preparation and shared, "being in AVID really helped me see what I gotta do... what career... what classes we need to take to transfer." He, like the rest of his peers, were introduced to Assist.org, the online California transfer and articulation system for public colleges. In addition, the students who enrolled in a four-year college and aspired to earn a graduate degree (Z, Edith, and Jesse) were AVID students in high school. In sum, the program provided them with support in important college and career decision-making processes. For Latinx first-generation college students, receiving this support from cultural brokers that understand their life experience, such as AVID, is essential for them to make informed decisions in high school and college that will help them move towards their academic and career aspirations.

Emotional Distress: "I Lost So Much Motivation and Hope."

A significant key transition experience that influenced some of the students' first year of college was emotional distress due to sudden change of academic path or college pressures, which affected their academic performance. Sophia, Erick, Jesse, and Edith expressed navigating significant negative social adjustments that ultimately impacted their emotional and mental well-being and academic performance, such as the two-year school "stigma," mental health issues,

and/or isolation. This is an area that was elaborated on by the students without directly asking about their mental health or probing.

Sophia and Erick explained the impact of enrolling in a two-year college last minute and how they managed that "crisis." As mentioned above, these students spent their four years of high school challenging themselves academically and in extracurricular activities, anticipating and looking forward to attend a four-year college immediately after high school. These students applied to and were admitted to four-year universities, but due to financial circumstances out of their control, their plans changed last minute. Navigating the unplanned two-year college trajectory was a significant emotional challenging experience during their college transition for several reasons. Further the transition from high school to college was impactful because, "most of [their] friends... did go to a four-year," something these students could not afford to do

Both students who attend such institutions perceived them as having a negative "reputation." Sophia shared, "I hear that students who attend city college that they haven't put enough effort." Erick similarly shared, "I was hesitant about it 'cause all the stigma surrounding it in high school." His hesitation to attend a two-year college was further enhanced by the pressure of his family legacy: "if I go to CC, I'll just follow the same path as most of my cousins did." His cousins did not pursue a career or had completely dropped out of a two-year college. Thus, Erick would have to be the first in his entire family to successfully navigate a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college, which was a lot of pressure for him. "I was kinda scared that that would happen to me too and but if I go to Fullerton then I would go with my friends, I can say that I went to a four-year right after high school," he said as he recounted his difficult decision-making process. Ultimately, due to financial concerns as well, Erick made the "responsible" decision to attend the free two-year college. Though "I remember I actually

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couldn't tell people that I went to City College," he shared. This perspective changed though through his interaction with other students and faculty at the two-year college.

Mental Health Issues.

Some students reported mental health issues. Sophia recounts her first-semester experience:

> I did [find] I lost value in the things that I love, you know I stopped going to the gym ... I requested less days off of work, I slacked off of work, I'd do everything last minute and I just found myself like in a pit where I couldn't do anything, I lost so much motivation and hope and everything just drained me.

As Sophia's narrative indicates, the challenging college transition impacted every area of her life. Also, Edith experienced mental health issues transitioning to college when she shared, "I guess it's because you know it's really far from home." She too found it impacted her academic performance and decided to approach a professor: "She [the professor] knew about the situation about my depression and stuff like that and she was a psychologist professor too, and she was just kinda rude about me asking her questions and then at that point I felt intimidated 'cause I was like oh am I going to be able to ask them questions? How am I going to pass her class now?" As Edith's experience illustrates, faculty's role in students' transition is crucial to their academic and emotional well-being, as reflected by their AVID teacher, and conversely, unsupportive faculty. Fortunately, both Sophia and Edith reached out to professional support and their wellbeing improved in their second semester or quarter in college. Faculty and staff training on first-gen transition and first-year college experiences may help alleviate the "crisis" students experience.

Isolation.

Jesse and Sophia isolated themselves from people to deal with their respective social

adjustment situation, which in turn, further perpetuated a negative experience. As individuals

that value social connections and community, isolation deeply affected their academic

performance. Jesse did not have "any" friends his first-semester, he explained, "that kinda

sucked first semester 'cause I could have easily gotten a 4.0 but I felt I don't know I didn't really

feel like I had community and ultimately my grades weren't the best." Although he still managed

to make it on the Dean's List, "it's one of those things where the classes I had I knew I could

have done much better, it's just I didn't have support at the time," he recalled. Sophia further

provided insight on the impact lack of social connections and community can have on students.

As mentioned above, the unexpected college system she enrolled in affected her social life as she

disconnected from her old friends, including on social media. "I lost contact with them and I

deleted all my social media apps and I just started isolating myself to the point where I you know

I didn't want to talk to anybody," she shared. She kept her isolation and mental health issues

experience to herself which deeply affected her emotionally and psychologically negatively.

Although she intentionally isolated herself, she explained, "At the same time, I did yearn for that

need for socialization which I didn't have and I needed it." From their challenging experiences,

Jesse and Sophia both further valued social connections and relationships. When asked what they

value most in life, Jesse explained:

> I think my ability to make relationships with a variety of people that's something I value
>
> a lot still because you know life is very hard to go through and if you don't have people
>
> who have your back or you know can share your experiences with and for me you know
>
> like everybody I kinda went through first semester kinda feeling alone especially being so
>
> far from home and making new friends.

Like Jesse, Sophia's experience increased the value she placed on support and connection "yeah I just really see the beauty of it and how this exchange of feelings and emotions can heal a person's mental and wellbeing and I think that's what I value the most out of life where people that actually care." It is clear, a challenging college transition increases the value placed on social connections. Fortunately, both realized they had to make changes and be proactive for their well-being during their second semester. Sophia reached out for professional and social support during her second semester and Jesse decided to step outside his comfort zone to approach people and introduce himself, along with joining cheer. Jesse and Sophia's quotes gives us insight on the importance of prioritizing social support and connections for students during their first year in college in both two and four-year colleges.

Campus Engagement - "If Someone Doesn't Get Something, The Person Next To You Usually Helps You Out."

Although there were similar characteristics and experiences between the two-year and four-year college students, there was a significant difference in the levels of campus engagement. From the case studies, it was found that four-year college students had a significantly greater social life and networks and a greater sense of community in college compared to the two-year students. Two-year college students generally did not develop a strong connection to campus as they typically did not stay on campus after their class time. These students reported a lot less involvement on campus and social engagement. Octavio was an exception for campus engagement for two-year college students, he was involved in MECHA. Four-year students who moved away and lived in university housing (Edith, Z, and Jesse) reported having extensive peer support in their institutions through formal and informal avenues. They spent a lot of time on campus, socializing and receiving academic support. By living on campus, these students had the opportunity to closely interact with other college students outside of their courses, have more

immediate access to school events and involvements and be involved in student organizations that support them in their academics and career preparation (i.e. Men of Chico, political science organizations, mentor programs, etc.).

It was also found that in their respective HSIs, Jesse, Edith and Z felt a strong sense of community. Edith explained, "Merced is mostly Latino so we all get each other, so we usually like for example, if someone doesn't get something, the person next to you usually helps you out. It's just like a really friendly environment." This perspective was shared by all three of the students: they experienced a strong community and support system on campus. Also, a factor important to acknowledge is that four-year college students were not employed during the school year, which allowed them to engage more on campus. Overall, students enrolled in a four-year college were achieving academically and students enrolled in two-year college reported struggling academically; however, they had a common base. This implies the resources and academic support available is the independent variable for students coming from the same background.

Answer to Research Question 2: Future Self.

This question was developed and analyzed with the interview questions with the Career Goals Pyramid handout and from section III, Future Self, in the interview protocol, with questions such as: "What are your future academic and career goals? If they changed, who/what influenced that change?", "Why do you want to accomplish those goals?", "Do you know the steps you have to take to achieve your goal?", "How do you plan to reach those goals? "What are you doing now that will help you reach your goals?"

After their first year in college, students continued to envision themselves in successful careers and "making a difference" as they did in high school. Most (Annalise, Sophia, Edith, Z, Erick, and Octavio) decided to pursue Bachelor of Arts or related fields (sociology, photography,

political science, and ethnic studies). Rek, Daniel, and Jesse decided to pursue a Bachelor of Science (mechanical engineering, biology, and exercise physiology). Additionally, seven students (Edith, Jesse, Erick, Sophia, Z, Octavio, Daniel) aspired to attain an advanced degree (juris doctorate, doctor of philosophy, and master's degrees) to reach their career aspirations.

Multiple students (Octavio, Sophia, Z, Daniel, Edith) had two career options or "backup" careers. Octavio (teacher/community organizer), Sophia (teacher/school counselor), and Z (paralegal/social worker) reflected career exploration, while Daniel (veterinarian/criminal justice) and Edith (immigrant lawyer/business) expressed a backup career due to the fear of not being admitted to the graduate program needed to reach their career goal. Some kept their career aspirations, although others changed career paths after they attended college. Daniel, Annalise, and Edith were students whose career aspirations remained consistent since high school. Those with one career goal were Annalsie (Photography), Rek (Mechanical Engineering), Jesse (Physician Assistant), and Erick (Sociology Researcher).

Factors in Aspiration Development.

The longitudinal multiple case studies data revealed all students envisioned themselves as college graduates and professionals. Some aspirations developed from exposure to career fields and others from intrinsic motivation; students whose future self-perception developed from exposure and changed career goals from high school to college and the students whose aspirations developed from intrinsic motivation had commonly consistent career aspirations by the end of their first year in college. Data also showed two-year college students generally focused on meeting the academic requirements to transfer to a four-year college, while four-year college students generally focus on their academics and career development during their first year in college. The findings on future self also revealed some students' identified mentors as a

need to help them reach their future goals, which suggests lack of career guidance and lack of clarity on the steps to reach their goals and an area of improvement for the academic institution.

Exposure - "I Was Able To See Myself In This Position."

Some students (Octavio, Erick, Rek, Sophia, Jesse, and Z) developed their aspirations through exposure and identification by the end of their first year in college. In this paper, exposure refers to information presented or interaction with the material pertaining to a particular career field (e.g. internships) and/or individuals in a career. Identification refers to students relating to others based on ethnicity, personal interest, background, or other factors as discussed in the single-case analysis. Through exposure, students learned about career options that sparked their interest and made those careers seem "very doable"; this identification allowed the students to see themselves in those careers. Exposure to careers and individuals influenced these five students to change career aspirations between their junior year in high school and after their first year in college.

Octavio's case study is an example of how exposure and ethnic identification led to his new career aspiration. He aspired to be an educator or community organizer to inspire youth. He explained, "That wasn't always at my top choice, but like through dialogue and like talking to people who are like me, I was able to see that's actually like a really dope position to be in." He referred to a Chicano Studies professor at Ocean View City College and other Latinx professionals and leaders in the community he met through a local education internship program and the youth leadership organization he volunteered with. He further explained,

> They had like people come in and talk about you know, their roles and what they're
>
> doing to make a difference and just having that allowed me to see this was reasonable and
>
> very doable. You know, before then I was always like told like you know 'oh you should

be a doctor you should be an engineer' and then I was just informed about this and being

told about this position and I was able to *see* myself in this position.

Octavio's career aspiration change reflects the impact exposure and representation in career

fields have on first-generation college students' trajectory. Similarly, Rek's exposure to

Mechanical Engineering through the Engineering Academy and his engineering work experience

in an environmental research firm in high school, where he performed junior engineer level work

and interacted with engineers, changed his career aspiration from public service to Mechanical

Engineer. It made him realize he deeply enjoyed that work environment and would like to

continue doing that as a career. Also, Erick was introduced to his new goal career as a Sociology

Researcher by a sociology professor during office hours and by seeing the passion his professors

had for the subject. Similarly, Sophia's exposure and interaction with caring counselors inspired

her new career aspirations to become an academic counselor in order to support other students

with similar backgrounds as her. Z, who in high school aspired to become a speech therapist,

changed career aspirations due to exposure and interaction with peers in her new area of interest,

law. Jesse's career aspiration that developed in high school also developed from exposure,

though his aspiration changed slightly, it was still related to the field of medicine. In high school,

he was introduced to sports medicine during an internship and aspired to become a physical

therapist; then in college he was introduced to physician assistant through another internship and

pivoted his career goal to that.

Exposure and introduction to a variety of career options for first-generation college

students is important due to the lack of information and limited perceived options they often

have going into college. We saw how the students' future self-perception was influenced many

times when they were able to learn about different career options. College is a critical time for

students to prepare for their aspired careers, and without a wide variety of career information and

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representation in leadership positions, they may limit themselves to others imposed on them due to the financial reward and prestige, though it may not be what will utilize their strengths or and would bring life satisfaction.

Intrinsic Motivation- "That Really Made A Biggle Impact."

Other students (Annalise, Edith, and Daniel) had career aspirations that stemmed from strong personal motivation and remained consistent from high school through the end of their first year in college. Edith's case study is one example of consistent career aspirations developed from personal motivation. In high school, she shared how the deportation of her aunt influenced her future career aspirations: "That really made a biggle impact and then that's when I decided to study into immigration law 'cause that is when I was like 'oh, I want to help the people to not get separated from their families.'" She planned to major in Political Science and then go into law school to become an immigration lawyer. Her personal experience with the immigration policies and "heated up" politics motivated her to support and serve the immigrant community, "I think I can be a person that can help those people actually have a voice, so that's why I really want to obtain my degree... go into law school and help those people," she stated once again in college.

Similarly, Daniel's motivation to reach his career aspiration remained consistent. In his junior year in high school, he envisioned himself becoming a veterinarian; he had always loved animals and his cousin's death, who also aspired to become a veterinarian, further convinced him that he "needs" to become one. "So just knowing that he wanted to be one, makes me feel like you know I want to do it for him" he shared. In college, he continued to aspire to become a veterinarian and was majoring in Biology. Regardless, Daniel continued to take the required STEM courses and focus on his goal of becoming a veterinarian. Also, Annalise continued on the path towards her aspired career in art, specifically photography, that has always been of personal interest to her. It is important to note that due to the academic rigor in college for their

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aspired field of study and work, Daniel and Edith have both prepared for backup majors and areas of study by taking alternate courses to minor in those areas, yet they are still focused on their aspired careers.

Career Aspiration Preparation Knowledge.

The results reported in this section are taken from the answers to the interview questions: "Do you know the steps you have to take in order to achieve your goals?" and "What are you doing now to reach your goals?" The case studies showed that the understanding on the steps to achieve their career goal and post-graduation aspirations generally varied according to the institution type they attended. Students enrolled in four-year college, were achieving at higher levels academically and actively engaged in their career exploration in their first-year in college, while generally students enrolled in the two-year college had not begun this process or put it on hold while they navigated the transfer preparation process.

Two-Year College Students- "It's Not Really My Main Focus Right Now."

Daniel, Octavio, Erik, and Sophia had relatively vague understanding of the steps required to achieve their career goals. Their current focus was on meeting the requirements to transfer to a four-year college, not on career or grad school preparation. Erick exemplifies this, he responded the question about understanding the steps to reach his future goals in the following way:

> A little bit I kinda looked into postgraduate work but it's not really my main focus right now because I'm mainly focusing on transferring... [and] how to transition from a two year to a four-year and all that because it's taking up all my time. And of course, having to actually getting the grades in order to transfer...I do know about all that. I really haven't looked into much depth into the postgraduate I will definitely once I'm able to say I'm gonna transfer and stuff like that and then we'll take it from there.

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However, their post-graduation preparation was delayed and most likely shortened because transfer students have roughly two years to adjust to the new college culture, graduate, and prepare for life after college. Many times, the two-year and four-year college systems and policies in place do not allow them to adequately prepare for their post-graduation aspirations and decisions.

Also, Sophia demonstrated little understanding on how to reach her career goal. She said, "I haven't really looked into it, I do know that (pause) I actually don't know (laughs)." She did not have "much time to look into it," but planned to connect with people in that profession for guidance and mentorship to reach her career goal. Daniel demonstrated their vague general understanding and present focus on the transfer process by the end of their first year in college. He understood he needed a particular major and "a lot of dedication, ….giving it 110% on studying... are important steps to completing the goals 'cause if I don't pass the classes I won't be able to transfer and I'll just be stuck, you know, I gotta pass." Once he completed the coursework at his two-year college, he planned to transfer to UC Davis for their strong veterinarian program. Though he was correct about doing well academically, there are additional requirements to reach such a highly trained profession that can be initiated while in college. Like the other students, Daniel had not yet understood the intrinsic process to reach their highly trained career goals, for example, according to the UC Davis Veterinary Medicine website, Daniel will need to meet admission requirements, "substantial" volunteer experience with veterinarians or animal and/or research projects, and pass a board certification exam aside from taking the academic preparation and earning a strong GPA in qualified majors. Having a specialization in a particular area would require further preparation beginning in college. Eric and Sophia had similar responses; they had a general idea of how to reach their career goal: graduate with a related area of study and network.

However, Daniel, Octavio, Eric, and Sophia left out gaining experience through internships, volunteer or student involvements as part of their career preparation, something four-year college students were very well aware of. Through the Promise Program, these students had an academic plan that matched their major and transfer school choice. Their current actions revolve around the courses required to transfer, and as a result had vague knowledge on graduate school and career preparation after their first year in college. Rek and Annalise, had a better understanding of the steps required and what the career entails because they had hands-on experience and knew they needed experience in addition to their degrees to achieve their future goals.

Four-Year College Students- "I'm Already Preparing For [the LSAT]."

On the other hand, Edith, Z, and Jesse, generally, had a better understanding and more specific information of how to achieve their career goals. In addition to focusing on their studies, and being engaged on campus, they actively prepared for their careers through internships, field-specific student clubs, and understood the importance of networks in their area of study to reach their aspirations. By the end of their first year in college, Edith joined a professional law student group, Z was actively looking for internships, and Jesse participated in internships in his career field.

Edith had in-depth knowledge and was specific about the steps required to reach her goals, including the GPA requirements, extracurricular activities, and the law school admissions test (LSAT), "I'm already preparing for [the LSAT]," she shared. She had become involved and actively engaged with the Pre-law Society in her institution. In the same manner, Jesse had developed an in-depth knowledge on how to reach his academic and career goals through his own research and initiative. He learned he needed to attend physician assistant school, "a condensed version of medical school," and will take a "hybrid" of the requirements of nursing

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and medical school. This means Jesse understood he would need to take more courses than the average students in college.

Z had a slight disconnect between the steps needed to take to reach her career goals since she had a recent change in academic and career goal; however, she was actively looking for internships at the local courthouse and had gone to law school info sessions. She planned to reach her goals "step by step" academically and understood the importance of building networks in the law field. Z's longitudinal case study has shown academic excellence, yet a disconnect between education and aspired careers—in high school she aspired to become a speech therapist, but did not aspire to earn a graduate degree, however, one is needed in order to become a speech therapist. In college, she aspired to become a paralegal or social worker and enroll in law school; however, a law degree is not needed for those careers.

The case studies reflected all students envisioned themselves as college graduates and professionals. It was found that four-year institutions have more opportunities, guidance, and resources, which will be discussed in the resource section.

Mentors - "Connect Us To Other People."

When asked what they needed to help them reach their career goals, Jesse, Octavio, Sophia, and Erick stated mentors and peers in the same academic and career field to work towards their future goals. Jesse stated, "just find people who are on the same career path as me perhaps and me just being staying with them, us staying together." Erick also stated he needed to network, "Just building the connections that maybe would help me in the future." Similarly, Octavio asked for guidance and he said, "The school can be a lot of help by you know just connecting us with people who are already doing the work and you know can show us like the way they're doing it, like ways that connect us to other people so we can just learn from them."

Their requests for guidance suggest lack of support in the steps to reach their goals and an area for institutional improvement.

Answer to Research Question 3: Challenges and Resources.

We learn about students' challenges and resources across students' worlds with the "What Are My Worlds" elicitation prompt and questions from section II, "What Are My Worlds," by asking them, "Who/what causes you difficulties in your schoolwork or other school experiences?" and "Who/what provides you with support with your schoolwork or other school experiences?", "How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your school current actions and decisions?", " How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your future aspirations?", and "Tell me about your positive and not so positive experiences in your classes.

The challenges the students encountered during their first year in college were the amount of time dedicated to work and being unprepared for the new academic college culture. The resources they utilized to help move them towards achieving their future goals were cultural brokers, including staff, professors, and peers. Ultimately, the students maneuvered through the college-going process and successfully completed the school year.

Challenges.

Students described challenges to attaining their college and career dreams while navigating their first year in college; the most dominant theme that emerged from the data was the implication of their financial realities in their college experience and career preparation. Another important theme that emerged from some students' narratives was being unprepared for the college culture, including the academic rigor and pace.

Financial Limitations- "After School I Just Go Straight To a Job."

Although through the two-year Promise Program most students received free tuition, Annalise, Sophia, Daniel, Rek, Octavio, and Erick, all rolled in the two-year college, still found

themselves in the need to work while being full-time students to help support their living and personal expenses. These students identified work as a significant challenge during their first year in college. Annalise and Sophia had an especially challenging time as they worked two jobs during the school year. The students stated their need to work (service jobs, e.g. pizzeria, babysitting, waitress/waiter, etc.) minimized the time and strained the energy they dedicated to their studies.

Although most enjoyed their job, gained valuable skills, and met their financial need, it considerably interfered with their schoolwork, especially during the Fall semester because at that time, they had not developed a "balance between school and work." Annalise explained, "After school I just go straight to a job, so the way I see a college student is ...we all work hard for something in life." These students without a question represent hard working, committed college students. Often, they found themselves staying up late at night or getting up early in the morning to finish schoolwork, yet their jobs were not related to their career aspirations. The students were not gaining career-related experience through paid internships or entry level jobs.

On the other hand, the three students (Edith, Z, and Jesse) not employed during the school year were the students that enrolled in a four-year college. Not investing time and energy on a job allowed them to focus on their studies and involvements connected to their career goal as mentioned above. However, Jesse was actively looking for a job during the school year, but was not able to find one, which was a challenge he identified. Then, he worked full-time with a gardening company back home over the summer after his first year in college. "That will help me pay for rent and not have to worry too much about that so that way I can focus more on schoolwork less throughout the year," he shared. Overall, student narratives indicate academic and career development is generally more conducive at a four-year college.

Preparation for the College Culture Support- "I Was Not Prepared For Anything."

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Another important theme that emerged from students' narratives was being "unprepared" for the new academic environment: the expectations, rigor, and independence of college. By the end of their junior year in high school, all students took between 1-12 advanced courses, including AP, Honors, and Dual Enrollment, yet all students had to adjust to their new academic environment. Particularly, Daniel, Octavio, Rek, and Annalise discussed their "rough" college culture transition. The majority of the students realized the different expectations in the way to school effectively in college; they explained the very clear focus shift from assignments and homework to tests, which required more commitment to independent studying, auditory learning, and individual note-taking compared to high school. They also quickly noticed the fast pace of material presented and expected learning in their course. They explained feeling "unprepared" and "like a kid going into the big world and I was not prepared for anything," as Annalise expressed.

Academic Rigor- "Overwhelming and Intimidating."

The academic rigor was also a challenge for the students to navigate. They felt unprepared for "the college world" academically, which made them college transition "overwhelming and intimidating." Octavio and Annalsie struggled with the writing expectations, especially the length of his writing assignments. "I was definitely not used to writing like a ten page essay and that was one of the first-assignments I had to do and I was like are you serious?," Octavio laughingly recalled. Annalise felt it difficult to "impress" her English professor as she was a "hard grader." Additionally, Daniel quickly realized the academic difference between high school and college, "when I got to college it felt like if I was going ten times faster than high school, so it was a transition I was not expecting. A lot harder than I thought." The amount of material covered in a week for an exam was considerably more than he was expecting and prepared for. Though Daniel still envisioned his future self as a veterinarian, after taking college

courses, he began to question that career choice. The rigor of his science classes influenced a possible major and career change. He said "I love science, I think it's very interesting, but for some reason my brain doesn't... It's a lot of different um molecules and atoms, all that glucose whatever you can think of in science." He, like the others, realized the considerably greater amount of time he was required to spend on his studies compared to high school. Academic support resources were vital for the students' college transition.

Academic Independence: "I'd Forget About Dates For Like Specific Assignments."

Also, all students experienced a drastic increase of academic independence in college, as opposed to high school where "things were more laid out" for them. Jesse reflected, "you have the liberty to do almost anything, how you choose to do it." With more independence, students realized the importance of time-management and taking control of their learning. Z, Sophia, Jesse, Erick, Octavio, and Annalise discussed how they struggled with managing study time, class schedules, work, social life, and personal time. Learning what to prioritize and how was a learning process, and some struggled more than others to take control of their college experience. Octavio shared his struggle with time-management, "I wouldn't be able to track time, I'd show up to events late, I'd forget about dates for like specific assignments and that really like set me back my first semester," he had a hard time to grasp control on his responsibilities and commitments as a student emerging into adulthood. Sophia added, "you have a lot of responsibility going on in your life and I think that's a wakeup call and you know like oh you're growing up and you got a lot on your plate to take care of." As a result, their learning experience was impacted. "I wasn't then really capable of managing my time efficiently so I couldn't really do the whole reading instead I just did what I could get notes from my friends from my notes and just hope for the best on the test," Erick explained. The student experiences with increased independence in college reflected the need for high school to prepare students for the college

academic culture, such as note-taking skills, study techniques, and self-discipline to smoothly
transition to college.

Taking control of Their College Education.

Though the students struggled to adjust to the college culture their first semester, some
were able to take control of their learning process. They realized they were responsible for their
learning and college experience and took control during the second semester. Their
determination to succeed in college and reach their goals drove them to learn to navigate the
college culture despite the abrupt high school to college transition. Sophia shared, "I have done
my part in trying to find out like the resources that I need to find in order for me to be
academically successful." Erick also took control of his college education during the Spring
semester and he explored different studying strategies until he found what works for him. "Many
of my friends think I'm weird because I'm wasting a lot of time by just reading ... that's the only
way I can understand it and from there, I just jot it down and then I can remember most things
that I learned and then I do really well in tests," he stated, before adding, "I really took the
initiative and I had to find when I could read, when I could study more and then that ended with
a lot of late nights." Though all students had taken advanced courses and were enrolled in at least
one college preparation program for first-generation and low resourced students, they all
struggled to adjust academically and to the new college culture. Perhaps if college preparation
initiatives align their environment and structure to college, it would help students have a
smoother transition to college. Nevertheless, there was no mention of dropping out of college,
rather, motivated to continue towards their aspirations.

Resources: Cultural Brokers In Multiple Worlds.

Despite the challenges, students utilized emotional and instrumental resources across
their worlds to move towards their future academic and career goals. Students self-identified

more resources on the facilitation prompts and elaborated their responses considerably more on resources than challenges, though, I will only cover the umbrella dominant theme that emerged from the data: Cultural Brokers in multiple worlds. Social relations with cultural brokers encompasses staff, professors, peers and siblings. These social relationships in their school, work, and home worlds served as cultural brokers that served as bridges between their worlds and helped build their academic and career pathway.

Staff- "From the Financial Aid Office To Academic Advising."

Staff in student centers and programs dedicated to support minoritized students, such as counselors and staff in the Transfer Student Center, identity-based support programs, (e.g. gender, ethnicity, first-generation college student status, and academic field specific), and student living communities were a powerful source of support students' school world. Jesse, Erick, Sophia, Z, and Edith shared how college cultural brokers in their school world provided students with information on how to navigate college effectively towards graduation and beyond. For Jesse, Men of Chico, a "minority male support group," was a vital resource that introduced him to the culture of his institution by other male staff and counselors whom he identified with. Male students are introduced to male staff members on campus, "from the financial aid office to academic advising," who make an effort to support and mentor male students as "individuals," and it was successful because he felt understood and supported in academics and life. The Transfer Achievement Program was a vital resource to Erick; he received support from counselors, who in his perspective, truly cared for students' success through mentorship and financial aid support (e.g. scholarships and the Cal Grant applications). Z's cultural brokers were in the residence hall who provided numerous benefits to her first-year college navigation. Her resident assistant (RA) and program coordinator (PC), who lived in the halls along with the students, mentored her in multiple aspects of college life and career preparation. She became

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especially close to her RA who was a fourth year Political Science major, after several conversations and lunches together, Z who was undecided about majoring in Political Science and weather it was the best thing for her in the long-term, was able to learn about the school resources, research career options, and additional steps to take in that degree. At the end, "I was like 'yeah, I do love my major, I love what I'm taking so far,'" she shared. Her PC further facilitated workshops and guided her on the importance of networking, career skills, financial aid, along with other important college and career skills.

   Professors: Identification and Inspiration.

   It was also found that professors were a significant resource for students (Octavio, Jesse, Erick, Edith, and Sophia) to progress towards their aspirations through identification and career inspiration. This theme was more prominent in the narrative of 3 male students (Octavio, Jesse, and Erick). For Sophia and Octavio, professors they identified with provided a sense of belonging and engagement as college students. Sophia explained:

> I find myself in a very diverse room, I would find myself with women professors, I'd have professors of color and which make me comfortable and everywhere I look I have people that look like me in those classrooms that are engaged in the same topic as I am or engaged in the same curriculum that I'm in...and that has helped me to engage more in the classroom rather than focus on my fears and my doubts of what needs to be done in the class.

Sophia compared this experience to her high school advanced course, where she felt silenced and an "outcast." Diverse educators and classmates provided her with the opportunity to engage with the course material and have better learning outcomes. Also, chican@ studies and sociology professors were important cultural brokers for Octavio. His Chican@ Studies professor particular made a significant impact on his first-year college experience and future aspirations

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development; He identified with him, as he is "also a Chicano, so he understands, you know, the experiences that we go through... [he's] also gone through a lot of hardships throughout his life, so he's able to understand you on that level." He expressed that the focus of that class was to equip students with facts to support arguments pertaining to the Latinx population, something other professors do not incorporate into their curriculum. Sophia and Octavio's narrative exemplifies how professors with the same background as their students not only make them engage as learners, feel understood, and included, but also empowered.

Further, for Ocatvio, Erick, and Jesse, their professors were a resource for their career aspirations. Octavio's sociology professor provided sociology resources and she helped him realize the local four-year university was a "really good option" for that major and even provided him with a book from a Latino professor in the university, and "it just got me more motivated to pursue sociology and like being able to make a connection with a professor," he said. Also, Erick acquired passion for his area of study, developed a growth mindset, and was motivated to set high academic and career expectations for himself from his professors. The passion Erick noticed from his sociology professors during lectures influenced his passion for the subject as well. He felt motivated to continue learning, talk to his professors, and ask questions about the area of study because he wanted to become more knowledgeable in the subject. Erick's professors ultimately influenced his deep interest in sociology and interest in a PhD degree.

Peer Mentors and Peer Support - "they were like 'no, you should really take this as an advantage.'"

Additionally, the significant role peer mentors and peer support in their school, work, and home worlds was identified by the students. Formal peer mentors, such as in peer support programs (Z and Edith), and informal peer mentors, such as coworkers and older siblings

(Annalise, Edith, Z, Erick, and Daniel) supported the progress towards their college and career aspirations.

Formal Peer Mentors.

Z and Edith, both enrolled in a four-year college, discussed structured peer mentor programs for first-year students through their own institution that helped them engage on campus and make progress towards their future goals. They received transition and academic support, these mentors oriented them on campus involvement, key networks on campus, insights on how to approach people, and essay writing. Also, they encouraged them to begin actively preparing for their career by exposing them to student organizations or internships. Z had an additional strong structured peer support network through her residence halls. Her resident assistant (RA) and a program coordinator (PC) also provided her with important information on how to navigate college and career exploration resources, such as the importance of networking, career-related opportunities, and financial aid. Peer mentors were able to provide information in a way that is more relevant for new students to understand given the similar recent lived experiences. Formal peer mentoring provided by the institution with training and guidance is a powerful tool to help students transition and adjust to campus and prepare for their post graduation goals.

Informal Peer Mentors.

Informal peer mentors in and outside of school, such as coworkers and siblings, were also found to be powerful resources for the students. Erick discussed the impact informal peer mentors at work and old high school friends enrolled in a four-year college made on his first-year college experience. His coworkers were enrolled at UCSB and were transfer students who motivated him to aim to transfer to a more "competitive" UC:

> I was like 'oh yeah sure' I was actually just deciding on going to one of the UC that I
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> thought maybe would accept me like UC Santa Cruz or something like that, and then they

were like 'no you should really take this as an advantage... Instead you should focus on

going to somewhere where you never thought you would go or at least try to'... and so I

did my Spring semester. I finally like kicked myself in the butt and like went for it.

His coworkers encouraged him to see his two-year college experience as an opportunity to

expand his possibilities for the future, which was crucial in his academic aspirations pathway.

The encouragement and mentorship his coworkers offered Erick was one example of many that

students received from peers outside of school.

Siblings.

Additionally, Annalise, Edith, Z, and Daniel had siblings who attended or previously

attended college at the time of the interview showed to be strong cultural brokers and supported

their progress towards their goals. For example, Annalise's older siblings had earned graduate

degrees, thus they understood how to navigate the higher education system and provided

Annalise with support. Also, Z's older sister who was enrolled in college was "the one that

actually knows what I'm doing, and she understands," she shared when asked about the support

she received. Daniel's older brother's experience in college helped inform his college culture

understanding, specifically, the academic fast pace and the quantity of material learned compared

to high school. Having a sibling understand the culture and expectations of college was found to

be a strong resource.

These vivid descriptions give us an understanding of why and how peer support is an

important component to students' college and career trajectories. Social relations (e.g. staff,

professors, and peers) in students' multiple worlds are clearly a powerful resource for students'

college transition, adjustment, and career preparation in their own perspective and in my

analysis. Additionally, they identified academic support, such as tutoring centers and

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supplemental instructions, as a resource, but they did not elaborate on them, simply mentioned them.

In summary, the students identified stronger and more resources than challenges in their facilitation prompts and interviews. Most stated that they had the resources needed to reach their goals, and it was up to them to take advantage of them. Erick summarized the thoughts of the students attending the two year college at the end of their first year:

> They already provided so much for me like saving up a lot of money for school, they give me all my books for free and all that and definitely the TAP program because they help me see all the schools, they help fund it, they give me motivation everyday that I go to class.

This may reflect students' perception of feeling supported in their respective Hispanic Serving Institutions or it may also be the case that they do not fully have an understanding of their challenges and the institutions' capacity to support their needs.

Answer to Research Question 4: Identity Development.

This section covers the way the challenges and resources the students identified in question two and three impacted their identity development pathway. Questions two pointed to how either exposure or intrinsic motivation influenced the way students perceived themselves in the future. Question three summarized the challenges faced in their college transition and first year experience, the implications of their financial realities, and adjusting to the new college culture. It also summarized how cultural brokers in their multiple worlds supported their progress towards their aspirations. Identity development is a complex process, therefore, I only focus on the academic and career identity captured in a two-year period. This section focuses on the most striking themes found in longitudinal case studies data. The student narratives demonstrated they had developed a community-centered identity and high achieving student identity even further.

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Community-Centered Identity- "to Create a Better World, You Know, I Wanna Make a Change."

The student narratives demonstrated students developed community-centered identities, identities that centered on the wellbeing of their community. It was demonstrated by their motivation and actions in college, future career aspirations, values, and definition of thriving after college. In this paper, community is defined as individuals coming from similar backgrounds and lived experiences, including family, Latinx, and underresourced individuals, basically, people they share life circumstances with.

Based on the lived experiences and challenges they faced in society and the school system, Edith, Sophia, Z, Octavio, Jesse, Z, and Rek expressed their desire to "give back" or "help society," their community, and family in their future careers. After they graduate from college, they aspire to "create a better world," for example, Edith wanted to "help [immigrant] people actually have a voice" and Sophia wanted to help other students with college aspirations reach their goals. Octavio aspired to become a leader in his community; he described himself as a "Chicano" with ambitions to graduate from a four-year university and "coming back to [his] community and doing amazing stuff" as an educator or community leader.

Further, most students identified their family as their main value and motivation in life. An example is Jesse's narrative, he explained, "helping my family to live a life where they don't want to worry about rent or food on the table... and honestly my goals are very simple but ultimately I'm a very motivated kid because of that." He exemplifies all the students as highly dedicated students, determined to reach their career goals in order to help people live better lives and help provide for their family. Also, their definition of thriving encompasses the wellbeing of their family and community.

High-Achieving Student Identity- "work my butt off to be prepared."

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All students in the study maintained a high-achieving, resilient student identity demonstrated by their college goals, current priorities, and values. Their strong student identity was tied to their perceived future self, in order to reach their aspired careers, they must achieve highly in college, and their perceived future self was tied to larger socio-economic challenges, for example, Annalise planned to "work[her] butt off to be prepared" to "hold down a job" that would help her financially and with health insurance. Accordingly, their main goal in high school and by the end of their first year in college was to "do [their] best academically" and earn "good grades" in order to progress towards their future career goals.

Also, Sophia, Z, Edith, Octavio, and Erick aimed to become more connected to their campus socially and academically through student organizations and clubs (e.g. career programs, volunteer), and connect with professors their second year in college to prepare for their careers. Further, all, but Octavio, listed to reach their educational goals and academic opportunities as current priority and that was demonstrated by their resilience and being highly focused on their academics for a better future. Erick, Jesse, Edith, Z, and Daniel stated that earning a graduate degree (e.g. law school, veterinarian school, medical school, PhD programs) was a priority in their life. Also, Z, Edith, and Erick elaborated on the value they place on the opportunity to receive a college education as first-generation college students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. They even felt the pressure to succeed for their family and community. Overall, all students demonstrated being highly resilient despite challenges faced in high school and college in their mission for a better future.

Thriving- "after you've been through all of this, I think that's the least you deserve, to be happy."

It is important to understand the definition of thriving in and after college from the students' perspective in order to better meet their needs and support their goals. From the

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question, "What is your definition of "Thriving" in and after college?", it was found that their definition stemmed from challenging lived experiences as first-generation college students coming from under-resourced backgrounds. Thriving in college was defined as excelling academically while "making sure that it's not destroying you in the process, but instead building you." This explanation illustrates the sacrifices students make while navigating the school system motivated by a better future for themselves, their family, and community. As first-generation college students, navigating the unknown college world created a lot of pressure and stress; thus, three students expressed experiencing happiness as thriving. Erick explained:

> I think the definition for thriving in college would be making sure that you're working hard to get to your goals and making sure that it's not destroying you in the process, but instead building you. That's something I definitely consider thriving and ensuring that you make the best of what you have and take advantage of everything possible that is available to you and making sure that you're still happy at the end of the day...and that you're making good connections with people that will help you in the long term...yeah just be happy at the end of it all just after you've been through all of this, I think that's the least you deserve, to be happy.

As Erick stated, navigating college should help build students become the best version of themselves, not "destroy" them.

Thriving after college was defined as reaching financial stability, the wellbeing of their family and community, and having a happy and healthy lifestyle. Since the students come from under-resourced backgrounds, it is clear why economic stability drives their motivation. The majority of students (Sophia, Edith, Daniel, Octavio, Z, and Jesse) stated financial stability, or "no money issues," was thriving after college. Sophia, Edith, Daniel, and Octavio stated owning a house marked success for them. Also, for Sophia, Edith, and Daniel, thriving included being

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hired in their aspired career, to apply the knowledge they gained in college in their careers, and "keep going up." Further, as Latinx males, Jesse and Octavio stated being "able to provide for [their] family" as succeeding in life. These findings show important links between their lived experience and their college and career aspirations.

In summary, findings of this longitudinal multiple case study research gives us a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of Latinx students navigating the school pipeline determined to reach their goals, and can be used in academic and student affairs when making decisions on policies, training, and dissemination of resources. The implications and discussion of these findings will be discussed in the following sections.

Chapter 6: Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

This chapter is divided into three sections: (a) an analysis of select dominant themes that arose from the raw data, (b) discussion of that data, and (c) limitations and suggestions for future research. With the student narratives at the forefront of my conversations, the first section provides an analysis of the dominant themes in the study, while the second presents an in-depth discussion and implications of the dominant themes. Using asset-based social justice models, this study maps how nine Latinx students navigated their worlds along with the academic pipeline as they moved from their junior year of high school to the end of their first year in college. My research examines how past and present school experiences influence these students' abstract goals and how their concrete actions connect with those aspirations, in addition to tracing how they built pathways across their worlds (families, peers, schools, and communities) to college and beyond. The students' narratives revealed academic, emotional, career, and social challenges and resources, some of which supported their college transition and adjustment, while others hindered it.

Select Themes and Institution Comparisons

Overview

The analysis and discussion include an individual, social, and institutional level of analysis using the Bridging Multiple Worlds Framework and Diverse Learning Environment Model. Although various meaningful findings were revealed in the analysis process of the data (interviews, academic records, and facilitation prompts) across cases, the analysis focuses on four overarching themes shared across cases. The following themes are: (a) Financial Limitations and Financial Aid Policies; (b) Preparation for the College Culture Support; (c) College Adjustment Process: Gatekeepers and Bridges; and (d) Identity and Aspirations Development: An Institutional Analysis. In addition, four areas are covered in the discussion section: (a)

Ultimate Goal of Education in a Multicultural World; (b) Hispanic Serving Institutions as Bridges: Intentional Opportunities for Social Transformation; (c) Knowing the Latinx First-Generation College Students; and (d) Institution-Wide Support Structures.

Analysis

This section is separated into two DLE model levels of analysis: the institution context, which includes students' multiple worlds (home, school, work, community), and within the institution context level of analysis, which explores students' school world. This level of micro-context is explored more in depth later in the chapter. The findings in this study support and supplement much of the research on Latinx and first-generation college students, while offering additional insights and identifying some missed opportunities on behalf of colleges to enhance transition and adjustment for these "rising giants" (Garcia, 2019).

To better contextualize my analysis, I first provide a brief review of the students. The students in this study were diligent and worked hard in high school in order to attend a four-year college by taking advanced courses (e.g. IB, AP, Honors, and/or dual enrollment), exams for college credit (such as AP exams), enrolled in a variety of academic and college-prep programs and organizations, and participated in extracurricular activities. In addition, the students in the study lived in a strong college-going culture community near a UC and attended a high school with college outreach programs and partnerships. Additionally, the local two-year college has a strong transfer culture, which showed the possible pathway from two to four-year colleges.

Using previous research and new analysis of the data gathered in this study, generalizable patterns in the college adjustment process have been identified that have important implications for students' experience and success in college. Keeping the students' profile in mind, their narratives revealed they persisted and made progress towards their college and career aspirations pathway. They navigated uncharted territory without much guidance or resources, yet, their inner

drive to succeed for their family and community that stemmed from their lived experiences, propelled them forward day after day. While students pointed to several expected challenges (financial realities) and support structures (cultural brokers, support programs), their narratives also revealed challenges and resources that unfolded throughout their first-year college experience not covered broadly in the literature.

College-ready students' financial realities had the largest impact on their college transition and first-year experience. In spite of a strong academic background and college prep programs, financial circumstance was a key factor in their college choice and how their time was spent during their first year in college. In addition, some students experienced significant emotional distress and struggled with the college culture transition, yet their desire to actualize their goals was stronger, and subsequently, they reached out for support, made adjustments, and stepped outside their comfort zone. With key social relationships, such as institutionalized and informal college brokers in and outside their school world, they continued on their pathways towards their aspiration. College-going peers were especially influential to help move them towards achieving their future goals for these students. Students' challenges and resources impacted their identity development as they developed community-centered and high-achieving student identities. Also, aspirations were developed by exposure or intrinsic motivation for the students in this study.

Deeper analysis revealed students experienced multiple layers of challenges and resources that influenced their development of academic and career aspirations, suggesting some missed opportunities on behalf of colleges to enhance transition and adjustment for these "rising giants" (Garcia, 2019). The findings from this study suggest institution-wide intentionality and student awareness are crucial to effectively serve first-generation Latinx college students. It is only by understanding the students' trajectory and experiences that institutions can effectively

serve them. They put their hope in the education system in that it will provide for a better future for themselves, their family, and their community, and academic institutions are in a position to make structural pivots to meet the students where they are for social transformation. HSIs particularly need to examine how their curriculum, policies, and pedagogies serve the sustained and growing student population because these institutions are "key drivers to economic and social mobility for students" (Martinez and Santiago, 2020, p.12). For the benefit of society as a whole, Latinx students need to develop their full potential and thrive in college and beyond.

Review of Frameworks

Before delving into the analysis, I first provide a brief overview of the Bridging Multiple Worlds (Cooper, 2011) and Model for Diverse Learning Environment Model frameworks (Hurtado et al., 2012). Both frameworks center on the institution's role in promoting equity, competencies for a multicultural society, and ultimately, social transformation through inclusive practices for diverse student outcomes. The Bridging Multiple Worlds framework (BMW) (Cooper, 2011) examines how youth navigate their multiple worlds (families, peers, schools, communities, etc.)—confronting "mismatches"(challenges) and "build[ing] bridges" (resources)—to progress towards their academic and career aspirations. This model explains that students encounter cultural brokers (staff, faculty, and peers), who help bridges across worlds, and gatekeepers (staff, faculty, and peers), who create obstacles along their pathways (p. 11). With this framework, cultures, identities, and academic pathways are analyzed to examine the "academic pipeline problem" mentioned in the introduction.

The Multicontextual Model for Diverse Learning Environment (DLE model) (Hurtado et al., 2012) is a campus climate conceptual model that examines how microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems level contexts prompt "social transformation or the reproduction of inequality" in a diverse society (p. 103). In short, these interrelated systems in the curricular

(course content, teaching methods, pedagogies) and cocurricular (programming, activities, practice) spheres center on the identities of students, faculty, and staff. It explains how the student context is nested within the institution and the institution context is nested within the larger policy context, all influencing each other. The objective of the model is for institutions, especially "broad access institutions," to be cognizant of delivering inclusive and intentional practices to foster "habits of mind" or "skills for lifelong learning," competencies for a multicultural world, and achievement, inclusive of retention, and degree attainment for equity and social transformation. This model is used to examine higher education's area of growth as it pertains to the findings of this study.

Financial Limitations and Financial Aid Policies.

Using the institutional context in the DLE campus climate model (Hurtado et al., 2012), the external factors—the exosystem and the macrolevel dimensions—which had the greatest impact on the students' college experience and progress towards their academic and career goals were financial limitations and financial aid policies. The narratives demonstrated that coming from a financially disadvantaged background has a wide, long-lasting implications for students, including college choice, and college and career preparation experiences.

College Choice.

The students in this study reflect the literature on Latinx students' college choice, which identifies the influence of students' financial realities (Zell, 2010; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008). During the college choice decision-making process, students experienced "cross-pressure" in their different worlds. Though all were diligent and worked hard in high school in order to attend a four-year college, Sophia's, Erick's, Octavio's, Rek's, and Daniel's college pathway diverged to a two-year college due to their financial reality. Erick shared, "I was left with the decision 'uh do I go to CC and do the financially responsible thing,

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or go to Fullerton and then maybe things can work' ...it came down to me just knowing I'm becoming an adult, I should make the most important decisions, and I did and I went to CC, ultimately." Regardless of the college acceptance as Erick indicates, college choice was made based on finances for these students. This is important to highlight because as stated in the literature review, college choice is associated with student outcomes, and ultimately, has long-term effects for the student's educational journey (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Perez & McDonough, 2008).

While financial limitations aligned with previous studies, the data in this study challenged other research findings. Literature states secondary level institutions play a critical role in the college decision-making process for Latinx students (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Ceja, 2006). Contrary to some research that state that first-generation Latinx students often lack college preparation, college application knowledge, and guidance (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009), the students in this study had college preparation, application knowledge, and guidance through advanced courses and AVID and/or the Access Program. Yet, the college choice of most of the students in this study still reflected that of the state and national patterns for Latinx students discussed earlier. The dominant college choice for these students was not qualifications, rather the majority were admitted to a four-year institution. Though due to financial concerns, all two-year college students expressed the Promise Program's two-year free tuition as the only viable option to access higher education. In this way, they aligned with literature that states that it is common for them to perceive two-year colleges as the only option to access higher education (Salas et al., 2018), though not because of incompetency or preparation. In addition, as opposed to research that states that peers significantly influence students' academic behavior with post-high school decisions (Gandara & Contreras, 2009), the students in this study made decisions independent of

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their friends. Most of their friends enrolled in a four-year institution as they had all planned and prepared for together. This implies secondary institutions must reexamine their college preparation efforts with the financial needs and school experiences of this student population.

Educational pathway divergence is particularly important to pay attention to for first-generation, first-year college students due to their dependence on institutional resources and guidance to help them reach their goals in college and beyond as the first in their family to navigate that unfamiliar territory. Also, literature and data from this study demonstrate four-year institutions bring a multitude of benefits for these students (e.g. campus engagement, more high-impact activities available, peer mentor programs) that will be discussed below.

Time Investment.

During their first year in college, two and four-year students dedicated their time outside of lecture differently. Four-year college students did not have paid jobs during their first year in college. Instead, they spent their time outside of lecture engaged in campus activities, programs, and extracurricular activities. It is possible that the students who decided to enroll in a four-year college took out loans, though I did not directly ask students. On the other hand, the local two-year college students experienced "cross-pressure" in their different worlds (Cooper, 2011). Due to their financial realities and close proximity to family, they had immediate external commitments, such as employment and family responsibilities. Although the Promise Program covers tuition, fees, and books for two years, the local community has a high cost of living; thus, basic needs were still unmet for the students, which required them to assist their family financially by working, and as in Annalise's and Sophia's cases, it required them to work two jobs.

Students expressed that their jobs took up a significant amount of time and energy outside of their courses, which consequently took time away from their studies, making campus

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connections, and developing career preparation. It is important to note they all worked in service jobs, which created important implications for their career preparation during college that should be underscored. Though all types of work provide disciplinary and valuable skills, which are important characteristics for career development, this energy was not channeled towards the acquisition of the skills and experience needed for their respective aspired careers. More importantly, as future transfer students, they will have limited time (i.e. 2-3 years) to prepare for life after graduation in college, and consequently, this may leave students unprepared for the workforce despite many years of hard work to reach their academic and career aspirations. Thus, it is important to provide two-year college students with more funded high-impact activities to offset their need to work jobs that do not connect to their aspirations. We must ask, what career development opportunities are available at two-year colleges and in what form? How accessible are they? This will be discussed further below.

Taken together, equity in college access and career preparation can be achieved via increased financial aid and institutional policy. In the case of these students' experience, despite the free two-year college program, all two-year college students were required to work outside of college, which implies that financial issues remained. A holistic financial aid reform, which adjusts the total cost of assistance and increases need-based financial aid support in the form of federal aid policies, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), HSI and MSI grants, emergency grants, institutional financial aid packets, and funded high-impact activities, would allow students to participate in more academic and career development opportunities.

In addition, a bigger presence of financial aid centers is needed at the high school level, "taking into account familial expectations and historical and cultural contexts" of first-generation and minoritized students (Schneider, p.400, 2015), to clearly lay out how students can fund

college at the local, state, and national level from freshman through senior year. Sophia narrates why this is needed, she explained, "It seemed impossible for me to attend any of the schools I wanted to go to or the ones I got accepted to, and I did get to a point where I was applying to scholarships but... I thought that my chances were pretty low and at some point in my high school career I kinda lost hope where I wasn't gonna go to a four-year university." Her experience demonstrates the urgent need for more financial aid support services in high school. More articulation of financial aid opportunities, how to search and apply for scholarships and internships, and the realities of the financial cost of a college education need to be provided to students to avoid such drastic pathways divergence that have emotional repercussions for students such as Sophia. The structures suggested are already in place, however, more financial and manpower devoted to these services are needed. To take this a step further, as Rek stated, free public education should be a right, nor should education be a burden for students and their families. Since the colleges are increasingly comprised of Latinx students, our nation will only go as far as Latinx students go. As the largest growing population, if Latinx students lack opportunities because of their inability to pay for college, the economy and country as a whole will suffer in the long run.

Preparation for the College Culture Support.

The school world, or within institution context, is explored more in depth in the students' college transition and first-year experience narratives. This level of analysis includes microsystem (individual and roles) in curricular and cocurricular spheres, such as students' "classes, jobs, friendship groups, and roommates" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 74), and the mesosystems, spheres of interaction between those microsystems (navigating those worlds). The analysis also examines the frequency and quality of interaction between social identities (behavior dimension) in formal and informal curricular and cocurricular context. Though it is

acknowledged that student life (Greek life, student organizations) and basic needs (housing and food security) are important for first-generation college students' well-being and academic success, those factors are beyond the scope of this paper.

Another dominant theme found in the data was feeling unprepared for the academic college culture in students' first year in college. As Annalise shared, "I felt like a kid going into the big world and I was not prepared for anything." This small excerpt can be read as an example, implying that students have very little information on what college is and how it works. Despite students' rigorous college preparation, the case studies of students enrolled in the two-year college demonstrate the students did not yet understand the college culture, were not prepared for the academic demands, and especially struggled with the unexpected academic pace, expectations, and new-found independence. However, although Latinx students did not initially feel prepared to succeed academically (Zell, 2010), their will to succeed for themselves and their family was stronger (Zell, 2010; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009).

Literature on college transition states there should be greater effort made to provide more comprehensive first-year student orientations, which are specifically tailored to provide essential knowledge needed to effectively transition and understand the university culture, including academic, basic needs, social living, important locations, services, and extracurricular activities (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, providing this knowledge at orientation may be too late for many first-generation college students. Instead, information should be emphasized earlier in their academic journey, such as in early high school. The findings from these narratives suggest that high schools can adjust their institution-wide models and take the responsibility to prepare students for college more seriously. One area students identified as a challenge was the increased responsibility and self-accountability that came with independence; thus, if students are given the opportunity to develop their independence and self-discipline in college, their college transition

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may be smoother. Also, high schools can partner with college readiness summer sessions where students are able to acquire readiness skills over the summer in high school, engage with peers, and understand the college culture expectations before they are expected to navigate it independently.

College Adjustment Process: Gatekeepers and Bridges.

 Building academic pathways to their aspired careers requires mindful navigating among worlds, challenges, and resources in high school and college. During the college transition process, students must learn to navigate their multiple worlds: "students must find ways to access needed on and off campus resources and do what is necessary to deal with stresses in order to maintain a positive well-being and reach an optimal level of college adjustment" (Ubaldo, 2011, p. 35). The data showed students' transition and adaptation to their new social and academic environment was challenging for both two and four-year college students. However, all also had strong commitments to their aspirations. Students drew motivation from their families' financial challenges, pre-college programs, cultural brokers, and social resources in formal and informal domains to adjust to the new college environment. As reflected by Daniel, "I have a mindset that I'm gonna pass, and if I can tell if I'm struggling you know I go seek for help whether it's the professor or whether it's a tutor center or you know math center or science lab or something just to ensure that I'm getting all the material or understanding all the material." Daniel's comments reflect how the students in this study took control of their learning experience after a difficult fist-semester or quarter transition by reaching out to cultural brokers and changing academic and social patterns to adjust to college.

Emotional distress

The increasing numbers of Latinx students in higher education enrollment demonstrates these students' resilience and the progress made by the academic institutions, yet there is still a

lot of work to be done in the area of meeting students' emotional needs. A significant theme that emerged from the student narratives was the drastic social adjustment that occurs for students in both two and four-year colleges and results in emotional distress (e.g. "stigma," isolation, and mental health issues), which deeply impacted their wellbeing in college. As stated in the statement of the problem and literature review chapters, the culture clash between the institution and the students results in students having to navigate their pathway without being understood by family or the institution, which creates tremendous pressure and an overwhelming experience. The literature further states the importance of "sustained academic and emotional support from high school through college" (Cooper, 2011, p. 86), though many times that is not offered to students' along their educational pathway.

Sophia, Erick, Jesse, and Edith are all highly ambitious students and their college adjustment processes give us insight on the emotional needs specific to the first-generation Latinx college students' social adjustment experience. Navigating different worlds (school, family, friends, and work) resulted in tension and pressure to succeed with high expectations from people in their multiple worlds and created a sense of social isolation from others not part of their new forming worlds. As Jesse shared, "life is very hard to go through and if you don't have people who have your back or you know can share your experiences with, and for me you know... I kinda went through the first semester kinda feeling alone." His experience during the college transition is one example of the emotional experiences students have when navigating in their new forming world. It is critical that all school agents "should be sensitive to the complex and deep relationships that manifest in these students' lives" (Bradbury & Mather, 2009, p. 277). The emotional health of students should be a priority along with academic and social integration in first year in college. It is also important to have clear communication and coordination within

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and across units and departments to connect students and prevent students from navigating emotional distress on their own.

The definition of thriving used in this study includes not only academic and social engagement, but also emotional engagement, or "a level of psychological well-being that contributes to their persistence to graduation and allows them to gain maximum benefit from being in college" (Schreiner, 2010, p. 4). One way to encourage emotional engagement is to educate students as a whole person, centered on their identities, in curricular and cocurricular multicultural practices (Garcia, 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2012; Rendon, 2009) in order to support diverse identities to thrive. Rendon's work on inclusive pedagogies, ways of knowing, intelligences, and validation is a way educators can support Latinx students' emotional well-being and ultimate success in college and beyond.

One approach is *sentipensante*, which fosters inclusive pedagogy and ties student and faculty identities. Laura Rendon's book, *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Education for wholeness, social justice and liberation* (2009), envisions transforming the education system to a more humane institution using a multicultural perspective. Rendon stresses the importance of implementing a holistic and multicultural approach to teaching and learning in the context of social justice by weaving in philosophies and knowledge of her Latina ancestors with current Western educational theories. Rendon borrowed the term *Sentipensante* from Eduardo Galeano (1989), and she quotes Galeano's "'celebration of the Marriage of Heart and Mind' (p. 121). The word *sentimensante* comes from a combination of two Spanish words: *sentir*, which means to sense or feel, and *pensar,* to think" (p. 131). With it, she explores the balance between intellectualism and intuition. She gives these concepts equal importance and interdependence for the well-being of not only the student, but society as a whole. Further, a main purpose of her framework is to help "students release limiting views about themselves, fostering high

expectations and helping students to become social change agents" (p. 1). Rendon highlights wholeness (mind, body and spirit), multiculturalism, self-esteem, and empowerment as the ultimate goals of education for social change in her book. Thus, from what was covered above on what constitutes a thriving Latinx student population, *sentipensante* is an unconventional framework that can be explored by institutions to address emotional wellbeing and let students know they are cared about as a whole, not just their academic success. Sophia supports this approach after her emotionally challenging semester when she saw "how this exchange of feelings and emotions can heal a person's mental and wellbeing and I think that's what I value the most out of life where people that actually care." Bringing care (feel and think) to the academic institution can be transformative for students.

Peers as Cultural Brokers: Critical Bridges.

On the other hand, social relationships were a positive support for the students on the path towards their aspirations. It is well documented that cultural brokers within the school world (professors and other institutionalized agents) are foundational for student success (Hurtado et al., 2012; Cooper, 2011; Ibañez et al., 2004; Rendon, 1994). Also, Ibañez et al.'s (2004) study found that relationships in school and family were the key motivating factor for all Latinx students. In addition, the numerous research reviewed in Cooper's (2011) book found that generally, "siblings, peers, and teachers" play a supportive role, albeit to a "lesser degree," than compared to supportive parents (p. 117). On the contrary, this was not the case in this research study and peers were found to be one of the most influential resources for the students. The role of peers, including siblings, as cultural brokers in the college transition and navigation process has not been given the acknowledgement it merits.

Recent research has shown peer social interaction that involves shared personal characteristics (values and views) are associated with a sense of belonging in college and that

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peer academic interaction with shared academic concerns and peer expression of care are associated with "mattering" in college (Cole et al. , 2020). Cole et al.'s research emphasizes the vital role peers have in students' transition and first-year college experience. Aligning with the literature, the students in my study identified peers as a key resource bridging their multiple worlds (home, school, and work) and helped build bridges along their academic and career pathway. In the academic world, knowledge-sharing and peer mentoring for social and academic adjustment, especially with upper-class students and resident hall advisors, has been identified as a resource in the Latinx student transition to College (Hurtado et al., 1996). Strikingly, peer mentors outside of their school world (e.g. siblings and coworkers) are generally not considered vital school cultural brokers or validators, despite what was found to be for the students in this study.

Peer Mentors.

The student case studies demonstrated the integral role formal and informal peer mentors play in the transition in a first-year college year experience. This distinctive network of emotional and practical support, such as advice on choosing a major, common career goals, and college knowledge-sharing, helped students move towards their goals. Peer mentoring creates less intimidating relationships, provides access to information the student did not have before, and provides a peer who is someone students can relate to and share similar experience with. Formal peer mentor programs, where students receive strong peer support through institutional formal avenues, were a prominent factor of student life for students enrolled in a four-year college. Institutional programs with peer mentors allowed students to develop positive relationships with peers, especially when they felt isolated or invisible in other places on campus. In their interviews, Edith, Z, and Jesse identified institutionalized peer-mentor programs in residence halls and first-year student courses, and identity-based programs that helped them.

These programs at a four year college create a shared bonding experience as most of the new students navigating their first-year in college are the same age, away from home for the first time, and are eager to make new friends. In catering to these factors and experience, the institution allows for more identification between peers.

On the other hand, two-year college students did not report participating in programs that provide formal peer mentors; however, they encountered peer support outside of campus. Informal peer-mentors such as coworkers and old high school friends shared knowledge and motivation to these students. As Erick explained in his discussion of his coworkers, "they have big dreams and they kinda helped me forge my own," further, "[they]really instilled the idea that I can do it." That is not to say formal peer mentorship programs are not found in two-year colleges, but these findings indicate these programs may not be as easily available for first-year students to locate. Thus, students enrolled in the two-year college were found to have a more difficult time finding supportive social relationships on campus. To address this challenge, institutions can facilitate learning communities for increased peer interaction on campus. As the first or one of the first in their family to navigate college, these students generally do not have pre-existing connections or the social capital to leverage on. Rather, they navigate college learning and build relationships as they go. Therefore, it is vital for school agents, or "institutional bridges" to reach out to this student population (Hurtado et al., 2012; Rendon, 1994;). Two-year colleges have the power to further nourish and align peer networks for students.

It was also found in this research that strong peer support was provided through siblings. As first-generation college students, Latinx students rely less on parents for academic and career information, and more on other social networks, such as professors. However, the role of siblings as cultural brokers in their educational trajectory is understudied. The available research on

siblings has found they simultaneously have a role as a family member and as a social network, which puts them in a highly influential position for assisting with the educational experience of Latinx students. For instance, while examining the college-choice process of first-generation to college "Chicana" students, it was found that siblings who have attended college have "paved the path to college" (Ceja, 2006) for their younger siblings. Another study found this population relies on older siblings familiar with the college culture for college information and validation (Zell, 2010).

Furthermore, it has been found that older siblings who have attended college, broaden the perceived opportunities available to them, and provide motivation for their siblings to attend college (Alfaro & Umaña-Taylor, 2010). From his study on "Chicana" high school students, Ceja (2006) reports that they are able to see college as a reality, "older siblings are able to provide support and guidance based on personal accounts of their own collegiate experiences, something that many of these parents did not have the opportunity to do themselves" (p. 98).

This study supports the literature in which older college-going siblings built strong bridges across the students' home and school worlds. Z shared, "My mom wouldn't understand if-o-like the difference between a B, a C. I have to say like '*Uh quatro contra un diez y algo asi,*'" or a four versus a ten in Mexico's school grading system. Her older sister was "the one that actually knows what I'm doing, and she understands." As Z indicates, siblings are in a unique position to share the home and school world, allowing them to share their learned capital and provide support and guidance based on personal accounts of their own collegiate experiences with the younger siblings (as identified by Z, Annalise, Daniel, and Edith). Z further demonstrates the impact her older sister made on her journey as she prepared for college, "Having her as a resource to teach me like 'okay this is what you *should* do, this is what you *shouldn't do*, these are the classes that you *should* take, these are the classes that you *shouldn't*

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take." Z's narrative shows how older students support their younger siblings and pass information from one another.

With such powerful, yet minimal work on siblings as cultural brokers for Latinx students, it is clear that more investigation is needed. This study served as a valuable window into how siblings serve as cultural bridges for Latinx students' educational pathway, and how in those relationships first-gen college students are bridges for each other. Often, we focus on examining who helps underrepresented students in many domains, but rarely do we ask who they in turn help.

It is worth noting that students in the study identified more resources than challenges, which reflects the way these students see opportunity and are determined to take it, although it also may reflect the narrative of sole responsibility they put on themselves to achieve their goals. When asked the question, "How can your school help you reach your goals?", students had a hard time identifying what they needed and repeatedly shared the ways their school provided resources. This finding aligns with Bukoski & Hatch's (2016) study on men of color, who are socialized to "stand on their own," but systematically are not given the opportunity to do so.

Identity and Aspirations Development: An Institutional Analysis.

Students negotiate identities across their multiple worlds (Syed et al., 2011, p. 27). The school world, or academic institutions, are an important component of the student identity development process (Means & Pyne, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2012; Cooper, 2011) for minoritized college students. In the academic environment, identity development is influenced by the exploration of institutional structures and opportunities students have in relation to their socioeconomic status and the degree to which they are accessible. For example, schools with more accessible academic and career opportunities allow students to expand their identity development, while students with limited exploration opportunities may commit to fewer identity

possibilities. (Cooper, 2011). Also, Gandara & Contreras (2009) found that the lack of exposure to opportunities can give low-income students an altered view of the world and "limited vision of possibilities that exist in it" (p. 32). The findings in this study support previous research: after their first year in college, it was found that exposure to opportunities in high school and college and/or intrinsic motivation influenced students' emerging identity development. The student narratives also revealed that the understanding of the steps required to reach that career goal was influenced by institution type, two vs. four-year college, due to the different institutional structures and opportunities. Not having a clear understanding on how to achieve their goals was a theme in their junior year in high school and after their first year in college. Taken together, an inclusive, equitable institution that exposes a wide range of options for the future to students supports a positive identity development and student success in college and beyond.

Institutional Socialization Process.

If academic institutions have such great power over the minoritized student development, we must bring our attention to the institutional socialization process. The education system is a social reproduction institution, in which the dominant norms, messages, rules, tools, and modes of ways of being shape students for the larger society (Garcia, 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012). The Diverse Learning Environment model (2012) emphasizes the importance of the socialization process with diverse students' experiences in mind and "in preparation for work/life in the larger society" (Hurtado et al., 2012, pp. 83-4). Hurtado et al. (2012) state that "if higher educations' goal is to improve both individual and social mobility and advance social equity, educators have to adopt the stance of a resocializing agent" (2012, p. 84). The Bridging Multiple Worlds framework (2011) and the Diverse Learning Environment Model (2012) center on the importance of students' multiple identities in their educational experience, "knowing more about the student is critical to the process of inclusion in both curricular and cocurricular spheres of

college" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p. 72). Heterogeneity within the Latinx student populations in the country, and even within states, is important to consider. Each institution is unique in their student demographics and community environment, and thus in order to intentionally serve students, leaders and practitioners must know the students they serve (Garcia, 2017, 2019).

Community-Centered Identity.

To know more about students, one must understand their experiences and cultural values. For first-generation Latinx college students, the first-year in college is a dynamic one as it is a key identity formation stage (Cooper, 2011), while retaining some core values. As previously discussed, financial limitations affected students' college choice, college experience, and career preparation experiences; thus, it was a significant factor that ultimately informed the students' identity development in this study. Given the impact financial limitations had on their lives, they aspire to graduate from college to not only increase their quality of life, but also "give back" to their family and community, who also struggle financially. Also, data demonstrates the students share a collectivist cultural framework that is carried with them to college and their aspirations. Further, the study found that although the students did not feel confident or prepared to succeed academically based on past academic experiences, their will to succeed for themselves and their family was strong. In concordance, scholars highlight the need to include and educate parents in the college decision process (Kimura-Walsh, et al., 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Students' past educational experiences also strengthened their resilience and tolerance of ambiguity, while hardships in parents' lives played a central role in students' college and career aspiration and identities (Cooper, 2011). For example, Jesse illustrates this financial implication: "[I need to] take the burden that they have of trying to keep us all like alive onto myself." Elaborating further, Jesse also said, "my step dad, since he is the breadwinner, he's older, he's 62 at the moment and he (chuckles) works in the fields and I'm just like 'yo I need to try to get

through this.'" Jesse's statements demonstrate his feelings of financial obligation towards his family because of the collective hardships.

In addition to financial incentives, students anticipated working in their careers on behalf of their family and Latinx community. Edith explained, "I think I can be a person that can help those people actually have a voice so that's why I really want to obtain my degree...go into law school and help those people." As described in the literature, giving back to their family and communities stem from the value Latinx students place on "familism" and connectedness, the prioritization of family (Cooper, 2011). The findings suggested students did not see reaching their goals as individual success, but rather they conceptualized it as community success. It was very clear the students prioritize collectivism, community needs, unity, selflessness, over individual interests. On the other hand, the European-American culture values independence and individualism in the identity developmental process, which as a result may be a confusing developmental process for Latinx youth navigating different cultural values (Moreno, 2016; Hill & Torres, 2010). Thus, it is important for institutions and school agents to support the students' community-oriented identity and have other culturally appropriate practices in place that help them navigate the different cultural expectations they face.

Institutional Career Preparation.

Another important finding in the case studies pertaining to aspirations and identity development is their career preparation experience. The year 2045 marks an important year for the workforce of the nation. By 2045, the steady demographic shift in the United States will in effect create a labor force composed of predominantly People of Color (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). It is expected that the majority of Baby Boomers and the generation after them- who are also predominantly white- will be retired (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). With that fact, a report by Georgetown University states that "the nation must face up to a need to train more of its workers

for the growing high-skill jobs that play an increasingly central role in the post-Great Recession economy" (Carnevale, et al., 2016, p.33).

Specifically to the Latinx community, there has been a lot of recognition and resources provided to address the academic barriers Latinx first-generation college students face, but less attention has been given to the career preparation opportunities for these "rising giants" (Garcia, 2019). The Latinx labor force is expected to increase "3 percent every year, while participation is expected to decrease for non-Hispanic Whites;" thus, Latinx student success is directly tied to the success of the nation (Martinez & Santiago, 2020, p. 8). Given these trends, particular attention should be given to the Latinx career skill development as it is crucial to the nation's need for a competitive workforce, strong civic leadership, and collective social and economic success (Martinez & Santiago, 2020; Hurtado et al., 2012).

While the ultimate goal of pursuing a higher education is for a successful career, Zell (2010) argues that the majority of students lack a clear plan or goal. The disconnect between career aspirations and clear plans is attributed to the ineffective or inadequate resources and information available to students. Consequently, first-generation college students are unable to make well-informed decisions in college to help them attain their career goal. Salas, et al., (2018) explain that students make choices "based on a combination of knowing why (aspirations), knowing how (gaining knowledge and skills), and knowing whom (sources of information about college and careers)" (p.48). In other words, not only do aspirations, but also the information, opportunities, and cultural brokers available to students, shape their decisions. Therefore, career related information and opportunities is crucial.

From the results in this study, we learn early career and professional preparation experience and opportunities in college are important to examine. We need to better identify the missing links between first year college experience and professional development, which is still

often viewed as an obsolete factor in the college adjustment process. Also, this observation aligns with previous research that stated that Latinx students have high academic and career aspirations (Chavira, et al., 2016; Cooper, 2011; Ubaldo, 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Chaidez, 2008; Conchas, 2001; Kao & Tienda, 1998) and are highly motivated to succeed in school (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). However, in high school and in college, data revealed that students had a clear understanding of how to become competitive college applicants, but had a vague understanding of the steps required to reach their career goals. The students reported a lack of knowledge and confidence to successfully graduate college and transition to their desired career. As a result, nine out of twelve students reported a need for career and skill related preparation and guidance from their school. Octavio demonstrates this: "The school can be a lot of help by you know just connecting us with people who are already doing the work and you know can show us like the way they're doing it like ways that connect like connect us to other people so we can like like just learn from them." As Octavio indicates, these students relied on cultural brokers at school to provide college and career guidance. This gap in knowledge often overwhelmed Latinx students because as children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, they feel pressure to be college graduates and have a financially rewarding career. The findings suggested they did not understand the implications and potential connection of their day-to-day success in school to attaining their long-term aspirations.

Though a small student sample, the narrative demonstrated students enrolled in a two-year college had less opportunities for career preparation and exploration due to their work demands, lack of college engagement, lack of institutional career preparation opportunities, and focus on academic requirements to transfer. Conversely, students enrolled in four-year colleges were actively exploring their career identities during their first year in college. The student and their families may not have the understanding on the specific steps required to realize their

aspirations, but they have the tenacity and navigational capital to navigate unchartered territory. It is important for academic institutions to be more involved in the career preparation of students, beyond providing students a list of majors and careers, college fairs or representative visits in both high school and two-year colleges.

In fact, it is the responsibility of the institution and institutional agents to serve as bridges and support the students' career goal preparation, while being more involved in the process for first-generation and minoritized college students (Kezar et al., 2020). Academic institutions have the potential to prepare the workforce of tomorrow and can easily implement what scholars have identified as high impact activities (i.e. high-touch practices) to prepare the growing number of Latinx in the workforce (Garcia, 2019; Terris, 2009). Social justice models in education, such as the Diverse Learning Environment (Hurtado et al., 2012), Bridging Multiple Worlds (Cooper, 2011), and Latinx-Enhancing Organizational Identity (Garcia, 2019), emphasize the importance of culturally competent career-preparation due to the large number of Latinx enrolled. High impact educational practices include experiential learning, such as internships, study abroad, research, learning communities, etc. (Garcia, 2019; Terris, 2009). These culturally relevant practices can support students' learning by applying the material to real life and connect to their larger world in a meaningful way and help them develop critical thinking and skills for the future (Terris, 2009). Studies have found that Latinx students who have more career exploration activities are more "confident in their ability to accomplish tasks related to career decision making" and "more likely to have a clear vision of their goals, strengths, and interests," (Gushue et al., 2006, pp. 313-314).

Further, it has been found that a career-centered education and programs are most effective. Scholars suggest institutions provide career-related courses for increased student engagement and motivation to expose students to different career opportunities (Nitecki, 2011;

Conchas, 2001). Also, Nitecki (2011) states that exposure to "career-focused coursework" leads to high confidence and ultimate retention and transfer rates. As such, two-year colleges are encouraged to commit to facilitating professional development and career preparation in and out of the classroom, such as vocational programs or "career-focused programs." Internships are especially important as they further help students develop professional skill, find their field of work, and engage in college, consequently, encouraging students to persist in higher education. It is important to note that this research on academic programs is based heavily on females (68%) and other ethnicities (6% Latinx students were included in this study).

It is important for those who work with this population to be mindful of "experiences of working students and how such experiences might be used to grow college and career aspirations." For example, "differentiated, purposeful, and institutionally driven" career counseling." Also, "community networks, which are more important to the Latinx students, can be leveraged as opportunities to enhance knowledge of and pathways toward careers" (Salas, et al., 2018, p.61). For this, commitment is needed from the entire institution to carry-out these initiatives.

Another important area of post-graduation preparation is graduate school preparation. Even less literature has emphasized the importance of graduate school information and resources in two-year colleges. Graduate school is further complicated for students who begin their academic career in two-year colleges. There are no graduate programs in these institutions for students to have an understanding of the implications or benefits of graduate school. Further exposure to research and upperclassman mentor opportunities are not available. This is a critical aspect of a graduate school that two-year college students are largely missing out on. Having graduate student mentors or shadowing graduate students can help with feeling overwhelmed and becoming familiar with the research process (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2018). Since the majority

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of Latinx students begin their college career at two-year colleges, Latinx students are at a disadvantage in professional development and graduate school preparation. Nevertheless, Zell's (2010) study on the psychological experience of Latinx student in two-year college found that they hold "a sense of purpose in life, described in part as a desire to help their families, their communities, and society was a powerful motivating factor in attaining a college education"(p. 182). Therefore, even with the lack of adequate resources and information for their career preparation, Latinx students' inner drive serves as a protective factor to persist and reach their career aspirations.

The article, "Tapping Latino Talent: How HSIs are Preparing Latino Students for the Workforce" by Martinez and Santiago (2020), demonstrated the importance of intentionality of streamlining the needs of students of color (e.g. offer academic services in the evening and weekend, engage parents, professor mentorship programs, connect with Latinx student organizations) connecting to the workforce, and leveraging on the strengths of Latinx students (i.e. majors and courses in professional Spanish) are key to help them become competitive in the workforce. The institutions in the study are up-to-date on the needs of local employers and providing experiential learning opportunities, opportunities that allow students to apply their learning, by not only connecting with local employers (schools, hospitals, non-profits etc.) but through paid internships or internship scholarships and incorporating those experiences into class curriculum (Martinez & Santiago, 2020). The authors argue that funding workforce development programs or initiatives is an important, for example, allowing "workforce development" under Title V grants for HSIs and internship scholarships. Furthermore, they state the importance of a campus-wide commitment to bring students information rather than have students find it on their own. The institutions in this study are a model for others to follow to ensure Latinx students enter as competitive prospects for the workforce.

These recommendations should be considered by HSI and two-year colleges as they are broad access institutions and enroll the majority of Latinx students. More specifically, these institutions should make greater efforts to invest more resources in connecting Latinx students to the professional world. If institutions are to serve their students, they need to be better attuned to student needs and respond to changes taking place in society if they want to develop a higher quality workforce.

Two-Year College Career Development.

As mentioned in the problem section, Latinx students' demographics are steadily increasing, with the majority enrolling in two-year colleges; thus, these institutions have a great responsibility to prepare the workforce of tomorrow. In the study, students enrolled in Ocean View College had a detailed transfer plan, but their career plan is vague. The two-year college system has a lot more potential to prepare their student population beyond transferring, including for later careers and graduate school. As the data demonstrated, students at two-year colleges focus solely on meeting the course requirements needed to transfer, not yet on preparing for careers or graduate school. To support the needs of transfer students in academic and career preparation, two-year colleges can incorporate more research, introduce graduate school workshops or programs, and career preparation. Additionally, two-year colleges can create a career development plan in conjunction with the required Promise Program academic plan and support workforce preparation by collaborating with nearby four-year institutions where students have access to upperclassmen mentors, research opportunities, and connect with graduate students. Bridging institutions is a way to maximize student support without needing much additional resources.

Career Preparation: Bridge Institutions.

Many times, two-year colleges do not have the infrastructure or resources to provide career and graduate school preparation opportunities, though there are several collaborative and creative ways to provide those opportunities. Sustained bridges between institutions across multiple worlds from preschool through graduate school will strengthen students' school pipeline and beyond (Cooper, 2011). To effectively support Latinx students, "institutions must collaborate with one another in facilitating fluid movement among institutions where this may already be occurring informally, and work with the local community to ensure pathways toward degree completion" (Hurtado et al., 2012, p.90). Although each campus has a unique student population, institutions do not have to create practices on their own, schools can partner with each other to share tools, strategies, and research. Also, there are national organizations and alliances, such as *Excelencia* in Education and Alliance of Hispanic Serving Educators, that work to promote Latinx college student success and support practitioners by sharing practices that have shown effectiveness across the country that may be replicated. Institutions can copy models that will work to serve their own students. There is also the possibility of community-based organizations partners that effectively have addressed students' needs, such as Future Leaders of America. Institutions do not have to do the work alone.

If institutions work together, the post-graduation preparation becomes a community effort and everyone wins. Four-year college collaboration can take an active role in programs, workshops, grad student involvements, and financial aid support workshops facilitated by high schools or two-year colleges. There is an urgent need to focus on the professional development of Latinx first-generation college students. Clear, laid out, and supported paths to students' goals is an urgent area of concern for institutions that state their commitment to educational equity.

Having the knowledge and skills required to achieve your aspirations is a social justice issue. Academic institutions are not only in a position to move that forward, but have the

responsibility to do so. Academic institutions can be leveraged as avenues for social transportation (equity, inclusion, and justice); (Marope et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012). As college students and the nation are increasingly Latinx, their success is crucial not only for the students, but also for the progress of the institutions and the country. Latinx students have made progress in college completion rates, yet significant gaps remain, especially in graduate school enrollment and post-graduation readiness, which are critical areas of attention that require extensive work. By addressing these gaps, institutions have the potential to shift social reproduction of oppression and marginalize to empower (Garcia, 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012; Yosso, 2005).

Discussion

This section presents a more concrete discussion of the findings' implications and recommendations to student services and campus-wide structure in two and four-year colleges, specifically, HSIs. Issues within higher education "are complex and multidimensional, including individual, societal, national, regional, global, temporal, and sectoral dimensions" (Marope et al., 2019). Hurtado et al. (2012) also lays out the multidimensional nature of education in their Diverse Learning Environment model.

This study demonstrates that first-generation Latinx college students are taking a leap of faith in the education system in order to provide more opportunities for themselves, their family, and their community. College represents hope for these students as they continue academically with the motivation to attain a better overall life through education. To help students navigate college, we need a deeper understanding of how their college experience influences their identity and the development of their aspirations. In this study in which I followed nine first-generation, underserved Latinx students with strong college preparation backgrounds, we gained a more nuanced understanding of Latinx students' college preparation, transition, and first-year

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experiences as they encountered challenges and accessed resources in their multiple worlds. The narratives presented here hold important implications for anyone interested in supporting first-generation college students, particularly at the institutional level with two and four-year HSIs in the position to foster a thriving student population in college and beyond. This section focuses on HSIs because they have a critical role in serving the future of the nation.

Ultimate Goal of Education in a Multicultural World

As aforementioned, it is the responsibility of academic institutions and all the school agents to serve the student population of the United States of America as a form of social justice (Martinez and Santiago, 2020; Gaxiola Serrano, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2012) in not only college, but high school as well. It is important for academic institutions to create a learning environment that fosters achievement, inclusive of retention, and degree attainment for all students (Hurtado et al., 2012). However, in the grand scheme of things, the ultimate purpose of education is to cultivate "habits of mind" or "skills for lifelong learning" (Marope et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012) in order for students to be workforce-ready (Garcia, 2019; Marope et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012) and to cultivate students' capacity to handle the challenges and opportunities that a multicultural word brings (Marope et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012; Cooper, 2011).

Habits of lifelong learning can allow students to develop their full potential in high school, college, and beyond. It is the ability of students to process information and use it constructively for the benefit of a diverse society through mastering independent thought and action, critical thinking, curiosity, creativity, self-expression, and the ability to discern information and hold a diverse framework, among others. It is the responsibility of the institution to cultivate these skills through its structures and practices, and in particular, for school agents and educators to empower students to "use, question, and to take a role in constructing knowledge to make the best use of college education" (Hurtado et al., 2012; p. 51). These skills

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are especially important for current challenges in society, where racial, health, climate and economics are immediate concerns.

Many scholars have highlighted the importance of preparing students for a multicultural word through inclusive practices that challenge dominant white cultural norms (Garcia, 2019; Stephens, et al., 2014; Hurtado et al., 2012; Cooper, 2011; Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) explain that "U.S. history reveals that White upper-class and middle-class stories are privileged, whereas the stories of people of color are distorted and silenced" (p. 36). With the increasing multicultural society, it is crucial that the stories of people of color are highlighted to provide a diverse learning environment that will prepare students to succeed in a civic life in a multicultural world (Hurtado et al., 2012) in high school and higher education.

One such large-scale organization that promotes worldwide multicultural quality education is UNESCO. Born from the Second World War, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to promote "a genuine culture of peace" in the world through international cooperation (The Organization's history, 2017). It promotes world peace by providing "educational tools to help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance," and emphasizes the value of cultural diversity, and advocates for access to quality education for all (UNESCO in brief: Mission and Mandate, 2019). UNESCO's International Bureau of Education formulated the document, "Future Competencies and the Future of Curriculum: A Global Reference for Curricula Transformation," which intended to guide the future of curriculum at a global level, argues that a "quality" curriculum is the "first operational tool" of global competency to enable learners to navigate and contribute to the 21st-century, a complex, diverse, and fast-changing century. Mmantsetsa Marope, Patrick Griffin, and Carmel Gallagher (2019) also layout competence-based curriculum that cultivates educational

equity with input, review, and comments by global leaders. For Marope et al. (2019), competency is defined as "the developmental capacity to interactively mobilize and ethically use information, data, knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and technology to engage effectively and act across diverse 21st century contexts to attain individual, collective, and global good" (p. 27). Not only does competency involve more than skills and knowledge, it requires values and attitudes (p. 19).

Marope et al. (2019) articulate that education must respond to new challenges in individuals, society, countries, and world to produce graduates who meet required competencies in industry, technology, demographics, and climate--something that education has often failed to do, "evidence includes the perceived alienation of graduates from their cultures, poor mastery of national languages, functional illiteracy, poor civic responsibility, poor employability, lack of digital skills required in labor markets, escalating intolerance and violence, etc." and the reality of the "educated unemployed" (12-13), which prevents a competent workforce. Furthermore, they argue, "what learners learn is necessary but no longer sufficient, what is most critical is how they can apply what they learned across fast-changing, unpredictable, and even disruptive contexts of the 21st century in general... future curricula have to reflect competences that prepare learners for an unknown future" (p. 27). They identified seven global competencies in order of importance for the public good are: "(i) Lifelong learning; (ii) Self-agency; (iii) Interactively using diverse tools and resources; (iv) Interacting with others; (v) Interacting with the world; (vi) Multi-literateness; and (vii) Trans-disciplinarity" (p. 31). Marope et al. conclude the document by emphasizing that "the time is now to give curriculum its rightful place in individual, collective, national, and global development agendas, and in shaping the future we deserve, the future we do not know, and the future we want to bequeath new generations" (41). Along with

Hurtado et. al. (2012) and Cooper (2011), UNESCO state institutions of higher education have the responsibility to create an equal and just multicultural world.

Going from the macro lens to a micro lens of how a diverse learning environment can contribute to the greater good of society by preparing students for the workforce and increasing their quality of life, the following section examines how institutions can effectively and intentionally serve a Latinx student population, the fastest growing student population, especially in HSIs and other broad access institutions in the United States.

Hispanic Serving Institutions as Bridges: Intentional Opportunities for Social Transformation

HSI are especially important to examine because they enroll the majority of Latinx students and educate the "fastest growing population in the United States" (Garcia, 2019, p. 137), making them the "key drivers to economic and social mobility for students" (Martinez & Santiago, 2020, pp.10-12). Adding to the Diverse Learning Environment Model, Bridging Multiple worlds, and UNESCO's argument that postulate academic institutions are in a great position for social transformation is Gina Garcia's (2019) argument on Latinx students and HSIs. Garcia argues, "HSIs may very well be the best-equipped institutions for providing culturally engaging space for Latinx and other minoritized students" (2019, p.137). Although there has been lots of attention and momentum to support the Latinx first-generation college student experience in the last decades, there is still a lot of work to be done in the sector of cultural relevance in the higher education system, particularly in HSIs and other broad access institutions. First, it is important to acknowledge that not all HSIs are deficient and to examine the metrics they are being compared to (Garcia, 2019). This said, there is a lot of potential to further improve HSIs and transform Latinx students' economic and social mobility through the institution (Martinez & Santiago, 2020).

Gina Garcia (2019) underscores that at the organizational level, "racial inequalities present across the educational pipeline are grounded in the racialization process of society, whereby educators and educational systems reinforce the racial hierarchy" and it is more pronounced in postsecondary education (p. 9). It is recognized that there are "challenges and limitations associated with these support structures" (Means & Pyne, 2017, p.920), though they have great potential to transform the educational experience of students of color and society as a whole by serving their students. "Servingness" goes beyond the metrics of HSI definition; institutions can enroll Latinx students and get them to graduate, but not truly serve them. Serving students is educating with intentionality, or a culturally enhancing approach, that is transformative for the educational experience and life quality of a student.

Leaders and practitioners must make sure all students are served well and transform the established institutionalized culture of the college. Thus, it is important for leaders to be intentional in the way data is used to change policies, so that they are not simply graduating students, but helping them thrive in their respective campus. Intentionality has been emphasized by experts on serving minoritized students (Garcia, 2017, 2019; Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Hurtado, et. al., 2012). Institutions cannot continue to use traditional practices, strategies and approaches, with post-traditional students—Latinx being a large majority of them—rather they need to leverage the strengths and needs of the new student demographics and change accordingly. Thus, institutions need to have awareness of students' reality, including structural inequities and racism, and try to understand these students' experience through the students' lenses in order to effectively serve them. Being intentional with practices also means understanding that Latinx and other minoritized students have family and work responsibilities because of their economic reality and many times do not experience a sense of belonging on campus.

As discussed previously, curriculum is at the center for social transformation (Marope et al., 2019). Scholars argue that a competence-based curriculum should be grounded in the learner's context and be learner-centered, which "requires the structuring of learning environments that motivates the learners' acquisition and use of competences" (Marope, 2019, pp. 27-28). A diverse curriculum and scholarship are reflective of the commitment to equity since it highlights the institution's view on what knowledge matters (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Knowing the Latinx First-Generation College Student

Thriving in their World.

The case studies in this study help contribute to the understanding of larger societal influence on Latinx students. The indicators of student success are defined in several ways by different stakeholders, yet the "indicators of excellence and greatness are subjective" (Garcia, 2019, p. 17). Cooper (2011) explains that, "students' success is often measured in terms of their academic achievements," for example, grades, "standardized test scores, high school graduations, completing college-prep courses, or college enrollment and graduation" (pp.78-9). Increasing admissions and graduation rates is a start; however, "we need to understand students, families, and community members may define their own aspirations for youth in ways that extend beyond school success" (pp. 78-79). The most valid definition of student success is that of the student's conceptualization. Highlighting students' definition of thriving in their own terms allows us to discover their unique cultural meaning, instead of relying on scholars to define, impose, and generalize it for the community. It further allows us to understand how college is a means to achieve their ultimate goals and how we can better provide resources to support them.

Though some literature focuses on the "major need for multiple interventions to help [traditionally disadvantaged] students survive in college" (Schneider, 2015, p. 400), I argue there is a critical need for an institution-wide intervention to support students to *thrive* in and after

college, especially at HSIs. In order to gain the maximum benefit and foster a holistic student development, thriving consists of intellectual, social, and emotional engagement on campus, a sense of community, and a level of psychological well-being. Again, the students' definition of thriving was framed by their financial imitations and status; the students defined thriving as having an improved quality of life and giving back to their community. This supports previous research on Latinx' hope to achieve the American Dream through college and thus gain a better future (Cooper, 2011). Yet systematic barriers are in place for Latinx students due to cultural differences, as covered in the literature review. However, Latinx students bring powerful assets to higher education that should be valued and celebrated. When they do, systematic structures will align to support them improve their and their communities' quality of life, while ensuring that they do not have to struggle to reach their goals on their own.

To better understand how to create a culture in which Latinx truly thrive, it is important to understand students' first year in a higher education environment and their understanding of their cultural wealth. Using Yosso's community cultural wealth lens, data from the case studies revealed the students leveraged on several cultural capitals to navigate their first year in college: aspiration capital, familial capital, social capital, and navigational capital. Primarily, aspiration and familiar capital fed students' tenacity. They maintained high hopes and dreams despite not knowing how to achieve them, lacking financial resources, and feeling emotional distress: "this resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals" (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-8). Students' family and community well-being was at the center of their motivation. "Family is always in the back of my head... I would just stick to that goal and think about my family how they're really hard working and I just think about that and I'm like 'okay, I have to pass 'cause they're putting all this work into me and they believe in me," shared Edith. In

addition to family motivation, students like Edith reflected their peer network as one of their strongest resources. As first-generation students, they choose to experience uncertainty and concern and leave comfort behind because of their ambition and perceived necessity of attending a university. This motivation allows them to successfully navigate their first year of college despite not possessing the dominant culture. While the literature often focuses on the negative experiences students of color have, they also have multiple strengths that they bring with them from home and their communities that help them successfully navigate college.

Institution-Wide Support Structures

It is urgent to increase systemic advocacy or minoritized college students. There is a consensus that one program, family, or community cannot solve the academic pipeline problem alone (Cooper, 2011). An institutional shift that includes a campus wide effort and institutional commitment, not just programs or centers for historically marginalized students, is needed to ensure that these students receive the necessary information and preparation to succeed in college and beyond (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017). The weight of student support should not be left to a few units on campus; instead, student support programs need to be embedded in colleges. As mentioned earlier, minoritized students tend to be first-generation college students who generally do not know how to navigate the system, so having a comprehensive college environment that can tap into all areas of the resources needed is crucial to support them as they navigate college.

Institution-wide support has the potential to make students feel not just welcomed, but wanted on campus (Hurtado et al., 2012) and enhance a sense of belonging. Students will feel part of the larger community, not just a space on campus, and that they feel like they matter when institution-wide support is enacted (Means & Pyne, 2017). Latinx students are an incredibly diverse group and their needs will continue to shift and develop, so it is the responsibility of the institution to meet students where they are. For this, it is important to stay

proactive and continue to listen to the needs and concerns of their students. We must bring *voces perdidas to voces de poder* for educational equity and institutions should take their needs and assets seriously.

Conclusions

In hopes of contributing knowledge to inform a more equitable education system through policies and practices for the benefit of the students, their families, their communities, and the larger society, I documented the past and present educational experiences of Latinx students and made their often invisible everyday lives visible by entering their life worlds. This study examines the narratives of students' college preparation, transition, and first-year college experience and how they relate to their college and career aspirations development, progress, and identity. Centering on the student identity and institutional culture, this study examines the narratives of nine Latinx college students through longitudinal multiple-case studies research design. Understanding the schooling experiences of these students can help academic institutions better utilize existing cultural assets to promote achievement, and it can produce culturally tailored interventions for these "growing giants."

This study helped advance the understanding of how school experiences relate to self-perception for Latinx students from high school to college and it can help practitioners, support and outreach programs, and administrators have a better understanding of how to serve their student population in high school and at the two-year and four-year college level, especially at HSIs. As the rate of Latinx students' enrollment, and other students of color continues to increase, it is crucial that institutions not only generate a campus assessment for a culturally diverse learning environment, but also work together to create a thriving culturally diverse learning environment. By asking the student participants to make sense of the trajectory that led

to their enrollment in college after high school, I was able to highlight the pathway and experience of attending a two and a four-year institution.

This study allowed us to examine the students' agency in navigating their challenges and resources across their multiple worlds during their transition and first year in college. Despite challenges, each of the students found success through a myriad of ways, including peer support and other social relationships. Although initially students were not ready for the academic college culture, they were resilient and drew resources from their school, home, work, and community worlds in order to continue on the path towards their aspirations.

Literature states that the idea of success for children of Mexican immigrant families is conceptualized as achieving the "American Dream" by going to college and doing "college-based work" for themselves and their families (Cooper, 2011, p.112). For these individuals, the "American Dream" equates to going to college and working a college-based job, which then translates to success for them, their families, and their communities. If they put their trust in the education system for a better life, the education system cannot fail them, according to their beliefs. Institutions have the potential to serve this group and reach education equity, as a form of social justice, while meeting the demands of the workforce and benefiting of society as a whole.

The success of the nation is the success of Latinx students in our colleges. Through this study, we unfolded their motivation, sacrifices, resilience, aspirations, experiences, structural challenge, and resources. Octavio reminds us to ground our higher education objective and the purpose of every school agent, to support students to attain a "better life," and support them "to create a better world, [because] you know, I wanna make a change," in society. The year 2020 demonstrated that quick systematic shifts to adjust to the larger societal context are possible. Thus, we must continue to be open to shift according to the student needs.

Limitations of the Study

The findings that emerged from the narratives in this study were consistent with the literature on Latinx college students. We can also learn from these narratives as they allowed me to further shed light on Latinx students' experiences in a small context (Yin, 2014). Despite this, there were some limitations in this study. First, there was a time gap between the in-person interviews in their junior year in high school (2016-17) and the follow-up interviews at end of their first year in college (Summer 2019). This means, students responded to questions about their college decision and transition process from memory. Also, not all previous participants responded to the follow-up interview email invitation. Participation of the original twelve students would better support the accuracy of the cross-case results and analysis provided. Next, I was not able to collect the college transcripts from every student to examine how their academic progress aligned with their goals as I did when they were in high school. In addition, a follow-up interview after the college interview was transcribed and coded would have allowed for further probing on their college funding situation for a better analysis of their financial realities in college. Lastly, as the researcher, I shared multiple identities and experiences with the students in the study; as a Latina immigrant from the same schools and college outreach program, my personal biases may have influenced the interpretation of the data and narratives write-ups.

Future research

In order to have well informed intentional practices and policies, future studies should continue to include longitudinal empirical data of the narratives and voices of the students. This data will allow researchers, educators, and administrators better understand how students experience education and how that impacts their emerging identity in order to make institutional changes away from the traditional "white normative" to "transformative practices" (Garcia,

2017) that reflect the current student demographics. More longitudinal case studies where data is collected in different life points will further support the understanding of students' educational experience and decision-making process. Also, researchers should consider using more qualitative case studies research approaches to study the "rising giants" over longer periods of time to gain a deeper understanding of how academic institutions influence outcomes for minoritized students long-term (Means & Pyne, 2017; Cooper, 2011).

Further, from my own experience and the data presented, more studies should examine the impact college preparation outreach programs that serve the critical student population and how they can be embedded in the institutional structure for greater funding, more staff, and research to support their efforts. The data in this study demonstrated the vital role they play in Latinx student's educational pathway.

Lastly, we must also consider how higher education institutions react in times of crisis, such as the impact of COVID-19 on the educational experiences of the students. For example: changes in the economic situation; academic and career guidance; home environments; academic decision-making process, career preparation; and individual goals that impact their educational trajectory. How do institutions adjust or don't adjust? We recently saw how systems can completely pivot with collaboration; thus, we learned it is possible to pivot the way institutions operate in the long run. Short-term institutional transformation can lead to long term *serving* with intentionality.

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Appendix A

Master's Student Characteristics Data

Junior year in high school, 2016-2017

	Annalise	Sophia	Rebecca	Patricia	Z	Edith	Daniel	Zack	Rek	Jesse	Octavio	Erick
Interview Time	#1)35:19 2/9/17 #2)13:19 =48:38 mins	#1) 58:20 2/13/17 #2) 25:28 = 83:48 mins	#1) 40:17 12/16/16 #2) 24:49 = 65:6 mins	#1)34:47 1/12/17 #2)15:41 = 50:28 mins	#1)36:19 12/15/16 #2)24:30 = 60:49 mins	#1)35:02 12/12/16 #2) 17:16 =52:16:02 mins	#1)29:31 12/16/16 #2)18:10 = 47:4 mins	#1)30:19 12/16/216 #2)18:47 = 49:6 mins	#1)1:02:49 12/14/16 #2)31:02 =1:33:03 h =93:03 mins	#1)51:52 2/13/17 #2)22:34 = 74:2 mins	#1)46:53 12/13/16 #2)21:44 = 68:37 mins	#1)38:49 1/13/17 #2) 25 = 63:49 mins
Academic GPA: unweighted	2.36	3.45	3.13	3.41	4.0	3.17	2.76	1.97	2.79	3.36	3.36	3.12
weighted	2.41	3.74	3.19	3.70	4.41	3.38	2.82	2.05	3.35	3.69	3.84	3.87
English Proficiency	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP	EO	IFEP	RFEP	RFEP	RFEP
SAT II		SAT II Spanish										SAT II Biology World History ACT
AP Test									Calculus AB 2 World History	Spanish Language World History	World History	Biology World History
AVID		X		X	X	X	X			X	X	
Access Tutorial after school program		X	X	X		X	X	X				

Appendix B

Self-Identity Interview Protocol

        The purpose of this interview is to learn about your academic journey; including your past experiences, present actions and future goals. All of the things we talk about are confidential, that means that no one will know what we talk about. Unless you tell me something that may put you or someone else in danger, I would have to break confidentiality and tell the appropriate authorities. This needs to be done to ensure your overall safety and well-being. Also, I want you to know that I am not here to judge any of what you say, I really just like to know what your experience has been as a student and your future goals. The interview questions are very similar to the questions I asked you in high school and are separated into three parts: I. "Who am I" has 6 questions, II. "What Are My Worlds" has 9 questions, and III. "Future Aspirations" has 11 questions. There is a total of 26 questions.

You will be asked to fill out facilitation prompts and think aloud. I will also be recording the interview, is this okay with you?

Let's begin:

I. Who Am I?
1.) Please describe yourself (Name, age, employment) (self-concept)
2.) What colleges did you apply to, where did you get accepted and why did you decide to attend the college you are enrolled in?
3.) What do you value most in life? (Major life influences)
4.) In what ways do these values impact your goals and actions? (example of how they influence)
5.) How would you describe yourself as a college student?
       a.) Is this different from high school?
6.) Tell me about your current priorities? (values versus priorities)

II. What Are My Worlds
What are My Worlds handout activity (pass out and read instructions)
1.) What are the "Worlds" that you participate in?
2.) How have these changed since high school?
3.) What academic adjustments did you have to make in college?
4.) Who/What provides you with support with your schoolwork or other school experiences?
 5.) Who/What causes you difficulties in your schoolwork or other school experiences?
a.) Can you give examples, please.
6.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your school current actions and decisions?
7.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your future aspirations?
8.) Tell me about your positive and not so positive experiences in your classes.
9.) What strategies do you use to manage stress and well-being?

III. Future Aspirations
Career Goals Pyramid handout (pass out and read instructions)
1.) Do you remember what your aspirations were during your junior year of high school? (If not, remind them)
2.) What are your future academic and career goals?
b.) If they changed, who/what influenced that change?

3) Why do you want to accomplish those goals?
4.) Do you know the steps you have to take to achieve your goal?
5). How do you plan to reach those goals?
6.) What are you doing now that will help you reach your goals?
7.) What people or experiences have been major influences on your future plans? (These may be positive or negative like a field trip or a friend getting into trouble.)
8.) Who/What will support you in reaching your future goals?
9.) Who/What will present difficulties in reaching your future goals?
10.) What do you need from your college to reach these goals?
b.) What else would make it easier for you to achieve these goals?
11.) What is your definition of "Thriving" in and after college?

Before we end the interview, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in school?

Thank you for your time, _____. I wish you all the best in your educational journey. Please let me know if I can help in any way.

Appendix C

Research Questions and Interview Protocol Comparison

Master's Project Research Questions	Dissertation Research Questions

1. How do Latinx high school Juniors envision their future selves?
    a.) Who and what informs this vision?
    b.) How does this vision impact their present actions and guide their pursuit of academic pathways beyond high school?
 	
 2. What are the resources and challenges Latina/o students face along the academic journey towards college?
	1. What were key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced the transition from high school to college and first year in college of the students?
	
	 2. How did the students envision their future selves after they attended college, and how does this compare with what they envisioned for themselves during their junior year in high school?
	
	 3. What challenges did participants encounter during their first year in college, and which resources did they utilize to help move them towards achieving their future goals?
	
	 4. How did the challenges and resources found in response to Question 2 and 3 impact the identity development pathway of students?

Interview Protocol for Master's Project

I. Who am I?	II. Worlds	III. Future Aspirations
1.) Please describe yourself 2.) What are the things you value most in life? 3.) How do these values influence who you are? 4.) How would you describe yourself as a student? Have you always been that way? 5.) Tell me about your aspirations when you were little.	1.) What are the worlds that affect your schoolwork or other school experiences in a positive or negative way? 2.) Who/What resources help your schoolwork or other school experiences in these worlds? 3.) Who/What causes you difficulties in your schoolwork or other school experiences? 4.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your school current actions and decisions? 5.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your future aspirations? 6.) How have these changed throughout the years?	1.) What are your goals in high school? 2.) What are your future academic goals? 3.) What are your career goals? 4.) Why do you want to accomplish those goals? 5.) How do you plan to reach those goals? 6.) What are you doing now that will help you reach your goals? 7.) What people or experiences have been major influences on your future plans? These may be positive or negative like a field trip or a friend getting into trouble. 8.) Who/What will support you in reaching your future goals? (Resources) 9.) Who/What will present difficulties in reaching your future goals? (Challenges) 10.) Why do you think your future aspirations have changed or stayed the same over time? 11.) Do you think you can accomplish these goals? Before we end the interview, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in school? (a comment, experience, person, feelings experienced).
Interview Protocol for Dissertation Study		
I. Who am I and Who do I want to be?	**II. New Worlds**	**III. Future Aspirations**

1.) Please describe yourself (Name, age, employment) (self-concept)
2.) What colleges did you apply to, where did you get accepted and why did you decide to attend the college you are enrolled in?
3.) What do you value most in life? (Major life influences)
4.) In what ways do these values impact your goals and actions? (example of how they influence)
5.) How would you describe yourself as a college student?
    a.) Is this different from high school?
6.) Tell me about your current priorities? (values versus priorities)
	What are My Worlds handout activity (pass out and read instructions)
	
	 What are My Worlds handout activity (pass out and read instructions)
	1.) What are the "Worlds" that you participate in?
	2.) How have these changed since high school?
	3.) What academic adjustments did you have to make in college?
	4.) Who/What provides you with support with your schoolwork or other school experiences?
	5.) Who/What causes you difficulties in your schoolwork or other school experiences?
	    a.) Can you give examples, please.
	6.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your school current actions and decisions?
	7.) How have these challenges and/or resources influenced your future aspirations?
	8.) Tell me about your positive and not so positive experiences in your classes.
	9.) What strategies do you use to manage stress and well-being?
		Career Goals Pyramid handout (pass out and read instructions)
		
		1.) Do you remember what your aspirations were during your junior year of high school? (If not, remind them)
		2.) What are your future academic and career goals?
		    b.) If they changed, who/what influenced that change?
		3) Why do you want to accomplish those goals?
		4.) Do you know the steps you have to take to achieve your goal?
		5). How do you plan to reach those goals?
		6.) What are you doing now that will help you reach your goals?
		7.) What people or experiences have been major influences on your future plans? (these may be positive or negative like a field trip or a friend getting into trouble.)
		8.) Who/What will support you in reaching your future goals?
		9.) Who/What will present difficulties in reaching your future goals?
		10.) What do you need from your college to reach these goals?
		    b.) What else would make it easier for you to achieve these goals?
		11.) What is your definition of "Thriving" in and after college?
		
		Before we end the interview, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in school?

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Appendix D

"What Are My Worlds" Handout

Pseudonym: _____

Date: _____

What Are My Worlds?

Directions:
1. Circle the worlds you participate in that are important in your life, in a positive or negative way. We are especially interested in those worlds that influence your life at school. You are welcome to create a new world if it is not listed on the worksheet.
2. rite the important people you interact with in these worlds. It is not necessary to write their names, but DO write their relationship to you (e.g. mother, father, older sister, priest, coach, counselor or mentor).
3. Please indicate whether they are positive or negative influence on your life by putting a + or – sign next to the person.
4. How do these worlds relate to school? Draw a line to those that are connected to school
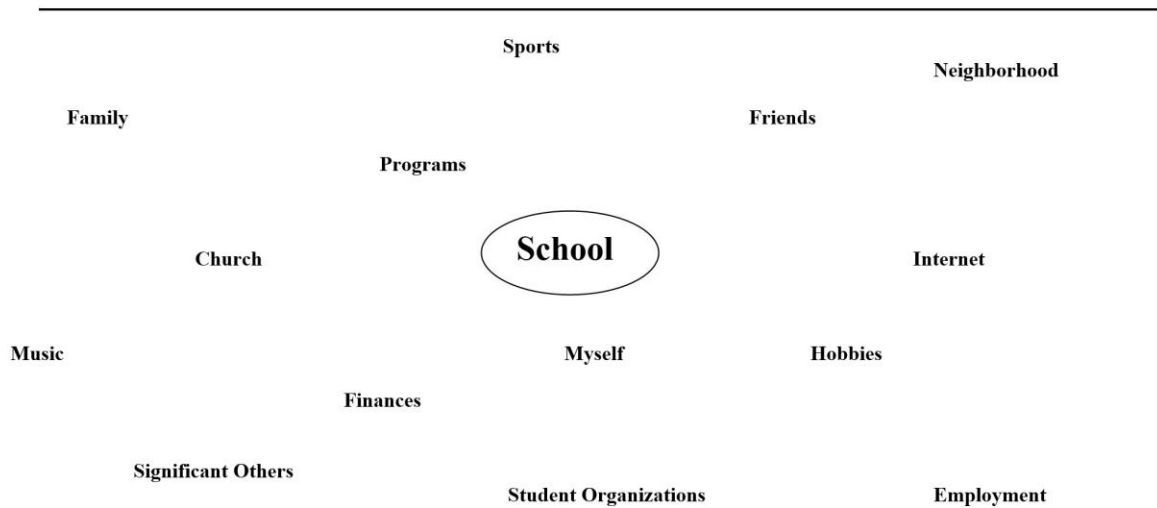
Sports

Neighborhood

Family   Friends

Programs

Church   School   Internet

Music   Myself   Hobbies

Finances

Significant Others

Student Organizations   Employment

Appendix E

"Career Pyramid" Handout

Career Pyramid

Pseudonym:_____   **Career Goals**_____

Date: _____
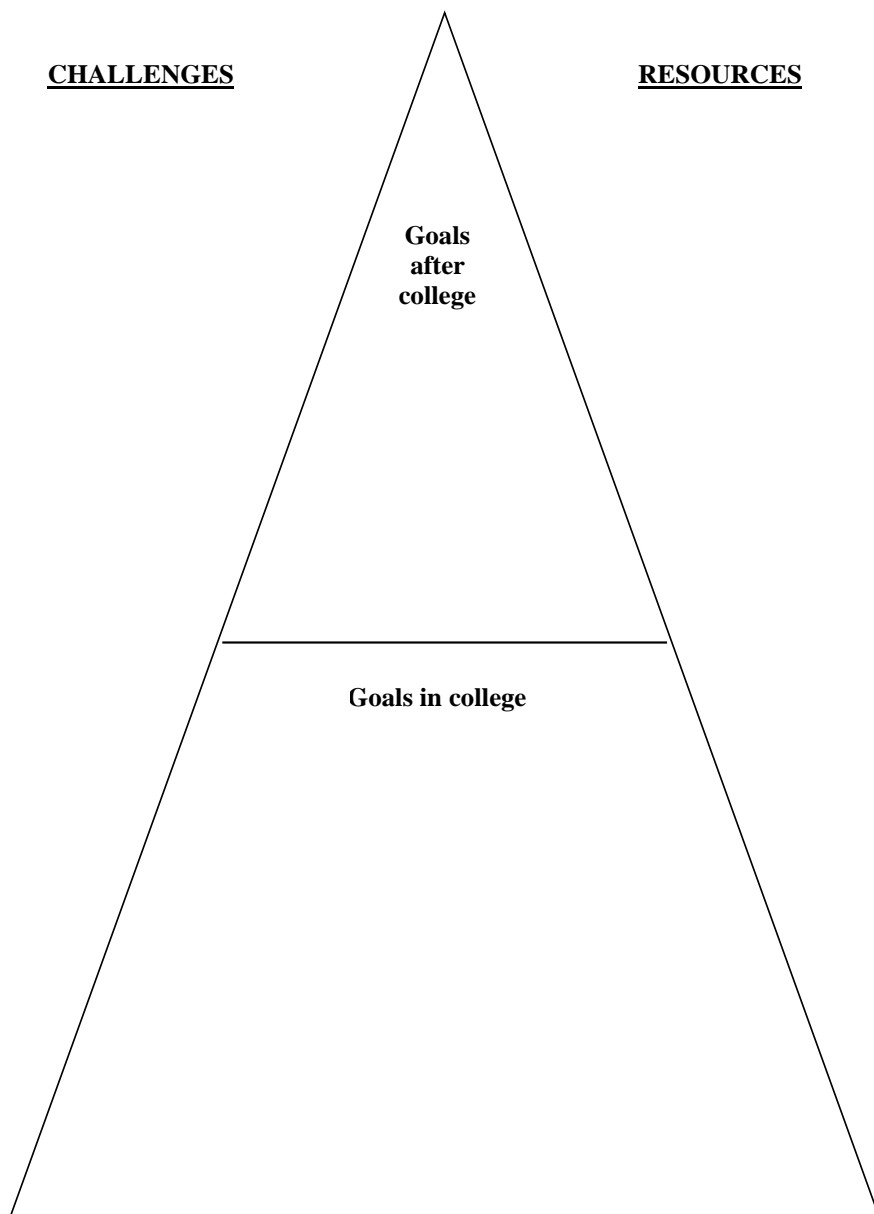
CHALLENGES   RESOURCES

**Goals
after
college**

Goals in college

Appendix F

Full Dissertation Data Table

End of students' first year in college, 2019

	Annalise	Sophia	Z	Edith	Daniel	Rek	Jesse	Octavio	Erick
Interview Time	41.37 mins	70.23 mins	53.21 mins	36.48 mins	52.07 mins	58.6 mins	70.91 mins	69.35 mins	64.71 mins
Institutions Applied	Ocean View City College	4 UC 4 Cal States	4 UC 4 Cal State 1 private	4 UC 4 CSU	3 CSU, 1 UC	Ocean View City College	11-12 institutions - 6 CSU 1UC, 1 private	3 CSU, 4 UC	6 CSU, "possibly more"
Institutions Accepted	Ocean View City College	San Francisco State University, Cal Sate Northridge, Fullerton, UC Santa Barbara, Merced	UC San Diego, Riverside and Merced, Cal State Long Beach, Fullerton, Sacramento, Cal Poly Pomona, Cal Lutheran	CSU Fullerton, Northridge, East Bay, UC Merced	CSU Channel Islands and Northridge	Ocean View City College	7 institutions - two privates and rest were Cal States	CSU Pomona, Sacramento State, UC Riverside	CSU Fullerton, East Bay, Sacramento and San Francisco State, Waitlisted in Cal Poly Pomona
Institution Enrolled	Ocean View City College	Ocean View City College	UC Riverside	UC Merced	Ocean View City College	Ocean View City College	CSU Chico	Ocean View City College	Ocean View City College
Factors that Influenced Institution Choice	"Take it slow" "process everything"	"Financial instability at home", father, counselors, college prep programs	Financial aid, near relative, make own path, took into account parents' feelings,	UC system prestige, financial aid packet	The Promise Program	The Promise program, "good school"	Institution "understanding", did not take away financial aid", Good Kinesiology program	Financial reasons, "needed at the house", professors and peers at CC	Insufficient Financial Aid, the Promise Program
The Promise Program	X	X			X	X		X	X

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Worlds	Family, music, significant other, financial, myself, hobbies, employment and friends	Friends, programs, myself, hobbies, employment, finances, significant other, family and music	Family, church, music, finances, myself, friends, internet and hobbies	Family, myself, student organizations, hobbies, internet and friends	Family, programs, sports, friends, internet, hobbies, myself, employment, finances, significant other, music	Family, employment, hobbies, myself, finances and sports	Family, programs, sports, myself, friends and neighborhood	Sports, friends, programs, family, church, music, finances, myself, hobbies, employment, student organizations	Sports, programs, friends, internet, myself, finances, employment
College Transition and First Year Experience	"Not prepared" for workload	"isolation, "depression", "I didn't want them to think that I was a very vulnerable and weak person"	easy transition "college was so much easier than high school"	Less involvements (programs), depression	"I didn't really expect it to go that fast", "it's just a lot harder"	"I was naïve", "it's about lecture, not the book now"	"have to work a lot harder", isolated first semester	"Downhill", no time management skills, not ready for academic expectations	"super hard", " wasn't expecting it to go as fast", "I don't get that free time anymore"
Major	Photography	Ethnic Studies, transferring with Women and Gender Studies	Political Science	Political Science, minor in business and economics	Biology, possibly change to Criminal Justice	Mechanical Engineer (not sure if official)	Exercise Physiology and minoring in nutrition	Sociology (plans to double major in Chicanx Studies)	Sociology
Career Aspirations	Photographer	School counselor	Paralegal or social worker	Immigration Lawyer, backup business	Veterinarian, backup Criminology	Mechanical Engineer	Physician Assistant	Teacher: Chicano Studies, Ethnic Studies, or Spanish Or community organizer	Sociology Researcher
College Aspirations	Transfer to Cal State Fullerton or Cal Poly Pomona and graduate with a Bachelor's degree	Transfer to San Francisco State University	Paralegal license or law school	BA degree in Political Science and minor in business and Economics, Law school,	Transfer in three years to UC Davis, Graduate with a degree in Veterinary	Transfer and graduate with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering or something in STEM	Physician School	Transfer to UCSB, UC Davis or UC Berkeley, Master's in something or law school	Transfer to UC Berkeley or Los Angeles or any Cal State, PhD in Sociology

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Goals in College	Graduate, study and work hard	Get good grades, obtain max 60-70 units to transfer to a university, join clubs and organizations	Get an internship, do good in school, good GPA, maintain my friendship with the people in my hall and join the Catholic mentorship program	Participate in pre-law society, join a professional opportunity, start a new organization, stay in the honor society for major	"take harder classes to challenge myself and still end up passing them and to make my family proud	Improve learning and talking abilities, do well in classes, be happy	"Do my best academically", "be a great athlete", develop into future self	Transfer to a 4-year university, rebuild MECHA at CC, give back to community, get Bs or As, be proud of his work	Keep an A average, do well in honor's program, stay involved in TAP, volunteer to build connections in the field, do more scholarships, connect more with professors
Goals After College	Travel and be happy	Have a family, get a house, be a school counselor/coordinator/teacher and get married	Get married maybe foster or adopt a child, continue my education	Law school, business school or other grad school, have a "help those people actually have a voice"	"become a veterinarian, have a nice house, have a healthy lifestyle"	Work-life balance	EMT (save as many lives as possible), PA school, Cheer coach,	"graduating and coming back to my community and doing amazing stuff. Just to create a better world, you know I wanna make a change"	PhD in Sociology, become a Sociology Researcher
Employed	Yes, two jobs	Yes, two jobs	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Challenges	Friends, money, "learning disability", no health care, politics	Mother and time spent at work Social life, finances, employment, schoolwork	Self (procrastination, finances (low income), too social, finding a husband, not enough experience for career	Roommate, rude professor, academic rigor	Internet "distraction", "procrastination", "laziness", academic rigor, "finding time to relax"	Work a lot, too idealistic, rigor of classes,	Death of a close family member, pressure to succeed in career to support family, no community first semester, time demand of sports, other students "not as focused as me", socioecono	Time, no study space, home responsibilities, balancing workloads, essay writing, financial, no guidance, academic rigor, time management	Employment, unmotivated classmates, financial aid, not being accepted to a 4-year college, other negative CC students

							mic status, isolation first semester, not finding a job		
Resources	Older brothers, school counselor, teachers, boyfriend, tutoring	Father, boyfriend, past and current counselor, close friends, campus resources, people working in career goal	Older sister in college, study groups, science majors in residence halls, college major mentor, church, family, community in residence hall, Hall RA and Program coordinator, internet, UCR Women's Center and Chicano Center, Tutoring centers, TA office hours, textbooks in library	Family, friends, internet, makeup, art, peer mentor, cousin- a UC Merced alumna, twin sister (roommate), professors, pre-law society	Professors, tutors, older brother, girlfriend, family, "moral support", myself	Myself, family, girlfriend, coworkers, counselors	Community, family (motivation), Men of Chico, sports (cheer), myself, neighborhood, academic centers on campus, mom, like-minded people, people with same career path	CC Latinx and sociology professors, HS AVID teacher, FLA team, CC Equity Room, bigger network, being bilingua , discipline, gym,	PE instructors, sociology professors,TAP counselors, friends in college, coworkers in college, internet, employment
Sibling/s in college	X		X	X					
Role Model for Younger Sibling/s		X			X			X	X
Definition of Thriving	Happy, excited, prepared for life	"be a very active person as I was back in high school", obtain recognition,	"being happy I guess loving what you're doing not living like in a box so	In Honor's Program, succeeding in college, having a job after college, having a	Well-paid job, own a house and a car, "keep going up", healthy lifestyle, no money	Good grades, getting a job that I enjoy, do things I like doing, work-life	managing a healthy social life, minimizing loans as much as possible, giving back	Be happy in and after college, good grades, getting enough sleep,	"School does not destroy you, instead it builds you, make the best of everything, happy at the end of the day,

		prodigy in school or community, excelling academically, apply knowledge to career, get a house, reach career goal	like having the financial like having the necessities"	house	issue"	balance	to my community, getting into PA school, be able to provide for family, get married	being involved, staying active, make a change on campus or the community, travel the world, support family financially (buying a house), "knowing the people I care about are safe and are well taking care of"	making good connection"
Values	Family & herself, "becoming the person who I am and knowing what I want to be"	Wellbeing resources, people that "actually care"	Family, God, education, college opportunity	Family (very supportive) opportunity to study	Family (always there for me), loved ones	Present happiness = balance school, work, health, relationships and family	Being genuine yourself, true colors- before used to be afraid of being judged, honesty with self and others	Family, friends, nothing else matters	My ambition to attend a competitive UC, possibilities, goals
Priorities	Graduate with an AA, transfer, "hold down a job", have health insurance, "work my butt off to be prepared"	Summer school, pass classes, find a social life and active life, avoid going back to isolation	Education, grades happy with, parents, everything okay back home, religion	School assignments, focus on school- no distractions	School, "do as best I can in school", be disciplined at work, spend time with family	Do well in school, follow passion in cycling and biking	"definitely academic", fulfill requirements for PA school, make relationships, connections, be a leader in cheer	Self-care mentally and physically In summer – enjoy and "gain more knowledge"	"Idea that I could go to schools I didn't even think I was able to go to", academic opportunities,
Notes	Experienced significant identity dev., politics major role in her college experience	AVID junior high- high school, navigate "bad reputation" (CC), rough personal college transition,	Living in dorms, got close to hallmates, benefits of living in dorms for first-gen, roommate is best	Continuous focus, Merced an example of HSI experience, has more resources in college, brings up	Consistent with goals and motivation	Provided info on the Promise, drastic focus since high school, worked a lot senior year of HS,	Significant identity dev., knowledge-able of career steps, living in dorms	Coaching experience, code switching, active with Latinx community, MECHA	Spends most time on campus, less student orgs, id academic centered

		significant academic identity dev. , diversity in classes important for her, utilizes many resources on campus	friend from high school, financial aid packet allowed for dorm experience	politics, spends most time on campus, living in dorms		currently passion is bikes, Engineering Academy in HS, does not stay on campus after class		co-chair, parents and Latinx community at center of motivation and actions	

Appendix G

Single-Case Data Table

	Edith	Z	Sophia	Annalise	Jesse	Octavio	Rek	Daniel	Erick
College acceptance	UC and CSU	UC, CSU, and private	UC and CSU		CSU, Private	CSU and UC		CSU	CSU
College decision	UC	UC	Two-year college	Two-year college	CSU	Two-year college	Two-year college	Two-year college	Two-year college
College choice decision factor/s	Financial aid packet, twin sister, prestige	Financial aid packet, make own path, near home	Financial realities	"Taking it slow"	Understanding college, strong community	Financial realities, supporting parents	Financial realities	Financial realities	Financial realities, "financially responsible"
First-year transition and experience	Focused priorities, took control of education, identification with peers	Smooth, deeply engaged, "never alone"	"Stigma" identity tension	"Raw", "overwhelming and intimidating"	Loss, professors' support	Lack of college skills, challenge old ways	"Present happiness"	Fast-pace, older brother, make family proud	"stigma", inspiring brokers, took control of educatio, exposure
Future aspirations in high school	Immigration lawyer	Speech therapist	Law enforcement	Photographer and "see the world"	Sports Medicine	Engineer	Pubic Service	Veterinarian	Videogame designer
Future aspirations in college	Immigration lawyer/buisness	Paralegal/social worker	Academic counselor/ teacher	Photographer"	Physician's assistant	Educator/ community organizer	Mechanical Engineer	Veterinarian/ criminal justice	Sociology researcher
Career Plans	Clear	Vague	Vague	Vague	Clear	Vague	Clear	Vague	Vague
Challenges	Rude roommate, unsympathetic professor	Family financial reality	Depression, work	Work, lack of basic needs, political climate, slower learning process	Family financial reality, lack of community	Lack of career guidance, family responsibilities and overcommitting	Working many hours	Old procrastination habits, academic rigor	Unmotivated friends, critical professor, work
Resources	Supportive networks	Cultural brokers	Cultural brokers, campus diversity	Inner drive, cultural brokers	Student programs, community	Safe space on campus, cultural brokers	Mentors, himself	Determination, supportive networks	Student service, cultural brokers
Motivation	Family member's deportation, give voiceless a voice	Stable income in the future	Leader in community	Make parents proud, provide them dream life	Support family financially, father and aunt's loss	"make the most difference", honor family/ Latinx community	Achieve a balanced life, growth	Make family proud, prove to others	More life opportunities, "be at the top"
AVID	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Access Tutorial After School Program	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Total interview time	89 minutes	114 minutes	154 minutes	89 minutes	145 minutes	138 minutes	151 minutes	99 minutes	131 minutes

Appendix H

Single-Case Research Questions Results Table

	Edith	Z	Sophia	Annalise	Jesse	Octavio	Rek	Daniel	Erick
Q1: College Transition & first year experience	Focused priorities, took control of ed., identification with peers	Strong college prep, residence halls, Smooth, deeply engaged, "never alone"	"Stigma", Identity tension	"Raw", "overwhelming and intimidating"	Loss and faculty support	"Down hill" Lack of college skills, AVID	Value on "present happiness"	Fast-pace, older brother, make family proud	Two-year college "stigma", inspiring brokers, took control of ed.
Q2: Future Self	HS: Imm. lawyer C: Imm. lawyer	HS: Speech Therapist C: Paralegal or social worker	H.S Law enforcement C: Academic counselor	HS: Photographer C: Photographer	HS: Sports medicine C: Physician's assistant	HS: Engineer C: Educator, community organizer	HS: Public service C: Mechanical engineering	HS: veterinarian C: veterinarian	HS: Video game designer C: Sociology Researcher
Q3: Challenges (C) and Resources (R)	C: Rude roommate, unsympathetic professor R: Supportive networks	C: Financial Reality R: sister and school peers	C: Depression, work R: Cultural brokers, campus diversity	C: Work, lack of basic needs, political climate, "slow" learning process R: Inner drive. cultural brokers	C: Financial reality, lack of community R: Student programs, community	C: Pressure, lack of career mentors R: Safe space, identification	C: Work R: Mentors, himself	C: Old procrastination habits, academic rigor R: supportive networks, self-determination	C: Unmotivated peers, a critical professor, and work R: TAP, professors, peers
Q4: Identity Development	Opportunity-driven	Academic-centered	Self-aware, intentional	Independent, responsible, confident	Motivated, genuine, community-oriented	Proud "Chicano," leader	Love for learning	Determined, resilient, family-centered	Ambitious, confident

Appendix I

Cross-Case Findings Summary Table

Research Question	Findings
1. What were key background characteristics and key experiences that influenced the transition from high school to college and first year in college of the students?	• College Choice: Financial Realities • AVID • Emotional Distress: "stigma," mental health issues, isolation • Campus Engagement: 2 vs 4-year
2. How did the students envision their future selves after they attended college, and how does this compare with what they envisioned for themselves during their junior year in high school?	• Successful and "Making a Difference" • Factors in Aspiration Development: Exposure and Intrinsic motivation • Career Aspirations Preparation Knowledge: 2-year vs 4-year college students • Mentors Request
3. What challenges did participants encounter during their first year in college, and which resources did they utilize to help move them towards achieving their future goals?	• Challenges: Work and Adjusting to the College Culture • Taking Control of their College Education • Resources: Cultural Brokers in Multiple Worlds
4. How did the challenges and resources found in response to Question 2 and 3 impact the identity development pathway of students?	• Identity Development: Community-Centered and High-Achieving Student • Thriving in College: Excel academically while "not destroying you in the process, but instead building you" • Thriving After College: Financial stability, family and community wellbeing, and a happy and healthy lifestyle