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**Navigating High School Academics: A Qualitative Study of Education and  
Transnationalism in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region**

By

Sofia Elena TannenhauS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

Committee in charge:

Professor Bruce Fuller, Chair  
Professor Patricia Baquedano-López  
Professor Cybelle Fox

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## ABSTRACT

### **Navigating High School Academics: A Qualitative Study of Education and Transnationalism in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region**

by

Sofia Elena Tannenhaus

Doctor of Philosophy

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Professor Bruce Fuller, Chair

Thousands of Mexican students commute from Mexico to the United States each day to attend school. South San Diego's *transfronterizo*, or cross-border, students (most U.S. citizens) offer a colorful microcosm of the greater diversity evident in American schools. But little is known about this phenomenon of *transfronterizos*. The topic demands penetrating research to understand how we can effectively help these students navigate the U.S. education system and routes into higher education.

The shift from middle to high school is a critical life transition, particularly for students who were previously educated south of the border, and now endeavor to traverse two countries, two languages, two cultures, and two education systems. This study focuses on the educational experiences of eight students attending a public high school in South San Diego. Each of the focal students crosses the border on a daily or weekly basis from Tijuana, Baja California to attend school in the United States. Drawing on the causal accounts and conceptual tools of social capital theory, my research describes the journeys of these savvy adolescents and seeks to explain how the social ties they variably develop contribute to their comparative success in high school and to seeking admission to college.

Through qualitative research, I detail the relative strength of each student's social ties and networks by moving from three elements of social capital theory: 1) network formation, 2) information channels with regard to obtaining knowledge about college, and 3) trust of peers and adults. I also explore parents' own knowledge, networks, and social capital through interviews regarding their education and career, expectations of their children, and information channels.

In addition, a comparative analysis focuses on the knowledge of college requirements and course selection strategies of focal students relative to a comparison group of peers: bilingual Latino students who have never lived or attended school in Mexico. The comparison allows me to determine if the knowledge and social capital that

*transfronterizo* students build over time resembles that of students living locally.

The state university systems in California require that at least 11 college-preparatory courses be completed in high school, known as A-G coursework. I discover that focal students have different academic experiences and varying knowledge of the A-G requirements, largely based on whether they are in the AVID program – a selective initiative that acquaints chosen students with college preparation and downstream options. For the most part, AVID enrollment is granted to students who have an above average GPA. I detail the informal, unwritten criteria for gaining access to this pivotal program at one San Diego high school, and then link students' social networks and capital to resources and ties fostered by the AVID program.

I also find that trust among peers does not translate into obtaining thick information about college. Befriending other students who have college-oriented expectations often determine whether they pursue greater knowledge about university requirements. Parents of focal students are generally uninformed about the A-G requirements, financial aid options, and high-stakes tests such as the SAT and ACT. Focal parents' work schedules and residence in Tijuana makes it nearly impossible to attend workshops held at school. None of the focal parents' own social networks and capital facilitate much knowledge about college or how to effectively maneuver through high school.

The results of this study have implications for research in transnationalism, education, and U.S.-Mexico border relations. The complexity and uniqueness of each student's journey to the U.S. for a quality education is a call for understanding the characteristics and needs of cross-border students along the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition, because of the porous nature of the border – e.g., students living in one country and attending school in another or the obligations the students have on both sides of the border – policymakers could learn a great deal about *transfronterizo* students engaging in transnational education practices.

This dissertation is dedicated to the devoted students living in Tijuana and commuting to the U.S. each day for better opportunities.

*Gracias por compartir sus vidas, experiencias y hogares conmigo.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE: THE CASE FOR RESEARCHING U.S. TRANSNATIONALISM**

### **Introduction**

In the early 2000s, I was a high school student in San Diego, California, the southern part of the county, better known as Chula Vista and often referred to as *Chulajuana* due to its proximity to Tijuana, Mexico. My high school, Hillstone Senior High, was considered better than my administratively assigned school, but just above average quality for the district. Statistics available on the California Department of Education website show that the demographic shift at Hillstone has been fairly significant in the past decade, as there has been a nearly 20% hike in Latino enrollment; in 2001-02, Latinos made up 59.7% of the school's enrollment compared to 78.5% in the 2011-12 school year. During my high school years, only a handful of Latino students commuted to our school from Tijuana, Baja California. It was a known but unspoken phenomenon. These students often socialized with each other, as their preferred language was Spanish.

It was not until later in life that I reflected on this transnational activity, prompted by their familial and economic circumstances, that students traversed two countries often on a daily basis. Based on informal conversations with former high school teachers during graduate school, teachers were aware of the phenomenon; in fact, teachers often knew which of their students were crossing the border each day, but they acknowledged the unspoken awareness of *Tijuanense* students pursuing a better education in the United States.

This chapter reviews the literature that positions my study. This section describes the larger context of transnationalism along *la frontera* and how elements of social capital theory point to social ties and resources that may help explain why some *transfronterizo* students get ahead in terms of pursuing college admission, while others do not. My literature review also reveals the lack of studies on how cross-border students navigate their U.S. high school and form ties ("accumulate" social capital) that advances their inclination to pursue college admissions. In addition, it offers a critique of some of the present gaps and approaches used by researchers studying transnationalism as well as potential suggestions for improving the study of this field.

### **School Enrollment Policies**

After investigating federal school enrollment policies, I discovered that residency is the only prerequisite for the right to an education in this country. While an important stipulation for undocumented migrants to be educated and become future contributors to society, U.S. citizens living in Mexico are not entitled to an education in the country in which they were born. It should be noted that undocumented immigrant students attending American schools, which is legal, sparks a similar debate over the costs to taxpayers.

Policy on public school access becomes highly relevant when discussing *transfronterizos*’ means of enrolling in school in the United States. The California Education Code outlines theoretically important stipulations applicable to the focal students, which restrict public school access to American citizens living in Mexico. While many students based in Tijuana, but attending U.S. schools, do rent an apartment within the school district’s boundaries, a high proportion cannot afford to do so. The California Education Code includes residency requirements for admission to K-12 public schools. Section 48051 of Part 27, Chapter 1, states the following regarding students living in a foreign country adjacent to the state:

48051. Any person, otherwise eligible for admission to any class or school of a school district of this state, whose parents are or are not citizens of the United States, whose actual and legal residence is in a foreign country adjacent to this state, and who regularly returns within a 24-hour period to said foreign country may be admitted to the class or school of the district by the governing board of the district.

48052. The governing board of the district shall, as a condition precedent to the admission of any person, under Section 48051, require the parent or guardian of such person to pay to the district an amount not more than sufficient to reimburse the district for the total cost of educating the person, including the total of the amounts expended per pupil for the current expenses of education, the use of buildings and equipment, the repayment of local bonds and interest payments and state building loan funds, capital outlay, and transportation to and from school. The per pupil cost attributable to capital outlay shall be on the basis of an average expenditure for the preceding five years. The cost of transportation shall not exceed ten dollars (\$10) per month. Tuition payments shall be made in advance for each month or semester during the period of attendance. If the amount paid is more or less than the total cost of education and transportation, adjustment shall be made for the following semester or school year. The attendance of the pupils shall not be included in computing the average daily attendance of the class or school for the purpose of obtaining apportionment of state funds. The school district shall not be eligible for nonimmigrant or noncitizen reimbursement under the provisions of Chapter 11 (commencing with Section 42900) of Part 24 of Division 3 of this title, Article 2 (commencing with Section 56865) of Chapter 6 of Part 30 of this division for these students.

Under the California Education Code, students living in Tijuana may attend U.S. public schools. The caveat, as outlined in § 48052, is that Mexico residents who are educated in the United States should pay the school district the cost of educating the child and for the use of buildings and equipment, among other expenses. During his appointment, the district superintendent who oversees 11 middle schools and 13 high schools, including Guerrero High School, stated, “an American citizen living outside the county would pay tuition of \$7,162” (2012 *New York Times* article). California Education Code § 48051, however, does not acknowledge the *fluctuation* with which students return to their home in Mexico during the school week. Therefore, some *transfronterizos* fall within a grey area of the education code. By stating, “whose actual and legal residence is in a foreign

country adjacent to this state,” students whose families rent an apartment in Santo Domingo are clearly not in violation of the law.

It is Guerrero High School’s policy to verify residency through a utility bill, bank statement, etc. Once that occurs, the school does not (and is not allowed to) further investigate. There have been districts, however, that have hired private investigators to photograph students crossing the border in the morning. For example, San Luis High School located within the Yuma Union High School District (YUSD) in Arizona, employs an attendance officer who doubles up as a detective for the six schools in the district. According to a Los Angeles Times article,

The district was forced to confront the residency issue after a bond measure to build a high school in San Luis was rejected in 1992. Voters believed the school would serve mostly students who lived in Mexico. The district decided it needed to prove to voters that its students were attending legally, and created the position of attendance officer.

In 2005, the state superintendent hired a private investigator to videotape students coming from Mexico. Afterwards, the district had a school bus cease to pick up 85 students in a small town at the border crossing each day. YUSD’s attendance officer typically finds approximately 150 students (out of 10,000 districtwide) each school year who should be withdrawn for violating the residency requirements. He and the assistant superintendent advise parents of these students to either move north of the border or make a U.S. resident the legal guardian of their child. The article indicates that most parents make the adjustment. As an alternative, parents living outside of the district boundaries may pay \$5,300 annually for their children to attend school in the YUSD, but only eight families were doing so at the time.

A truant officer was dispatched in another school district in Calexico, California, to photograph students crossing the border. However, conducting this task was deemed “an exercise in futility” and discontinued, as explained by superintendent Richard Fragale (*The New York Times* 2012 article). Like YUSD, Fragale also estimates that between 100 and 200 students cross daily, most not paying tuition. “Ultimately, there are painful decisions for the district,” according to Fragale. He cited a recent example in which, two parents were deported, leaving two children, both American citizens, in limbo. He also raised important theoretical considerations about the education of cross-border students: “What do we do with these youngsters? Philosophically, as an educator, if a young person comes to the door, we should educate them.”

In 1982, the Supreme Court established that schools cannot inquire about a family’s immigration status. According to Guerrero High School’s principal, Mr. Escobedo, the administration does not investigate any student’s living arrangements once they have demonstrated proof of residency prior to enrolling in school. However, there are *transfronterizos* who have not established their own residence in the U.S., but rather, are borrowing a friend’s or family member’s address for purposes of enrolling in school. The aforementioned *transfronterizos*, therefore, would be considered to not be abiding by the stipulations outlined in the California Education Code with regard to school

admission. Whether the policy should be changed, or whether these students (who are U.S. citizens) should be legally allowed to enroll in U.S. public schools, is not a topic I seek to delve into.

I argue that *transfronterizos*, much like undocumented migrants who arrive in early childhood, find themselves in a situation that is beyond their control. *Transfronterizo* students often live in Mexico for financial reasons; in other words, their families cannot afford to live in the United States given their low income, leading them to live south of the border. At the same time, the state provides the majority of school-level funding, making up for over half of total funding for low-income schools. As a result, some may argue that it is unfair for students not residing in the state to be served by its public schools. Various questions, secondary to the research questions of this project, arise from the topic at hand. Should one's citizenship entitle them to a U.S. public education regardless of where they live? And what constitutes residing in the U.S.? Is going to your cousin's house each day before and after school, and occasionally spending the night, enough? Or must you sleep there each and every night?

What we need to know more about—than formal rules constraining educational access and post secondary options—are the lives of *transfronterizo* children, what exactly they know about college requirements, how they obtain this information, and how they go about fulfilling such requirements. In other words, determining the less visible social mechanisms operating in students' own peer groups (based on elements of social capital) that help to explain postsecondary outcomes. Understanding the qualitative components of students' lives and how they currently navigate the institution of education allows us to become better acquainted with the student population we seek to serve. In addition, this knowledge can help practitioners find different ways to support student success and college matriculation.

While a handful of educational researchers have expanded our knowledge on *transfronterizos'* English language acquisition and social integration (Garcia, 1996; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Zentella, 2009), no studies have focused on the social capital of *transfronterizos*. As their point of departure, most social scientists in this field use cognitive debates about second language acquisition. While a much-needed and critical area of investigation, this often paints a limited picture of *transfronterizo* students, depicting their linguistic trajectory as stagnant. However, there are many children who successfully navigate the education system by utilizing their social networks, trust, and information channels that involves continued contact and interaction with peers, teachers, or relatives who attended high school in the United States. Not all students rely on social ties in order to navigate the education system and university requirements, though. This research seeks to determine why some students actively strengthen and utilize their social capital compared to others.

In the studies specifically addressing *transfronterizos*, a similar gap exists. While numerous texts on transnationalism abound in cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, and migration studies (see Chapter 2), there is scant attention paid to youth and social capital in *la frontera's* context. This dissertation is a step in addressing the dearth in both transnationalism and educational studies.

In this qualitative study, I focus on how the social ties and peer groups of eight *transfronterizo* youth, including links to teachers, help to explain succeeding in high school and pursuing admission to college. Two focal students are in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, four are in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and two students are seniors. The youth are first-generation *mexicanos* living in Tijuana. All of the *transfronterizos* are U.S. citizens, but have varying educational experiences within the same school. Not all of them will attend a four-year university immediately after high school, partially due to being unfamiliar with the American education system. Half are enrolled in a selective program, which provides them the support they need to apply to college, resulting in a nearly 100% university acceptance rate; meanwhile, the other students experience a range of academic outcomes. Some focal students actively seek advice from counselors and teachers about course enrollment and college applications, while others take a passive approach to their education. I draw on components of social capital theory, including trust, information channels, and peer networks to help determine why some teenagers build social capital through connecting with peers and adults on campus, while others do not.

Primarily using repeated interviews with focal students, coupled with observations and home visits, this dissertation empirically informs the following questions:

- 1.A.) Who are the students that belong to *transfronterizos*' social networks within high schools? Who within the *transfronterizos*' social networks proves influential in reinforcing or shifting expectations, if any, of themselves? Do 'membership boundaries' or rules regarding who can be a member prove consequential in the social ties and capital that these students build?
- 1.B.) How do the social networks of *transfronterizos* vary among students, and relative to a comparison group of students living locally?
- 2) What kinds of knowledge and expectations move among the social ties (capital formed) among *transfronterizo* students? Do *transfronterizos* have a similar degree of knowledge about college? How does *transfronterizos*' knowledge about college admissions compare with peers living in the U.S.? In what ways, if any, do *transfronterizos* use their social ties to act instrumentally in taking college-prep courses or pursuing the necessary steps for applying to college?
- 3) How do structural mechanisms within a high school – availability of college-prep courses or program (e.g., AVID), access to counselors, tracking – shape information channels and the social ties formed by *transfronterizo* students?

Navigating post-secondary requirements and opportunities is no easy task. Given that counselors are assigned over 400 students each, many students simply do not receive the information they need in order to be eligible for the opportunities they seek out after high school. Learning more about why some students obtain college information while others do not, knowing whether students are held to high expectations, and understanding how institutional mechanisms influence one's academic experience are all critical components in addressing the college matriculation rates at Guerrero High School.

Improving the educational experience of students in the border region ultimately improves the region's prosperity, as many individuals pursue careers locally.

This report is not research solely about the education of transnational students, but it is situated in transnational and educational policy, reflecting much of what is virtuous and problematic about society, particularly affecting youths' academic formation. It is not a work of history or law, but it incorporates the history of border relations and educational policy as a frame for understanding contemporary politics of transnationalism. When we take into account that Latinos are now the majority in California<sup>1</sup>, it becomes essential to understand the dynamics of students' educational experiences.

### **The Case For U.S. Transnationalism**

The U.S.-Mexico border creates conditions in which *tranfronterizo* students must learn to navigate physical, social, political, and cultural barriers. The *frontera* literature details the intertwined history between the two countries, and some studies capture the social experiences and implications of "life on the border". One way to study the border is to employ social capital theory in exploring the navigation of the educational system and its requirements. Of particular importance is determining who *transfronterizo* students trust and why, and how these adolescents utilize their social networks. These elements lead to my research questions because we do not know how these youth make sense of their opportunities.

Worldwide, there are only two examples of first world and third world countries bordering each other. The first is the six countries that border Turkey, while the second is the U.S. and Mexico. The income difference alone explains why so many Mexico residents commute internationally each day. *Tijuanaense* students educated in the United States indicate that they cross the border for their education because the U.S. offers better opportunities compared to Mexico. The same is true for *transfronterizo* employees given the wage differential. Thus, we know that the U.S. provides a means for individuals to achieve upward mobility, but are students using the resources available to them? Are students informed about the array of academic and career opportunities? Knowing to what extent students use support systems, build relationships with knowledgeable adults, and learn about their options is an important first step toward improving their academic formation and post-secondary outcomes.

While many studies on transnationalism incorporate various regions of the world, the vast majority have focused on the U.S. and another country. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) helps define the term "transmigrant":

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 14.99 million Latinos compared with about 14.92 million non-Hispanic whites were living in California as of July 2014 (CBS News).

Immigrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organization, religious, and political – that span [national] borders (p.1).

The U.S. is an ideal site for particular transnationalisms to exist because of its long history of immigration. In fact, in the U.S. today, about half of the immigrants are first generation while the other half is their second-generation children. This research, however, focuses on a different type of migrant, namely, *transfronterizos*. The narrative of *transfronterizos* is a unique case as they cross international borders almost daily and are typically dual citizens. Of particular interest to me are high school *transfronterizos*, whom we know little about due to their vulnerability as minors and their ‘hidden status’ within schools. The experiences of *transfronterizos* are not atypical in this day and age, as more and more people are choosing to live and raise their children in a transnational lifestyle (Levitt, 2009; Levitt, 2004). Fourn & Glick-Schiller (2002) find that, “once a migration is firmly established, child-rearing is a transnational process” (177). This means that in research on the second generation, we cannot assume that adults who have immigrated and settled in the United States will have children born and reared in the United States only.

### **La Frontera**

The San Diego-Tijuana region, and the greater U.S.-Mexico border regions, has typically been understood to be a melting pot of two cultures, languages, and countries. Yet, García (1996) finds that this ideology wherein “the children of immigrants abandoned their native language and culture as they were urged to become 100 percent American” was not typical, in fact, “it just doesn’t happen along *la frontera*.” Research regarding *la frontera* conceptualizes the border as a hybrid of cultures. García defines *la frontera* as “an extensive geographic region bordering the U.S. and Mexican border that is, intellectually and empirically, a significant social and economic zone distinct from either nation” (9). This move to separate the border region from either nation is an ideological shift from past scholarship as it brings attention to the region’s specific needs that have developed over the course of its unique economic and political histories.

García’s distinction of *la frontera* from both the U.S. and Mexico has its most significant effect on policy and research methodology. García moves to alter the ideology surrounding students in border regions and proposes “to think differently about these students [in *la frontera*]– to view them in new ways that may contradict conventional notions and to recognize their needs” (9). This change in approach is meant to adjust to García’s anticipated changes in the American demographic, which predict that by 2020, “the foreign-born workforce of the United States is...projected to reach 1 in 7 persons” (11). With this increasing diversity, the curricular emphasis is placed on sheltered English instruction so as to cultivate English language acquisition. The ultimate goal becomes mainstreaming students as soon as possible. Yet, the aforementioned projection does not imply that English-proficiency efforts must be increased, but instead that policymakers and researchers must “first educate [themselves] about who [the students] are and what they need in order to succeed” (10). García critiques the presumption that “students from

*la frontera* families...share a lack of English fluency” and challenges that “such a definition masks their diversity and underestimates the challenges facing schools” (12).

When considering the effects on students of crossing the international border, *transfronterizos* fall into the category of borderlanders that Robert Alvarez Jr. (1995) outlines in his study of “anthropomorphizing” the border. Alvarez acknowledges the difficulty in defining the borderlands in contemporary ideological spheres but identifies a defining borderland characteristic through the presence of *fronterizos*. These people are “marginal... [*fronterizo*] applies to one who lives on a border...[and] to one who is marginal yet specifically defined and identified” (454). Alvarez views “the border as artifact” and argues that, “the borderland became a perfect laboratory in which to view the coming together of, clashing of, and interface between cultures” (454). This interaction and clashing is the critical border quality that *transfronterizos* constantly engaged with, both at schools and at the moments of physical crossing with border patrol. With the border considered as an artifact, Alvarez marks its uniqueness in anthropology, complete with its own set of culture and ethnography. This classification is due to “the Mexico-U.S. border [being] the best example of how nation-states negotiate, marginalize, and influence people’s ever-shifting local behavior,” as each *fronterizo* “represents distinct historical backgrounds and cultural behaviors” (451).

### **Theoretical Development of *Transfronterizo* Education**

Given the diversity within the Hispanic student population, researchers should not simply attribute educational outcomes to GPA. In order to determine what factors lead to academic success and university matriculation, I examine the formation and possession of social capital, as well as the institutional mechanisms (e.g., the AVID program and Advanced Placement courses) impacting college preparedness. Cross-border students living in Mexico and attending school in the United States comprise an unknown but substantial portion of students educated in the border region. A majority of the limited research that has been done on *transfronterizos* has investigated acculturation, child development, and identity. For example, Relaño Pastor (2007) focuses on the socialization aspect inside high schools and how personal social-identification has implications on *transfronterizos*’ language acquisition. Zentella (2009) analyzes social stratification among *transfronterizos* and discovers that these students actually remain locked in their socially assigned identities rather than resisting their status.

My research fits within the broader landscape on transnational students attending school in the United States, but is the first of its kind to focus on the educational navigation of course selection and college requirement fulfillment using elements of social capital theory. To offer a privileged perspective into the lives of *transfronterizos*, and in many ways to do justice to the straddled lives that transnationals live today all across the world, it is critical that researchers investigate the variety of ways in which students and workers journey through unfamiliar systems and institutions.

## **Social Capital Theory**

Within this policy context, we would like to learn about the social dynamics enacted by *transfronterizo* students – especially social action with peers and influential teachers – that may affect their desire to succeed in high school and pursue higher education. Social capital theory offers a useful framework for identifying attributes of social ties or peer relations that may be predictive of academic success.

Singer & Massey (1998), who have focused on social capital, assess how the border patrol's practices impact undocumented immigration and immigrants' social capital. However, social capital in the name of learning about post-secondary educational options and university requirements has remained less of a focus by scholars examining issues related to the *transfronterizo* educational experience. Those of us who have and are studying *transfronterizos* could better serve the field by paying closer attention to how social networks are formed, whether social ties are used to obtain knowledge about college, and the ways in which institutional mechanisms restrict or enable network formation and information channels regarding college access among *transfronterizo* students.

Social capital theory posits that resources and knowledge are embedded within social networks and it is through inter-relationships that individuals access these resources to gain upward social mobility. Bourdieu posits that social capital is the aggregate of actual or potential resources, linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships. Social networks are not a natural given, however. With regard to school choice, a Bourdieuan point of view would argue that educational policies create the local jurisdiction determining where students go to school, but that individuals have social agency within this limitation. Agency is structured, however, and individuals employ their social capital to advance their own status. Fuller & Hannum (2002) also argue that individuals have agency and they explain that, "local forces shape children's engagement with and capacity to succeed inside schools" (2).

Social capital influences adolescents' learning and motivation, and according to Coleman (1988), socioeconomic status (SES) and neighborhood characteristics are the strongest predictors of academic success. Coleman details three forms of social capital: 1) obligations/expectations, 2) information channels, and 3) social norms, arguing that social capital is embodied in relations. The value of social capital, therefore, derives from resources used by actors to realize their interests. The more extensively people call on one another for aid, the stronger the social capital generated. In short, Coleman would argue that social capital is composed of inter-relationships with college-goers. This is in direct contrast to cultural capital theory, which involves using cultural knowledge to establish one's place in society's hierarchy of students. My research seeks to determine the ways in which *transfronterizos* utilize their social networks in the name of college preparation.

If students are supported by a network with strong norms about moving in a certain direction, social capital theorists like Coleman (1988), Fuller & Hannum (2002), and Ream & Rumberger (2008) argue that one will move with that network. According to

Ream & Rumberger, “social capital mediates the impact of student engagement on school completion or dropout” (119). Social networks essentially change expectations. In their study, Ream & Rumberger find that Mexican American students are less involved in informal academic endeavors and formally sponsored extracurricular activities than White students. Social class background is not mentioned in this finding, however. Ream & Rumberger come to the conclusion that four factors lower the likelihood of dropout: 1) school preparation, 2) participation in an organized sport, 3) art participation, and 4) completing homework (119). Based on my interviews with focal students, income does not appear to be an obstacle to participating in sports or completing homework. When students cannot afford to participate in extracurricular activities in the United States, they seek out these activities in Tijuana; others are simply not interested. Ream & Rumberger explain that children in extracurricular activities are more integrated in school, befriend people with similar interests, and avoid problematic behavior, which reinforces the importance of students’ social networks. They put forth that “students’ involvement in academic and nonacademic activities, when conceptualized as behavioral precursors that influence the formation of friendships among adolescents, influence the patterns of school completion or drop out” (Ream & Rumberger, 112). While my interest goes beyond high school completion and focuses, rather, on students’ familiarity with college requirements, my outlook is in line with Ream & Rumberger’s argument that extracurricular involvement cultivates a positive academic orientation; this assumes, of course, that other teens in those activities also place a high value on school.

Lareau (2007), coming from a somewhat different perspective, problematizes institutional discrimination through her study comparing low-income and middle-class habits of child-rearing. Middle-class parents employ concerted cultivation in raising their children, which strives to produce kids to be well-prepared to activate their social and cultural capital as they navigate educational and employment systems. In contrast, low-income families lack resources for enrichment activities, among other things, and adopt a natural growth method of child-rearing. Lareau finds that low-income parents who work longer hours cannot hire help in caring for their children; as a result, there are less structured activities. Parents who practice natural growth child-rearing also focus more on their children’s basic needs, such as shelter and food, and focus less on developing their children’s communication skills, for example. According to Lareau, class is more indicative of child-rearing practices than race; this lends itself to a focus on class-determined processes through which cultural capital is taught, learned, and activated. Class-determined processes, therefore, dictate acculturation. If what Lareau suggests holds true, I would have expected to see differences in how middle-class and low-income students, regardless of which side of the U.S.-Mexico border they live on, activate their social capital. Based on the two rounds of interviews that I completed with each focal student, it appears as though all 11 of them qualify as low-income in the United States. Of interest is that several of these students are involved in extracurricular activities and manage impacted schedules comparable to children raised in middle-class households. My findings illustrate that Lareau’s theory of the impact of child-rearing does not hold true for my research. However, given the uniqueness of the focal families, I did not expect their child-rearing practices to fit neatly into Lareau’s theory. Research into child-rearing practices among *transfronterizo* families could serve as an insightful avenue of future research.

Loury (1977), on the other hand, analyzes the consequences of social position in facilitating acquisition of the standard human capital characteristics. Social capital, Loury argues, makes one consider how social forces (beyond one's control) account for variable success in the labor force (or in this context, academic achievement). According to Loury, social capital is not just for elites, as there is value in network formation for all kinds of communities, including the powerless and marginalized. Of the arguments that Loury makes, my research assumes only the viewpoint that every individual, regardless of class, can develop and benefit from social relationships.

By employing research on social capital and education policy my research conceptualizes how adolescents move through this transitional time and gain knowledge about college. In Chapter 4, I draw on elements of social capital theory, such as trust, information channels, and peer networks to help me organize my account of why some teenagers build social capital through connecting with others via social networks, while others do not. I build on anthropological research by analyzing the negotiation of social and physical boundaries in the daily lives of cross-border youth during high school. Such boundaries are constructed by one's beliefs, attitudes, personal experiences, and socialization, influencing how an individual responds to institutional mechanisms (i.e., border control at the ports of entry, ability tracking within schools) affecting one's upward social mobility. I focus on how social networks contribute to one's academic endeavors, course selection, and understanding of educational and societal norms.

### **Cross-Border Educational Travel**

Multiple systems offering service to the general public (including border enforcement, public transportation, and public education) coalesce and facilitate Tijuana residents obtaining an education in the United States. The physical navigation of arriving to the classroom and returning home to Tijuana each day requires a mastery of how multiple institutions function. The journey between these border cities can be considered complex and seamless simultaneously, and requires strong human and cultural capital for the successful navigation. However, the presence of the international border, and the time needed to commute between school and home, poses a restraint on the ability of *transfronterizo* students to build social capital with school peers, staff, and faculty. Students who reside on the American side of the border are alleviated of many commuting hours each week. The border itself symbolizes restriction and control, while public transportation beginning just steps into the U.S. serves as a marker of possibility for these young students.

South San Diego is the cultural nexus between Baja California and San Diego County. The south bay region is home to several schools, a bustling outlet mall, banks, and restaurants, among other stops that Mexico residents make when crossing the San Diego-Tijuana border. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) released a report based on a "Cross-Border Travel Behavior Study" in September of 2011. Of particular interest to this study are the crossings at the Santo Domingo and Otay Mesa ports of entry with school as destination. Out of nearly 15 million estimated annual

crossings at these two ports of entry, about 900,000 were made for educational purposes (SANDAG, 19).

There are no statistics on the number of *transfronterizo* high school students who cross from Tijuana to San Diego because many students claim to live in the U.S. with relatives in order to be eligible to attend U.S. K-12 schools. We do know based on the SANDAG's report, however, that college students make up a sizable portion of over 50,000 cars and 25,000 pedestrians that cross the border going northbound every day. The SANDAG study only includes individuals of age 18 and over (presumably community college and university students), however, numerous cross-border students obtaining a post-secondary education in the U.S. already have experience in the U.S. education system. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that many of these Mexico residents commuting north for educational purposes also did so for high school. Whether this theory is true would have to be investigated further.

According to the American Community Survey (ACS) from 2008-2012, nearly 30,000 people resided in Santo Domingo; the median household income was \$35,680. In contrast, over three million people resided in San Diego County, with the median household income at \$63,373. Twenty-eight percent of San Diegans self-identified as Mexican, while ninety percent of Santo Domingans self-identified as Mexican. With regard to educational attainment in 2012, there were stark differences between the populations 25 years and over in Santo Domingo versus San Diego County, as shown in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1 – Educational Attainment of Santo Domingans vs. San Diegans**

| Category                                                                      | Santo Domingo | San Diego County |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Completed less than 9 <sup>th</sup> grade                                     | 29.70%        | 7.50%            |
| Completed 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade with no high school diploma | 18.10%        | 7.10%            |
| High school graduates with no further education                               | 21.70%        | 19.00%           |
| Bachelor's degree or higher                                                   | 9.60%         | 21.40%           |
| Median earnings for the past 12 months (in 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars)   | \$22,273      | \$39,572         |

Source: American Community Survey, 2008-2012

The data show that annual median earnings were over \$15,000 more in San Diego County overall compared to Santo Domingo. This is likely to be positively correlated with low levels of educational attainment among Santo Domingo residents; about 21% of San Diegans have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to less than 10% of Santo Domingans. In Santo Domingo, more than quadruple the amount of San Diegans have completed less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade (7.5% versus 29.7%). With the exception of the similar rates of "High school graduates with no further education," Santo Domingans are disproportionately less educated than San Diegans overall. Making information about college access more available to *transfronterizos*, and public school students in general, has room for improvement. I argue that raising expectations coupled with providing students with complete information about university admissions is a step toward

improving college attendance rates among Latinos, which have remained flat for the past decade.

### Scarce Literature on Transnational Students

Because this study focuses on *transfronterizo* youth engaged in cross-border educational travel, I purposefully examined studies that broadly describe transnational Latinos. Even approaching studies in this manner, I found a dearth of literature on children and youth. Guadalupe Valdés' (1996) ethnography about how migrant families go about navigating and succeeding in a new country does center on education, but the focus is on mothers. And while Luis Alberto Urrea's (1993) work deals with the struggle that Mexican border residents in Tijuana endure to survive amidst extreme poverty, it does not highlight the phenomenon of *transfronterizos*.

There are many youth who lead transnational lives, engaging in continued interaction with relatives and friends on both sides of the border (Farr, 2006; Sanchez, 2007; Potowski & Gorman, 2010). Childhood experiences in particular are being addressed and unpacked in recent works on Latino border-crossers (Zentella, 2009; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Escala Rabadán & Vega Briones, 2005). When we take into account that the generation of young adults in the United States includes a Latino majority, and the population along the southern border of the United States has been majority Latino for some time, it becomes exceedingly important to understand the dynamics of this life experience and to be able to put it into perspective. Without insight into this complex picture, we lose a valuable opportunity to appreciate an incredible transnational phenomenon.

No research has been done on *transfronterizos*' navigation of the education system in the United States, which is how my research contributes to the literature on transnational individuals. From my own perspective as the daughter of *transfronterizos*, I believe that some practices are often "hidden" from public view even when researchers may be "looking" for them. In his work on Mexican transmigrants in the U.S., Smith (1998) uses a framework that addresses part of this disparity. He explains a new way of "seeing" transnationalities in Ticuani families residing in New York City:

We [academics] are accustomed to equating membership in a political community with citizenship, or membership in a nation-state; to treating migration as a structural phenomenon through which migrants passively respond to 'push' and 'pull' forces. These images have captured the imaginations of scholars precisely because they correspond to important realities: most of us *do* live our lives as citizens in nation-state; migration is induced by structural causes. However, these conceptualizations also lead us to develop what Veblen called 'trained incapacity': the inability to see what is there because of how we have been trained to look (*italics in original*, p.197).

While this new way of "looking" at migration processes does indeed incorporate a transnational lens, there will still be some processes obscured from education researchers.

Additionally, such work on transnational dynamics may not focus on students' social ties, which vary systematically and play a role in explaining educational outcomes.

Having been born and raised in a border community with *transfronterizo* parents, I have come to understand how certain aspects of transnationalities can often remain unseen. In many instances, *transfronterizo* children are encouraged by their families to not (fully) disclose the fact that they reside in Tijuana for fear of retribution—being fined for using a residential address at which they do not reside. In addition, students may find some stigma attached to living in Mexico. They may “hide” significant parts of their lives to protect themselves within an institution. In general, focal participants agree that teachers, staff, and even school-based peers have little knowledge of their experiences as border-crossers. Marela, a sophomore who met the criteria to be a focal student but was not selected, discusses the fact that she had not told her friends that she lives on the other side of the border because she was scared to tell others.

**ST:** ¿Tu eres la única que vive allá de tus amigas?  
(*Are you the only one among your friends that lives over there [in Tijuana]?*)

**Marela:** Creo. No les he dicho. \*giggles\*  
(*I think. I haven't told them.*)

**ST:** Ah, no saben. ¿Por qué no les dices?  
(*Oh, they don't know. Why don't you tell them?*)

**Marela:** No sé...no.  
(*I don't know...no.*)

**ST:** ¿Tienes vergüenza o tienes miedo de que la gente se va a enterar?  
(*Are you embarrassed or are you afraid that people will find out?*)

**Marela:** Tengo miedo.  
(*I'm scared [that people will find out I'm crossing].*)

Gladis, another focal participant, had been instructed by her mother to not let others know that she is a *transfronteriza*:

**ST:** Do any adults (teachers, coaches, counselor, etc.) know that you wake up early because you live in Tijuana?

**Gladis:** No.

**ST:** Is there a reason you haven't told them?

**Gladis:** 'Cause my mom tells me not to tell anybody.

As researchers in this field, we need to develop finer methodological tools to “see” and “uncover” transnationalities, in particular those involving youth and children. Otherwise,

we risk overlooking important processes of transnational childhood education and their navigation of a foreign education system.

### **Historical Context for a Community's Transfronterizo Practices**

The Mexico border region, as distant as it is from Mexico City, has experienced rapid economic and population growth over the past two generations. Mexican border residents not only benefit from the relative prosperity of their region, but also from their proximity to the United States, where wages are several times higher than in Mexico. On the American side, the border region varies from affluent, conservative, and predominantly white in San Diego County to low-income, politically liberal, primarily Mexican-American counties in Texas.

Largely due to its geographic location along the southwest border of Mexico and the United States, the city of Tijuana experiences unique sociocultural processes which have been delineated by historical, social, and cultural characteristics. Sparrow (2001) highlights the political and economic history of the U.S.-Mexico border, in which the two countries have constantly worked to maintain their separateness but have become increasingly integrated over the years. For example, that San Diego (and more so Tijuana) residents carry out daily activities on the other side of the border creates an intense transcultural relationship between the sister cities. Various elements feed into what is considered daily life in the border region, including practices stemming from education and work to visiting family and shopping. Most importantly, actions (including where individuals work or shop) benefit both cities' residents, in addition to various institutions, organizations, and local government on both sides of the border.

While economic concerns have brought the two countries together through trade treaties, labor exchange, and capital investment, educational politics have served to exacerbate the national boundaries. The U.S. Department of State, for example, only offers educational (F-1) visas to foreigners at the post-secondary level. Not offering a permit for *transfronterizo* students living in Mexico to attend school in the United States carries far-reaching implications for the economic prosperity of the border region. The non-existence of such a permit limits the extent to which American citizens living in Mexico can pursue educational and career opportunities in the country in which they were born.

Glen Sparrow (2001) notes that cities in border regions act as companion cities since their intersections serve "as zones of transition between the two nations" (73). In studying the historical and political trends that have shaped these companion cities, he has found a common feature: "the two very distinct and separate cultures work to maintain their lifestyles...people on both sides of the border cling to their traditions and ways of life" (74). These efforts to maintain selfhood provide a context to understand why the border regions have been difficult to address successfully through policy and research. This attempt to maintain separateness is embodied by the experience of navigating the border; traveling in either direction exhibits "the immediate reaction...of stark contrasts signaling a change of economies, cultures, and governments" (75).

*Transfronterizo* students' ability to adjust to these changing dynamics exhibits a heightened cultural awareness critical to their academic achievement.

Sparrow finds that this cultural clash between the two nations "has steadily moved toward interdependence driven primarily by economic force" (77). Much like the cooperation between Nogales and Sonora due to industry needs, the San Diego-Tijuana area began collaborating in the 1940s when their nation's respective economic policies began to complement each other (77). The strongest manifestations of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico were the U.S.'s *Bracero* program from 1942-64 and Mexico's *maquiladora* program. The *Bracero* program benefited the U.S. when the country was going through a labor shortage due to World War II, while the *maquiladora* program allowed "duty-free, imports of machinery, equipment, raw materials, and components into plants located inside a 20 kilometer strip...of border region, as long as their output was exported" (76-77). These collaborative efforts brought the U.S. and Mexico into an interaction that altered each nation's prior efforts to maintain selfhood in the border regions. This did not mean that these preservation efforts ended, however, as they evolved and manifested in the political and electoral processes.

Sparrow recognized this development since "San Diego voters voted in numbers greater than the California voters in general" on racially-motivated initiatives, including Proposition 187 (1994) and Proposition 227 (1998). Proposition 187 barred undocumented migrants from enrolling in public education, while Proposition 227 outlawed bilingual education and required that all public school instruction be conducted in English. Support for both propositions was strong, sending a message to "people of foreign background that they were expected to become and act like 'Americans'" (77-78). Affirmative action was essentially outlawed by voting to create separation with Latinos as the target.

As the preservation of nationhood intensified in the electoral process, Sparrow found that the economic processes kept the U.S. and Mexico in constant collaboration. These efforts resulted in "a series of treaty agencies to monitor and/or address labor and environmental concerns," such that "these agencies [had] developed models of formal collaboration and produced a type of trans-border governance" (80). The formal collaboration networks are a form of border spanning, or "extra governmental agencies whose sole purpose is to bring together the various governments in order to accomplish a particular task" (80). Perhaps the best-known example is The North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA), enacted on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 under the Clinton administration after a full-fledged national debate. This was the first free trade agreement signed between countries with such a sharp difference in terms of levels of development. Those in favor believed it would expand the United States' exports to Mexico by reducing barriers, while also creating jobs in the U.S. Critics agreed that a strong trading relationship with Mexico was needed, but believed NAFTA created the wrong "rules of the game" on how to integrate the two economies. This history provides the context for one of Sparrow's conclusions: "a globalized economy is the driving force that is creating the San Diego-Tijuana regional economy and, to a certain degree, a growing 'border culture'" (81). The creation of these agencies came about due to the specific economic and environmental needs for

the border regions; similarly, education policy efforts could be developed through this approach.

History plays an important role in this research because policies and laws continue to affect Latino students and employees, including *transfronterizos*. According to historian Antonia Castañeda, the U.S.-Mexican War was about violence –

“A violence that did not end once the war ended or military phase of the war ended. The violence and the violations that people experienced were not only in terms of taking away their lands or their livelihood but, ultimately, was also an effort to take away their language” (Castañeda, 2006).

And we continue to live with the effects of Mexico’s defeat. Americans live with “the impact and the effects of the acquisition of that land, the displacement of the people on it, the appropriation of their labor at less than livable wages. In fact, in a sense, we continue to fight the war over and over...” (Castañeda, 2006). I agree with Castañeda’s argument that Americans have not yet come to terms with what it means to be a conquering nation. In terms of education policy, propositions such as 187 and 227 have attempted to continue to suppress Mexican students in the United States. And most recently, presidential hopefuls have subjugated Mexicans south of the border and undocumented migrants living in the U.S., crushing the possibility of formulating binational policies to improve immigration policy. Understanding our shared history with Mexico, therefore, can help us be solutions-oriented with regard to our damaged binational relationship. More importantly, our history can help us consider how the United States can affirm and validate the Spanish language and Mexico’s culture in our schools and in the workplace.

This study advances the existing literature by providing a privileged perspective into how students straddling two countries use social capital to advance their educational opportunities. Though my focus is on *transfronterizo* students, much of what I elaborate is useful in the study of newly arrived migrant students as well. Furthermore, for academics who work in Chicano studies – and focus on the intersection of social, cultural, political, and economic systems that many Latinos in the southwest continually negotiate – connecting the past with current issues highlighted in this research can yield important understanding.

Each of the focal students, indeed, leads a life that orients toward transnationalism. They demonstrate a certain plasticity that is quite different than an immigrant, let alone a first-generation adult migrant. The young men and women in this study have a wide range of understanding of life in *la frontera* because they are immersed in two worlds. And because of their age, they are at a transition point that serves as a departure for their adulthood. In the following chapters, I attempt to detail the ways in which the *transfronterizos* navigate the American education system and its requirements utilizing and social ties, trust, and information channels.

Chapter Two, “Conducting a Qualitative Study about *Transfronterizo* Youth,” I explain why I used an ethnographic approach to “uncover” the navigational practices of youth within the education system often obscured in the public sphere. I provide the types

of data collected in this study and its analysis while discussing my own position as a researcher and member of this border town community. This chapter also details school performance data, academic and extra-curricular program offerings, and discusses the school's leadership.

Chapter Three, "The School and Its Immediate Environment" provides portraits of the eight young *transfronterizos* and their families, as well as a comparison of the eight students. This chapter also provides the setting of this study, which includes the youth's school environment in Santo Domingo, California and their home environment in Tijuana, Mexico. Because of the vast detail in this chapter, it is more like a data chapter.

Chapters four and five are the remaining data chapters. In "Chapter Four: Students' Formation of Social Capital," the findings indicate that students rely on different friends for different reasons. Focal students who had an older sibling or cousin that they looked up to tended to also seek out information from those particular people. Meanwhile, non-AVID students did not tend to utilize resources, but rather, relied on their counselor's knowledge and expertise for the selection of their classes. Some focal students also reported having trusting relationships with a teacher on campus. Teachers that focal students trusted all shared the same characteristic: they understood why students needed to cross and they were from the border region themselves.

Finally, "Chapter Five: Institutional Mechanisms Inhibiting or Facilitating the Fulfillment of College Requirements," analyzes school-level academic requirements in place which affect students' ability to meet A-G requirements. It delves into the effects of entering the ELD program compared to the AVID program, which is largely based on grade and English language proficiency. This chapter also outlines the challenges that arise from how the system is set up. All students reported an interest in attending college, but A-G knowledge among *transfronterizos* varied, often by program participation (e.g., AVID, ELD). With the exception of one student, all focal students not enrolled in AVID did not have the necessary knowledge about university requirements.

The conclusion addresses how this study informs the field of transnationalism and education by offering a close look at high school students engaged in transnational education practices. I discuss how a qualitative study such as this one redefines the characteristics and needs of cross-border students being educated in this country (Relaño Pastor, 2007; Zentella, 2009). In addition, this approach broadens the lens on bicultural students in American schools as well as the evolving literature on *transfronterizos*.

## CHAPTER TWO: CONDUCTING A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON *TRANSFRONTERIZO* YOUTH

### **Methodology**

I argue that *transfronterizos* must acquire their social support, knowledge, and resources from peers and teachers – then employ this stock of social capital – in order to function as mainstream students, to succeed in an American high school. This phenomenon calls for a qualitative study that takes into account the broader political context and institutional inequities in which researcher and subject find themselves. Interdisciplinary in nature, the proposed study combines ethnic and cultural studies with the goal of achieving social justice through policy. This research employs qualitative methodology similar to that of Baquedano-López (2002), Relaño Pastor (2007), Valdés (1998), and Zentella (2009).

Qualitative research is particularly suited for studying the intricacies of transnationalism. One-on-one interviews allow researchers to document how actors simultaneously maintain and shed cultural repertoires, interact within a location and across its boundaries, and act in ways that are in concert with or contradict their values over time. Before beginning the first interview, I asked each focal participant which language they preferred to speak in. After that initial determination, Spanish or English was maintained with each of the students as our language of communication. Relaño Pastor demonstrates another methodological model for my own research, as she bases her findings on 40 individual, one to two hour tape-recorded interviews using a sociolinguistic approach, wherein the interviews addressed the experiences of crossing the border over a two-year period.

Two recruitment phases took place. The first recruitment phase was completed in August 2014 in which I visited regular English, English Language Development (ELD), and AP/Honors/Accelerated English classes to inform students of this study. To address the legal concerns of the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, the criteria for study participation was students who have either lived or gone to school in Tijuana, Mexico before having begun their education in the United States. Upon receiving signed consent forms, I conducted one-on-one screening interviews until eight students were selected to participate. All of these students met the criteria for participation with the added element that they lived in Tijuana. Due to the nature of what I considered to be an interesting finding within the recruitment phase, the study's focus changed from students having previously been educated in Tijuana to cross-border youth and how they navigate the education system.

The second recruitment phase was for comparison group subjects only. Having a comparison group allowed me to specifically determine how other students at the same high school gain knowledge about college access and how they choose their course load so as to fulfill their post-secondary goals. The online survey was intended for bilingual Guerrero High School 10th-12th grade students of Mexican descent who have not lived or attended school in Mexico (as opposed to students in the focal group who have lived in/attended school in Mexico before coming to Guerrero High School). The comparison

group recruitment lasted one school day. On the last day of school before winter break, I recruited students from a range of classes, so as to have a sample representative of the larger student population.

Given the range of students that Regular versus Honors versus AP classes attract, I engaged in focal and comparison group recruitment efforts in an array of classes so as to solicit the participation of students with differing and representative educational experiences at Guerrero High School. The table below lists the classes that I visited for comparison group recruitment:

**Table 2.1 – Recruitment**

| Grade            | Regular | Accelerated/ Honors | AP  | AVID |
|------------------|---------|---------------------|-----|------|
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | 6       | 2                   | N/A | N/A  |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> | 5       | 1                   | 2   | 1    |
| 12 <sup>th</sup> | 1       | 2                   | 1   | 0    |

Note: All classes with the exception of AVID are English classes.

A total of 24 classes – ranging from regular to accelerated/honors and Advanced Placement – were visited for recruitment purposes. Of those 24, three were AP Spanish classes. I selected these classes because several of the focal students in the study were enrolled in (or already took) AP Spanish. One online survey was administered in December 2014/January 2015. The survey asked questions regarding course selection, knowledge of college prerequisites, and post secondary plans. Many of these questions were duplicates of my interview questions with focal students, which allowed me to draw comparisons between the two groups. Approximately 500 students were reached through classroom recruitment, and only five of the eight comparison students who took the online survey by the end of January 2015 actually completed it. As a result of the low survey response rate, it should be noted that conclusions based on survey responses might not be generalizable to the larger student population at Guerrero High School.

Below is a summary of activities contributing to the qualitative data collection:

- Each *transfronterizo* (n=8) was interviewed twice and surveyed once. They were asked about who their friends are, how they met their close friends, how often they see each other, whether they spend time together outside of school, what sorts of things they discuss with their friends, and who they trust (peers and adults), among other details questions regarding elements within social capital theory.
- Parents of *transfronterizo* students were interviewed twice once regarding their social networks, expectations for their children, the process and motives for enrolling their child in school in the United States, and knowledge about college prerequisites, among other topics. Parent interviews took place during the home visit.

- Anywhere from four to eight classroom observations were conducted for each focal student. The purpose of conducting classroom observations was to determine whether there was a college going culture in English, Spanish, and AVID classes that focal students were enrolled in. This also afforded me the opportunity to see which language students used when speaking to their classmates.
- One informal home visit to most focal student's home took place. The purpose of this visit was to see each child in his/her natural home environment and to experience what it is like in each focal student's home.
- The comparison group (n=5) was surveyed once (December/January 2015) regarding course selection, knowledge of college prerequisites, and post secondary plans.
- Occasionally, faculty and Parent Center meetings were observed.
- Interviews with teachers and "non-teachers," or counselors/administrators, took place in person or by phone.

The main source of data derived from one-on-one interviews with students, with additional data from interviews with teachers, school counselors, and the principal. Parent interviews supplemented the data. I also made one home visit to each of the eight focal participants' homes – five of these visits were overnight. I engaged in this research for one and a half academic years at one high school. By interviewing 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders over time, I was able to identify the factors that influence network formation and the ways in which students come to learn and prepare for post secondary educational opportunities. Interviews with the 12<sup>th</sup> graders allowed me to gain an understanding of their network formation leading up to their last year of high school, how their knowledge of the college application process developed over the school year, and how they selected which universities and colleges to apply to, among other things. Both high school seniors were interviewed one last time in November 2015 in order to assess how they came to their decision of which post secondary institution to attend, and to learn what they were majoring in, among other questions.

An ethnographic study will often tell a story of a select amount of individuals. In order to properly capture and understand the focal students' lives while living in the Bay Area, I asked each family for permission to conduct a home visit and an overnight stay. Each of the eight families agreed. The purpose of the home visits was to get a firsthand account of each student's home environment. Simply put, visiting the focal students' homes would enrich the backstory when describing and reporting on each student. With the exception of the audio recording of parent interviews, no other recordings (audio or video) were made during each visit to the students' homes; instead, I typed my field notes before going to bed during my overnight visit or the next day.

Children's social capital can often stem from their parents' social capital. Parent interviews allowed me to paint a full picture of these students' lives and their social capital by learning more about their parents' social ties, and whether they utilize these social ties to increase opportunities available to them and their children. Questions included topics such as: parents' aspirations for their children, social networks, their motives for enrolling their children in an American school, and their knowledge of college requirements, among other topics. Of particular interest was how parents leveraged their social networks so as to enroll their children at Guerrero High School, which I later discovered was not a factor in students' successful navigation of the education system.

I spent three to seven days in the field every 6-8 weeks over a 16-month span. During the study period, I had informal conversations with the focal subjects before and after their interviews. We spent at least 15 minutes talking and catching up each time we saw each other for an interview and I believe that it was during those conversations that the students began to see me as someone they could trust. I sought to develop relationships with each of the focal participants in an effort to understand more about their lives, their families, and the meaning that being a *transfronterizo* had in their lives. I exchanged emails and texted with several of the students in the study, and all of them became my Facebook friends. I used minimal information obtained from the students via Facebook, and I disclosed that anything they communicated to me could potentially be used in the dissertation, to which all students consented. This methodological practice was solely used to clarify information that had surfaced in interviews, and it arose because communicating with the focal students via Facebook was the easiest way to get in contact with them. The overnight stays at students' homes, in which I met the students' families, also helped cultivate trusting relationships between the focal students and myself.

Throughout this process, I determined that, with the exception of an occasional news article, the general public, our schools, and academic research rarely recognized the transnational lives that students in the border region lead. These traditional "official" sources of information were only minimally helpful for furthering much of my reflections. Because there was no research on how *transfronterizos* move through high school, I understood the importance of my work with these eight students and how a study about their navigation of an international border and education system could be a valuable contribution to those who work with, write about, or study *transfronterizos*.

### **Data Collected**

The combined methods utilized in this study led to opportunities for participant observation, including classroom and home visits. Supplementing this data are 20 formal one-on-one interviews (see Table 2.2) with *transfronterizo* students, their parents, the school principal, counselors, and teachers.

**Table 2.2 – Participants**

| <b>Interviewee</b>  | <b>Relationship to Youth</b> | <b>Place(s) of Residence</b>            |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Carlos Villareal    | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Rebecca Montezuma   | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Chikis              | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Marisol             | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Gladis              | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Esteban             | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico & Santo Domingo, CA |
| Annie               | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Ricardo Gonzalez    | Self                         | Tijuana, BC, Mexico & Santo Domingo, CA |
| Mario Villareal     | Carlos' Father               | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Mariana Villareal   | Carlos' Mother               | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Guadalupe Montezuma | Rebecca's Mother             | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Diana Castellanos   | Annie's Mother               | Tijuana, BC, Mexico                     |
| Mrs. Gonzalez       | Ricardo's Mother             | Tijuana, BC, Mexico & Santo Domingo, CA |
| Mr. Escobedo        | Guerrero High Principal      | Chula Vista, CA                         |
| Ms. Torlickson      | Counselor                    | San Diego, CA                           |
| Mr. Smith           | Counselor                    | San Diego, CA                           |
| Ms. Mora            | Counselor                    | San Diego, CA                           |
| Ms. Moraza          | Counselor                    | San Diego, CA                           |
| Mr. Rembrandt       | Counselor                    | San Diego, CA                           |
| Ms. Gómez           | AVID Teacher                 | San Diego, CA                           |

I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews. Student interviews were conducted in a conference room in the main office or in the school's parent center. Counselor, teacher, and principal interviews took place in each individual's office or classroom.

The first phase of coding involved transcripts of the first two interviews with each focal student, in addition to SurveyMonkey® data which was used for the third interview. The second phase included coding SurveyMonkey® survey responses of comparison students and comparing data between the two groups. In the third phase, I coded interview transcripts of counselors and focal students' parents. I also coded data from interviews with the principal and an AVID teacher. Of course, as I went back to re-read data, I drew connections that I had not previously made. In addition, my own analysis of

data was also influenced by insightful speculations by Carlos and Chikis who both had a sophisticated level of understanding of student motivation (or lack thereof).

My next focus was on the students in the instructional settings of their English, Spanish, and AVID classes. The objective of said observations was to witness firsthand how comfortable focal students appeared to be in these classes, and whether they seemed to have friendships with, and trust, those around them as evidenced by whether they conversed with peers or teachers and who they went to with questions. Observations were only used to supplement the data and were not included in the data analysis using N-Vivo. Language spoken by students in the classroom can carry implications for how best to communicate college requirements to students attending school near the U.S.-Mexico border. Many teachers were gracious enough to let me observe their classes and one of the AVID teachers shared some of her experiences and frustrations with me; her insight is detailed in Chapter Five.

### **My Positionality and Transnational Background**

This work is narrative-led, meaning that sociological analysis illuminates stories and experiences of transnational students. As I share their stories and provide analysis, my perspective is influenced first and foremost as the daughter of transnational parents. Born in the United States, but raised in Tijuana, my mother commuted to the United States each weekday for an education and, subsequently, to work. My father, a self-employed veterinarian licensed in Mexico, crosses the border multiple times per week for business purposes in Baja California. My own transnational background has played an important part in shaping this study as well as my understanding of the eight youth and their families.

According to Collins (2000), “to be credible... Black feminist intellectuals must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, everyday people.” In the same way that Collins describes her role as a woman of color researcher, I find that my own epistemology reflects my Mexican background. Having worked extensively with Latino students in my hometown shaped the type of study I chose for my dissertation work. Though I came to the Bay Area to acquire a social theoretical lens and policy analysis skills, I also arrived committed to conducting research in a meaningful way. When thinking of embarking on any research, I knew that pursuing a Ph.D. at UC Berkeley meant I would become, in part, an “outsider” to any given Latino community.

My experience as a doctoral researcher in the Guerrero High School community and in Tijuana mirror the experiences of other scholars of color who have negotiated their simultaneous insider and outsider status while researching in ethnic neighborhoods (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Baquedano-López, 2002; Behar, 1993, 1996; Jacobs-Huey, 2002; Zentella, 1997). By virtue of having been raised in the border community and having been educated in the Maple School District, which Guerrero High is a part of, I gained privileged access to the school site. Having attended high school with *transfronterizo*

peers, and as the daughter of *transfronterizo* parents, I also understood the cross-border phenomenon and what drives students to engage in such practices. On the other hand, the focal participants viewed me as an outsider partially due to my graduate student status at UC Berkeley – an institution that several of them aspired to attend, but did not plan to apply to due to their perception of it being too elite of an institution for them to gain acceptance. Consequently, I actively demonstrated that I was a hard-working student, just like them, and reaffirmed that if they worked hard, they could achieve what they set out to do.

Hagey (1997) describes research as a power discourse used as a “means of regulating society,” therefore making it a political undertaking (2). My research is undeniably embedded in politics, too—a politics of equalizing opportunity for U.S. citizens living in Mexico (for reasons beyond their control) to fulfill college requirements in the country in which they were born. My research, then, has an “ethical aim,” as Collins (2000) proposes every inquiry must.

## Limitations

As in any qualitative study, the researcher can only write about those things she was able to see or those that she was told about. I did not live in the homes of the focal participants or even in the same neighborhood; however, I did spend time with, and interview, these students over the course of 16 months in which I became very aware of their lives, personalities, activities, as well as their questions and concerns about college. At the same token, focal students became quite comfortable seeking advice from me, which enhanced but complicated my level of engagement.

I want to also address the generalizability of this study. While depicting the lives of only eight young students is a small sample, the length of the study and the intensity of the interactions with the participants are significant. To date, there is no study exploring the educational navigation of *transfronterizo* youth in the U.S.-Mexico region. For educators and researchers working with *transfronterizo* children—in cultural studies, border studies, and urban education—it is hard to believe that the context of *transfronterizo* is rarely considered.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a qualitative text that illuminates in more detail the everyday practices of children living transnationally should be a welcome addition to this understudied area.

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<sup>2</sup> See conclusion for a broader discussion on this topic.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE SCHOOL AND ITS IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

This chapter details the key elements of the school context, attributes of its students, and how the institution structures routes through courses and variable preparation for college. I first describe the history of cross-border educational and work travel. I then offer a portrait of Guerrero High School and its immediate environment by focusing on its geographic location, school performance, and challenges as described by the school's principal. Finally, I describe each of the focal students' post-secondary interests and extracurricular involvement, and I detail my experiences visiting their homes. Including background information provides a fuller picture of the focal students' lives and a privileged understanding of how a daily transnational commute across the border affects them.

Located two miles from the world's busiest land border crossing (SANDAG, 19) fosters a deluge of students from Baja California attending Guerrero High School. At its inception in 2002, Guerrero High School was a brand new institution in a residential area. It opened its doors to 9<sup>th</sup> graders only, 98% of which were Hispanic/Latino.



**Photograph 3.1:** Concession stand menu for women's soccer game featuring five items, three of which are Mexican food items.

Guerrero High School has embraced the community's primarily Mexican-American heritage, but its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border has also presented the community with many challenges, which include language barriers and low socio-economic levels, making Santo Domingo one of the poorest communities in the nation. There are still no restaurants within walking distance for students to frequent. It was only in 2013 that a city bus station was built near the school. Some GHS students occasionally ride the city bus to the outlet mall adjacent to the border to walk around or grab a bite. That same bus

will take passengers to a trolley station, where students catch a trolley that drops them off steps away from the Tijuana-San Diego border.



**Photograph 3.2:** Bus schedules available to students at check-in desk of nearby high school.

A considerable amount of students now use public transportation to arrive to school and return home. The focal students in this study who do not participate in school-based extracurricular activities generally head straight home (or to their relative's home) once the school day is over.

During my interview with Ms. Gómez, the issue of tardiness among *transfronterizos* came up. She sympathizes for the students who have to cross the border and is flexible with her attendance policy because of their daily ordeal:

**Ms. Gómez:** Most of the time the students live in Tijuana for financial reasons, and like I said, it's such a huge burden. I don't believe in punishing my students for those circumstances.

**ST:** Is this ever addressed in staff meetings? The fact that there are kids coming from Tijuana?

**Ms. Gómez:** No, no. It's the elephant in the room. Never.

The fact that *transfronterizos* are not addressed in staff meetings, similar to how the needs of EL students need to be discussed, is not necessarily the school leadership's fault. School administrators along the border are caught in between state and federal policies and the reality of what occurs on the ground.

## **Santo Domingo, California**

The settlement, growth, and development of Santo Domingo has historically revolved around its proximity to the United States/Mexico border and its status as a border-crossing town. As such, perhaps the most significant year in Santo Domingo's history is 1848. In that year, the United States and Mexico established the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which created the international border we have today. According to the U.S. General Services Administration website, 25,000 northbound pedestrians and 50,000 northbound vehicles are processed each day at Santo Domingo's Port of Entry. A majority of said entries are workers who commute from Tijuana for better paying jobs in San Diego, and among those crossing are the *transfronterizos* in this study.

Santo Domingo, like many small agricultural communities at the time, was severely affected by the Great Depression and was devastated in 1933, when Mexican President Cardenas seized and nationalized all foreign-owned businesses. American investors withdrew all of their money from Tijuana and Santo Domingo and fled the region. The border was left to its own resources, which without tourists, were bleak. Santo Domingo was nothing more than a sleepy agricultural village, but World War II dramatically changed the composition of the border town. In 1942, due to the shortage of manpower, United States farmers convinced the federal government to initiate the *Bracero* Program. This allowed thousands of Mexicans to work in the United States legally for a limited time. As a result, Santo Domingo experienced a cultural transformation as many Mexicans crossed the border to participate in the Bracero Program. The expiration date of the legislation was extended twice until 1964. Meanwhile, many Mexican farmworkers stayed, had their families join them, and settled in the area. Locals established community-serving businesses, such as hardware stores and lumberyards along Santo Domingo Boulevard, the community's main thoroughfare.

What began as an experiment to preserve rural America has now emerged as a bicultural community and the busiest border crossing in the world. Santo Domingo has characteristics of a small town and bustling city, and is a gateway to San Diego and the United States.

## **School Performance**

School records show that the Fall 2014 enrollment included 2,328 students, with the senior class consisting of 509 students. The school reflects demographic shifts in California's school population, and it has experienced some of the challenges associated with suburban education in *la frontera*. The total 2014 student enrollment was as follows: 0.9% Caucasian, 3.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 93.7% Hispanic, 1.6% African American, and 0.3% Other. With regard to post secondary education, 20% of graduates from the class of 2014 enrolled in a four-year college/university; meanwhile, 60% enrolled in a community college and the other 20% pursued vocational/technical, military or other path.

Approximately 81% of Guerrero High School students received free or reduced lunch in the 2013-2014 academic year, making it a Title I school. Ms. Torlickson informed me that the school does not have data on social class differences in post-secondary educational outcomes among its graduates. Although she could not officially confirm statistics based on socioeconomic status, she stated that it seems as though her “students who do not qualify for Cal Grants because of their parent’s higher income are usually those who are applying to universities versus community college” (personal communication, 1 March 2016). Therefore, it can be assumed that higher socioeconomic status students are matriculating into four-year universities at higher rates compared to their low-income peers.

Guerrero High School’s Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) is a 158-page plan of actions intended to raise the academic performance of its students. California Education Code sections 41507, 41572, and 64001, and the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) require each school to consolidate all school plans for programs funded through the ConApp and ESEA Program Improvement into the SPSA. According to the SPSA 2013-2015, Guerrero High School is making progress in several areas, such as growth in Academic Performance Index (API) scores – recently meeting its 2013 API goal. The API, which is based on scores from various standardized tests, measures how a school’s or district’s academic performance changes from year to year. There has been a decrease, however, in the percentage of all Guerrero High students, as well as ELD, meeting the A-G course requirements pressed by California’s state universities. The “A thru G” completion rate illustrated below measures the percentage of high school graduates completing the courses required for admission to the University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) systems.

**Table 3.1 – Percentage of ALL Students Meeting A-G Requirements**

| <b>Academic Year</b> | <b>GHS</b> | <b>District</b> | <b>State</b> |
|----------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>2011-2012</b>     | 35.4%      | 36.6%           | 38.3%        |
| <b>2012-2013</b>     | 29.4%      | 39.1%           | 39.4%        |
| <b>2013-2014</b>     | 29.6%      | 43.6%           | 41.9%        |

**Table 3.2 – Percentage of English Learners Meeting A-G Requirements**

| <b>Academic Year</b> | <b>GHS</b> | <b>District</b> | <b>State</b> |
|----------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>2011-2012*</b>    | 33.4%      | 25.6%           | 22.7%        |
| <b>2012-2013</b>     | 5.0%       | 4.7%            | 8.9%         |
| <b>2013-2014</b>     | 6.2%       | 8.1%            | 9.9%         |

\*Students considered English learners in the California Department of Education’s data for the 2011-2012 school year were from the Limited English Proficient (LEP) subgroup as defined by NCLB. The change in criteria to English Learners resulted in a drastic decrease. Note: no explanation for English Learner is provided.

Before the 2012-2013 school year, Guerrero High School had a higher percentage of English Learners meeting A-G requirements compared to the district and state. In the most recent year for which data is available, 2013-2014, Guerrero High School had a lower percentage (just over 6%) of its ELs meeting A-G requirements compared to the district and state, at approximately 8% and 10% respectively. The decline shows a

distinct weakness in the social organization of the school. In other words, school administrators have allowed this subgroup's performance to sink, highlighting structural problems, as well as EL students' challenge in building social ties and capital. The school has also experienced a slight decline in the percentage of all students fulfilling A-G compared to the district and state. As of 2013-2014, only 29.6% of all students met A-G requirements at Guerrero High School compared to 43.6% districtwide and 41.9% statewide.

With regard to test performance, SAT scores in reading, math, and writing have improved, and more students are taking the ACT – with an average score increase of two points. Table 3.3 below compares 2014 SAT scores in reading, math, and writing between Guerrero High School and California.

**Table 3.3 – 2014 SAT Scores**

| Percentile | GHS     |      |         | California |      |         |
|------------|---------|------|---------|------------|------|---------|
|            | Reading | Math | Writing | Reading    | Math | Writing |
| 75%        | 510     | 520  | 470     | 570        | 590  | 570     |
| 50%        | 450     | 460  | 430     | 490        | 510  | 480     |
| 25%        | 380     | 420  | 390     | 420        | 430  | 410     |

Source: California Department of Education website

The table above illustrates that Guerrero High School's performance is below the California average in all three areas of Reading, Math, and Writing. While Guerrero High's socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroup exceeded its API goal in 2013, the EL subgroup did not meet the growth target, and actually decreased in performance. Also of particular importance is that Guerrero High has not met its target graduation rate (86.3% in 2011-12 and 81.5% in 2012-13), therefore, it did not meet its Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. The principal has showed zeal in improving the school through student support programs and by fostering a college-going culture on campus (personal communication, March 5, 2015).

The school offers an array of academic programs, which includes the following:

- Pathways in the following: Medical & Health Careers
- Demonstration Certified Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Program
- Fine arts courses in drama, theater production, band, choir, design mixed media, and award-winning *baile folklórico* & mariachi
- Nationally Recognized Naval JROTC program
- Independent Studies HS: an alternative education program for students who need additional/different academic opportunities
- Bilingual Program

Of particular significance are the AVID and Medical Pathways Programs, both of which are nationally recognized. According to the AVID website, "demonstration schools

undergo a rigorous validation process and are required to be revalidated every few years to ensure high levels of implementation with quality and fidelity to AVID strategies schoolwide” (accessed 10 August 2015). Of the 4,800 sites across the nation with AVID programs, Guerrero High is one of 149 sites that has received the distinction of being a National Demonstration School. The Guerrero High website states that students take AVID as one of their electives for the following reasons:

Students in AVID recognize that getting to a four-year university is not easy, especially for a first-generation college student. AVID seeks to ensure that students not only get accepted to a four-year university, but that they are also prepared to succeed once they are there. AVID students learn about all different universities, especially those outside of San Diego. AVID students also have access to many scholarships just for being in AVID! Many students believe that the best part of AVID includes the many fieldtrips AVID classes take to explore universities. SYH AVID students have visited schools as close as UC Riverside and as far as UC Berkeley.

There are approximately 400 students in the AVID program making it the largest program in the district. According to its website, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program seeks to close the achievement gap by teaching skills and behaviors for academic success, as well as providing intensive support with tutorials and strong student/teacher relationships. The SPSA Plan explains that AVID serves as a support for students taking rigorous classes such as Advanced Placement (AP), Accelerated, and Honors (HN) courses. The AVID program “allows students to receive support for rigorous classes, accelerates them towards higher education, as opposed to the traditional idea, now nonexistent, of remediation” (SPSA, 3). Meanwhile, the Medical Pathways Program enrolls students who are interested in a medical technical or medical career and leads them through four years of rigorous classes in science. Some of the Medical Pathways classes are also offered with the honors rigor and credit.

According to the school’s website, ELD classes are described as follows:

#### **ELD 1/2**

- Spanish is used for instruction
- Beginning students
- Focus on vocabulary, basic communication
- In bilingual core classes

#### **ELD 3/4**

- Focus on using English during instruction, use Spanish more on a one-on-one basis
- Beginning-early intermediate students
- Continued focus on vocabulary, begin to read novels in English
- In bilingual core classes

### **ELD 5/6**

- English is focus of all instruction, participation, writing, etc.
- Early intermediate, some intermediate
- 2-3 novels read during the year, academic writing a focus
- In bilingual core classes, some students in REG

### **ELD 7/8**

- English only, taught as a regular English (ELA) course
- Intermediate, some early intermediate
- Curriculum that of a regular English student
- Teamed with an ENG course (grade level)
- NO BILINGUAL CLASSES

Guerrero High School offers an array of advanced courses, including 12 Honors and Accelerated class and 11 Advanced Placement Classes. Below is a complete list:

| <b><u>Accelerated Courses</u></b> | <b><u>Honors Courses</u></b> | <b><u>Advanced Placement</u></b> |                          |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| English 10 AC                     | English 11 H                 | AP English Language              | AP Spanish Language      |
| Biology AC                        | US History H                 | AP English Literature            | AP Spanish Literature    |
| World Cultures AC                 | English 12 H                 | AP Government                    | AP Physics               |
| Integrated Math II                | Math Analysis H              | AP US History                    | AP Studio Art            |
| Economics                         | Chemistry H                  | AP World History                 | AP Environmental Science |
|                                   | Physics H                    | AP Calculus AB                   |                          |
|                                   | HumanAnatomy&Phy.H           |                                  |                          |

In May 2014, 334 Guerrero High School students took a total of 531 Advanced Placement Examinations<sup>3</sup> – 389 exams taken received a passing score of 3 or higher. According to Trevor Packer, Senior Vice President for AP and Instruction at the College Board, "The College Board remains committed to ensuring all students with the potential to succeed in AP courses are able to access those opportunities" (Bidwell, 7 October 2014). He did not state, however, how The College Board actually ensures student access to AP exam-taking opportunities. Packer also stated, "Research clearly shows that challenging coursework in high school is a vital component in helping students succeed as they transition to college and beyond." Of particular concern with regard to this claim is that several of the focal (non-AVID) students at Guerrero High School did not feel challenged – but rather, comfortable – in their classes. Non-AVID students in the ELD program or in regular classes did have a pro-school ethos, but their potential was compromised by institutional structures and practices. These same students also lacked knowledge about A-G requirements, therefore, they had no motivation for seeking out how to enroll in more appropriate classes. On the upside (at a macro-scale), in 2014, The College Board found that Hispanic students were,

...taking AP exams at almost the same rate as the nation overall: 19.1 percent of Hispanic high school junior and seniors took an AP exam in 2014, compared with

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<sup>3</sup> Some students took multiple Advanced Placement exams.

21.9 percent nationwide. The participation rate has also increased among students who use fee reductions provided by the College Board, an indication that more low-income students are participating in AP programs.

In order to fulfill Title I requirements, the school's Categorical Program Office conducts an annual online Needs Assessment Survey in both English and Spanish. The SPSA Plan includes a summary of the findings from the April 2014 data collection. Seventy-one parents completed the survey. Below are the demographics of respondents, as detailed in the SPSA Plan:

**Table 3.4 – Demographics of Parent Survey Respondents**

| <b>Parent Characteristic</b>           | <b>Count</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>Education Level</b>                 |              |                |
| Elementary                             | 7            | 9.72%          |
| Middle School                          | 12           | 16.67%         |
| High School                            | 30           | 41.67%         |
| Some College                           | 5            | 6.94%          |
| College Degree                         | 6            | 8.33%          |
| Post Graduate/Master's Degree/Doctoral | 11           | 15.28          |
| Other                                  | 1            | 1.39%          |
| <b>Languages</b>                       |              |                |
| English                                | 10           | 13.89%         |
| Filipino                               | 3            | 4.17%          |
| Spanish                                | 59           | 81.94%         |
| <b>Ethnic Background</b>               |              |                |
| African American                       | 1            | 1.39%          |
| Asian                                  | 3            | 4.17%          |
| Hispanic Latino                        | 65           | 90.28%         |
| Filipino                               | 1            | 1.39%          |
| Other                                  | 2            | 2.78%          |
| <b>Gender</b>                          |              |                |
| Female                                 | 54           | 75.00%         |
| Male                                   | 18           | 25.00%         |

Source: 2013-2015 SPSA Plan

Variation in parent responses based on socioeconomic status was not included the SPSA Plan. Also excluded from Table 3.4 is that one-third of respondents' children are classified as English Learners. Over 40% of the 71 parents either reached or completed

high school and 75% were mothers<sup>4</sup>. The survey covered topics such as: opinion of the school, familiarity with college requirements, understanding of reports cards and progress reports, and email usage, among other topics. Strengths and areas of improvement were based on the survey data, some of which are outlined below:

Strengths:

- Over 80% of parents feel welcome at Guerrero High School.
- Most parents (76%) understand the academic and behavioral expectations of Guerrero High School teacher, which is an increase of 5% from the previous year
- Nearly 80% of parents feel that their child is safe at school and over 70% feel that there is adequate supervision.

Areas of Improvement:

- Approximately 80% of parents understand progress reports and about 73% of parents understand the semester report card.
- About two-thirds know which classes their child should take to access a college or university-level education.
- Just over half (53.5%) understand the A-G requirements.
- Only two-thirds have an email account and regularly use it.

Only about half of the parents who took the survey reportedly understood the A-G requirements. Moreover, survey respondents may present selection bias as these parents are more likely to be involved in their child's education; therefore, it is likely that the schoolwide parent population that is familiar with A-G requirements is even lower. None of the focal students' parents, for example, were familiar with the A-G requirements.

The school does offer two monthly workshops, which are intended to increase parental understanding of the U.S. education system and requirements. The first of the two workshops, Parents as Partners Series, takes place each semester (mornings during the fall semester and afternoons during the spring semester). The other workshop, College 101, began in 2014 and was facilitated by two teachers. Presentations include subjects such as: college access, recommended high school classes, funding for college, and miscellaneous college-related topics as requested during the first College 101 workshop. Guerrero High School alumni are also invited to attend the College 101 semester dinner, in which parents have the opportunity to learn more about college culture and life in an informal setting. According to the survey, parents would like more College 101 workshops. Parents also suggest that in order to increase attendance, workshop meetings could be mandatory. Of course, the dissemination of workshops such as these is critical, and parents would like for the school to continue to distribute flyers and make phone calls regarding these valuable opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> Sample size of parent survey respondents presents validity concerns.

## Guerrero High School's Leadership

Mr. Escobedo and his administration stand at the school's front gate each morning to greet students as they enter the campus. When I asked the focal students about role models on campus, several of them mentioned that the principal, Mr. Escobedo, is influential and motivational. Mr. Escobedo was actually my middle school principal who has been at Guerrero High since before its inception in 2002. Mr. Escobedo is a lively person who has high expectations of his students. He has cultivated the positive, college-going school culture that is seen and felt by students and visitors.

In 2013, the National Association of Secondary School Principals recognized Guerrero High School as a National Breakthrough School. According to an article in the *Principal Leadership* journal, the culture of collaboration among the faculty and staff is part of the school's academic culture. Mr. Escobedo has a determined vision captured by this excerpt in the journal article below:

I envisioned a school that would become the educational hub of the most socioeconomically challenged community in San Diego County. My leadership has evolved over the years with this goal in mind (64).

Mr. Escobedo displays an inclusive leadership style; for example, he involves department chairs in the interviewing and selection process of teachers. My experience as a substitute teacher at Guerrero High School has shown me that students view school as "their business" and arrive to class prepared to learn. Many students also take advantage of after-school programs and co-curricular activities.

What also sets Guerrero High apart is Mr. Escobedo's annual assembly with freshmen in which teachers are not present – it is just he and the students. The assembly is held in English and according to the May 2013 "Principal Leadership" article,

On the first day of school at Guerrero High School, all incoming freshmen report to the gym where Principal Escobedo greets them. He then begins what has become a Guerrero tradition: talking to the students with no other staff members present. Escobedo speaks directly about the challenges the students face that foster low expectations, including negative stereotypes about their ethnicity and poverty. He tells the students that they have 720 days of opportunities in front of them that will shape their future. He explains how the school functions and what the students must do to succeed. He also explains that they won't have to do it by themselves. Next, he hands out a pledge form with the requirement that students must complete it and return it directly to him within the next two weeks.

When they turn in the pledge, students are required to shake the principal's hand, introduce themselves, and explain their goals for the next 720 days. The principal seeks out students who have not completed the task and works with them to set personal goals. The pledges are then posted in the media center for all to see.

As Escobedo finishes talking about the school's expectations, teachers arrive in the gym, link arms, and form a circle of commitment around the students. That graphic display of support underscores the principal's powerful message of caring and commitment: you commit to your goals, and we commit to seeing that you reach them.

Below is the pledge that student complete:

**Guerrero High School**

**Class of 2020 Pledge**

I pledge to myself that:

1. I will graduate from high school.
2. I will have 100% school attendance.
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

Ms. Gómez claims that students internalize what Mr. Escobedo tells them during this assembly, and hearing this from the focal students themselves demonstrates that the message really does stick.

**California by Day, Tijuana by Night**

This section describes the focal students' lives, focusing on their commute home after school, their home environment, their relationship with – and support from – parents, and their weekday morning routine. The information contained here provides a closer look into *transfronterizos'* straddled lifestyles, while highlighting the physical navigation, resilience, independence, determination, and adaptability involved in crossing the border on a daily basis.

**ST:** Tell me about your morning routine Monday-Friday before getting to school.

**Marisol:** I wake up at 5:30/6:00 in the morning, I go downstairs to eat breakfast, I go back up to my room and get ready. Then, I go downstairs and wait for my mom to eat breakfast and then from there they take me to my aunt's who gives me a ride over here to the U.S. By then it's 7:30/8:00 in the morning and I'm crossing the border to go to school.

*(Me levanto a las 5:30/6:00 de la mañana, bajo a desayunar, subo otra vez a mi cuarto y me arreglo. Ya bajo y espero a que mi mamá desayune y ya después de allí me llevan con una tía mía que me da raite acá a U.S. (USA). Para allí son las 7:30/8 de la mañana y estoy cruzando la línea para ir a la escuela.)*

**ST:** What time do you get to school? *(A qué hora llegas a la escuela?)*

**Marisol:** I get to school at 8:00/8:30...latest 8:40. (*Llego a las 8:00/8:30...a mas tardar 8:40.*)

*Later in the interview...*

**ST:** Do you get nervous when you cross? (*¿Te pones nerviosa al cruzar?*)

**Marisol:** When I cross the border from Tijuana to the other side, I do get nervous because I think they are going to say, ‘Why do you live over there (Tijuana)?’ and ‘You study here (U.S.) and you’re a (U.S.) citizen and you should live here and work...’ and who knows what else. But I just say, ‘Yes, I’m a citizen, I was born here, I can study and work wherever. Nobody prevents me from doing this, and this, and this’. But yes, I get nervous, and even more so with SENTRI.<sup>5</sup>  
(*Yo al cruzar de Tijuana al otro lado si me pongo nerviosa porque pienso que me van a decir, ¿Y por que vives allá? Y ‘Estudias aquí y eres ciudadana y debes de vivir aquí y trabajar y no sé que. Pero por mi parte digo, ‘si, soy ciudadana, nací aquí, puedo estudiar y trabajar en donde sea. Nadie me impide que haga esto y esto y esto. Pero si me pongo nerviosa, y más con la SENTRI.*)

The above interview excerpt captures a typical morning routine of a *transfronterizo* who is given a ride to school; the excerpt paints a picture of what it is like to begin your day in one country and to cross an international border for your education in another country. It also serves as an excellent introduction to the everyday lives of the eight youth portrayed in this study: Carlos (17), Rebecca (17), Chikis (16), Marisol (16), Gladis (16), Esteban (16), Annie (15), and Ricardo (15).<sup>6</sup> All eight of the young men and women in this study are U.S. citizens and have at some point been educated in Tijuana, Baja California. The duration of each student’s educational experience in Mexico varies greatly, ranging from Esteban who only attended school in Tijuana for one semester in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to Carlos who was educated in Tijuana through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. As discussed later in the thesis, the amount of years in the U.S. education system does not seem to have an impact on whether a student meets college requirements; in short, whether a student began their education in the U.S. in elementary or high school had less of an effect on successful navigation of college requirements versus participating in the AVID program.

In this chapter, I continue to provide ethnographic data in describing the personal and family background, as well as the transnational lifestyle, of each student. I focus on describing these aspects of the youth in order to help build a trans-border picture of each student’s world. Toward the end of the chapter, I offer some comparisons of the youths’ lived experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> The Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) program provides expedited processing at the U.S.-Mexico border for pre-approved travelers considered low-risk.

<sup>6</sup> All names of persons, cities, and schools in this study are pseudonyms. The eight youth, as well as all adults, chose their own fictitious names. Ages correspond to the start of this study in 2014.

## **The Seniors: Carlos & Rebecca**

Carlos and Rebecca are the two seniors in the study. They are both ambitious, were confident that they would attend a 4-year university immediately after high school, and they come from very low-income families (their families earn less than \$20,000/year, according to their parents). Both students did not begin their education in the United States until high school – Carlos in 10<sup>th</sup>, Rebecca in 9<sup>th</sup> – and they woke up each school day around 5:00-5:30 a.m.

### **Carlos**

At the start of this project, Carlos was 17-years-old. He is the youngest child of three and the son of Mario and Mariana Villareal. Carlos' father is a stay-at-home dad and he gives Carlos a ride to the border each day. Once he arrives to the border at around 6:30 a.m., he waits in the pedestrian line one to two hours on a daily basis. A humorous aside about his morning commute that Carlos had shared with me back in August 2014 was that he would actually cut a few hundred people in line – he simply got as close to the front as he could, knew that he upset people, but also noted that many people did the same thing. Once he was in the United States, he would take the trolley followed by a city bus to arrive to school. His zero period AVID class began at 8:10 and he usually arrived by 8:15 a.m.

Carlos enrolled at Hillstone Senior High when he first began his education in the United States in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade; his older brother's supervisor let Carlos use her address in order to enroll in school. Much to his dismay, Carlos did not like Hillstone – he said he didn't feel comfortable there, partially due to the campus culture. Carlos also explained that he could not "explore" what the school had to offer because of his limited English skills. He was placed into ELD 3/4 when we began at Hillstone, and his dedication to improving his English paid off because he tested into ELD 7/8 (the highest ELD level) when he transferred to Guerrero High School. Due to his good grades, his counselor also encouraged him to join the AVID program – a rarity for students (especially those coming from the ELD program) to be allowed to join after their sophomore year. Below are my field notes based on my visit to his home in Tijuana, which show Carlos' friendship with a fellow border-crosser, his independence, a stable home environment, and the difficulty in arriving to school on time.

*The Commute Home*  
*Field Notes: May 28, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA & Tijuana, BC, Mexico*



**Photograph 3.3:** The bus ride to the trolley station.



**Photograph 3.4:** The entrance to Mexico when crossing by foot.

*We walked for about a quarter-mile to the area where Carlos' father picks him up each weekday, but he wasn't there yet. Carlos had me follow him to the nearby pharmacy so that he could use their phone for 25 cents to call his father, who is a homemaker. His mother is a family doctor.*

*The Villareal Home*  
*Field Notes: May 28, 2015, Tijuana, BC, Mexico*

*We entered their welcoming two-story, five-bedroom home, which was a rather larger home, with three of the bedrooms being vacant because his brother and sister are attending UCLA and UC Riverside, respectively. Carlos did not know what to do with his time, as he had no homework, which felt very weird to him. Carlos thought he would show me the neighborhood and introduce me to his cousins who lived nearby. I learned that his female cousin, who is in her early-20s, crosses the border biweekly to purchase women's clothing and accessories at discount stores in Santo Domingo, CA and re-sells them in Tijuana to make a profit. This demonstrated to me the prevalence of Tijuana residents' reliance on their proximity to the United States to make a living.*

*Once she got home from work, Mrs. Villareal asked me a number of questions about my research. I said goodnight to Carlos at around 12:30 a.m., at which point he was printing a document for a college summer event.*

*The Commute to School*  
*Field Notes: May 29, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA & Tijuana, BC, Mexico*

I woke up at 6:15 a.m. in order to leave at the agreed time of 6:30 a.m. and arrive to school by 8:30. Like the previous morning at Rebecca's, we left the house later than we had planned. We made our way to the border at 6:55 a.m. and stood in the line that seemed a mile long at 7:25. One hour and ten minutes later (at 8:35 a.m.), we were back in the U.S. This was the time Carlos had wanted to arrive to school in order to turn in some sort of form for graduation, but we didn't make it in time. We had just missed the bus that would take us to Guerrero High School, so we waited about 25 minutes for the next bus. An eight-minute bus ride brought us to the high school.



**Photograph 3.5:** Carlos and Maritza wait for the bus at the trolley station to take them to school.

*Through talking to Carlos and Maritza, I learned that they pay \$36 per month for their transportation student pass. Given the low wages in Tijuana, the costs associated with traveling to school north of the border each weekday may deter more students from becoming transfronterizos. Rebecca's single mother struggles to make ends meet, but she earns more money than her counterparts working in Tijuana. Carlos' mother, on the other hand, is a physician; therefore, her wages are above average for Tijuana standards.*

The above field notes suggest that Carlos' siblings set an example for him of pursuing a university education in the United States. Having siblings that understand the educational system, coupled with his supportive home environment, point to factors in a student's life that can facilitate the pursuit of a university education immediately after high school.

The same week (in August) that I recruited Carlos to be in the study, he sent me an email following up on our conversation during his first interview about the disparity between San Diego and Tijuana:

HI :3

I am one of the students participating in your PhD research. During my interview I made a comment about a book that reflected the struggles of the lower class in Tijuana. The book is called "Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border" by Luis Alberto Urrea. Personally, this book helped me a lot to increase my knowledge of the real world as it opened me the eyes to the problems in places so close to.

I believe that for you to obtain a successful research and an effective plan, you need to study a little about Tijuana and how its culture has contributed to the problems among the immigrant students community. I hope the book helps you, and thank you for your help to community.

Carlos stood out to me intellectually speaking, as he possesses a deeper level of understanding of issues affecting his community and peers. We had interesting conversations about his thoughts on why students in the ELD track do not tend to advance into mainstream English, and a detailed conversation about his social networks, which led me to a central finding of this study (see Chapter 5). A few weeks after I conducted my home visit, he sent me a message on Facebook:

Hey I was talking to a guy from Holland and he was telling me about their education system and it's kind of weird. They take an exam and based on that exam, they place you in a high school that corresponds. There are five different levels. Levels 1-3 are for ignorant students and 4,5 is for intelligent ones. I tell you this because I feel it's related with your study because students at each level are isolated from the other levels and well, it seems like a phenomenon in which social networking is nonexistent. If this interests you, well I can send you his Facebook or WhatsApp so you can talk to him. He's 19 years old and well, he has the same mindset that I do haha. He can offer you a profound examination of their education system. Although as I write this I realize that the same thing happens in ELD classes haha. I recommend interviewing some students from ELD, those you see that don't know about college and you can include their experience as a contrast with the experiences of those who have formed good social networks. Haha well I think I got excited, I don't even know really well where your research is directed haha xD. Well if it interests you or something like that well let me know. And well I say to the ELD students because the majority of them don't have strong social networks with other students that care about college.

*(Oye estaba hablando con muchacho de Holland y me estaba contando de su sistema educativo y tienen medio raro. Hacen un examen y en base a ese examen te ponen en una high school que te corresponde. Hay 5 diferentes niveles. 1-3 level son como para ignorantes y 4,5 es para inteligentes. Te digo esto porque siento que se relaciona con tu estudio porque los estudiantes de cada nivel están aislados del otro y pues parece ser que es un phenomenon en cual no existe social networking. Si te interesa pues te puedo pasar su facebook o whatsapp para que hables con el. Tiene 19 años y pues tiene la misma mentalidad que yo haha. Te puede ofrecer una examinacion profunda de su sistema educativo. Aunque mientras escribo esto me doy cuenta que lo mismo pasa en clases de ELD haha. Te recomendaría entrevistar a algunos estudiantes de eld, a los que mires que no saben de college y puedes incluir su experiencia como contraste con a la experiencia de los que si han formado good social networks. Haha bueno ya creo que me emocione, ni siquiera se como para donde se dirige bien bien tu research haha xD. Bueno si te interesa o algo así pues me avisas. Y pues digo a los*

*estudiantes de eld porque la mayoría no tiene strong social networks with other students that care about college.)*

The above message illustrates the complexity of issues Carlos regularly ponders and his desire to be constantly learning. Carlos is now a freshman majoring in Biology at UC Santa Barbara. He chose UC Santa Barbara because he thought it was a good school. He informed me that he has also been researching the McNair Scholars Program and he plans to attend graduate school after earning his Bachelor's degree.

### **Rebecca**

Rebecca was also 17-years-old at the start of the study and her involvement in multiple school activities was impressive. In the fall semester, it seemed like she was in a different uniform nearly every day. Between being on the cheer squad, the junior reserve naval officer training (NJROTC) program, and *baile folklórico*, plus commuting to Tijuana each day, it seemed like there weren't enough hours in the day for her demanding schedule. The renowned *baile folklórico* program brought me to the classroom to observe their preparation for an upcoming performance. The lively teacher introduced me and offered me the opportunity to recruit the last senior I needed for the study. Rebecca was one of the young women who expressed interest and the next day, I met her mother on campus to discuss the details.

Rebecca's morning routine was quite different compared to Carlos, even though the two students woke up at the same time. Rebecca was in the NJROTC program during zero period, which seemed to have more stringent attendance requirements than other zero period classes. She would leave the house with her mother and sister at 6:00 a.m. and crossed by car at 6:30 in the morning.

In addition to NJROTC, Rebecca was involved in other school organizations and clubs, despite her need to return to Tijuana each day. At the time of the study, she was in the only advanced *baile folklórico* class that the school offered, which required students to perform at several events each year. She was also on the cheer squad her senior year, but had to drop the extracurricular activity due to her need to retake three failed high school classes at the nearby adult school. Rebecca was enrolled in several AP and Honors courses, but her grade point average was not particularly high. Based on her commitments, and relatively low grades, it seemed like she put too much on her plate. Rebecca often struggled to keep up with the pace of her classes due to her impacted schedule. Interestingly, her twin sister had to give up the same commitments due to her fairly low GPA. Rebecca's ambition did help her in the sense that she stayed committed to her extracurricular activities and applied to several 4-year colleges and universities.

The field notes below highlight Rebecca and her sister's close relationship with their mother, as well as the financial struggle that Rebecca's mother endured, and the reason why their family had to move to Tijuana. It is important to consider students' financial circumstances because poverty can hamper students' likelihood to succeed academically (Jensen, 2009; Marji, 2015). As Jensen (2009) explains,

Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance (43).

On the other hand, Harris (2006) suggests that the complex web of students' social relationships with peers, adults in the school, and family members "exerts a much greater influence on their behavior than researchers had previously assumed" (Jensen, 73).

*An Evening With the Montezuma's*  
*Field Notes: May 27, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA & Tijuana, BC, Mexico*

*Guerrero High School's year-end baile folklórico performance was the next day and all students were at the dress rehearsal.*



**Photograph: 3.6:** The seniors rehearsing for their Class of 2015 performance.



**Photograph 3.7:** Rebecca and her advanced *baile folklórico* classmates rehearsing for their performance the following evening.

*The groups finished rehearsing at 7:00pm (three hours total) and we waited 20 minutes for Rebecca's mother to arrive. Rebecca's mother works long hours as a sales representative for the pharmaceutical industry; her workdays are spent in pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens, promoting various products to potential customers.*

*Once their mother picked us up, we made our way south to the U.S.-Mexico border and we were in Mexico within a few minutes. Upon entering the car with them, what was most apparent was that Rebecca and her sister had a very close relationship with their mother; the three joke around and also seem to talk to each other about everything.*

*Because of how late it was, it was decided by Rebecca's sister that we should go out to eat. I noticed throughout the evening, that every so often their mother would say, "I have a friend who..." and it made me even more interested in interviewing her because she seemed to know a lot of people and how to utilize her social networks. Rebecca had also mentioned that she knows people in Northern California, near where she will be going to college, so she wanted to go to freshman orientation with her friend who didn't know people. What I found funny about this comment is that those people that Rebecca knew weren't even going to be at the orientation, yet she felt that the fact that she was more social (compared to her friend) would help her friend out.*

*As we pulled onto their street past 9:00 pm, I saw many gated townhomes on both sides of the street. The three of them lived in a 2-bedroom, 1.5-bathroom townhome, but the half bathroom did not have a door, so it was essentially used to store bathroom cleaning products and toilet paper. They had moved into this home a few months prior, but their busy lives had not allowed them to organize all of their things in the common areas. Their mother apologized several times about the mess, saying that she initially didn't even want me to come over because she was embarrassed.*

*I walked into Rebecca and Raquel's room and looked at all of the things they had on their walls, which ranged from awards and Rebecca's art to a newspaper article and the periodic table of elements.*



**Photograph 3.8:** The artwork, posters, awards, etc. on Rebecca's wall next to her bed.

*Rebecca insisted that I sleep in her bed, while she laid several blankets down on the floor for herself in their bedroom. Their mother had told me that they had been living in a trailer in Santo Domingo, California, but due to the high cost of rent, they ended up moving to Tijuana. Rebecca informed me it was simply easier to purchase what they needed and save money by living south of the border.*

*Rebecca stayed up to work on an art project that was due in two days. She was not going to have time to work on it the following night due to the baile folklorico performance ending at 9:30 p.m.*



**Photograph 3.9:** Rebecca working on her AP art project late at night.

*We woke up at 5:45 a.m. instead of their usual 4:30 am. About 30 minutes into our wait at the border, Rebecca got a book out and I was amazed that she was going to leisurely read at that time with such little sleep. She soon fell asleep. We ended up crossing the border two hours after having left the house. We arrived late for Rebecca's zero period Navy Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (NJROTC) program. Raquel used to be in the same class, but ended up dropping it because their activities and amount of homework became overwhelming for her. Now, Raquel's mom will usually stay parked at the school until she has to go to work so that Raquel can get more sleep in the car – she brings a blanket and pillow with her. Clearly, their daily commute is a drain on the three of them, but with their future in mind, the sacrifice is worth it to them.*

Risk factors, according to Jensen (2009), present an extraordinary challenge to educational and social success. However, Harris's (2006) research, helps us understand Rebecca's ability to overcome adversity and gain acceptance into a university despite her family's financial struggles. While academic success is not impossible, as Rebecca demonstrates, understanding the challenges that children living in poverty face can lead to actions teachers, counselors, and administrators can take to further help their economically disadvantaged students succeed.

Currently, Rebecca is a freshman studying Sustainable Manufacturing at CSU Chico. She chose Chico because it was the only four-year university that granted her admission. She told me that her time in Chico has been going wonderfully. Rebecca was not sure in January of her freshman year if she was going to pursue engineering as her major, but she said it was probable given how much she was enjoying her engineering classes. Once she has a chance to take more general education courses, she would be able to decide. She also reported that she does not know what career she would like to pursue after college, but that engineering, sustainability, or anthropology are possibilities.

## **The Juniors: Chikis, Marisol, Gladis, and Esteban**

### **1) Chikis**

Chikis takes her studies quite seriously. When I first interviewed Chikis, she told me that her father is a psychologist, who was working for the Mexican Law Enforcement. Chikis' father's job was to assess new police officers' psychological well-being in order for them to be issued firearms. Her course load is challenging, with several Honors and AP classes, and she is an AVID student as well. I was drawn to her because of her ability to have entered the advanced track within the school despite her relatively recent start in the American education system (7th grade). Chikis' enrollment at Guerrero High was not by choice, however, and she misses her friends and her school in Tijuana.

Chikis explained that members of a drug cartel approached her father in 2005 in which they demanded that he give them psychiatric clearance, which would permit them to purchase firearms. The members of the drug cartel began to stalk Chikis' father and her family, and her father refused to issue them what they requested. Out of fear for their safety, they moved north of the United States-Mexico border to escape the drug cartels' forcefulness.

**ST:** Did you like the school you attended before GHS? What did you like/dislike about it?

**Chikis:** I didn't want to come. (*Yo no me quería venir.*)

**ST:** Why? (*¿Por qué?*)

**Chikis:** Well, I was born over there [Tijuana], I liked it...I had friends, my family would go over there. In fact, it wasn't an option whether I wanted to come or not. It was for our own safety that we came.

(*Pues, yo nací allá, a mí me gustaba...tenía amigos, mi familia iba allá. De hecho, no fue una opción de que si te quieres venir. Fue por seguridad por la que nos venimos.*)

**ST:** Safety from what? (*¿Seguridad de qué?*)

**Chikis:** ...[Members of the drug cartel] threatened him saying that they were going to kill him or his family, so the next day we had to leave because they started following us home. The phone calls were intercepted. We ourselves couldn't go outside, like, nowhere because we were tracked. We stayed there for one week and here in the U.S. they didn't let us leave.

(*[Miembros del cartel de drogas] lo amenazaron, que iban a matar a su familia o a él, y al día siguiente ya nos teníamos que ir porque empezaron a seguirnos a la casa. The phone calls were intercepted. No podíamos salir nosotros, like, nowhere porque we were tracked. Nos quedamos una semana allá y ya aquí en Estados Unidos no nos dejaron salir.*)

Chikis is an example of a student whose family had no choice but to move across the border; contrary to her peers, she moved north (instead of south). Despite his credentials and post secondary education, Chikis' father was unable to obtain a career in the U.S. For years, he worked at a hotel in an unskilled position. As Chikis spoke to me about her father's unfortunate experience and his inability to obtain a job he was qualified for in the United States, it was clear that she had spent time reflecting on the sequence of events and what she could do for herself to have a better future.

Chikis was on the school's swim team the previous school year, but began cycling in Tijuana, which became her passion. Her self-assigned pseudonym, as she explained, is a nickname for *chiquita*, which means little one; in fact, her cycling teammates gave her this nickname because she was the youngest of the group. Because this extracurricular activity was based in Tijuana, her ability to develop friendships after school was somewhat limited; however, she befriended classmates in her honors and AP classes. One of the close friends she made was Rebecca, one of the senior focal students in this study. When asked in the last interview who her closest friends were, she indicated Rebecca was one of those people; however, Rebecca did not state Chikis as one of her closest friends. An analysis of the effects of younger students seeking out and obtaining information from older students is in the following chapter.

When I asked Chikis in August of her senior year if I could go home with her one day, she told me that it would not be a good time to visit because her parents had been arguing frequently and that they were likely going to separate. I happened to substitute for her American Sign Language class in October of her senior year. She saw me as she entered the room, saying "Sofia!" and greeted me with a hug. One of the first things she told me was that she was in the process of applying to universities. Once she was done with the work left by the regular classroom teacher, she told me she was working on her personal statement and asked if I could clarify something for her. She had received advice from her AVID teacher, but still needed one-on-one attention; therefore, I happily agreed to help her. Chikis' personal statement for the UC application needed a lot of work. I gave her several suggestions that day and asked her to email it to me after revising. In the end, her AVID teacher required all students to submit their applications before Thanksgiving break (and before we had a chance to fully review her personal statement together). This occurrence shows the how persistent AVID teachers are with their students regarding college applications.

I also asked Chikis the day I substituted about how she was doing with her parents separating. Among all of the focal students, Chikis' living situation was the least stable. At the start of the study, Chikis lived in Santo Domingo, but spent some weekday evenings and her entire weekends in Tijuana. Once her parents separated, she moved back to Tijuana. She told me that she and her siblings would go to their aunt's house in Santo Domingo after school each day and that around 10:00 p.m., her father would pick them up after he had finished working in Tijuana. Like many *transfronterizos*, Chikis went to a relative's home in the U.S. on weekdays but she did not spend the night there.

I knew from our interviews that Chikis' role model was her father. She looked up to him and aspired to be like him; in fact, she aspires to become a psychologist because of

her father. There was much tension between Chikis and her mother, however. Chikis looked down on her mother's behavior largely due to a personality and maturity clash; she told me that her mother was rather explosive in that she would get upset, start yelling, and once she practically turned her father's office upside down. She was not very close with her sister either.

I asked Chikis in November of her senior year if I could conduct a home visit at her aunt's house, and possibly visit their home in Tijuana. She said I could definitely go to her aunt's Santo Domingo home and that the only way I could visit her in Tijuana would be if her mother were not there. By the time we scheduled the home visit in December, her parents had separated. Her father was living with his mother (Chikis' grandmother) and Chikis' mom and brother were living in their family's home. Chikis and her sister were living with an aunt in Tijuana, but Chikis stayed at her grandmother's home on the weekends in order to spend time with her father. In short, Chikis' living situation was chaotic and unstable. Due to Chikis' lack of responsiveness via Facebook and email, I was unable to visit her home.

Despite not having the opportunity to see Chikis' home environment and meet her family, I admired her resilience throughout the college application period. She endured her parents separating at perhaps one of the worst times in a student's life during high school. Chikis used cycling as a form of stress relief and, like Rebecca, she did not let her family circumstances affect her academics.

I found out through Facebook that Chikis will be attending UC Merced in the fall. Because she did not respond to my emails, I am unaware of whether she was accepted to other four-year universities. Regardless, she gained admission into the UC system which is a significant accomplishment and a stepping stone for her to pursue graduate school in the future.

## **2) Marisol**

Many days, Marisol came to school with her *Ciel* water bottle, a Coca Cola brand of drinking water popular in Mexico. She was an outgoing young woman who enjoyed socializing with her friends; this was often the case when I would stop by her physical education class to interview her. She would usually complain about her P.E. class and the requirement to run a mile or do push-ups. Marisol completed middle school in Tijuana and began high school in the U.S. in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She had also attended school in the U.S. for first through third grade. She is the youngest of four – with a wide age gap between her and her siblings. At the time of the study, Marisol was 16; Marisol's older brothers were 35 and 26 years old, and her older sisters were 32, 31, and 26 years-of-age.

Three of her siblings completed high school, and of those three, two of them attended U.S. high schools. One sister went to San Diego State University and a brother finished culinary school in Tijuana. Marisol's father completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade and her mother completed 9<sup>th</sup> grade (the last grade in middle school in Mexico). Marisol would like to pursue one of three careers: either a kindergarten teacher because she likes kids, an

accountant because she like her middle school math classes and found them to be easy, or a neonatologist because she likes babies. During our first interview, she believed she would attend a four-year university and planned to apply to UC Berkeley because she has family in the Bay Area. She was also planning to apply to CETYS, which is an institute of higher education located in Tijuana, and Santo Domingo's local community college.

All of the juniors were enrolled in AP Spanish at the time of the study. I stopped in for a classroom visit one day and happened to arrive just in time for Marisol to be reciting a poem that she wrote. The composition and presentation of these poems were part of a class competition for a spot in the school-wide Poetry Night contest. Fellow AP Spanish peers would vote for their favorite poem and presentation and the winner would compete in the contest. Students could choose from the following topics: War/Peace, Environment, Latino Pride, Love/Hate, and Life/Death. Below is Marisol's poem on Latino Pride:

### **La Diferencia**

Muchos hablan y muchos callan.

(Many speak and many silence.)

Unos observan y nos ignoran.

(Some observe and ignore us.)

Otros piensan y otros crean.

(Others think and others create.)

Aquellos critican y nosotros peleamos por injusticia.

(They criticize and we fight for justice.)

Mientras miramos como nos discriminan,

(Meanwhile we see how they discriminate against us,)

miramos como la otra blanca persona

(we see how the other white person)

es el ignorante al no reconocer el valor

(is the ignorant one to not realize the value)

que tenemos como latinos, humanos y almas.

(that we have as Latinos, humans, and souls.)

Te puedo ver,

(I can see you,)

te puedo tocar,

(I can touch you,)

pero nunca entenderás como es

(but you will never understand how it is)

el ser un moreno lleno de amor y valor.

(to be a colored person full of love and value.)

Mi cultura jamás podrá afectarte,

(My culture will never be able to affect you,)

ni tampoco tu cultura podrá eliminarme.

(nor will your culture be able to eliminate me.)

Marisol's poem touched on the daily struggles that Latino students deal with in American schools. She had much more depth to her than she let on in our conversations. I was especially interested in visiting Marisol's home after hearing her recite her poem. Unfortunately, our plans fell through several times and I was unable to conduct a home visit.

### **3) Gladis**

I developed a special relationship with Gladis, a laid back, blue-eyed young lady. I felt like she was a younger sister, as she put much trust in me with academic concerns, shared some drama she had dealt with prior to us meeting, and always talked to me about the latest with regard to romantic relationships, her current crush, or solicited advice about relationship issues with her boyfriend once that relationship was established. She also asked me for advice on what she should study, and where, after finishing high school. I came to believe that Gladis had much academic potential but displayed a lack of confidence in her ability to perform in more challenging classes. I encouraged her to speak to her counselor about transferring to AP English and U.S. History (Honors), but by the time she did, it was too late to change classes. When I visited her classes, she usually seemed bored and in need of more intellectual stimulation. Unlike most of the students in this study, Gladis has been educated in the United States since elementary school – 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She is equally comfortable with conversational English as she is with Spanish.

When I first interviewed Gladis in August, she explained that she woke up each morning at 4:00/4:30 a.m. and left home with her father at 5:30 in the morning to make their way to her cousin's house in Santo Domingo, CA. The wait at the border was anywhere from 30 minutes to two-and-a-half hours. Once the border's renovations were completed, there was a significant decrease in wait time at the border if crossing by car. During our second interview in October, she informed me that their wait time dropped to anywhere from 10 minutes to two hours; the shorter wait time allowed her to get more sleep. Gladis spent some time at her cousin's house each morning before taking the five-minute ride on the school bus. Gladis was a case in point of students regularly using a place of residence in the U.S., but whose living situation does not fall within the Education Code regarding residency. For Gladis, it was simply easier to attend school in the United States rather than in Tijuana because her father worked north of the border and because her cousins lived in Santo Domingo and in surrounding areas. She also said she wanted to know what school was like in the U.S. Her 20-year-old brother was in his second year at Santo Domingo's local community college. While she did not know what she wanted to study at the time, Gladis stated throughout her junior year that she would apply to UCLA, which was her top choice, as well as UCSD and CSU San Bernardino. She was in AVID in middle school, but left the program because her brother said it was a waste of time.

I had given Gladis a ride after school on two occasions during her junior year because we ended her interviews minutes before the dismissal bell rang. The first time I gave her and her cousin a ride to her cousin's home and the second time I gave her and

two friends a ride to the mall. When I first told Gladis that I would be asking her parents for permission to visit her home, she was ecstatic and surprised that I would want to go to her house in Tijuana.

After several failed attempts of getting in contact with her via email, I connected with her by visiting her elective class in December 2015 and asking her if we could chat because I hadn't heard back from her. She agreed and informed me that she hadn't checked her email for quite some time. After scheduling my home visit for the following week, she desperately asked me what she should do about college. It was December 2<sup>nd</sup>, two days after the UC/CSU application period closed and I was devastated when she told me that she missed the deadline. She was stressed, saying, "What do I do? I want to go to a four-year university!" I suggested she consider private schools in San Diego (because she wanted to stay local) and community colleges. Her first question in response to my suggestion was, "Are the private schools four-year universities?" It seemed as though her primary concern was attending a four-year university, regardless of which one it was. I told her yes and that they are much more expensive than public universities, but that she would likely qualify for financial aid because she is a low-income student. If she ended up attending a junior college, I urged her to speak to a counselor after applying so that she could make a two-year plan so as to transfer without delay. I asked her why she missed the deadline and she simply said, "I don't know!"

Gladis and I met up after her soccer game on the evening of my visit. Below are my notes from my time with her.

*Gladis' Evening on a Game Day*  
*Field Notes: December 8, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA*

*School let out at 4:00 p.m. today, but Gladis' soccer game began at 5:00 p.m. and ended at 6:45 p.m.*



**Photograph 3.10:** Gladis throwing the soccer ball back into play during her game.

*On the drive home, Gladis made a comment about me helping her apply to private colleges. I remarked on the fact that I would be more than happy to help, especially because she had missed the UC/CSU deadline (but apparently she hadn't told her parents). Her dad reacted disappointedly at the news. He didn't know. In response to seeing that she had let down her father, she simply said she had forgotten to apply. She also said that for some time (not anymore) she was not even planning on going to college because she wanted to join the border patrol, which didn't require a college degree. Gladis' father disagreed with her, emphasizing the importance of a college education over working for the border patrol. "You can always work for the border patrol," he explained, and he went on to say that continuing her studies should be her priority. In response, Gladis said that he did just fine (at \$16/hour) without having gone to college. Her father went on to explain that if he were to lose his job in the maintenance department of a hotel in downtown San Diego, that he would have to start from the bottom elsewhere.*

*Her brother, a 2014 Guerrero High School alumnus, explained that he was attending the community college near Santo Domingo, CA. He recently changed his major from psychology to biology and he aspires to be a Biology teacher. At the time, however, he was only enrolled in two classes because the other classes he intended to take filled up. Next semester he would have four challenging classes, including Biology, Chemistry, and Calculus.*

*Much to my dismay, Gladis had forgotten to look into private universities as per our conversation last week. I reiterated that her options were either attending a community college or a private university. She told me she was interested in interior design and showed me a Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM) booklet she had looked through. She went on to say that she had spoken to recruiters who were very friendly and that she wanted to attend, acknowledging that she would have to live in Los Angeles for some time. I looked at the booklet as she spoke about her plans and then I saw the program cost...\$70,000...yikes! She seemed quite naïve about her job prospects after attending a school like FIDM, and I explained that recruiters tell potential students what they want to hear. After all, they are seeking your business and they know how to lure people in to their programs.*

*I had major concerns for Gladis about her desire to pursue an education at FIDM, primarily because it is a for-profit organization with a questionable job placement statistics. After doing some research, I came across FIDM reviews on Yelp. I asked Gladis to read through a few of the negative reviews, which detailed unfortunate experiences that former students had with, precisely, the program cost relative to the type of careers (if any) they were able to obtain. Multiple alumni commented on their inability to obtain the career they were looking for and they urged the readers to carefully consider whether FIDM truly is the best option for them before committing to the monumental debt they would graduate with. After speaking to Gladis about the comments former students had made, I was able to help her realize that FIDM cannot guarantee*

*that spending \$70,000 to become an interior designer would actually make her an interior designer.*

*I browsed San Diego's community college and four-year private university websites with her next to me to see if there were more affordable alternatives. Not surprisingly, neither private school offered such a program. I was able to find an interior design program at one of the community colleges, which offers the option of obtaining a certificate of achievement, an associate of science degree, or both. We looked into it together and she seemed interested, especially because of the difference in cost. She didn't quite grasp whether she would need to continue going to school after the program, however, because she didn't understand what it meant to have a certificate and an associate's degree. I explained and also encouraged her to email the program's point of contact to set up a time to speak by phone about questions I felt would be important to have answered.*

*Gladis was extremely sleepy, and wanted to know if she could tell her coach that she couldn't make morning practice because of my overnight stay. I said we couldn't do that and we went to bed around 10:00 p.m., once we finished looking into educational options for interior design. We woke up at 4:50 a.m., before the roosters began their daily 5:00 a.m. crowing. Again, she said she wanted to skip practice so she could sleep more.*

*As she applied mascara in the school restroom, she commented that she wouldn't have come to practice if it wasn't for me...but she clarified that it was a good thing. We walked down to the field together and the girls began to stretch in the middle of the field.*



**Photograph 3.11:** Gladis and her teammates walking to the field for practice.

*After stretching, the girls ran around the track twice (half a mile) before beginning some drills, at which point I headed home. I took an extended nap and wondered how Gladis kept up with this schedule every day. I truly feel I could not do what she does each day.*

I ran into Gladis at Esteban's swim meet in April of her senior year. She informed me that she will soon be enrolling in the interior design program at the local community college that we had researched together during my home visit. Clearly, my advice impacted her educational decisions. During the aforementioned recent encounter, she had asked me for help in applying to the program but she never followed up as I requested. I argue that her lack of follow-through accounts for why she did not complete applications for the CSU/UC systems. I argue that Gladis' likelihood of applying to the state university system would have increased if she had had support from resourceful teachers, comparable to the guidance that AVID students receive.

#### **4) Esteban**

Esteban is a quiet leader, a hard-worker, and exemplifies an impressive level of independence for a high school student. He was the captain of both the water polo and swim teams, was on the Homecoming Court during his senior year, and was deeply committed to his schoolwork. In fact, there was a time during his AVID class in which I intended to interview him but he showed some concern over finishing his classwork before meeting with me – during this occasion, we decided on another day in which to meet.

Leading up to his senior year, Esteban rarely saw his parents during the week; his parents rented an apartment in Santo Domingo, CA and owned a home in Tijuana. Therefore, he would stay in the U.S. during the week and leave to Tijuana each Friday. His mother would prepare him food at their Santo Domingo apartment, but he was responsible for getting to his 6:15 a.m. practice each day, getting to school on time, completing his homework, and going to bed at a reasonable time.

I went swimming one evening at the pool where his swim team was going to have a scrimmage. My swim workout and their scrimmage set-up overlapped for about one hour. While I was lap swimming, I saw Esteban take initiative setting everything up and leading stretches. Esteban's independent lifestyle due to family circumstances lent itself to becoming responsible, taking initiative, and possessing leadership characteristics at a young age.

During the off-season, he returned to Tijuana each day after school because there was no need to stay in Santo Domingo. He commented on the fact that it took a while to get accustomed to sleeping much less due to having to commute to school from Tijuana. Esteban's schedule did drastically change from his junior to senior year. In 11<sup>th</sup> grade, his water polo practice schedule from September to December was from 5:30-8:00 a.m. and the swim practice schedule from February to May was from 6:00-8:00 a.m. During his senior year, though, water polo practice was changed to 6:30-8:00 p.m. and swim practice was moved to 7:00-9:00 p.m. As a result, Esteban would go to his aunt's house after school to eat and start his homework by 5:00 p.m. before heading to practice. He spent weekends and a couple weeknights at their Tijuana home. Guerrero High School had a tradition of delivering the good news to homecoming court nominees by going to their

home before school and waking them up. Esteban was lucky that this occurred on a day in which he had spent the night at his aunt's house.

Esteban and I had scheduled my home visit for December of his senior year. However, the week prior to my visit, he informed me there were some issues at home. As a result, I was unable to conduct a home visit. He did keep me up-to-date on his college acceptances. After wrestling with the dilemma of whether to attend UCSD or UCLA, he chose UCLA and will begin his studies there in the fall.

## **The Sophomores: Annie & Ricardo**

### **Annie**

At the young age of four, Annie crossed the U.S.-Mexico border for a short visit with her mother. Once in the United States, her life changed forever in a matter of minutes. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) arrested Annie's mother for smuggling drugs; the agency confiscated the illegal substances and took Annie to another vehicle, which would transport her to an orphanage. Annie recalls an officer reading a book to her in Spanish while in the van, trying to nurture her through the sudden separation from her mother. Days later, an American couple opened their home to Annie, hoping to welcome a new daughter to their family. Annie was returned to the orphanage for the administrative details to be processed when her father and brother came for one last visit. Annie was unsure as to why the orphanage did not give her back to her father, and the only explanation she could offer me was that her father was not an American citizen. Out of desperation, her father took her from the orphanage and brought her back to Tijuana. Ten years later, Annie and I crossed paths. She lives in Tijuana with her single mother; her father and brother are deceased due to drug cartel violence. As a high school sophomore in Santo Domingo, California, Annie is creating her own path by working hard in school, with the aspiration of going to college.

Annie lives in Tijuana with her mother and younger sister. One of her older sisters had been released from jail just days before our second interview in October 2014 for smuggling drugs across the border. She was living in a halfway house at the time and would be released in two weeks at which point she could return home. Annie had the roughest upbringing compared to the other focal students – and, most likely, compared to the general student population as well – but her resilience was unparalleled. She told me about the death of her brother and disappearance of her father and about her experience in the orphanage, among other things, without showing emotion. She took school seriously, focused during class, and she was a 'no nonsense' type of person. Unlike most of the other focal students, Annie rarely noticed when I would visit her classes.

I conducted a home visit in December of her junior year, during the last week of school prior to the district's winter vacation. Annie said I was more than welcome to stay at her mother's house, however, I was indecisive about whether to stay the night because her brother had been murdered by members of a drug cartel seven years prior. In the end, she ended up staying the night with her sister in Chula Vista for the last two weeks of

school so that she could have more time study for finals and sleep. We did still go to Tijuana right after school to visit her mother. The following field notes detail my evening with Annie.

*Heading to Tijuana*

*Field Notes: December 16, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA*

*Although she was staying with her sister at the time, she still visited her mother at work each school day. She truly adored, and looked up to, her mother. From the bus stop, we went to the trolley station where we took the trolley to the border. Annie made a passing comment about the fact that she only eats dinner; apparently, she has a sensitive stomach and feels sick if she eats breakfast. She also doesn't eat lunch because she doesn't like the cafeteria food. I have found it to be the case with other students in the study, in which they don't eat three meals a day but they are, in fact, quite hungry. I offered Annie a snack while we waited, which she respectfully accepted.*



**Photograph 3.12:** Annie waiting for the trolley.

*Annie showed me childhood photos on her phone, including recent photos of an NJROTC competition and her boyfriend.*



**Photograph 3.13:** Annie racing during a recent NJROTC competition.

*She seemed very happy with her boyfriend, of Vietnamese descent, who was two years younger than her and one grade lower than her. She told me that he enrolled in a beginner Spanish class this semester so that he could learn how to speak in Spanish with her. The two spoke in English, though, because his Spanish was extremely limited. Annie was excited that he offered to take her to the outlet mall this week so that she could pick out something that she wanted. I asked Annie if he has ever gone to Tijuana with her, but she told me that his parents do not let him cross the border because it's dangerous.*

#### *Visiting Mamá*

*Field Notes: December 16, 2015, Tijuana, BC, Mexico*

*After walking across the border, we went to a taxi stand located about half a mile away. The taxi driver gave us a 10-minute ride to the plaza where her mother organizes an annual bazaar in which many vendors sell their goods for the month of December. Annie's mother, Diana Castellanos, had a large staff overseeing the entire event, including parking attendants, secretaries, and coordinators. In our interview, Diana told me about her hopes for Annie to realize her dreams because she saw something special in her daughter – a drive to succeed and the persistence so necessary to achieve her goal of becoming a surgeon.*

*We got to the border and we were astounded at the length of the line to cross by foot. Annie suggested we try to cross through ReadyLane because I had a Sentri card and they might let her cross as well because she was a minor. We went directly to the front only to be turned away and told that we needed to wait in the two-hour line. Annie said*

*that we were going to get to her sister's very late and that it would worry her if we went to the back of the line. She asked me if I would mind cutting in line to which I said that I would do whatever she wanted to do. With that, we cut in line and upset a few people. Within 20 minutes, we were back in the states.*

*Back in the U.S.*

*Field Notes: December 16, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA & Chula Vista, CA*

*In order to get to her sister's apartment, we needed to take the trolley and a bus. It felt like an eternity waiting for the bus on a cold night, but Annie came prepared with a blanket. We missed the bus by one minute, so we waited 15 minutes for the next one.*



**Photograph 3.14:** Waiting at the trolley station upon our return to the United States.



**Photograph 3.15:** Annie wrapped in a Scooby-Doo blanket with her backpack and sister's baby shower gift in tow.

*Once aboard, we rode the bus for 25 minutes and deboarded one street away from her sister's apartment in an area comprised of taco shops, nail salons, mechanics, and gas stations. Her sister, brother-in-law, and five-year-old nephew lived in a small one-bedroom apartment. Annie's sister was eight months pregnant and explained that they had sixty days to move out of the apartment once the baby was born. They didn't know this would be the case when they moved into the apartment five months ago, but the office personnel noticed that she was pregnant and informed her that they were allowed a maximum of three occupants in their one-bedroom apartment.*

*Annie had told me that she only had one final (instead of two) the next day. They had already taken the ELD final exam and she said that her English teacher wasn't even going to give them a final. Ultimately, he ended up needing to give them a final the next day, but he did not tell them what would be on it. It wasn't clear to me why the decision to have a final exam was last minute, nor why he didn't tell his students what would be on the test. As a result, she said she did not have to study because she had no idea what the exam would cover.*

*Overall, it was a relaxed evening. I was unable to stay the night because there was no space for me to sleep. Annie had told me that by staying with her sister, she would be able to wake up at 6 a.m. instead of 4:30 a.m. She would then take two buses to get to school.*

*Something that stuck out to me from the entire evening was Annie's mother's and sister's sincere hope of her being the one in the family to make it to college...to make something of herself. It was clear that Annie had the most promise; her family's background, discussed earlier in this chapter, was not conducive to academic success. However,*

*Annie had a supportive and hard-working mother who said that she would do “whatever it takes” for her daughter to achieve her dreams.*

### **Ricardo**

Ricardo is a quiet and extremely respectful young man. He began his education in the United States in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Ricardo’s family has an apartment in Santo Domingo, in addition to their home in Tijuana. When he stays the night in their Tijuana home, which is not too often because he is no longer in tae kwon do, he wakes up at 6:00 a.m. in order to leave the house at 7:00 a.m. He arrives to his home in the U.S. at 8:00 a.m. and walks over to the bus stop by 8:10 a.m. His father is a locksmith in Tijuana and his mother works in the U.S. as a housekeeping supervisor at a hotel. Ricardo aspires to study medicine and be a cardiologist. His motive for this career path is due to his personal health issues as a child:

Since I was young...well, I have always had health issues with many illnesses, and I had a heart problem when I was little. I was taken to a cardiologist and I liked the way that he cared for me, and well, it was then that I had the desire to want to be a cardiologist.

*(Desde cuando era chiquito...bueno, siempre he tenido problemas con muchas enfermedades, y me dio un problema del corazón cuando era chiquito y me toco cuando me llevaron con el cardiólogo. Y a mi me gusto la manera en que el cardiólogo me atendió. Y pues de allí me dio la sensación de querer ser cardiólogo.)*

During spring break, the school’s AVID program gave students (school-wide) the opportunity to go on a college visit tour to northern California. This was the first year in which students had this opportunity through the school. The tour lasted three days/two nights and included six university campuses: San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, San Francisco State University, CSU Monterey Bay, San Jose State, and UC Berkeley. Given the low socioeconomic status of the majority of Guerrero High School students, the nearly 50 who chose to attend certainly made a financial sacrifice given their low income, paying over \$300 for the trip. I met up with the group upon their arrival to the UC Berkeley campus and I was pleasantly surprised to see Esteban and Ricardo. Chikis was the only other focal student enrolled in AVID who did not attend the trip.

I visited Ricardo’s home at the beginning of his junior year. Below are my field notes from that visit:

#### *A Night with the Gonzalez Family*

*Field Notes: August 12, 2015, Santo Domingo, CA & Tijuana, BC, Mexico*

*In August 2015, I visited and spent the night at Ricardo’s home in Tijuana. Because he took the school bus to/from a location near the border, I was unable to ride along for that portion of his commute. I met him at his drop-off location about 25 minutes after school*

*let out and we walked across the border together. Once across, we walked for about five minutes to the taxi pick-up area and took a nearly 15 minute cab ride to his home. As we walked into the house, Ricardo introduced me to his sweet and soft-spoken mother who was making us an early dinner with a telenovela playing in the background. They owned their modest Tijuana 3-bedroom, 1 ½ bathroom two-story home and rented a 2-bedroom apartment in Santo Domingo for \$950/month. Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez earned a combined average annual income of about \$30,000.*

*Mrs. Guadalupe Gonzalez completed middle school (9<sup>th</sup> grade) in Mexico; she began high school but got married and dropped out. When asked about what her expectations were for her son for the future, she simply said that she wanted him to achieve his goals. The Gonzalez family moved to Santo Domingo in 2010 when Guadalupe became a naturalized citizen of the United States. Their motivation for the move was for more opportunities for their sons.*

*Ricardo had told me on our commute to his home that today would be a typical weekday evening except for the fact that he had much less homework than usual because the school year had just started. He is thorough with what he seeks out to do, however, and he spent over three hours on his homework tonight. It was a relaxed and supportive environment and I could easily see why Ricardo is a good student; he has nice parents, a stable home environment, and he is quite organized. He doesn't complain. Ricardo's parents also addressed me using usted, which is not common for individuals to use with a younger generation*

*On my tour of his home, he showed me a drawing he made during his summer vacation of his heart (as an organ). His goal of becoming a cardiologist was reinforced each day when he saw that drawing on his desk, as it served as a gentle reminder of why he works tirelessly in school.*

*Once Ricardo was done with his homework and after watching the news, we all went to bed around 11 p.m. Ricardo woke up the next morning at 5:30 in order to leave at 6:20 a.m. and make it to the school by 8:00 a.m. for his zero period class.*

I followed up with Ricardo about his thoughts on the universities that they visited. The email in which he detailed his thoughts on all of the colleges visited can be found in Appendix H. Below are his impressions of three of the institutions.

- Last year I had the opportunity to go on a field trip to UCLA and it immediately caught my eye/interest. The environment felt just like home: everyone was collaborating, everyone seemed to be satisfied, and there was just too much going on. The campus left me amazed. Along with feeling like home, UCLA seems to have something for everyone, meaning that in UCLA you will find something to be happy about. For example, there's a lot of clubs, you will definitely find one that fits with your personality
- CSU Fullerton is an amazing university. The environment feels great and the quality of education is outstanding. CSU Fullerton is my second option.

- SDSU is...my last option because [I am guaranteed admission through] Compact for Success. If i had to, i would definitely attend because of the quality of education i would be receiving. However, SDSU didn't had what i was looking for in a university: an environment that fits with my personality and students enjoying the campus.

Ricardo has thought carefully through his university options. I included Ricardo's impressions of UCLA, CSU Fullerton, and San Diego State University for specific reasons. First, thousands of students seek admission at UCLA each year. Ricardo expressed that he was interested in UCLA because of the opportunities to join student organizations and the potential to be happy there. Meanwhile, CSU Fullerton is a less desirable university for most students. However, Ricardo felt that it was an "outstanding" school and he took a liking to the campus environment. A priority for him, therefore, is that his future university must have a welcoming environment where he will feel comfortable being away from home (personal communication, April 9, 2016).

Lastly, SDSU tends to be a default school that most San Diego County students plan to attend because of its proximity to home. 'State', as San Diegans refer to SDSU, fulfills students' aspirations of attending a four-year university and many students attend through the Compact for Success program. In 2000, San Diego State University partnered with the Maple Union High School District, which Guerrero High School is a part of, to create a program that would bring new educational opportunities to the school district's graduates. According to the Compact for Success website,

The partnership would involve teachers working side-by-side with SDSU faculty to examine the rigor and alignment of math and English course offerings and to design a school curriculum that would meet specific requirements for college admissions. Students participating in the Compact for Success Program would focus on meeting the requirements...and all students meeting these requirements would be guaranteed admission to SDSU.

Despite this arrangement between the school district and SDSU, and likely due to their exposure to numerous colleges, all focal AVID students intended to apply to SDSU but had aspirations to attend another university. San Diego State, therefore, became a last resort for them. As Ricardo mentioned, he knows he will be accepted to SDSU, but he is more interested in other universities.

## CHAPTER FOUR: STUDENTS' FORMATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Peer networks can play a major role in students gaining knowledge about college and shaping how students think about their future. In this chapter, social network data demonstrates that students have different types of conversations with friends largely based on whether their friends are college-oriented. I define college-oriented as heading in the direction of applying to four-year universities, illustrated by meeting A-G course requirements and engaging in conversations with peers about college. Below, each focal student's peer network is outlined using a graph, followed by my interpretation of the extent to which the student employs social capital. The findings point to a tendency among AVID students to talk about college with their fellow AVID peers. The AVID program built richer knowledge among its participants, leading students to talk about college with their classmates, while students who were in regular classes tended to not have friends with a college-going mindset. These results highlight the need to instill a college-going culture across academic programs.

The most significant finding of the study is that participation in Guerrero High School's AVID program is essential for gaining access to information channels related to college and establishing ties with resourceful teachers. Of the focal students enrolled in AVID, all four of them (Carlos, Chikis, Esteban, and Ricardo) were highly knowledgeable of all of the CSU and UC requirements. With the exception of Rebecca, the non-AVID students were only able to tell me about some of the admissions requirements, such as A-G, but they were unable to explain what the components of A-G actually were. Rebecca was an anomaly because despite not being in the AVID program, she figured out how to navigate the various requirements so as to apply and be accepted to CSU Chico. Rebecca considered herself to be a "preguntona," which is a person who asks a lot of questions. She credited her knowledge of college requirements to her friend from *baile folkorico* who was in AVID. Rebecca would ask her friend questions on a regular basis and also utilized her counselor to the fullest extent; thus, her social capital was strengthened by her own resourcefulness.

While focal parents supported their children's ambitions, they had little to no knowledge of the American school system. Thus, parents were unable to assist their children with anything related to college. Findings point to AVID teachers and counselors proving to be the most helpful with regard to navigating course options and college requirements.

Carlos, like Marisol and Annie, crossed the border by himself each weekday; however, several factors converged to make his social capital potentially quite rich. Carlos informed me that his peer networks included the following: classmates (from AVID, honors, and AP classes), other *transfronterizos*, and, during his junior year, his older sister's friends as well. The graph below details Carlos' peer network.

**Graph 4.1 – Carlos’ Peer Network**



\*College-bound students within the *Class of 2014 Seniors* group of friends

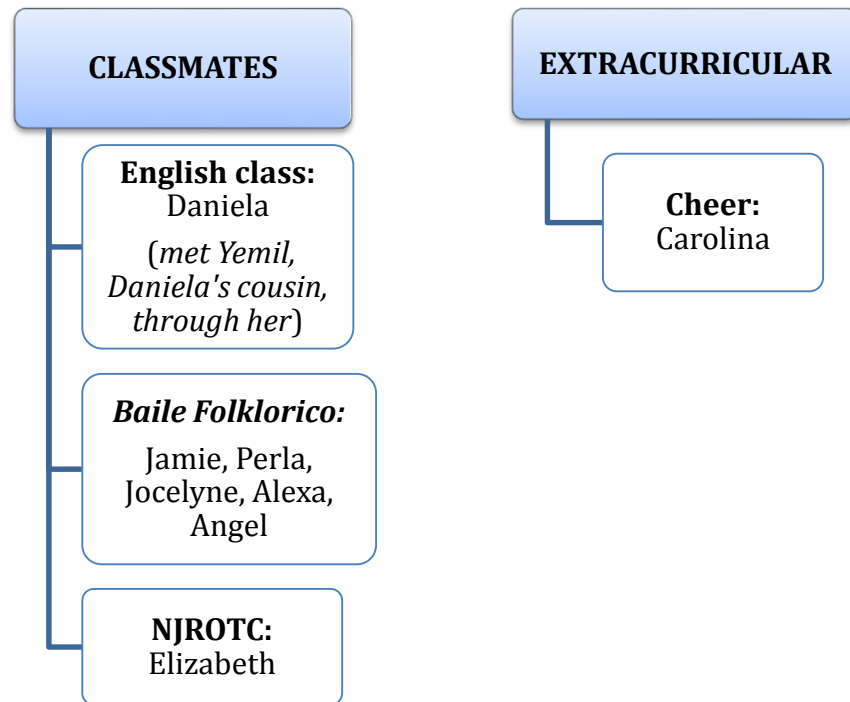
As seen in the above graph, Carlos had an extensive network of friends from various walks of life within his high school. The quote in each box is his description of that particular group of friends, which demonstrates that he relied on different groups of friends for distinct reasons. One noteworthy observation is that Carlos had two groups of senior friends. He defined the seniors in the first group (upper left) as not being college-oriented; these friends were primarily from his ELD classes during his first three semesters of high school in the United States. Carlos met the other students in that group at the bus stop on his way home. He indicated that he generally spoke to this group of friends about life and other typical things that students his age talk about. Carlos' second group of friends (upper right) consisted of university-bound seniors with whom he talked about college.

Carlos's remaining friends were either in the grade above or below him. At the time of the interview, Carlos had three 11<sup>th</sup> grade friends (bottom left of Graph 4.1) that he met through AP classes. And finally, he was connected to a group of students one year older than him (during his junior year) by way of his older sister. As seen in the above graph, nine of the 13 seniors he befriended in 11<sup>th</sup> grade were college-bound. In fact, Carlos once told me that "he'd be lost without them," referring to their resourcefulness. Two-thirds of the *Class of 2014 Seniors* friend group in Graph 4.1 was not university-bound. However, Carlos had knowledge about college from a few sources, including his older sister, the students he befriended through his sister, and the AVID program. Once his older friends graduated from high school, Carlos explained, three friends in his grade

(whose names are underlined) became his new “home base” during his senior year. Carlos and his “home base” had established group trust and reciprocity, in which they sought advice from each other on a regular basis.

Rebecca befriended students through various classes, including English, *baile folklórico*, and NJROTC, as well as through cheer.

**Graph 4.2 – Rebecca’s Peer Network**

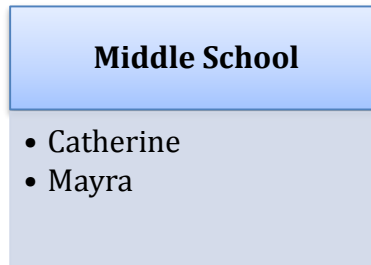


One friend in particular, who she met in *baile folklórico* (see Graph 4.2 above), was Rebecca’s source for obtaining information about college application deadlines and FAFSA. Daniela was enrolled in the AVID program, which made her an excellent resource for Rebecca to have her questions answered.

Because the study spanned two academic years, I was able to track changes of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade focal students’ peer networks. Carlos and Rebecca’s friendship circles were not applicable to my fall 2015 inquiries because they were in college by then. All remaining *transfronterizos* experienced changes with regard to their peer networks. As such, there were fluctuations in who students spoke to about college, as well as which peers influenced them. When peer networks did change, it usually involved befriending classmates or friends of friends. Ultimately, whether conversations about college took place was positively correlated with AVID participation. In other words, if students did not befriend peers in AVID, college-related conversations did not tend to take place. Details on student-specific peer network changes are outlined below, beginning with Marisol.

Chikis became elusive after Thanksgiving during her senior year. As a result, I was unable to compare her 11<sup>th</sup> versus 12<sup>th</sup> grade peer networks. Chikis did explain in our October interview during her junior year that her two closest friends were in the special education program. She had met them in 7<sup>th</sup> grade during lunch.

#### Graph 4.3 – Chikis’ Peer Network During her Junior Year

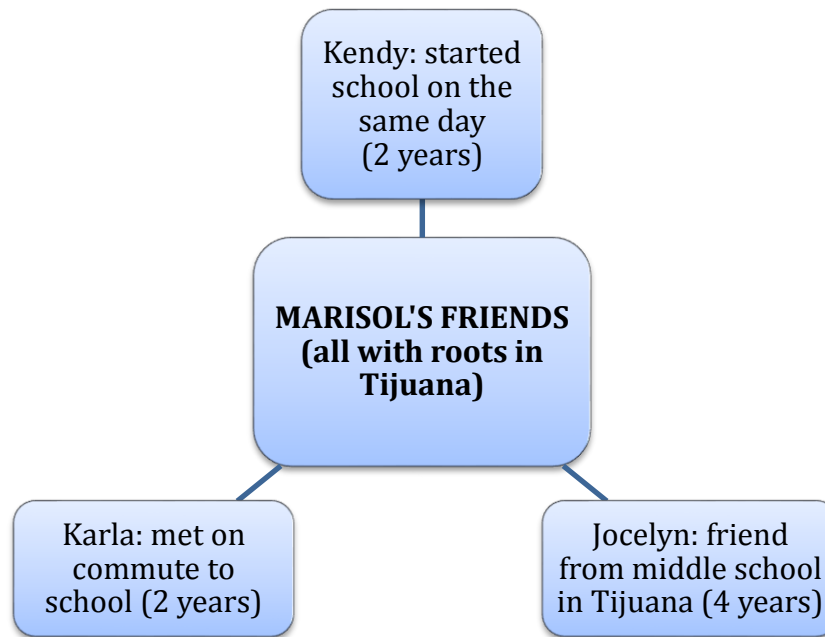


During her senior year, however, Chikis no longer hung out with Catherine and Mayra. Chikis was very college-oriented and it was clear that she needed an intellectual form of reciprocity from her friends. In other words, she wanted to socialize with other students who had the same priorities as her.

Structural antecedents, such as public transportation, facilitate the emergence of peer social ties. There is a sense of camaraderie among *transfronterizos* who meet on their commute to and from school. Marisol, who was mainstreamed after completing the highest level in the ELD program, and Annie, who was in the highest ELD level, both said that their close school friends were also *transfronterizos*. Both women, however, did not discuss academics with their friends; nor did Gladis. What I found interesting was that the remaining focal students were in honors and AP classes and those students *did* talk about their classes, homework, and college with their classmates.

Marisol’s three close friends had lived (or still lived at the time) in Tijuana. As expected, they spoke to each other in Spanish. She had known one of her close friends since middle school in Tijuana; Marisol met another woman, who she became close to, when registering for school.

**Graph 4.4 – Marisol’s Peer Network During Her Junior Year**



Although they did not meet in a class, all three of her friends were (or had previously been) in the ELD program. For the duration of the study, Marisol did not appear to capitalize on her peer networks or discuss course selection strategies with her counselor. She also did not speak to any of her friends about college. The lack of a college-going mindset and college-oriented norms among ELD students will be discussed in Chapter 5.

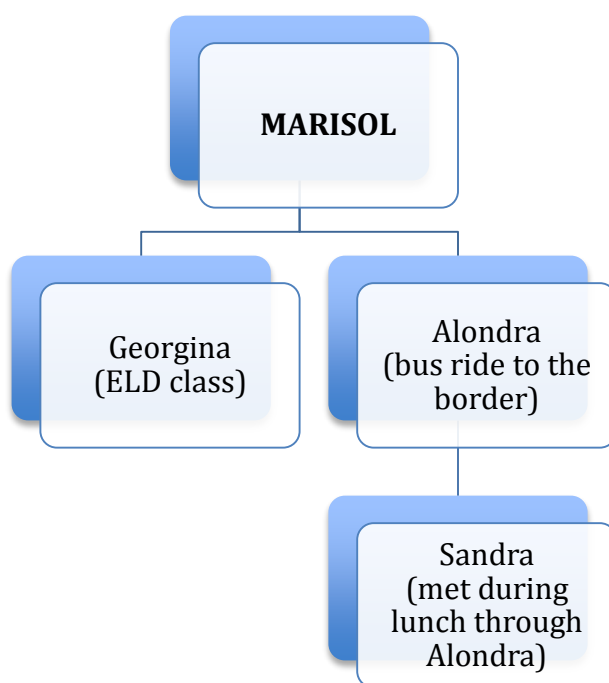
Social capital, according to Valenzuela (1999), is not an automatic feature of social networks; "it comes into being" through exchange relationships or "whenever social interaction makes use of resources residing within the web of social relationships" (27). The nature of advice Marisol received in her social interactions with friends tended to center around the physical navigation of the campus and how to use public transportation. In addition, Marisol (like Gladis) tended to be offered advice rather than seeking it out herself. She took a similar (passive) approach to school. The excerpt below illustrates a close friend, who she met on her commute, informing Marisol how to travel to the border via public transportation.

I came here and I would get picked up by car every day, and my mom told me, 'no, well now you're going to come on the MTS but you're gonna go via Santo Domingo'... I met a girl who I would get together with in the mornings and she told me, 'Oh, I also take the bus, I'll show you'. And then she showed me how much you have to pay for the trolley, the route I have to walk, and then I got picked up in Santo Domingo for 3-4 months.

*(“Yo llegue aquí y me recogían en carro todos los días, y mi mama me dijo, ‘no...pues ahora te vas a venir en el MTS pero te vas a ir por Santo Domingo’...Conocí a una muchacha que me juntaba con ella en las mañanas y me dijo, ‘Ah, yo también voy en bus, yo te enseño’. Y ya me enseño cuanto hay que pagar lo del trolley, lo que tengo que caminar, y ya me recogieron en Santo Domingo por 3-4 meses.”)*

By her senior year, Marisol’s close friends had changed to three other young women (illustrated in Graph 4.41 below). Although Marisol and Kendy still kept in contact, Kendy hung out with other friends during their last year of high school. Marisol and Jocelyn also remained friends, but according to Marisol, they no longer hung out in the same area at school. Karla, on the other hand, was one year older; therefore, she no longer attended Guerrero High School when Marisol was a senior. The two did not keep in touch and Marisol was unaware of where Karla was attending school now. I saw this as a missed opportunity for Marisol to learn about what to expect after high school.

**Graph 4.41 – Marisol’s Peer Network During Her Senior Year**



As seen in her previous group of friends, Marisol befriended young women with ties to Tijuana who she spoke to exclusively in Spanish. As such, her opportunities to improve her English language skills and meet university-bound students were minimal. The change in Marisol’s peer network could have meant the acquisition of information channels about college, but she did not discuss post-secondary options with her new friends either. It simply did not seem to be a topic of conversation among *transfronterizos*, which I argue is partially due to low expectations and an absence of college information channels.

In October of her junior year, Gladis' peer network was primarily composed of three young women – Karen, Rachel, and Samantha – who she befriended over the years beginning in elementary school.

**Graph 4.5 – Gladis' Peer Network**

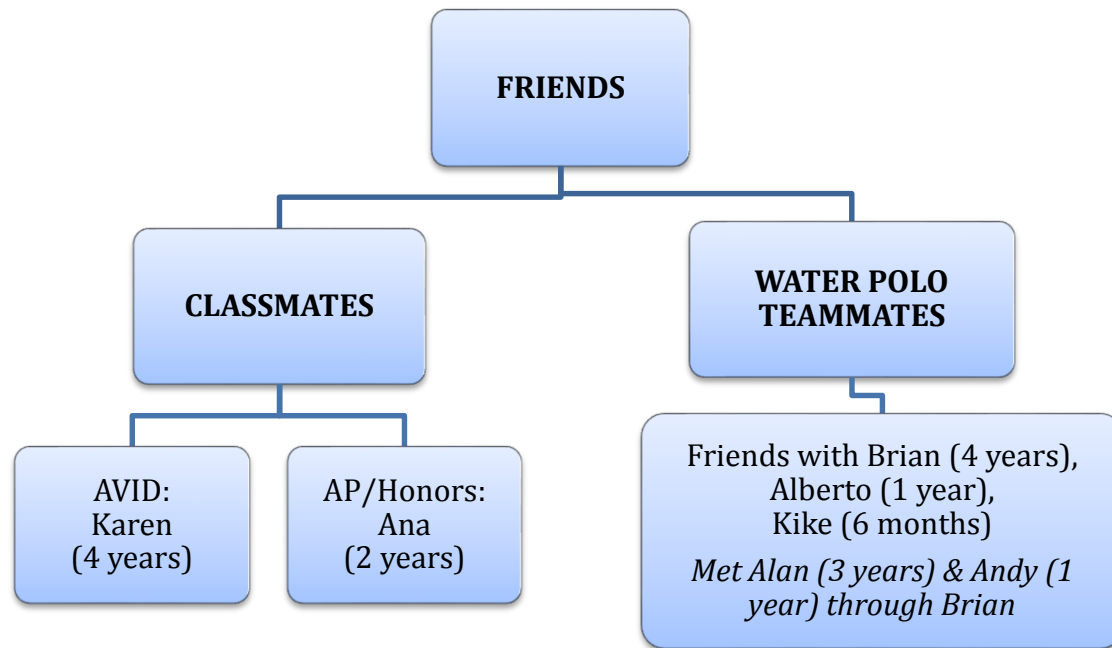
| ELEMENTARY SCHOOL                                                                                                                     | MIDDLE SCHOOL                                                                                                | HIGH SCHOOL                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Karen (friends since 4th grade - when Gladis began school in U.S.; soccer teammate)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rachel (AVID classmate, but not friends until high school)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Samantha (met in P.E. class)</li></ul> |

During my home visit in December of her senior year, however, Gladis told me that her only close friend at that point in time was Rachel. Gladis also confirmed that she occasionally spoke to Rachel about homework. Gladis told me that she was no longer friends with Samantha and that she wasn't very close to Karen anymore. I asked her if Rachel and Karen had applied to four-year universities to which she informed me that Rachel had not, but Karen had. Based on my analysis of college-bound students at Guerrero High School, I suspected Karen was in AVID, which Gladis confirmed that she was. I hypothesize that if Gladis had remained in the AVID program after eighth grade, she would have been more likely to enroll in more challenging classes and apply to four-year universities. According to social capital theory, Karen would be considered a weak social tie, which individuals can utilize for their benefit, but Gladis had not done so. Instead, Gladis sought out such information and advice exclusively from me.

The caveat to Gladis capitalizing on my knowledge is that she only reached out for advice whenever we saw each other on campus. Gladis never initiated contact with me via Facebook or by email. In other words, she relied on sporadic face-to-face encounters to ask me for suggestions. As such, her college information channel was present but not utilized to the fullest extent.

Esteban indicated that he talked about homework and college with all of his friends. His friends primarily consisted of peers from his advanced classes and his water polo teammates who were also enrolled in accelerated courses.

**Graph 4.6 – Esteban’s Peer Network**

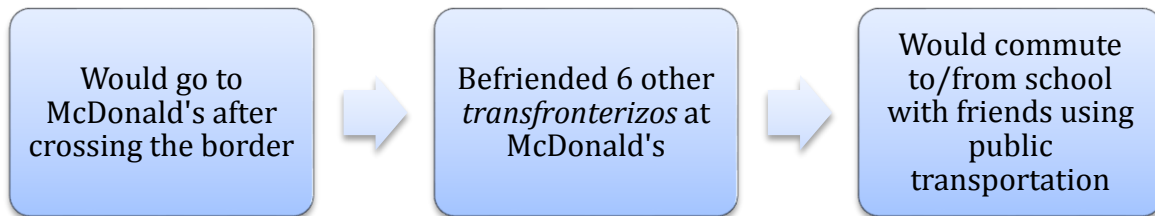


Esteban’s life was composed of academics and athletics. He was deeply committed to doing well in school and to being the best teammate and captain of the water polo team. Consequently, it is no surprise that he met his closest friends in class and through water polo. Ana, shown in the above graph, was actually Esteban’s girlfriend in October of his junior year, but Esteban told me during our March interview five months later that they were no longer together and, therefore, no longer friends. Nonetheless, five out of his seven close friendships originated through water polo: three were his water polo teammates and two additional boys were friends of his teammates. Esteban indicated that all of his friends were university-bound and that approximately 80% of them were enrolled in honors and AP classes.

Esteban left school early once per week for most of the academic year due to sports. He and his friends organically created obligations and expectations of each other with regard to keeping each other informed of what was covered in classes they missed due to leaving early. This essentially created what Coleman refers to as “credit slips,” which was based on the extent of the obligations held.

Like Marisol, Annie had not befriended her ELD classmates. Although most ELD students were relatively new to the U.S. education system and shared a limited English proficiency, Marisol and Annie met their close friends through other avenues. During her sophomore year, Annie’s peer network consisted of six *transfronterizos* that she met at McDonald’s – a shared location on their commute to school.

**Graph 4.7 – Annie’s Peer Network**

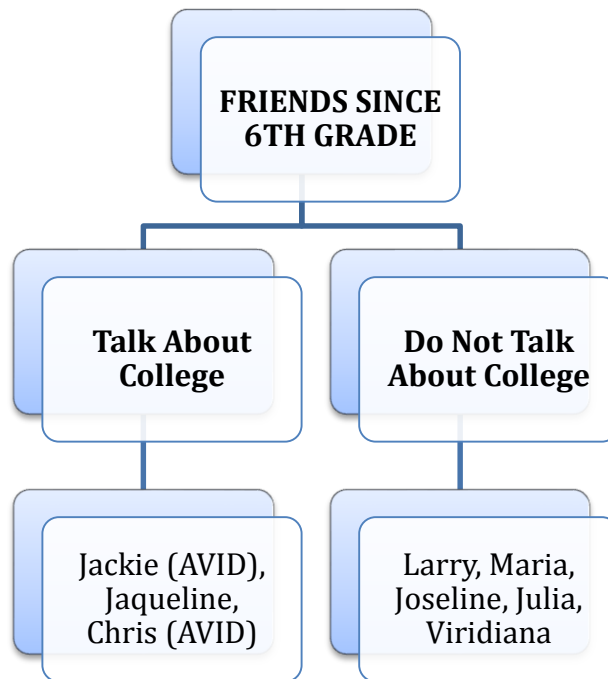


Although we did not go to McDonald’s the morning after my home visit, Annie told me that between the hours of 6 a.m. and 8 a.m., the McDonald’s adjacent to the border was full of students from Tijuana who attend U.S. schools. As a result, it served as a perfect meeting ground for high schoolers to befriend other students in the same situation. Annie’s peer network had changed by the time I conducted my home visit during her junior year, however. She explained that some of her six close friends had gotten into a huge argument; despite her and two others taking a neutral stance on the situation, the group split up and everyone went their separate way. Now, her close friends were her cousin (who was in the same grade as her) and her boyfriend (who was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade).

Annie had advanced to ELD 7/8, which was the highest ELD level, in her junior year. Her math and social studies classes were now taught in English with mainstream students. She informed me on the day of my home visit that she was taking AP Spanish Language. I asked her how her enrollment in AP Spanish happened to which she told me that she knew there was a foreign language requirement, prompting her to ask her counselor about which class to take. Her counselor suggested Spanish Speakers 5/6, which illustrates the deficit perspective that some counselors have toward ELD students. In response, Annie asked her about AP Spanish and she was provided with the necessary information: attend the meeting, speak with the teacher, and complete the summer assignment. I asked Annie how her first semester of AP Spanish Language had gone and she confirmed that it was very easy. Contrary to many students, Annie did not use her peer network to learn how to gain access into AP Spanish; instead, she relied on knowledge she had obtained independently, in addition to approaching her counselor on her own.

Ricardo befriended eight students in sixth grade, which he reported were his closest friends four years later during his sophomore year. He only spoke to three of his eight close friends, however, about post-secondary education.

**Graph 4.8 – Ricardo’s Peer Network During His Sophomore Year**



I became interested in why conversations about college took place with some friends but not others. Not surprisingly, AVID was once again the predictor of whether the youth became college-oriented. In fact, two of the three friends with whom Ricardo conversed about college were enrolled in the AVID program. Jaqueline was the exception to this finding, as illustrated by the interview excerpt below.

**ST:** Do you talk to any of your friends about college?  
(*¿Hablas con tus amigos sobre la universidad?*)

**Ricardo:** With Jackie, Chris...and Jaqueline, too. We almost always talk about it since we're in AVID and AVID is about universities.  
(*Con Jackie, Chris y Jaqueline también. Casi siempre hablamos como estamos en AVID y AVID es de universidades.*)

**ST:** You're all in the same class?  
(*¿Todos están en la misma clase?*)

**Ricardo:** Except Jackie. She's not in AVID, but she talks a lot about college.  
(*Menos Jaqueline. Ella no tiene, pero si habla mucho de las universidades.*)

**ST:** She's not in AVID, but she finds out [information about college]. How do you think she obtains this information?  
(*No tiene AVID, pero si se entera. ¿Cómo crees que se entera ella?*)

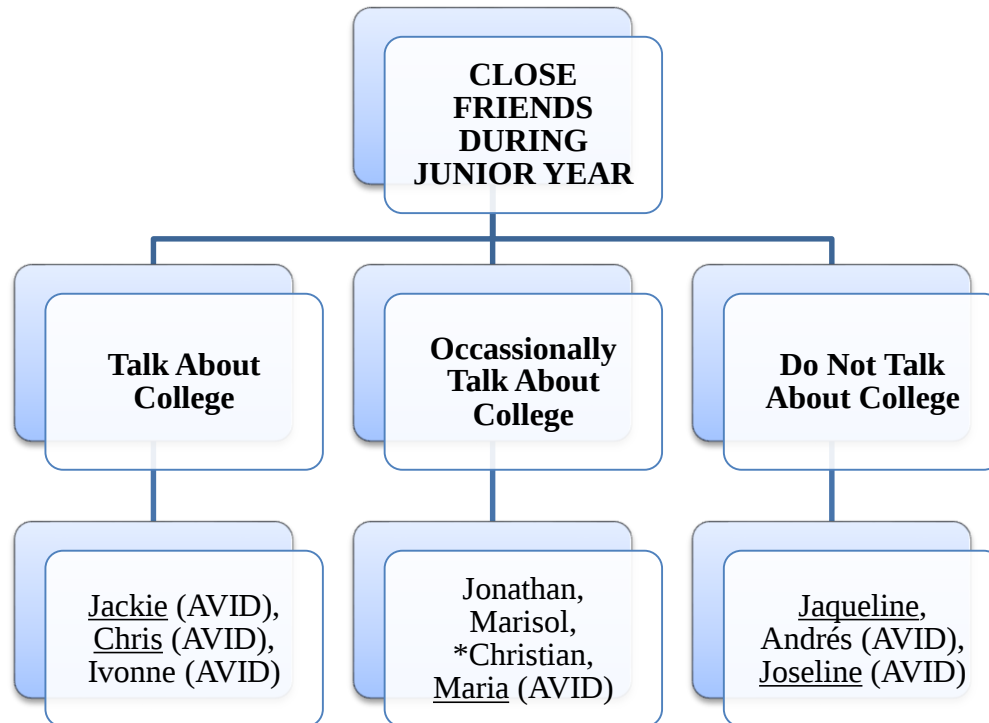
**Ricardo:** I think because of us since we are always talking.  
(*Yo creo que por nosotros que siempre estamos hablando.*)

Based on the above interview selection, Jaqueline's social capital (through her friendship with Ricardo, Jackie, and Chris) facilitated obtaining college-related information. Although she was not in AVID, she had information channels available to her through which she could better position herself for meeting college requirements and, subsequently, later gain admission into a four-year university.

Had Jaqueline not been friends with Ricardo, Jackie and Chris, it is questionable whether she would have had college-going norms within her social network. Similarly, Gladis may have received information about the college application process if she had remained close friends with Karen. While these are speculations, it is reasonable to assume that having close friendships with fellow students who are university-bound may increase the likelihood of one applying to four-year universities.

Ricardo's closest friends were all in the same grade as him, but those friends changed from his sophomore to his junior year, as shown in Graph 4.81 below. Students whose names are underlined are those who he had met in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and remained close friends with over the years.

**Graph 4.81 – Ricardo's Peer Network During His Junior Year**



\*Christian was initially placed in the 'Do Not Talk About College' category, but Ricardo emailed me as I was working on this chapter and informed me that Christian had mentioned to him that he wanted to attend

San Diego State University through the Compact for Success program. Christian had also discussed some other college-related things with Ricardo in the same conversation.

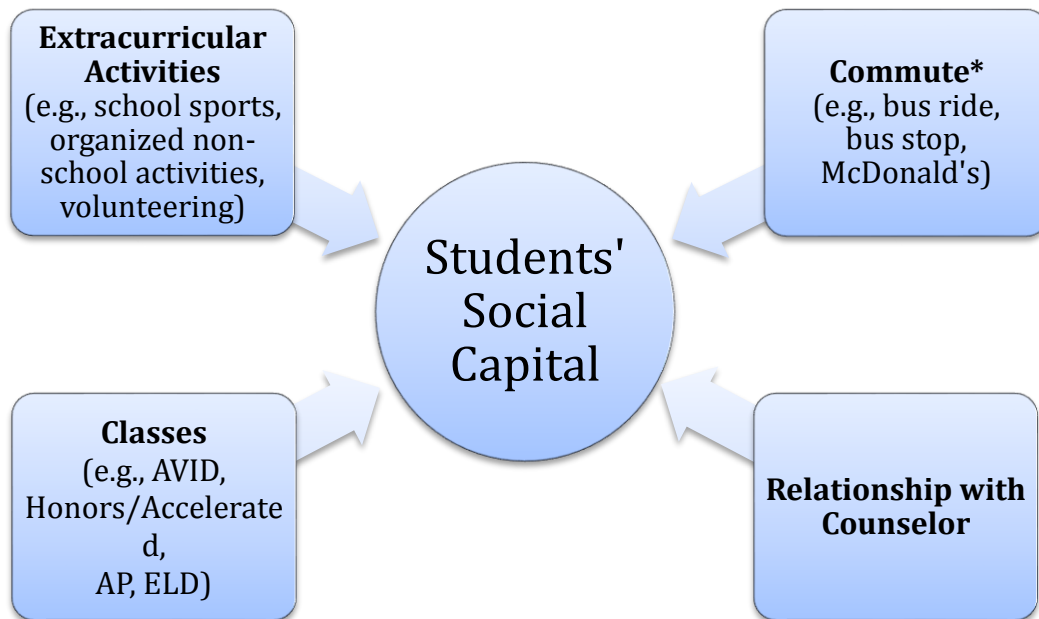
Andrés was the only person that Ricardo became close friends with during his junior year who he did not speak to about college. The two boys met because they hung out in the same area during lunch and they had some classes together. Jonathan, Marisol, and Christian were Ricardo's new close friends who occasionally spoke to him about college. Ricardo met Marisol and Christian because they, too, hung out in the same area during lunch and had some classes together. Meanwhile, Jonathan was Ricardo's neighbor and the two were enrolled in some of the same classes. Ivonne was the only addition to Ricardo's group of friends during his junior year with whom he spoke to about college. Ivonne and Ricardo met in their 10<sup>th</sup> grade AVID class and they continued to have some classes together in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. AVID was clearly what linked Ricardo and the friends he regularly spoke to about college.

When comparing Graphs 4.8 and 4.81, it should be noted that among the three close friends that Ricardo spoke to about college during his sophomore year, Jaqueline was the only non-AVID student. During his junior year, he continued to talk to fellow AVID students, Jackie and Chris, about college, but he no longer spoke to Jaqueline about it. In short, Jackie, Chris, and Ms. Gomez were the only people who Ricardo regularly spoke to regarding college and what brought them together was the AVID program. Ricardo regularly had conversations about college during his junior year with only three close friends who, not surprisingly, were also in AVID. Although Maria, Andrés, and Jocelyn were also in the AVID program, he only occasionally spoke to Maria about college and he had not spoken to Andrés or Jocelyn about the topic. I asked Ricardo why he did not speak to some of his friends about college; in response, he said that the opportunity had not presented itself.

### **Structural Antecedents**

Several structural arrangements exist at Guerrero High and its environs, which contribute to peer network formation among students.

**Graph 4.9 – Sources of Students' Social Capital**



\*Note: Comparison students did not develop their social capital through their commute.

As described in Chapter 1, Coleman (1988) argues that social capital is developed through obligations/expectations, information channels, and social norms. Graph 4.9 illustrates the four primary methods through which students established and strengthened their social networks, supporting Coleman's claim that social capital is embodied in relations. My findings, however, point to social relationships developing within structural antecedents (see Graph 4.9); these structural arrangements, in turn, play a critical role in student access to college information channels.

While not all students relied on all of the sources detailed in the above graph, both focal and comparison students used similar types of inter-relationships to access information about college. Extracurricular activities served as an additional opportunity to access valuable information channels. The commute for *transfronterizos* using public transportation to arrive to school also served as a meeting grounds, created a safe space for students based around a shared experience, and built a sense of trust, but students did not learn about college requirements through these social ties.

In addition, the type of academic program in which students were enrolled correlated with whether they obtained college information. The AVID program, for example, provides various forms of social capital to its participants; AVID students are obligated to remain in the program for all of high school, teachers have high expectations, and the college-going culture facilitates students expecting themselves to attend a university after high school. ELD students, on the other hand, were not on track to meet

A-G requirements and were not familiar with what the requirements were. The lack of college preparedness among ELD students was partially due to limited English skills, a culture of low expectations, and an absence of college information channels.

Students' relationship with their counselor partially determined their class schedule, which affected their access to information channels pertaining to college. ELD and regular track students trusted their counselor with selecting classes for them, while AVID and AP students played an active role in the class placement process and tended to speak up when they felt a class change was needed. The following section describes how information channels were used within these structural antecedents.

### Use of Information Channels

All of the AVID focal students indicated that the program *and* their counselor helped them with course selection strategies:

**ST:** Has anyone helped you choose the exact classes you will take?

**Carlos:** [My AVID teacher] helps me select classes and [my counselor] is the one who says, 'of these classes, take...'

*([Mi maestro de AVID] me ayuda escoger las clases y [mi consejera] es la que, 'de estas clases, toma...')*

**ST:** ¿Cómo? (How so?)

**Carlos:** My AVID teacher says every so often, 'you need to get these credits' or 'I recommend you take this class'. My AVID teacher recommends classes, my counselor is the one who says, 'take this class'.

*[Mi maestro de AVID] dice cada rato, 'tienes que agarrar estos créditos' o 'te recomiendo que agarres esto'. Mr. G me recomienda, mi consejera es la que me dice, 'agarra ésta clase'.*

Another example involves a conversation I had with Esteban:

**ST:** Who has helped you choose classes? Or do you just pick them by yourself?

**Esteban:** AVID. And my counselor, I go talk to her sometimes.

**ST:** How do AVID and your counselor help you choose classes? Do they tell you the requirements and you pick, or do they say, 'I think you should take this and this'.

**Esteban:** AVID gives me the options, [my counselor] kinda brings me back to reality. Cause I was gonna get AP Physics and she's like, 'that's too much for you, you're doing sports,' she kinda talked me out of it.

And finally, Ricardo stated that his counselor had also been helpful in selecting classes:

**ST:** Which classes has your counselor recommended to take?

**Ricardo:** What I've noticed is that [my counselor] wants me to take all AP, Honors, or Accelerated classes. Since I had gotten Accelerated English, but I told her that I wasn't going to be able to because I'm in AVID and they sort of give you double the amount of work [compared to non-AVID]. And well I wasn't going to be able to with so much stress from homework.

*(Lo que me he dado cuenta que quiere que tome puras clases de AP, Honor, o Accelerated. Como me había tocado English Accelerated, pero le dije que no iba a poder porque como estoy en AVID, como que te dejan el doble del trabajo. Y pues no iba a poder con tanto estrés de tarea.)*

Chikis was the only AVID student who did not cite her counselor as helping her choose classes, in addition to AVID; however, she did mention that if a class seemed too difficult, her counselor assisted her in finding a more suitable option. As seen above, Esteban's counselor also guided him to not take an overwhelming courseload. Ricardo, on the other hand, was pushed by his counselor to take the most difficult classes available to him. In the end, though, his counselor respected his course selections.

Three of the four non-AVID focal students said that their counselor was instrumental in selecting their classes. The caveat to this finding is that counselors place ELD students in classes according to their English proficiency; nevertheless, students like Marisol and Annie may not feel challenged in the classes they have been assigned. Based on Marisol and Annie reporting that they found several of their classes to be either too easy or a review of material they had already learned, counselors may not be properly assessing whether ELD students are being placed in the most appropriate classes. Gladis was the only focal student who said that she chose all of her classes on her own—and she also indicated that some of her classes were too easy. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I encouraged her to speak to her counselor about enrolling in more advanced classes, but once she discussed the matter with her counselor it was too late to make schedule changes. It is clear that regular (or mainstream) classes did not challenge Gladis to her fullest potential.

Information channels were a key component in evaluating students' social capital for increasing their knowledge of college requirements. All four of the AVID focal students cited the AVID program as being their sole source of information related to college. Their friendships with university-bound peers served to reinforce a college-going culture. Each of the other focal students relied on different people for college information; Rebecca was the only non-AVID student who relied on an adult on campus – her counselor – for said information. Marisol said she obtained the information she needed on her own. Gladis ended up seeking guidance from me on where she should apply college and what she should study. I wrestled with my desire to help Gladis meet her goals, but not influence any outcomes that my research would be investigating. It was not until my home visit (after the UC/CSU application deadline) that I provided

information beyond answering her questions because it was my last day of data collection from her. Annie, on the other hand, relied on her cousin who graduated from Guerrero High School a couple of years prior for advice on which classes to take.

As previously mentioned, Carlos had rich social capital as evidenced by his friendship with various groups of peers in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Carlos' older brother attended community college after high school and transferred to UCLA. It was clear, however, that Carlos benefitted from his older sister going through the education system and matriculating into a UC school before him. His older sister, in turn, had received help when she was in high school from an older friend who attended UC Berkeley. Specifically, Carlos received important suggestions about course selection and general educational advice from his sister, who he described as being a self-motivated person. He explained that his sister accounted for approximately 70% of the influence for him to pursue a college education. In fact, when asked if he admired any adults, Carlos mentioned his sister because she had set an excellent example for him.

Of the four focal students in the AVID program, three knew their GPA when interviewed in October and one knew what his approximate GPA was. Three of the four students who were not in AVID did not know their grade point average; meanwhile, Gladis, who was in AVID in middle school, knew her approximate GPA. Similarly, all focal students enrolled in AVID were extremely knowledgeable of the UC/CSU A-G requirements. Although she was not in the AVID program, Rebecca also knew the A-G requirements; in fact, her counselor served as her information channel for college-related details. Gladis was only somewhat familiar with the A-G requirements, and both non-AVID focal students – Marisol and Annie – who were also in the ELD program, did not know what the A-G requirements were.

**Table 4.1 – Comparison Group Tabulation**

| Student | Grade | Acad. Track        | Father's Education Level        | Mother's Education Level  | Network Formation                                     | On Campus or School-Associated Adults Trusted | Course Selection Strategies & Sources    | College Information Channels | Knows G.P.A./ Knows A-G Req. | Meets with Counselor |
|---------|-------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1       | 10    | Regular            | No Answer Provided              | No Answer Provided        | Cousin, Cousin's friend, choir & Chinese classmates   | None                                          | Self (some input from mother and cousin) | None                         | Yes/Yes                      | Never                |
| 2       | 10    | Honors/ Acc., AP   | High school graduate (Mexico)   | College graduate (Mexico) | Middle & high school friends                          | Ms. Torlickson                                | Friends in Honors/AP classes & Counselor | AVID teachers                | Somewhat/ No                 | Sometimes            |
| 3       | 11    | Honors/ Acc.       | Some elementary school (Mexico) | Some high school (U.S.)   | Friends from elementary through 9 <sup>th</sup> grade | Mr. Moore, Ms. Torlickson                     | None                                     | Mr. Moore                    | Yes/Yes                      | Rarely               |
| 4       | 10    | Honors/ Acc., AP   | Some college (U.S.)             | Some college (U.S.)       | Elementary & middle school friends                    | None                                          | Self                                     | Older sister and cousin      | Yes/Yes                      | Rarely               |
| 5       | 10    | Honors/ Acc., AVID | High school graduate (Mexico)   | Advanced degree (Mexico)  | Friends from elementary through 9 <sup>th</sup> grade | Ms. Gomez                                     | Counselor & previous teachers            | AVID                         | Yes/Yes                      | Sometimes            |

Including a comparison group offers perspective on findings that surface among *transfronterizo* students. It allows us to determine whether students who do not cross the border each day experience similar or contrasting educational experiences. Because comparison students had spent more years in the U.S. education system, their network formation was based on longer-term friendships – compared to focal students – which were established through their advanced classes. As illustrated in Table 4.1, four comparison students were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and one was in 11<sup>th</sup> at the time of the survey<sup>7</sup>. All but one of the comparison students mentioned or explained the A-G requirements and knew their GPA, while the other student reported getting “mostly B’s”.

Only one of the five comparison students was in the AVID program, yet four out of the five students were familiar with the A-G requirements. As such, being enrolled in the advanced track resulted in being more college-oriented and aware of college requirements compared to regular track students. The likelihood of Student 1 attending a four-year university was slim, as illustrated by his/her enrollment in regular track classes, selecting courses without teacher or counselor input, and not having any college information channels. Student 2, on the other hand, resembled Rebecca’s sourcefulness. This student was not in the AVID program, but she was enrolled in honors and AP classes and exercised her social capital by obtaining college-related information from her friends in AVID and her counselor.

Comparison students in regular classes – like Gladis, Marisol, and Annie in the focal group – did not receive any assistance in their course selection strategies. In general, regular track students chose their own classes and had minimal college information channels, if any. As a result, their likelihood of applying and gaining acceptance into a four-year university was lower than students who did seek out the information they needed. Given that regular-track comparison students chose classes on their own shows that self-selecting one’s class schedule might not be the most strategic in terms of meeting course requirements for college. In contrast, as previously mentioned, AVID teachers and counselors guided nearly all focal AVID students in selecting the most appropriate classes. This comparison group finding is critical in determining how we can better assist students with selecting the most appropriate courses given their talents and interests.

Three out of five students stated that there was an adult on campus who they could trust; two of those students indicated that they were close to Ms. Torlickson. As seen with Ricardo, the only student enrolled in AVID trusted Ms. Gomez with personal matters. Both students who did not list a trustworthy adult on campus either rarely or sometimes visited their counselor, therefore, they did not effectively build their social capital.

While parent education attainment did not appear to have any effects on students’ navigation of the education system, it should be noted that parents of comparison students were, as a collective, more educated than focal students.

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<sup>7</sup> A total of eight students took the comparison group survey, but only five completed it in its entirety; therefore, I compared the responses of the focal students with five comparison students.

## Independence and Resilience

I argue that the circumstances *transfronterizo* students find themselves in cultivate maturity, resilience, and a unique outlook on life. Most of the focal students possessed a degree of independence and resilience beyond their age as demonstrated by their ability to overcome hardships, navigate crossing the border, and taking multiple forms of transportation on their own in order to get to school on time, some without the luxury of having a parent drop them off. These students do not simply roll out of bed and get a ride to school, but rather, they start their morning at least two hours before their peers who live in Santo Domingo. They realize that their daily routine is a sacrifice that they make in order to obtain a better education than what is available to them in Mexico.

Esteban's level of maturity is captured in this portion of an interview in which we discussed his grades and the improvement over time attributed to having an eye-opening conversation with a previous teacher. It could be that his independence, brought on by the international border and his family situation, also facilitated maturity beyond his years.

**Esteban:** Some days when I have [water polo] games and I just get to the apartment, I don't even see my parents all day. So normally during water polo season, what would happen is, I wouldn't even see them. Last season, actually, I stayed home (in Santo Domingo)...I didn't see them for like 3 months...every weekend only. And this summer too, I only saw them every weekend cause I was doing off-season [practice]. It's pretty hard, you know, cause you kinda grow, I guess, independent. When you're in high school you think it's really easy to be independent, you think, 'yeah! It's gonna be so cool!' but then you start realizing all these responsibilities, like, 'oh my gosh, this is so hard'. You kinda get depressed at some point... like, 'oh my gosh, this is terrible'. You don't wanna do anything, you just lay in bed...just take a deep breath.

**ST:** What makes someone feel depressed? Is it that you don't see your parents that often...? What makes it hard?

**Esteban:** It's not having someone to get back home to. That's mostly it.

Annie, Marisol, and Carlos also demonstrated heightened independence through their daily commute of the U.S.-Mexico border using multiple forms of public transportation from Tijuana to Santo Domingo on their own.

By the young age of 16, several of the focal students had been presented with grave life challenges. Their resilience was unparalleled. As previously discussed, Annie's family history, which included murder and run-ins with the law, was more extreme than most of us will ever experience. Annie turned those unfortunate circumstances into positive learning experiences, which propelled her to do well in school. Daniela, on the other hand, dealt with her parents divorcing, while Esteban endured his mother and her boyfriend constantly fighting. Neither student let the tension between their guardians affect their academic performance.

Meanwhile, Rebecca’s living arrangement had been quite rough for a number of years. Prior to having met Rebecca, she had been living with her mother and twin sister in a trailer in a friend’s driveway. Due to her mother’s inability to afford the rent, they had moved into a two-bedroom townhome in Tijuana. The showerhead did not work, so they used a bucket full of water to bathe themselves, and the only functioning kitchen appliances were the refrigerator and a portable cooking range. Several weekday mornings consisted of crossing the border before 7 a.m. to avoid heavy traffic and then sleeping in the car once they were in the school parking lot. Rebecca’s lifestyle was not ideal, but she was not one to complain. She understood the sacrifices that she and her family were making in order to have a better life.

Ricardo was “lucky” in the sense that his parents rented a small apartment north of the border. His parents were supportive and he had a stable home environment, but Ricardo had dealt with major health problems as a child. Growing up, he admired the caring attitude of the cardiologist who treated him. Rather than feel defeated by his heart issues, being under the care of a kind and gentle doctor inspired him to want to become a cardiologist himself.

*Transfronterizo* students make daily sacrifices in order to obtain a better education than what is available to them in Tijuana. The long commute and sleep deprivation, compared to their peers who live in the U.S., cultivates an ability to overcome challenges that come their way. The aforementioned examples are just a few of the ways in which the focal students have become resilient human beings, a trait that universities seek in their future students.

## Extracurricular Activities

Participating in activities outside of the normal school day was an integral part of the focal students’ lives. The *transfronterizos* were involved in a wide range of extracurricular activities.

**Table 4.2 – Students’ Extracurricular Activities**

| <b>Student</b> | <b>Extracurricular Activity</b>               |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Carlos         | Volunteering 8 hours/week                     |
| Rebecca        | <i>Baile Folkorico</i> , Cheer, NJROTC        |
| Chikis         | Cycling                                       |
| Marisol        | Dance                                         |
| Gladis         | Water Girl (for football team), Soccer, Cross |
| Esteban        | Water Polo, Swimming                          |
| Annie          | NJROTC                                        |
| Ricardo        | Tae Kwon Do                                   |

Carlos tutored third grade students at the local community development agency for two hours each weekday. While he did not develop his peer network through his volunteer work, he did boost his marketability for prospective universities by exceeding his

community service requirement. Meanwhile, Chikis was part of a women's cycling group, Marisol belonged to a dance studio in Tijuana, and Ricardo practiced Tae Kwon Do. *Transfronterizo* students' commitments to the above activities limited their time in which to get homework done, especially given the need to commute to Tijuana each day. As a result, none of them got an adequate night's sleep. Esteban's living situation also exacerbated the drawbacks of his time commitment to athletics:

Being in a sport meant, I saw my parents less, I saw my brother less, I saw my girlfriend less, I had less time to do homework. It's really hard to keep a balance cause I really, really have to do everything when I can. There's no free time anymore.

Esteban staying in Santo Domingo after practice meant that he would be there alone because the rest of his family was in Tijuana; however, his lifestyle did foster independence and maturity at a young age. There were also clear social benefits to partaking in Guerrero High's programs and sports.

Rebecca and Esteban, who were a part of the *Baile Folklorico* and aquatics programs, respectively, benefitted most from their extracurricular participation by forming close-knit friendships with other Guerrero students. Rebecca, for example, befriended a young woman in her *baile folklorico* program, who was also in the AVID program and became Rebecca's source for all-things-college. Esteban, on the other hand, developed relationships with many of his water polo teammates with whom he would exchange information regarding what they had done in class on game days.

Other students' activities did not enhance their social capital in the name of increasing their knowledge of college requirements. Chikis, Marisol, and Ricardo's extracurricular activities, for example, took place in Tijuana; therefore, they did not obtain information related to college through those activities.

### **Trust: Friends**

Social capital theory posits that resources and knowledge are embedded within trusting ties and it is through inter-relationships, as reported by focal students, that individuals access these resources to build knowledge and gain information. Three of the eight focal students – Carlos, Gladis, and Annie – obtained college-related information from older peers or relatives. As described previously, Carlos relied on his 12<sup>th</sup> grade friends for academic advice when he was a junior. Similarly, Gladis dropped out of AVID after 8<sup>th</sup> grade because her brother told her it was not worth taking. Annie also received information from an older cousin who graduated from Guerrero High a couple of years prior and was attending a local community college at the time. It is important to note the reliability of these information channels as determined by whether students' connections possessed the knowledge necessary to help students meet their goals.

Between Carlos, Gladis, and Annie, Carlos was the only student who received advice from older peers who would be attending a four-year university, as well as from

his sister who was attending a UC school. Both Gladis' brother and Annie's cousin, who were attending community college, were sources of information for Gladis and Annie, respectively. Annie had indicated in an interview that she was planning on attending community college while serving in the navy prior to attending a four-year university. Therefore, she had a similar plan as her older cousin who was part of the ROTC program at the local community college. Gladis' post-secondary plan, however, had been to attend a UC or CSU school. Unfortunately, she did not effectively use trusting relationships she had with Karen or myself in order to receive the necessary guidance to apply on time.

During her first year at Guerrero High School, Annie had befriended several *transfronterizos* at the McDonald's near the border. I asked Annie how it made her feel to have friends who also cross the border to which she responded, "It makes you feel that you're not the only one, that you're not the only one going through that" (*"Eso te hace sentir que no eres la única, que no eres la única que estás pasando por eso"*). After Annie and I became Facebook friends during her junior year, I saw that she had posted a photo of her NJROTC group with the caption reading: #secondfamily. A few weeks later, I conducted my home visit in which I learned that she was no longer close friends with any *transfronterizos*, which were the students with whom she shared a sense of camaraderie. She was quite content, however, that her new social circle consisted of her boyfriend and cousin. With her boyfriend being one grade younger and her cousin being one ELD level below her, Annie did not seek academic advice from either one of them. She was able to practice her written (via text messaging) and oral English in communicating with her non-Spanish speaking boyfriend.

Trust is an essential component of friendships and social networks. One of the ideas tested through this research was whether trusting friendships served as information channels about post-secondary education. As seen in Graphs 4.4 and 4.41, Marisol befriended young women from Tijuana who told her where her classes were and showed her how to navigate the public transportation system; they did not, however, talk about college. Carlos also had close friends at school from Tijuana who he talked to about life, but not about academics. It was found that communication of post-secondary educational options and requirements did not occur by virtue of having trusting friendships, but rather, when coupled with a college-oriented mindset. AVID was often what propelled such conversations to take place. In other words, students who were like-minded in actively thinking about their education beyond high school often spoke about college.

### **Trust: Adults**

The first half of this section describes the role that school-affiliated adults play in the lives of the *transfronterizos* in this study. Overall, the faculty members at Guerrero High School are committed to their teaching. The principal told me in an interview, "teachers have heart, they care" (personal communication, 5 March 2015). Focal students trusted various adults associated with Guerrero High School, ranging from teachers and counselors to coaches. Rebecca had close relationships with four adults on campus, whereas six of the seven other focal students had one adult with whom that they had

cultivated a close relationship. Esteban, on the other hand, said he trusted his water polo and swim coaches, who were not teachers.

I found that students trusted adults on campus with one quality in common: the aforementioned teachers and counselors understood their need to live in Tijuana. For example, Ms. Gomez had crossed the border growing up, Ms. Aguilar and the Upward Bound counselor were raised in Tijuana, and Mrs. Roglic's husband was from Baja California. In addition, students had spent a considerable amount of time with the aforementioned adults that they trusted. Below are two excerpts from an interview with Annie regarding trustworthy adults on campus. The first details the fact that Ms. Aguilar came from a similar background as *transfronterizo* students, which contributed to students trusting her.

**Annie:** ...she has a science club and almost everyone that's in it is Mexican (from Mexico) and almost everyone crosses on a daily basis.  
(...*tiene un club de ciencia y casi todas las personas en el club son mexicanos y casi todos cruzan a diario.*)

**ST:** Why do you think it's like that? (*¿Por qué crees que es así?*)

**Annie:** It's because the teacher speaks a lot of Spanish and she actually speaks more Spanish than English. She speaks English, and she understands it very well or speaks it very well, but she is like us that in that she was raised with Spanish as her primary language. It's like...we have more trust in her because she knows how we feel being here.

(*Es porque la maestra habla mucho español y habla más español que inglés. Habla inglés, y lo entiende muy bien o lo habla muy bien, pero ella es como nosotros en que creció con español como su primer idioma. Es como...tenemos más confianza en ella porque sabe como nos sentimos estando aquí.*)

Annie also offered an explanation as to why Ms. Aguilar was the only adult on campus that she confided in; namely, that she had spent a significant amount of time with her compared to other teachers.

**Annie:** I would tell [other teachers that I cross] if I had spent a lot of time with those teachers. But until now, I haven't spent a lot of time with other teachers, except with my World History teacher, but it's not at the point where I have so much trust in him to tell him that, the way I trust my Biology teacher.

(*No, les diría [que cruzo a diario] si hubiera pasado mucho tiempo con esos maestros. Pero hasta ahora, no he pasado mucho tiempo con otros maestros, con la excepción de mi maestro de World History, pero no está al punto donde tengo tanta confianza en él para decirle eso, la manera en que confió en mi maestra de biología.*)

When asked, "if you had a personal problem, are there any adults on campus that you trust enough to tell them about your problem?" only half of the focal students

responded yes, whereas, three comparison students responded yes and two responded no. Two of the three comparison students who trusted an adult on campus indicated that they trusted their counselor, Ms. Torlickson, to this degree; additionally, one of the two students who trusted Ms. Torlickson also listed Mr. Moore, who was married to a Mexican woman. Four out of the five comparison students were sophomores, and half of the focal students were juniors. The results to this question show that comparison students may be developing close ties with adults at a higher rate compared to the focal students, however, the small sample size makes this theory not generalizable.

Of the eight focal students in the study, several of them felt sufficiently comfortable to ask me for help or advice with various things. It was not until the third student requested my help that I began to realize that I had become part of their social network and that I was considered someone that they could trust. For months, I was focused on determining who they trusted and why, and I had not acknowledged that I was one of those people. The home visits further strengthened that trust and the focal students also stayed in contact with me via Facebook and through text messaging.

The first to ask for my help was Carlos, one of the two seniors, who was applying for a scholarship and was in need of a letter of recommendation. This request was particularly unexpected because I had only interviewed Carlos once, therefore, I didn't know him very well. In the end, he either did not end up applying or did not end up needing a letter from me, but the act of asking for a letter of recommendation demonstrated his effective use of weak social ties.

In October, I ran into Gladis before the school day started. This was the first of several times that she asked me if she could talk to me about college and what she should study. With her permission, I recorded that informal conversation we had at a table outside her classroom. Gladis was primarily seeking advice on the following: whether I write letters of recommendation, how to pay for college, and what she should study after high school because she wasn't sure of her options. In response to what to study, I asked her which classes she had liked most in high school, to which she giggled, "Honestly, like...P.E. And I'm also really good in English." Gladis also mentioned that each student in her AP Spanish class had to give a PowerPoint presentation on a university of their choice, but that did not seem to help her come to any decisions about where to continue her education.

In her response to my August 2015 email coordinating the home visit, she wrote, "I was just planning on contacting you because I need help in a few things for my plans after high school, would it be possible if we meet soon?" The most significant conversation Gladis and I had is detailed in the field notes from my home visit. She had recently missed the UC/CSU application deadline and was concerned about what she would do after high school. Her only plan at the time was to attend FIDM's interior design program with a hefty price tag of \$70,000. Gladis had spoken to recruiters on the phone that she described as friendly and who had essentially told her that a FIDM education would offer excellent opportunities in the field of interior design. It is important to note that Gladis came to me, someone who she trusted, for my input on this plan. Unfortunately, she never used other sources of information or guidance.

In April, Ricardo texted me because he needed help to complete a homework assignment. As part of his AVID class, he was tasked with interviewing a college student about their university experience. Below is the text he sent:

Good afternoon, Sofia. Ms. Gómez gave us homework due tomorrow but the problem is that we can't get help from the universities right now. Could you help me?

*(Buenas tardes Sofia, Ms. Gómez nos dejó una tarea para mañana pero el problema es que no nos pueden atender ahorita en las universidades. Me pudieras ayudar?)*

Ricardo effectively used a resource available to him (me) in order to complete an assignment that he had limited means of completing. More generally, though, Ricardo placed a lot of trust in his AVID teacher, Ms. Gómez. She was in her early 30s and held high expectations of all of her students. She was amused by the fact that students called her AVID class "A.P. AVID". I asked her why she thought Ricardo trusted her and her response made it apparent that other *transfronterizos* trusted her as well:

One of the main reasons is that I come from a similar background, I grew up here, and I'm very familiar with that circumstance. Another reason I think is because I do strive to cultivate those personal connections with my students...I don't know if I've said it flat out, but I also very much imply that I will accommodate them. This morning...I have a student that crosses every day, she's in my zero period, and she says, 'Sometimes there's a lot of wait ...can you please not mark me absent? Do you mind if I text you? I'll text you when I'm on my way. You can mark me late, but don't mark me absent. And this morning, she sent me a text, 'I just crossed, don't mark me absent!'

As described in the previous chapter, Esteban and I connected over our experience in aquatics. Being a high school swim coach and having swam in high school myself, we often spoke about how he was doing in the season. At the beginning of his senior year, Esteban was trying to complete the community service requirement to graduate from high school. He felt sufficiently comfortable to text me, "Hey how you been, I was wondering if there was any way I could help you with something and get community service hours." In that same text message conversation, he invited me to an important water polo game for his team.

Chikis also demonstrated effective use of social capital, but contrary to Esteban, she did not hesitate to reach out to me for advice. In July 2015, when she was on summer break and not in regular contact with teachers, she sent me the following Facebook message:

Hi Sofia, this is Chikis I am working with you on your doctoral study. I hope that you can help me, I'm now a senior this year!!! I took the ACT and SAT last year but I should take them over this year how do I study for these exams? The one I did better in was the ACT. Thank you!!! Have a nice night ☺

*(Hola Sofia, soy Chikis estoy trabajando contigo en lo de la investigacion de tu doctorado. Espero y tu me puedas ayudar, este año escolar ya soy senior!!! Tome el ACT y SAT el ano pasado pero debo tomarlos de nuevo este año estudio para esos exámenes? el que sali mas alto fue en el ACT. Graciass!! Que pases una bonita noche ☺)*

Contrary to the trend of *transfronterizos* using resources available to them, Marisol did not appear to ask anyone for advice or insight about anything related to academics. Annie had indicated that she occasionally spoke to her older cousin about which classes she should take, but she rarely met with her counselor and she never asked me for advice. Esteban also never asked me for advice, but we walked around the UC Berkeley campus during his college visit trip and we had a conversation about what it was like to go to school there. The trust with his friends served him well in sparking conversation about college.

I became curious as to why six of the eight students did see me as a resource, while Marisol and Annie did not. It was not likely a matter of trust or comfort because these students did confide in me. They were both Facebook friends of mine, so getting in touch with me was a non-issue. Both Marisol and Annie, however, had been in the ELD program, in which it seems that ELD students are not informed about college requirements. ELD students, as I discovered, lacked an understanding of cultural norms due to their sheltered instruction with peers who are unfamiliar with sociocultural mores in the United States. Marisol and Annie also did not understand how important it was to seek out information for themselves.

According to Lin & Erickson (2008), people act instrumentally by using their social ties, especially their "weak" or extended ties, to gain occupational mobility beyond what is predicted by their structural position. In the context of this study's focal participants, Marisol and Annie were the only students to not capitalize on their social ties to better position themselves for postsecondary educational opportunities. And although Gladis did ask me for help, resulting in her decision to attend a local community college, she waited for chance encounters with me and did not follow through with to-do items. One explanation for Marisol, Annie, and Gladis' failure to effectively utilize the resources available to them is the lack of high expectations being enforced. Conversely, the other focal students were in AVID and/or advanced classes, therefore, their actions were nested in classrooms that instilled strong norms about pursuing a university education.

### **Parents' Social Capital and Educational Attainment**

We know that parental educational level is an important predictor of children's educational and behavioral outcomes (Davis-Kean, 2005; Hernández & Napierala, 2014; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). In fact, in an analysis of data from several large-scale developmental studies, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) concluded that maternal education was linked to children's intellectual outcomes even after controlling for a variety of other socioeconomic status indicators

such as household income. According to Hernández & Napierala (2014), mother's education is typically used as an indicator of parental education because a majority (96%) of children live with two parents or their mother only. However, we know little about how or whether parents prove to be influential social actors – with the social networks of their adolescents – in ways that affect high school success or college-going tendencies. Interestingly, half of the focal students' mothers and three of the five comparison students' mothers completed a higher level of education than their husbands. The size of the control and treatment groups in this study (n=13) allowed for consideration of whether either parents' educational attainment, and the country in which they were educated, might have any effect on student academic success.

When I embarked on this research, I was almost certain that I would find that parents learn about college requirements from their social networks. I hypothesized this because *transfronterizos*' parents had figured out a way to live in Tijuana and enroll their child(ren) in an American school. Many parents of *transfronterizo* children are *transfronterizos* themselves as they work in the United States. With the exception of Annie's mother, all focal students' parents were educated in Mexico. In comparison, only half of the control group's parents received their education in Mexico. Focal parents' impacted schedules coupled with their residence south of the border made it nearly impossible to attend parent meetings where college and financial aid information was provided. The ability to attend parent workshops, therefore, is much easier for parents who live in Santo Domingo.

Through parent interviews, I discovered that parents reinforced the idea of pursuing a college education so that their children would have a better life and more opportunities than they had. In interviewing the students, it became apparent that their parents had no *direct* influence on their educational decisions. None of the parents knew what the college requirements were, however, and they generally did not discuss their education-related questions with friends, family members, or co-workers.

Rebecca Montezuma's mother was the only focal parent that had gone to parent meetings at Guerrero High School in the past. She drove her daughters to school each day, which facilitated her attendance at the workshops. Mrs. Montezuma's work hours were quite long, which led her to stop attending the meetings. Despite having gone to a handful of meetings, she had only minimal knowledge of the A-G requirements. If needed, she explained, she could obtain whatever information it was that she needed by locating a folder she was given, which contained extensive handouts. In short, the *transfronterizo* students knew that their parents wanted them to go to college, and why, but they sought out this information themselves.

Annie's mother was the only focal parent who received her education in the United States. She *really* looked up to her mother. Annie acknowledged her mother's faults for smuggling drugs in the past, but she admired her for her intelligence, strong work ethic, leadership qualities, and overcoming her son's death. She has remembered one particular piece of advice from her mother, which influenced her to know what she wants for herself: "You don't have to follow anyone, everyone needs to follow you. You need to be the leader" ("*Tú no tienes que seguir a nadie, todos te tienen que seguir a ti.*")

*Tú tienes que ser la líder.*”). Annie’s mother also instilled in her a sense of independence from a young age, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

My mom tells me, “If you want this and this and this, well, you have to start planning right now how you’re going to do it because I’m not going to help you. You do it on your own.” And that helped me to know what I want to do already. I don’t need to wait for someone to do it for me, or for my counselor to tell me, “Oh no you have to do this and that”. No no no no, I know what I want to do. I’m going to tell her, “No, I want this and this and this. How can I do it?” I am just going to ask what I have to do in order to accomplish it and I can do it on my own.

*(Mi mamá me dice, "Si quieres esto y esto y esto, pues de una vez de planeando cómo lo vas hacer porque yo no te voy a ayudar. Tú hazlo sola." Y eso me ayudó de que yo ya lo sé lo que yo quiero hacer. Yo no tengo que esperar a que alguien lo haga por mí, o a que mi consejera me diga "Ay no tú tienes que hacer esto y esto". No no no no, ya sé lo que yo quiero hacer. Yo le voy a decir "No, yo quiero hacer esto y esto y esto. ¿Cómo lo tengo que hacer?" Solo voy a preguntar que tengo hacer para lograrlo y yo lo puedo hacer por mí misma.)*

I asked Ms. Gómez what could be done at Guerrero High School to better help students reach their college potential – she indicated community outreach and parent involvement would have the biggest impact. Ms. Gómez said, “I think the parents are very ignorant about the system and what exactly it takes to get to college” (personal communication, 4 March 2015). I spent quite a bit of time in the school’s *Centro de Padres*, or Parent Center, and I observed that there was only a small group of parents (less than ten) that came regularly. Most of these parents were mothers who often utilized the Parent Center as a place to strengthen their relationships with other parents and to increase their knowledge about the American education system by speaking to each other and attending workshops. I sat in on a parent workshop held in the Parent Center one day and it was the same group of parents, plus a few others, who attended. The information provided at the various workshops for parents seemed invaluable. However, the turnout was bleak.

Given that this group of parents is seeking out how to engage in their child’s education, the empowerment-based approach discussed in Baquedano-López, Alexander, Hernández’s (2013) work may be appropriate to implement at Guerrero High School’s Parent Center. Baquedano-López et al. argued for “counteracting deficit perspectives” and “articulating the ‘power of parents’ (Olivos, 2006) to become active agents, critics, and transformers of education and schools” (168). The school would, of course, need to provide a trained facilitator to “‘empower’ parents in order for them to be able to produce change” (168). The implementation of trained mediators offering such workshops would certainly have the potential to improve parent and community engagement within our schools, while also helping parents become more efficacious in their child’s education.

Below are conclusions of students’ and parents’ use of social capital based on their actions and my interviews with them:

- Students in honors and AP courses, or in the AVID program, effectively used resources available to them (via social networks and information channels) related to academics and college preparedness. Non-AVID students in the regular or ELD tracks tended to not actively ask for help or meet with their counselors.
- Trust among peers did not translate into obtaining information about college. The most important factor for students increasing their knowledge about university requirements was befriending other students who had a college-oriented mindset.
- Students trusted school-affiliated adults that they spent the most time with and who came from a similar background as them. Trusting relationships with adults did not always translate into gaining insight about college admissions.
- Parents of focal students were uninformed about the A-G requirements, financial aid, and standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT. Focal parents' work schedules and residence in Tijuana made it nearly impossible to attend workshops. None of the parents' social capital carried any benefit for their children's education.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: HOW INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS STRUCTURE YOUTHS' NETWORKS AND COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE**

In the previous chapter, I described in detail the effect that social capital has on *transfronterizos*' navigation of the U.S. education system and college requirements. I also paid attention to the ways in which some students make use of the resources available to them. The present chapter examines the concept of academic tracking, which affects one's knowledge of college requirements and, subsequently, the ability to meet those requirements.

Institutional mechanisms, such as academic tracking, currently affect Guerrero High School students' ability to meet college requirements. But some students find a pathway into challenging courses (e.g., accelerated/honors, AP, AVID), which generally excludes them from the adverse effects of academic tracking. For example, AVID's exclusiveness limits the amount of students who have access to the most useful and complete college information channels. AVID participation, therefore, results in focal students following-through with university application submission. And on the other end of the spectrum, newcomer *Tijuanense* students are treated with a deficit perspective in terms on class placement and expectations. Furthermore, ELD students do not tend to meet A-G requirements and also lack the cultural competency so necessary to succeed in the American education system.

Table 5.1 summarizes several focal student components, including, but not limited to: enrollment in schoolwide programs, the avenues through which students have formed social networks, who makes decisions with regard to their course enrollment, and whether students know their GPA and are familiar with the A-G requirements, among other details.

**Table 5.1 – Focal Student Tabulation**

| Student        | Academic Program(s)    | Began U.S. education/<br>Current grade | Father's Education Level     | Mother's Education Level         | Network Formation                                                 | On Campus or School-Associated Adults Trusted                                   | Course Selection Strategies & Sources | College Information Channels | Knows G.P.A./ Knows A-G Req. | Meets With Counselor |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Carlos</b>  | AVID, Acc./ Honors/ AP | 10 <sup>th</sup> / 12 <sup>th</sup>    | High School (but no diploma) | Graduate School                  | Classmates, AVID, Older Sibling's Friends, Other Transfronterizos | Mrs. Vargas (ELD 7/8)                                                           | AVID & Counselor                      | AVID                         | Yes/Yes                      | Regularly            |
| <b>Rebecca</b> | Acc./ Honors/ AP       | 9 <sup>th</sup> / 12 <sup>th</sup>     | Completed Middle School      | High School Graduate             | Baile Folklorico Classmates                                       | Derrick (Art), Urrutia (Upward Bound), Newman (Math), Hirsch (Baile Folklorico) | Counselor                             | Counselor                    | No/Yes                       | Regularly            |
| <b>Chikis</b>  | AVID, Acc./ Honors/ AP | 8 <sup>th</sup> / 11 <sup>th</sup>     | Graduate School (Ph.D.)      | College Graduate                 | Classmates                                                        | No                                                                              | AVID                                  | AVID                         | Yes/Yes                      | Sometimes            |
| <b>Marisol</b> | ELD                    | 8 <sup>th</sup> / 11 <sup>th</sup>     | Completed Middle School      | Completed Middle School          | Other Transfronterizos                                            | Mrs. Repeckj                                                                    | Counselor                             | Self                         | No/No                        | Rarely               |
| <b>Gladis</b>  | Regular                | 4 <sup>th</sup> / 11 <sup>th</sup>     | Completed Middle School      | Completed 10 <sup>th</sup> Grade | Classmates                                                        | No                                                                              | Self                                  | Me (Sofia)                   | Approximate/ Somewhat        | Rarely               |
| <b>Esteban</b> | AVID, Acc./ Honors/ AP | Kindergarten /11 <sup>th</sup>         | Completed Middle School      | Completed Middle School          | Water Polo & Classmates                                           | Water Polo & Swim Coach                                                         | AVID & Counselor                      | AVID                         | Yes/Yes                      | Regularly            |
| <b>Annie</b>   | ELD                    | 9 <sup>th</sup> / 10 <sup>th</sup>     | High School Graduate         | Guerrero High School Graduate*   | Other Transfronterizos                                            | Mrs. Avila                                                                      | Cousin (GHS alumna)                   | Cousin (GHS alumna)          | No/No                        | Rarely               |
| <b>Ricardo</b> | AVID, Medical Pathways | 6 <sup>th</sup> / 10 <sup>th</sup>     | Completed Elementary School  | High School Graduate             | AVID & Elementary School Friends                                  | Ms. Gomez                                                                       | Ms. Gomez & Counselor**               | AVID                         | Approximate/ Yes             | Sometimes            |

\*Annie's mother is the only focal parent who obtained a part of her education in the United States.

\*\*Ricardo primarily chose classes based on what his counselor recommended; however, he found out about the Medical Pathways program through a handful of friends that were enrolled in it.

After having tabulated student data on networks, trust, information channels, and college knowledge, certain themes surfaced, which were corroborated by empirical evidence and interview data. I discovered that the grade in which students began their education in the United States had no impact on whether they were college-bound. In fact, three of the five *transfronterizos* that were on track for university acceptance began school in the U.S. in high school. Ream & Rumberger (2008) purport that peer networks are influential in academic success. Both students in the ELD program indicated that their closest school friends were other *transfronterizos*. Because advancing out of the ELD program is based on English language acquisition, *transfronterizos* who befriended other *transfronterizos* spent minimal time speaking English and, subsequently, improving their language skills. While ELD classrooms are situated alongside non-ELD classrooms, the ELD student population embodies an enclave of Spanish-dominant students with relatively weak English skills and little knowledge of college requirements. As such, a culture of low expectations among teachers and ELD students has developed at Guerrero High School in which matriculation into a community college becomes the goal. As was discovered in Valenzuela's (1999) work on immigrant youth in the U.S., college was an "emotionally and experientially remote notion" for these students (151). Guerrero High's ELD students, similar to Valenzuela's immigrant youth, had also "been socialized toward the ideal of someday attending college but insufficiently socialized into an understanding of the tools and knowledge they would need to reach such a goal" (151).

Another finding surfaced indicating that speaking with friends in Spanish did not have a detrimental effect on gaining admission into a four-year university.

**Table 5.2 – Primary Language Spoken With Friends as Related to Academic Program & Postsecondary Education**

| <b>Speak in Spanish to friends</b> |                     |                                                             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Student</b>                     | <b>Program(s)</b>   | <b>Postsecondary Education</b>                              |
| Carlos                             | AVID/AP/Honors      | Currently attending UC Santa Barbara                        |
| Rebecca                            | AP/Honors           | Currently attending Chico State                             |
| Chikis                             | AVID/AP/Honors      | Will attend UC Merced in the fall                           |
| Marisol                            | Previously in ELD   | Will attend community college in the fall                   |
| Ricardo                            | AVID                | Likely to attend UC/CSU, currently in 11th grade            |
| Annie                              | Highest ELD level   | Likely to attend community college, currently in 11th grade |
| <b>Speak in English to friends</b> |                     |                                                             |
| Esteban                            | AVID/AP/Honors      | Will attend UCLA in the fall                                |
| Gladis                             | N/A - Regular track | Will attend community college in the fall                   |

As illustrated in the above table, the best predictor at Guerrero High School of whether a student will attend a four-year university immediately after high school is whether s/he is in AVID or in the accelerated/AP academic track. Ricardo, for example, spoke to his friends in Spanish and was not enrolled in accelerated classes; however, he was enrolled in AVID and will receive full support in the application process from his AVID teacher once it is time to apply to college. Conversely, Rebecca was not enrolled in AVID, but

she was in AP and honors classes and earned acceptance into Chico State. While she did not receive assistance from teachers on her college application, she sought out the information she needed from a friend enrolled in AVID as well as from her counselor. Ricardo and Rebecca are examples of students who spoke to their friends in Spanish but were university-bound. Meanwhile, Gladis, who primarily spoke to her friends in English, did not receive the help she needed in order to apply to the UC/CSU system.

Another point of interest is that all focal students had taken AP Spanish Language, including students in the ELD program. However, there did not seem to be a college-going culture in AP Spanish because it enrolled university-bound accelerated students, as well as ambitious ELD students who might not meet the A-G university requirements.

All non-ELD focal students indicated that they met their closest friends in their classes. The fact that most students befriend classmates carries implications for the relative strength of one's information channels related to academics and college. Given that AVID cultivates a college-going culture, befriending other students who are college-bound increases the likelihood that a student will pursue a post-secondary education.

As revealed in interviews, all focal students *not* in the ELD program or regular classes typically talked to friends about their post-secondary plans and aspirations. Interview data suggest that Annie (in ELD at the time), Marisol (formerly in ELD), and Gladis (in regular classes) did not converse with their peers about college. Annie, Marisol, and Gladis expressed interest in going to college, but did not obtain the necessary knowledge to apply to four-year universities. Among ELD and regular track students, the disconnect between post-secondary aspirations and the know-how for achieving those goals surfaced as a major finding. The excerpt below illustrates the general attitude of some ELD students toward post-secondary planning.

**ST:** Do you talk to any of your friends about college?  
(*¿Habras con tus amigos sobre la universidad?*)

**Annie:** No, not about that. (*No, no sobre eso.*)

**ST:** Why do you think you guys don't talk about that?  
(*¿Por qué crees que no hablan de eso?*)

**Annie:** I know that they don't think about that yet.  
(*Sé que no piensan en eso todavía.*)

**ST:** How do you know? (*¿Cómo sabes?*)

**Annie:** Because if I touch on the subject, they're going to avoid it because they don't know what they want to do.  
(*Porque si toco el tema, lo van a evitar porque no saben lo que quieren hacer.*)

**ST:** Even the ones who are in 11th grade? (*¿Hasta los que estan en el grado 11?*)

**Annie:** They don't know yet. (*No saben todavía.*)

Because the general ELD population was not surveyed, I am unable to make generalized statements; however, AVID program participants and students taking accelerated courses, were at the opposite end of the spectrum (compared to the ELD students) in the sense that they all expected themselves to attend a four-year university after high school coupled with having the necessary information to achieve that goal. Data analysis on college information channels and course selection strategies revealed that the AVID program and counselors play an important role in students selecting the most appropriate classes and meeting the A-G requirements. Suggestions for improving course selection strategies are presented in the discussion section.

As a result, or perhaps *because* of its criteria for entry into the program, only the most promising students (who did not already sign up in middle school) are admitted into the program at Guerrero High School, as determined by GPA. Therefore, the only way to be accepted into the program is to continue enrollment from middle school or to have good grades in high school. Due to AVID's heavy workload at Guerrero High, it can be argued that highly motivated and hard-working students tend to be the ones who join the program. Once admitted, these higher-achieving students with strong English skills form peer ties with like-minded classmates and cultivate relationships with resourceful teachers.

AVID students are expected to stay in the program for their entire high school career. At Guerrero, non-freshmen are rarely admitted into the program because it is typically treated as a 4-year commitment. However, a counselor-initiated exception was made for Carlos as a junior transfer student because of his good grades. It should be pointed out that Carlos' counselor was going to place him in the ELD track and regular math, but Carlos challenged that decision and within minutes he was placed into AVID and advanced classes.

**Carlos:** Well she is looking at my grades and I was insisting that I be enrolled in advanced classes because at first, she wanted me to go into ELD 5/6 and regular Algebra and I was saying like no, that she should put me in advanced classes. And then she said, "We have to put you in [advanced classes], you have to go into AVID," and something like that. The AVID coordinator was there and my counselor said, "Look, look at this guy's transcript..."

*(Pues está viendo mis calificaciones y estaba insistiendo que me metía en clases avanzadas, porque primero quería meter a ELD 5/6 y me quería meter a algebra normal y estaba diciendo que no que me pusiera a clases avanzadas. Y a mí me dijo que: "te tenemos que meter, te tienes que meter a AVID," no sé qué y estaba Mr. Gutiérrez [AVID coordinator] y dijo, "Mira, mira el transcript de este muchacho...")*

**ST:** So they both saw your grades and said that you had to join the AVID program?

*(¿Entonces los dos vieron tus grados y dijeron que tienes que meterte?)*

**Carlos:** Yes. (*Sí.*)

**ST:** And they explained what it was and...you just said “okay” and they enrolled you?

(*Y te explicaron lo que era y... ¿tú nomás dijiste "ok" y ya te metieron?*)

**Carlos:** Well my sister was in AVID, so she told me “oh, well join AVID”.

(*Es que mi hermana estuvo en AVID, entonces me dijo "o, pues métete a AVID".*)

Had Carlos not spoken up, he might have ended up being placed into the (low-performing) ELD track due to the fact that he had taken ELD 3/4 at Hillstone High during his sophomore year. As previously mentioned, institutional mechanisms make it nearly impossible for ELD students to meet college requirements. Given the AVID program’s success at Guerrero High School, Carlos’ AVID enrollment would undoubtedly assist him with all-things-college, including, but not limited to: university applications, FAFSA, letters of recommendation, and his statement of purpose. Similarly, Carlos’ first-hand account of being encouraged to enroll in AVID as an upperclassman illustrates the ways in which institutions are willing to bend the rules for their benefit. Carlos’ strong academic record as evidenced by his grades gave the counselors reassurance that he would contribute to the nationally recognized reputation that the school’s AVID program holds. Circumstances such as this one become a win-win situation for both the committed student and for the school because both parties benefit from one another.

Through interviewing counselors and students, it became apparent that AVID was a high-quality and selective program. According to Ms. Torlickson, “AVID classes are amazing, but they’re exclusive,” and not all AVID classes are full.

They definitely have a lot of students in them and it depends also on the grade level...the junior AVID this year could be fuller...the ninth and the tenth grade classes aren’t packed to the brim, but they’re adequate. They might have 30 in each. Some a lot more, but they have good numbers.

While the program has a wholesome amount of students, it seems as though it could enroll several more students. As previously mentioned, interview data indicate that focal participants enrolled in AVID were familiar with university requirements and their teachers were readily available to guide them through the college application process.

When asked what the school could do to better help students reach their college potential, Ms. Torlickson explained:

I feel that having more support in terms of doing college research and doing career research...figuring out what they want to major in...what a technical school is. What it means to just get an associates degree versus getting a bachelors degree. We try to talk to our kids about that, but we have such little time with them. Each counselor has a caseload of 400. It’s really hard to give that individual attention to each student. I love to see a class with that curriculum developed so not only AVID students get that kind of instruction, but every student is...at least maybe all juniors take the class where they can do that kind of exploration and

understand what they need to do their senior year in order to apply to college. In order to actually make it into college and have everything more thought out than they do at the moment.

Based on Ms. Torlickson's professional opinion, students not enrolled in AVID are likely not getting the information they need, nor developing a four-year plan, to attend college. While all of the focal students expressed interested in wanting to go to college, only the AVID students (and Rebecca) knew exactly what was required of them in order to reach that goal.

Table 5.3 shows the percentage of AVID seniors that applied to four-year universities over the past three academic years, as well as the percentage of students who were accepted.

**Table 5.3 – Application and Acceptance to Four-Year Universities**

| <b>Academic Year</b> | <b>Percentage of AVID seniors that applied to four-year universities</b> | <b>University acceptance rate of AVID seniors</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 2014-2015            | 100%                                                                     | 96%                                               |
| 2013-2014            | 99%*                                                                     | 90%                                               |
| 2012-2013            | 100%                                                                     | 100%                                              |

\*The only student who did not choose to apply to a four-year university chose to attend a technical school instead, according to an AVID teacher.

The AVID coordinator, Mr. Gutierrez, provided me with the information contained in Table 5.3. The statistics show that all AVID seniors (except one) applied to four-year universities each year for the past three years. Seniors not in the AVID program, however, have experienced less favorable results compared to their peers in AVID.

The above information was unavailable for non-AVID seniors, thus, I was unable to compare acceptance and admission rates for the two groups. Ms. Torlickson stated the following in an email response to my request for statistics on college application rates and matriculation.

We have done a very poor job of collecting data in the past. We are just starting to get our act together! Although we have had senior exit surveys in the past, the person who used to collect the data left and we haven't been able to hunt it down. The only numbers I can give you are from last year and they unfortunately don't include the AVID factor (although I will keep that in mind for this year's info we need to keep track of). So sorry!

Ms. Torlickson did explain that there were 450 graduates in the Class of 2015. Among those graduates, which include the AVID seniors, 31% matriculated to a four-year university. A majority (65%) of Guerrero High School graduates in 2015 matriculated

into a two-year community college or technical school, while 5% joined the military or entered the work force.

The very fact that the AVID program maintains longitudinal statistics on college application and acceptance rates, while the counselors do not do the same for the general senior population, exemplifies an opportunity for the school to improve its data collection practices. Subsequently, using this data to find ways to increase the percentage of students attending a four-year university would be critical.

Because data collection took place from August 2014 to January 2016, I was able to monitor any differences between universities that Chikis, Gladis, Esteban, and Marisol said they intended to apply to in October of their junior year and those that they actually applied to between November 2015 and January 2016 of their senior year. Table 5.4 below indicates intended and actual universities applied to. Because students may apply to some institutions after January of their senior year, Table 5.4 does not include private universities. What is important to note is whether students applied to the UC and CSU systems, where many students continue their education if going to a public university.

**Table 5.4 – Intended vs. Actual College Applications**

| <b>Student</b> | <b>Colleges Intended To Apply To</b>                                 | <b>Colleges Actually Applied to</b>    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Chikis         | UCLA, UCSD,<br>UC Davis, UC Berkeley                                 | UCLA, UCSD,<br>UC Berkeley, UC Merced  |
| Marisol        | UC Berkeley, CETYS Universidad (in Tijuana), local community college | None                                   |
| Gladis         | UCLA, UCSD, CSU San Bernardino,<br>local community college           | None                                   |
| Esteban        | Point Loma Nazarene, Stanford,<br>UCSD, UC Berkeley                  | UCLA, UCSD,<br>UC Riverside, UC Merced |

The above table illustrates stark differences between AVID and non-AVID seniors. Chikis and Esteban, who were in the AVID program, followed-through with their intention to apply to UC schools. Their AVID teachers were instrumental in guiding them through the application process and ensuring that they submitted their applications before the Thanksgiving break. Gladis and Marisol, on the other hand, had not applied to any universities by January of their senior year. The two young women simply did not have anyone to support them in the way that Chikis and Esteban did. As a result, it became very unlikely that they would pursue an education at a four-year university immediately after high school.

College visits in high school can play an important role in exposing students to the college environment and subsequently helping them select which universities to apply to. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance published a report in which five recommendations were outlined for high schools to help students navigate the path to college. One of the recommendations

set out by the panel, “Engage and assist students in completing critical steps for college entry,” (11) detailed the need to coordinate college visits (Tierney et al., 2009).

The March 2015 survey results indicate that Marisol was the only focal student who had not gone on a college visit. With college visits serving as an opportunity for students to be exposed to college campuses and to help them determine which institutions to apply to, Marisol not having visited a university campus raised concerns for me about her likelihood of attending a four-year university. In fact, Marisol reported the following in the aforementioned survey:

Hardly anyone [at this school] knows what I want to study. Only one teacher knows because I did a presentation [for her class] on my future career. But they should personally ask you about what it is that you want to study and guide you as to which college you should apply to and what their requirements are.

*“Casi nadie sabe lo que quiero estudiar. Solo una maestra lo sabe porque hice una presentacion de mi future carrera. Pero deberian de preguntar personalmente sobre lo que quieres estudiar y guiarte en que college deberias aplicar y que requisitos ocupan.”*

In an interview during her junior year, Marisol had stated that she planned to apply to UC Berkeley. Her reason for wanting to do so was not academic, but rather, was based on the fact that she had extended family in the Bay Area.

### **Teacher, Counselor, and Parent Expectations**

Given the high expectations that AVID teachers have of their students, I argue that teacher expectations also play a critical role in a student’s likelihood of applying to four-year universities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, social capital theorists posit that if students are supported by a network with strong norms about moving in a certain direction, one will move with that network (Coleman, 1988; Fuller & Hannum, 2002; Ream & Rumberger, 2008). The AVID program is a case in point of the influence that institutional mechanisms, peer networks, and teacher expectations can have on students.

AVID has a reputation at Guerrero High School for being a challenging program. As such, Ms. Torlickson raised the issue of attrition, which primarily occurs during students’ sophomore year, due to the program’s rigor.

There are very few that do [drop out]. Once sophomores, lots of them do because they are learning organizational skills, they're learning writing skills. It's a lot of rigorous material and they're just – I guess, honestly...lazy...most of them. And they don't see why they should have to do that extra work because it does give them a little extra work for every class because they have to keep these notebooks with organized with assignments for every class. So it pushes them. They're not used to that kind of work.

The excerpt above illustrates the AVID program’s intensive workload, which cultivates high expectations among students. It can be argued that students who remain in the

program for the entirety of their high school career will not only be familiar with the A-G requirements, but will have an advantage over their non-AVID peers at Guerrero High with regard to university admissions. My recommendations on expanding the AVID program are detailed in the discussion section.

Guerrero High serves one of the poorest communities in the country and, when coupled with the influx of students living in Tijuana, academic expectations are relatively low compared to those of students in more affluent neighborhoods. Many parents of *transfronterizos* have only basic academic expectations of their children. One of the counselors indicated that a number of parents simply want their children to stay in school.

A lot of our families have to work or they don't have a car to drive up here or they don't know or they're used to the school system in Mexico, which is different. And so, it's like we're always constantly teaching and teaching and teaching, 'Okay, this is how it works and this is how you communicate with teachers'. I feel like it's just so many... sometimes it's a lot of barriers. It is. Some parents will say, 'well my oldest barely didn't graduate so I wanna make sure with this one, you know, I don't fall behind.'

The above excerpt does not illustrate poor parenting, but rather, parents' hope that their children will get farther (educationally) than they did by completing high school. While a high school diploma from the United States will often exceed what students' parents have accomplished academically, one's ability to obtain a job and provide for a family will still be bleak.

In addition to existing research on counselors as gatekeepers, literature on student success also cites high teacher expectations as critical (Cotton, 1989). Both Carlos and Ricardo discussed their perception of how the school's staff perceives students from Tijuana.

**ST:** What should the school and your teachers know about you in order for you to succeed?

**Ricardo:** I don't know how to explain it but I would like for the school to know that just because I'm Mexican, or from Tijuana, doesn't mean that I am incapable. For example, there are other schools that discriminate for being that, and they think that you won't be able to, and that just not knowing the language means you won't be able to [make it]. But at this school, it seems very good to me because the teachers don't think like that...they help you. And if you don't know...they try to help you so that you can.

*(No sé como explicarlo pero a mi me gustaría que la escuela supiera que no no mas por ser mexicano, o de allá de Tijuana, significa que no puedo. Por ejemplo, hay otras escuelas que te discriminan por ser eso, y piensan que no vas a poder, y que no mas no saber el lenguaje no vas a poder. Pero en esta escuela se me hace muy bien porque los maestros no piensan así...te ayudan. Y si no sabes, tratan de ayudar para tu puedas.)*

**ST:** But you said that they don't discriminate at your school and you also said that you would like for them not to do it. Do they discriminate or not?

*(Pero dijiste que en la escuela no te discriminan, y también dijiste que te gustaría no lo hagan. Si lo hacen o no?)*

**Ricardo:** There are people that discriminate, but not as much as in other schools.

*(Si hay gente que discrimina pero no tanto como en otras escuelas.)*

Both boys came to the same conclusion independently: *Tijuana* students are treated with a deficit perspective. Carlos' first-hand experience in both ELD and AVID allowed him to see a trend in the student profile of a typical ELD student compared to a typical AVID student. He noticed that the AVID program tends to enroll students who live in Santo Domingo, whereas ELD students are primarily from Tijuana.

**Carlos:** [AVID] helps you, it's what pushes you to go to college. Intelligent people, you can say, the ones who are really going to go to college. I also found it interesting that a lot of people that are in AVID have lived their whole lives here, and a lot of the people in ELD live [in Tijuana] as well.

*(...[AVID] te ayuda, es lo que te pulsa a meterte a la universidad. Una gente inteligente, se puede decir, las que van a ir a la universidad en verdad. Se me hizo también curioso que mucha de la gente que esta en AVID es gente que ha vivido toda su vida aquí, y mucha gente que esta en ELD es gente que viva allá también.)*

**ST:** Do you have any thoughts as to why that is? Why it is that people [from Tijuana] go into ELD and people from here are in the regular track? What do you think about that structure?

*(¿Tienes un pensamiento sobre eso? ¿Cómo es que la gente de allá se mete en ELD y la gente de aquí esta en regular track? ¿Qué piensas de esa estructura?)*

**Carlos:** It seems a bit unfair, like they deny you that opportunity. Just because you come from Tijuana, they give you an exam to assess your English. Maybe it was like, well yeah, you need to know your English level, but it seems very unfair that they automatically think that, "You come from Tijuana, you're not capable," like you are being forced to be here.

*(Se me hace un poco injusto, como que te nieguen esa oportunidad. Solamente por venir de Tijuana, te hacen un examen para saber tu inglés. Quizás era como que, pues si necesitas saber tu nivel de ingles, pero se me hace muy injusto que automáticamente piensen que, "Vienes de Tijuana, no eres capaz," como tienes que estar aquí a fuerzas.)*

**ST:** But the counselors don't know that they cross the border when they enroll in school, right?

*(Pero ellos no saben que cruzan cuando entran a la escuela, ¿verdad?)*

**Carlos:** Well, it's assumed that they don't, but you can infer it. It's also, like...I think they ask you, "Is this the first time that you're in a school in the United

States?”

*(Pues se supone que no, pero puedes inferirlo. Es de también, como...creo que te preguntan, “¿Es la primera vez que estas en una escuela en Estados Unidos?”)*

**ST:** And you think that’s what dictates what path you take?

*(¿Y eso es lo que crees que dicta what path you take?)*

**Carlos:** Yeah. And also, I found it interesting that if you’re in ELD, you don’t progress, and if you’re in AVID or another regular class, you are going to go to college. When I was in ELD, the teachers would tell you, “You’re going to do so-and-so” or some project or “you’re going to participate in the workshop so you graduate.” In AVID, including regular classes, like regular English. It’s like, “When you start college,” “you’re going to do this in order to get into college.” It’s always like...ELD is to graduate [high school] and regular is to get into college.

*(Yeah. Y luego también, se me hacía curioso la idea que si estas en ELD, no progresas, y si estas en AVID u otra clase normal, vas a ir al colegio. Cuando estaba en ELD, los profesores te decían, “Vas a hacer tal cosa’ o tal proyecto o vas a participar en el workshop para que te gradúes. En AVID, incluso las clases normales, como inglés normal. Es como, ‘cuando entras a la universidad’, ‘vas a hacer esto para entrar a la universidad’. Siempre es como que...ELD es para graduarte y normal es para que entres a la universidad.)*

In short, AVID teachers instilled strong norms about college by using language that implied that students would attend a four-year university. Students in the ELD program, however, reported that classes were too easy and that the hope was for them to simply graduate from high school. Having been in the ELD program at Hillstone High prior to coming to Guerrero High, and through his observations of the students enrolled in the ELD program at both schools, Carlos also provided some insight regarding students not being mainstreamed from ELD:

**ST:** Regarding this problem of everyone from Tijuana...they’re put in ELD and can’t get out of there, they get stuck, why do you think that happens and why don’t people get out?

*(Sobre este problema de todo el mundo que es de Tijuana...los ponen en ELD y no pueden salir de eso, se atorán, ¿por qué crees que pasa eso y por qué no se sale la gente?)*

**Carlos:** I think it’s because of the structure of ELD, it’s your comfort zone, you’re with all of your friends, all of your classes are with people that you know. You don’t have to worry about anything, you just need to go to classes. A lot of people also don’t know that you have to do more than just go to class...you have to meet the A-G requirements, the exams, and think about taking exams and studying and really try hard. You get lazy thinking about that after spending time with your friends and worrying about classes...versus just going [to class] and doing worksheets and getting an A.

*(Creo que es por la estructura de ELD, esta tu zona segura, estas con todos tus amigos, todas las clases que tienes estas con gente que conoces. No tienes que preocuparte por nada, solamente tienes que ir a las clases. Mucha gente tampoco sabe que tienes que hacer algo más aparte de ir a las clases...tienes que hacer los créditos A-G, los exámenes, y pensar en que tienes que hacer exámenes y estudiar y en verdad echarle ganas. Te da flojera pensar eso después de estar tiempo con tus amigos y preocuparte de las clases...contra solamente yendo y llenando hojas, y agarrando una A.)*

According to Carlos, ELD culture is very much about doing the minimum to graduate from high school. In fact, students (i.e., Annie & Marisol) do not necessarily know what is required of them if they wish to go to a four-year university. Both ELD students corroborated Carlos' statements about the ELD track being a safe place for students where they can get by with doing very little. As a result, topics become a review of material already learned. For example, focal students found that AP Spanish Language is comparable to Spanish taught in Tijuana middle schools.

**ST:** What else do you like here, aside from the fact that there are more opportunities?

*(¿Qué más te gusta de aquí, además de que hay más oportunidades?)*

**Annie:** The classes. Although they're a little more behind compared to Mexico, I mean, they teach you really simple things.

*(Las clases. Aunque sean un poco más atrasadas que en México, o sea que, ya te enseñan cosas muy fáciles.)*

**ST:** What do you mean they are more behind? *(¿Cómo que estan más atrasadas?)*

**Annie:** I'm referring to the fact that in Tijuana, they teach you things that they don't do here until 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In a more advanced class, for example, over there they teach you things in Spanish that here they teach in AP Spanish. Over there they teach you very advanced things, like math, like Geometry, Algebra...here they teach you as if you're learning it for the first time.

*(Me refiero a que allá en Tijuana, te enseñan cosas que aquí te van enseñando en el doceavo grado. En una clase más avanzada, por ejemplo, allá te enseñan cosas de español que aquí te enseñan en AP Spanish. Allá te enseñan cosas muy avanzadas, como matemáticas, como Geometry, Algebra...aquí te lo enseñan así como si apenas lo estuvieras aprendiendo.)*

**ST:** Do you like [being taught concepts you have already learned] or no?

*(¿Te gusta eso o no?)*

**Annie:** Yes, because for me it's like a review, and to be able to memorize it more. *(Sí, porque para mí es como un repaso, y para poder memorizármelo más.)*

**ST:** You don't feel that it's too easy if you've already learned it?

*(¿No sientes que es demasiado fácil si lo has ya aprendido?)*

**Annie:** Yes, but since sometimes I forget a lot of things, it doesn't seem easy and I like reviewing it again, and it's the opportunity that they give me here...reviewing it again.

*(Si, pero como a veces se me olvidan muchas cosas, no se me hace fácil y me gusta repasarlo otra vez, y es la oportunidad que aquí me dan...repasarlo otra vez.)*

Spanish-dominant students who enter the ELD program having been educated in Tijuana are viewed academically through a deficit perspective. Although students are administered a math assessment during the school registration process, most perform poorly and are placed into Integrated Math 1 (the most basic level of math taught at Guerrero High). And once students are placed into classes they find too easy, they do not speak up about it.

Gladis, the other non-AVID/non-honors student in the study, had been educated in the United States since she was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She was extremely comfortable in English and she would choose to speak in English during our interviews. Without much guidance, she selected the classes she enrolled in each semester. However, she built her class schedule based on what she thought would be “just right” in terms of difficulty. She had excellent grades and I asked her why she didn't choose to take more advanced classes. Below is the excerpt from that conversation:

**ST:** Is there a reason why you didn't go into Accelerated or Honors?

**Gladis:** I don't think I'm that smart.

**ST:** What makes you think that? You have a 4.0.

**Gladis:** Maybe I have a 4.0 right now because I actually...I can understand [the teachers], you know what I mean? I'm not really struggling, but I'm also thinking that I should struggle a little to be in a class.

As illustrated by her saying, “I'm also thinking that I should struggle a little,” Gladis realized (during the interview) that she should be a little more challenged in school. For her it's not a lack of confidence about her English skills – it's a lack of self-confidence about her academic ability.

During the second phase of data analysis, I discovered that confidence was positively correlated with teacher expectations. Focal students who were in AVID and honors/accelerated classes were part of a college-going culture in which teachers had high expectations of their students; Moreover, students and teachers alike anticipated that they would go on to a four-year university. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Fuller & Hannum explain that, “local forces shape children's engagement with and capacity to succeed inside schools”. In the case of AVID and honors students at Guerrero High, they have multiple sources of support and institutional mechanisms on their side to excel and be self-confident. ELD and mainstream students, however, do not seem to be held to the same high expectations. As a result, students follow distinct educational paths with ELD

and mainstream students attending community college after high school, while AVID and honors students tend to pursue a university education.

### Limited English Output

I observed that Marisol and her classmates spoke to each other in Spanish. In her regular Chemistry class, nearly all students also spoke to each other in Spanish. A student at Marisol's lab station jokingly said, "English, please" after I asked her if the class was 'Bilingual,' which it was not. Teachers in the ELD program had asked their students to use the phrase, "English, please," if their classmates spoke to them in Spanish. The institutional use of this phrase seemed to be effective for purposes of English language development because it elicited communication in English rather than Spanish

In her sophomore year, Annie was in a similar situation to Marisol in the sense that her close friends preferred Spanish and were not college-bound as defined by being familiar with, and meeting, A-G requirements. "Almost all of my friends have some kind of relation to Mexico," Annie said, "but friends from here, that are living here, I only have like three, but I rarely hang out with them"<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, Marisol and Annie's access to English-dominant and college-going peers was practically non-existent. As noted in chapter 3, however, Annie's strong ties changed to her cousin and English-dominant boyfriend. As a result of her romantic relationship, Annie's English proficiency improved. Her college knowledge, however, was still bleak.

Perhaps due to their lack of output in English, Annie and the other former ELD student, Marisol, felt quite stigmatized with regard to their language skills, especially when it came to speaking in English.

**ST:** Did you know how to read, write, and speak in English when you started school in the U.S.?

*(¿Sabías como leer, escribir y hablar en inglés cuando empezaste la escuela en E.E.U.U.?)*

**Annie:** I did know how to speak [English] but I felt shy. I still do.

*(Si sabía hablarlo pero me daba mucha pena. Todavía.)*

Marisol made the following comment regarding her experience with English at the onset of her education at Guerrero High School.

Now that I am used to it, I see it as normal. But before, I hated when people spoke to me in English. I mean, well, I come from Tijuana, I speak Spanish, it's like I'm barely getting the show so that they can speak to me in English soon, like regular. Right now I understand it and I can speak a little bit, but when I started it was like I just stared at them, kind of like, "What are you saying?" I did understand some things that they said but then I sat there like, 'Hello?'

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<sup>8</sup> Translation: "Casi todos los amigos que tengo tienen alguna relación con México...pero amigos ya de aquí que estén aquí, solo tengo como unos 3, y con ellos casi no me junto."

*(Como ya me acostumbré, ya lo veo normal. Pero antes, odiaba que me hablaran en inglés. Digo, bueno, vengo de Tijuana, hablo español, es como que apenas voy agarrando el show para que hablen luego luego en inglés, así como regular. Ahorita ya lo entiendo y puedo hablar leve leve, pero cuando entré era como que les quedaba mirando, como que '¿Qué están diciendo?' Si entendía algo que decían pero luego me quedaba como que, 'Hello?')*

What I found interesting was that Carlos and Ricardo were also stigmatized about speaking English; Carlos and Ricardo, like Marisol and Annie, spoke almost exclusively in Spanish to their friends. The difference between these four students was that Carlos and Ricardo were in the AVID program, while Marisol and Annie were not. It was no surprise, then, that Marisol and Annie did not have homework assigned each day and that they found their classes to be easy. In contrast, Carlos and Ricardo spent hours on homework each day and felt that their classes were challenging.

**ST:** Do you have homework assigned every day?  
*(¿Te asignan tarea cada día?)*

**Marisol:** I rarely had homework last year. I think it's because of the grade, it being sophomore year, but now this year I have had two or three homework assignments.

*(El año pasado casi no tuve tarea. Yo creo que fue por el grado, por sophomore year, pero ya este año si he tenido como dos tareas o tres. Si se han juntado.)*

**ST:** And last year's classes, were they easy? Or a bit difficult?  
*(Y las clases del año pasado, ¿se te hacían fáciles? ¿O eran un poco difíciles?)*

**Marisol:** They were totally easy.  
*(Se me hicieron totalmente fáciles.)*

**ST:** Was it in part because you didn't have homework?  
*(¿Era en parte por que no tenias tarea?)*

**Marisol:** Partly, yes, because I was free to do whatever other activity or to study more. But yes, last year's classes were easier.

*(En parte, si, porque tenia libre para hacer cualquier otra actividad o estudiar mas. Pero si, se me hicieron mas fáciles las clases el año pasado.)*

**ST:** Were the teachers easy?  
*(¿Los maestros eran fáciles?)*

**Marisol:** Yes, with the exception of English.  
*(Si, con la excepción de inglés.)*

Research on Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs (Clark, 2009; Krashen, S., Rolstad, K., & MacSwan, J., 2007) suggests that English language

instruction with student grouping based on proficiency improves academic achievement for English learners. The Maple Union High School district, which Guerrero High is a part of, requires that English Learners enroll in the ELD program at a level determined by their CELDT performance. Once students complete ELD 5/6 (the third of four year-long classes) with accompanied bilingual science, English, and math classes, they are enrolled in ELD 7/8 with mainstream classes taught in English. Ms. Torlickson had the following to say regarding institutional challenges facing ELD students:

Technically the student doesn't get English credit until they make it to ELD 7/8 and unless they do that they are not completing the graduation requirement. We want them to jump as quickly as possible to that level so that we can start placing them in all English classes and if need be, sending them to adult school for credit recovery so they can take those English classes that they're missing or summer school but until they reach a certain level of English, we can't really provide those options because it would be too difficult for them. If it's all in English, we can't leave them to figure it all out on their own.

Based on my observations and secondhand knowledge, however, the drawback to having Spanish dominant students in classes together is that they quickly revert to Spanish. According to Ms. Torlickson,

Yeah. I mean, it's sheltered instruction. I think they need that. The only flaw, like huge flaw is that these students are with each other all day. They're not speaking English...in general it is like a little Mexico. You don't have to learn how to speak English. Any store you go into, any business you go into, you just speak Spanish and there's no need to speak English. I feel like our school is kind of like a mirror of that.

If one steps foot into the classroom before the bell rings, each and every student is speaking in Spanish. While it cannot be proven, Annie told me at one point that practically all of the ELD students live in Tijuana; thus, Ms. Torlickson's mention of the ELD classes being "like a little Mexico" is nothing short of accurate.

### **Course Selection/Placement**

Counselors play a major role in course selection for students and can act as gatekeepers (Yogev & Roditi, 1987; Glance et al., 2012) barring entrance into more advanced classes for students who are perceived to be struggling. Interview data show that at Guerrero High it is often which program a student is in that affects how active his or her counselor is in class enrollment advising. AVID teachers guided AVID students as to which classes to enroll in for the following school year, therefore, AVID students were generally in good hands. Meanwhile, mainstream students selected classes on their own unless they sought help from their counselor. Based on the previous section's findings on expectations, if teachers don't hold students to high standards, students may not develop high expectations of themselves.

ELD students, however, had their classes selected for them by their counselor and they were placed at the bottom of the totem pole. If a student comes to Guerrero High School from Mexico, s/he will be administered English and Math assessments. Results from these tests will determine which ELD and math class the student will be placed into. The head counselor, Mr. Rembrandt, expanded on the topic of placement:

**Mr. Rembrandt:** When they register, they take a test. And depending on how well they do on that test and on the written component, we determine their level of English language. The kid that came in here today, I didn't have anything as far as the test goes so I was just speaking to him and asking him, "How is your English?" He said, "Oh. I'm fine I can do it." I made sure I spoke to him in English to see if he understood so I put him at the highest level and depending on how he feels later on, he is going to come back and tell me whether or not he was put on the right level.

**ST:** The highest level? What level was he put in?

**Mr. Rembrandt:** He is an incoming ninth grader and I gave him ELD 7/8 concurrent with English 9. All of his classes are in English so if he struggles I'm sure he is going to come back and let me know and then I'll modify his classes if I need to.

Mr. Rembrandt's explanation of how he went about placing a new student from Mexico into classes that morning, however, did not follow the ELD placement protocol that the school has in place. First, the student was not given the assessment, which is designed to standardize ELD placement. Second, Mr. Rembrandt made the assumption that the student would follow-up with him if his classes were too difficult. Given that three of the eight focal students (Marisol, Gladis, and Annie) had not typically spoken up for themselves regarding the degree of difficulty of their classes, Mr. Rembrandt's class placement procedure for this student may not have been the most sound.

Below is Annie's experience with regard to class placement and the degree of difficulty of her classes.

**ST:** Did your counselor use your transcript from Tijuana when selecting your classes?

*(¿Tu consejero usó tu transcript de Tijuana al elegir clases?)*

**Annie:** I don't think so. The only one that my counselor paid attention to was my English class, but not math because they put me in the lowest math class.

*(Creo que no. El único que se fijó creo que fue el de inglés, pero en matemáticas no porque me metieron al matemáticas más bajo.)*

**ST:** Do you feel you could be in a more advanced math class?

*(¿Sientes que podrías estar en matemáticas más avanzado?)*

**Annie:** I think so, but up until now I feel that I'm fine with the math class I have. Like I've always said, it's like a review, it's good, it doesn't matter. Although I

would have liked to have been in a more advanced math class because when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I passed math with a B+ and they didn't advance me.

*(Pienso que si pero hasta ahorita siento que estoy bien con el que tengo. Como siempre he dicho, es como un repaso, esta bien, no importa. Aunque si me hubiera gustado haber estado en uno más avanzado porque cuando estaba en noveno grado, si pase matemáticas con B+ y no me adelantaron.)*

It is not known what percentage of students is placed into classes that are too easy for them. Based on both ELD focal students feeling that their classes were not challenging, it may be the case that it is a common occurrence.

Marisol described school registration and her class schedule upon enrolling at Guerrero High, which was similar to Annie's in the sense that the school's staff decided everything for her:

**ST:** Did they use your transcript from Tijuana?  
*(¿Usaron tu transcript de Tijuana?)*

**Marisol:** Yes, they used my grades and all of that. I went to the office and they did all those things and then I went to my counselor and they just gave me the paper and I was like, 'Well, these are my classes'. And they showed me where my classes were...first I had ELD 1/2, and all of my classes were Bilingual [taught in Spanish]. I said, 'well, this is a start'. I went to my ELD teacher and he said, 'You know how to read, how to write and you understand English, you should be in regular English.'

*(Si, usaron mis calificaciones y todo eso. Fui a la office y ya me hicieron todas las de estas y luego fui con mi counselor y no mas me dieron la hoja y me quede como, 'bueno, estas son mis clases.' Y ya me enseñaron donde eran los salones y luego tuve...primero tuve ELD 1/2, y todas mis clases eran bilingües en español. Dije, 'bueno, es un comienzo'. Y ya fui con mi ELD teacher y me dijo, 'sabes leer, sabes escribir y entiendes el inglés, tu debes estar en English regular'.)*

**ST:** Who was it? *(¿Quién fue?)*

**Marisol:** Mr. Watkins. I knew the basics from Tijuana, it was ELD 1/2, 3/4. And I told him, well, 'it's what I know' and well, 'I'm going to do it' and yeah. I was in English 10 [mainstream] and they would give me a paper and tell me, find the rhetoric device in this paragraph and give me this and who knows what, and I would just sit there staring at the paper, like 'What am I doing?'...I don't understand it and all I see is everyone writing and highlighting, and I, 'whoa, I don't know anything' and then slowly I learned. Yes, I learned something, but I would get D's, all D's and F's. I passed my first semester with a D-/D+ and then my second semester it was poems, and poems, and poems. I said, 'well, I'm going to keep doing this' and once the semester was almost over, they called me, my dad, and my teacher, as well as some people who are in charge, I don't know what they're called. They told me, 'Why didn't you tell us that you didn't know

English well?’ And, ‘We would have moved you to ELD, to a more advanced level.’ I said, ‘It’s just that I didn’t know that I had to do that on my own,’ that was one of the things I learned here as well, that you have to do everything on your own. Like going to your counselor, if you don’t like this, if blah blah blah.’ I ended up passing with a D/D- and yeah. Last year, second semester they gave me ELD 5/6. Then I took summer school for English.

*(Mr. Watkins. Yo traía lo básico de Tijuana, que era un ELD 1/2, 3/4. Y le dije, pues, 'es lo que yo se' y pues 'lo voy a hacer' y ya. Estuve un semestre en English 10 y me daban un papel y me dicen, encuentra la figura retorica en este párrafo y dame esto, no se que, y yo me quedaba viendo el papel, y yo 'que estoy haciendo?' No le entiendo, y ya no mas vi a todos así escribiendo, subrayando, y yo, 'whoa, no se nada' y ya, poco a poco aprendí, si, aprendí algo, pero sacaba D's, puras D and F. Pase mi primer semestre creo con una D-/D+ y ya luego mi segundo semestre, eran poemas y poemas y poemas, y dije, 'bueno, voy a seguir haciendo esto y ya que se iba a acabar el semestre, me hablaron a mi y a mi papa y a mi teacher y a algunos que se encargan, no se como se llaman, y ya me dijeron, 'por que no nos dijiste que no sabias de ingles, así, bien.' Y 'nosotros te hubiéramos movido a ELD, a otro nivel mas alto'. Y dije, 'es que yo no sabia que tenia que hacer eso por mi misma,' esa era una de las cosas que aprendí también aquí, es que tienes que hacer todo by yourself. Así de ir con tu counselor, si no te gusta este, que si blah blah blah. Y ya pase con una D/D-, y ya. El año pasado, segundo semestre, ya me dieron ELD 5/6. Luego hice summer school de English.)*

From the first interview, Marisol indicated that she was interested in eventually pursuing one of three career options: kindergarten teacher, neonatologist, or accountant. She attributed her desire to be a teacher or neonatologist to her love of children. I commented on the fact that the accountant career path was much different than the other two possibilities. Marisol explained that in middle school (in Tijuana), she took three years of accounting, which she found quite easy and really enjoyed. Based on her interview data, however, she never selected courses based on her interests in those career paths. Given that she took three years of accounting, I would have expected her to have enrolled in a more advanced math class.

Marisol is an example of a student who takes a backseat approach to course selection, whether intentional or not, Marisol’s counselor selects her classes for her and she just accepts it as the way it should be. In the excerpt above, she said, “Well, these are my classes,” demonstrating passivity in decisions affecting her education. She also mentioned that there was a meeting between her, her father, her counselor, and the administration once she had failed her English class. When asked why she didn’t speak to anyone about it being too advanced for her, she responded by saying, “It’s just that I didn’t know that I had to do that on my own.” The need to take initiative in educational decisions was something she learned in the United States. Later in that interview, she explained that she does as her counselors tell her, which shows her trust in the system:

“I assume that they know what is best for us, so I do ask they ask.”

*(Supongo que ellos saben que es lo mejor para nosotros, entonces, yo hago lo que ellos me pidan.)*

While not supported by empirical evidence, I suspect that Marisol not questioning academic authority stems from the fact that schooling in Tijuana is extremely strict and students are expected to respect authority by doing as they are told. The same is taught in Mexican households. Annie also displayed the same attitude toward figures of authority, which could have been a combination of having been educated in Tijuana, her participation in NJROTC, and her desire to join the military.

### **Institutional Tracking: AVID's Success and Creation of School-Level Inequity**

The most significant finding of the study is that student participation in the AVID program generally meant that she or he was familiar with the A-G requirements and, subsequently, applied to four-year universities. In other words, those not enrolled in AVID were less likely to know what the university requirements were. Given the program's college focus, in addition to helping students with their personal statements and reminding them of deadlines, AVID positions high achieving students for university acceptance.

According to interview data, enrollment in accelerated classes at Guerrero High School is often for students with an above average GPA who converse with their counselor about registering for more challenging courses. In some cases, teachers recommend their students for placement into accelerated classes the following semester or year. Counselors subsequently use teacher recommendations to place students into appropriate classes. Participation in the AVID program was often positively correlated with enrollment in advanced classes, which was to be expected given the program's admission criteria of having an above average GPA.

Because of the program's emphasis on college preparation, AVID students tended to know what their GPA was, and they were able to name all of the A-G requirements. Below is an excerpt of a conversation I had with Esteban in August about his GPA:

**ST:** Can you tell me about your GPA?

**Esteban:** Well, do you want the overall [cumulative]?

**ST:** Yeah.

**Esteban:** My freshman year, it was around 2.9/2.5, I'm not quite sure. I was below a 3.0, I know that for sure. Sophomore year it was a 3.11/3.3. My overall just jumped from a 2.0 to a 4.0 and this year...the year already started, it's starting off really bad because classes are even harder, but I'll get them up. I gotta get used to the schedule.

**ST:** Why was it such a jump, do you think?

**Esteban:** The AVID teacher. But he left the school...we were an annoying class, in my opinion. He believed in us so much but we always let him down. Every semester he would make us sign a sheet so by the end of the year, it's like, your

goals, and I wrote down a 4.0. He walked me to his desk and he told me, 'these are all your past GPAs,' and he's like, 'do you really think you can get a 4.0? That's a big jump, you gotta set your steps. You won't probably get a 4.0 ever in high school'. And I was like, 'well, I mean, that's pretty harsh'. He said I can't do it but I'm like, 'I could probably do it'. I guess I matured, took a big step, I was like, wow, this is my life. This isn't just middle school, it's not elementary, it's my future, you know? And it kinda got me, cause in a way, he would always say, 'You guys are the Mexicans, you guys are what people expected, you guys don't wanna live up to that stereotype, do you?' And everyone would just laugh, you know? It's like, we are living up to the stereotype by him trying not to prove us to live up to the stereotype. I would be one of the kids that would laugh, but it would get me...I would think about it, walking to the bus, walking home. And then, sophomore year it kinda hit me...I was like, 'well, I have to do something.'

**ST:** What do you think about a teacher that says, you know, 'I don't know if you can get this 4.0'?

**Esteban:** I guess it's like any other person that cares about you...they tell you your reality.

As illustrated through the above anecdote, the catalyst for Esteban getting his act together was an influential teacher with high expectations who highlighted the importance of one's GPA. The dynamic and culture in AVID is no accident. In fact, Carlos brought to my attention the difference between AVID and non-AVID students, illustrating the institutional mechanisms of tracking:

AVID has helped me a lot and the friends I have there. It was also very interesting when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I wasn't in AVID, and in 11<sup>th</sup> grade I was, so I found it interesting that in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was the smartest student in my class, and then I went into AVID with the people who had all AP classes.

*(AVID me ha ayudado mucho y los compañeros que tengo allí. También estuvo muy curioso cuando en el 10 no tenía AVID, y en el 11 si tuve, entonces se me hizo muy curioso que en el 10, era el más inteligente de mi salón, y luego pasé a AVID con la gente que tiene puras clases AP.)*

Students at Guerrero High School are aware that AVID is homework heavy. For this reason, Ricardo's older brother (who was a senior when Ricardo was a sophomore) did not wish to be in the program. Ricardo's brother continues to live in Tijuana with his parents and he works at his father's locksmith company down the street. Ricardo's path, however, will be quite different from his brother's. Based on his good grades and stated goals, Ricardo will likely attend a four-year university, which is largely attributed to his work ethic and participation in AVID.

Several significant findings surfaced with regard to institutional mechanisms facilitating and hampering students' ability to meet college requirements and for the successful navigation of the high school system.

- Entry into the AVID program is selective, with admission typically reserved for the most promising students at the school, as determined by above average grades. Being in AVID at Guerrero High School results in a high likelihood of applying to, and being accepted into, four-year universities. Success of the program is partially due to its exclusivity, admission criteria, teachers supporting students in course selection and college applications, and a college-going culture.
- Being in the ELD program disables — for lack of a better word — students from taking courses that meet A-G requirements. Unless students are mainstreamed by 10<sup>th</sup> grade and work diligently to make up core requirements for college admission, they are not eligible to apply to the state university systems in California.
- ELD students lacked cultural competency and did not realize that they had to advocate for themselves in order to successfully navigate the education system and to be placed into the classes that were best for them. Focal and mainstream students in the ELD program never spoke up if classes were too easy or difficult for them. ELD students were also unaware of the academic requirements for college admission.
- With the exception of the AVID program, Guerrero High has not maintained data on the percentage of seniors who apply and are accepted into four-year universities. For the past three years, nearly 100% of AVID seniors have applied to four-year universities and more than 90% of AVID alumni earned acceptances to four-year universities. A majority (65%) of Guerrero High School's 2015 seniors (which includes AVID alumni), matriculated into community colleges and 31% continued their education at a university.
- There was a major disconnect (among regular and ELD students) between educational aspirations and knowing how to achieve those goals. All four juniors intended to apply to at least one UC school when interviewed in October of their senior year. Chikis and Esteban did end up applying to UC schools, while Marisol and Gladis did not. AVID became the predictor of whether the focal students followed-through with applying to universities they had intended on submitting applications for.
- *Tijuanense* students, who were newcomers, were treated with a deficit perspective in terms of class placement and expectations. Because placement into English and math was determined by assessment results, students were usually placed into the most basic classes offered at the school. Within the ELD program, the hope was for students to graduate from high school. Earning acceptance into a four-year university was out of the question due to students systematically being barred from meeting A-G requirements.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research helps us better understand why children, adolescents, and adults living in Mexico commute to the United States each day. In particular, it seeks to inform the reader of how adolescents navigate the American education system and its requirements and how institutional mechanisms inhibit or facilitate academic success and access to challenging classes. This study seeks to give a voice to students who often conceal their realities at school out of fear of being caught, and to prompt administrators to take action in not having this phenomenon act as a sleeping giant within the school district.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this research. Data point to varied educational experiences and differentiated levels of college preparation based on one's academic program. For example, there is a culture of low expectations in the ELD program in which students are not expected to meet A-G requirements due to their limited English proficiency. Conversely, 'membership boundaries' surrounding the AVID program proved consequential in the social ties and capital that focal students built. Accelerated and AVID focal students reported meeting their closest friends in their classes, in which teachers served as providers of information related to college admission. ELD and regular track students did not discuss college-related topics nor did they know to advocate for themselves with regard to class placement, while AVID and accelerated students were in regular communication with teachers and counselors about course selection strategies.

## **Discussion**

A significant part of my work was to establish ways to potentially increase the amount of students meeting A-G requirements in the Santo Domingo-Tijuana border community. I consider a community a group in which members feel an affinity and desire to cooperate. The essence of a community is that there is interdependence, where members – or for the sake of this research, nations – have a stake in the success of the other. For example, when the value of a neighbor's house rises, it increases the value of homes around it. This means that we need to address transnational challenges together. Cooperation and collaboration can be localized (Santo Domingo and Tijuana) or expansive (the U.S. and Mexico), as members choose how to live in a globalized society, as countries change, and as economies fluctuate.

The benefit of this qualitative approach arises from the interviews detailing a range of circumstances and experiences that transnational students confront by traversing two countries. These students demonstrate a certain level of independence beyond a traditional high school student. In some cases, however, independence worked against students who thought they could navigate the educational institution on their own, without discussing their options with their counselor or teachers.

Several elements of social capital theory (e.g., social support from college-bound classmates, normative expectations found in accelerated/advanced classes and the AVID

program, information channels) proved to be the strongest social grist for some students moving toward academic success. Students identified as high-achieving generally obtained information about college and had access to resourceful teachers in the AVID program, while ELD and regular track students did not have comparable support. Normative expectations varied based on academic program, and enrollment in such programs largely depended on counselor and teacher perceptions of individual students.

Programs of many kinds that achieve an exceptional status do so by being selective and exclusive. The AVID program at Guerrero High benefits about 100 students in each grade, all of whom apply to four-year universities. The rest of the student population, with minimal guidance from their counselor and teachers, is left to obtain critical information about college on their own. Mainstream Guerrero High students with below average grades do not appear to be encouraged to enroll in AVID, which is clearly a stepping-stone to university acceptance. And English Language Development students, who are the least informed about college requirements, do not typically join AVID because their class schedule is full due to their elective being ELD.

In fact, Mr. Rembrandt told me in an interview, “Honestly, I don’t think our students from Tijuana or parents know of AVID unless they have family members who can tell them about it” (personal communication, 27 October 2014). Mr. Rembrandt’s statement acknowledges that there exists an information gap among *Tijuanense* students and assumes that some of these students have the social capital to obtain such information. It can be inferred that counselors are not disseminating information about the AVID program to students from Tijuana, regardless of the grade in which they enter Guerrero High School. As such, institutional mechanisms at play exclude students coming from Tijuana from full access to academic programs (e.g., AVID and Medical Pathways), which are nationally recognized and prepare students for post-secondary education. Since all focal students planned to attend college, it makes sense to help all students learn about postsecondary options and prepare for college.

Based on my observations of ELD students’ lack of knowledge of college admission requirements, the Guerrero High School administration should consider having the counselors visit ELD classrooms to explain (in Spanish) the A-G requirements. When asked how the district could better support the ELD program, Ms. Torlickson said the following:

[The district] could definitely provide more FTE’s [full-time equivalency] for us to have more bilingual classes, more bilingual electives. We have the highest population of ELD students in the district and yet they treat us uniformly as if we were like other schools and we’re nothing like other schools and we have special needs and they don’t acknowledge that.

One way Guerrero High could expand opportunities available to ELD students would be to create bilingual AVID classes, which would have the potential to improve the college preparation of ELD students. According to Mr. Rembrandt, “since students work in groups, we don’t really have an AVID bilingual program...so if students are taking bilingual classes, they won’t coincide with anybody else in the AVID program as far as

getting assistance.” Given the college acceptance rate among AVID students, granting high-achieving ELD students access to the program would be a good start.

For the long-term benefit of students, the expansion of AVID could possibly be incorporated into advisory, also known as “homeroom,” which is a space for students to check in with their teacher. This would make AVID accessible to all students by design, rather than exclude most students for not meeting the criteria, as is happening now. Consequently, college information channels would reach regular track and ELD students. Of course, the purpose of advisory would need to change, and teachers would need to be trained in AVID teaching techniques. Offering an annual AVID curriculum workshop would pose a cost for the school, but the impact could be far-reaching. The AVID program is not open to all students now because it is treated as a four-year commitment, which perhaps has contributed to its national recognition. In addition, many students simply do not have room in their schedule for AVID due to their participation in other programs (e.g., Medical Pathways, ELD, *baile folklórico*, NJROTC). Based on the statistics presented in the data chapters, AVID becoming a schoolwide program would have the potential to dramatically increase the percentage of students applying to (and being accepted into) four-year universities.

### **Lack of Cultural Competency Component**

Another concern regarding students being placed in the ELD program is that they are not developing cultural competency of life in the United States due to the strict focus on second language acquisition and development. According to Carter’s (2006) work, students who most successfully navigate high school academics have strong cultural capital, which helps them function in various settings. Cultural capital, as Carter defined, is the possession of skills that contribute to “participating in multiple cultural environments, including mainstream society, school environments, and respective ethnoracial communities” (306). Her analysis detailed the following:

Students who strike the best academic and social balance are those whom I refer to as “cultural straddlers.” Straddlers understand the functions of both dominant and nondominant cultural capital and value and embrace skills to participate in multiple cultural environments, including mainstream society, their school environments, and their respective ethnoracial communities. While straddlers share cultural practices and expressions with other members of their social groups, they traverse the boundaries across groups and environments more successfully (Carter, 322).

Based on Carter’s findings, it would benefit ELD students if the faculty reconsidered the mission of the ELD program and the delivery of the approach. For example, can information about college and voting be integrated into the curriculum so that students are learning vocabulary and simultaneously obtaining information about being civically engaged citizens? Of course, this does not fall within the parameters of reading novels and subsequent writing assignments, but an evaluation of life skills that the ELD student leaves Guerrero High School with is absolutely warranted.

A separate but relevant issue is that of Spanish-dominant students entering Guerrero High School as juniors with limited English proficiency and low parent expectations. Ms. Torlickson explained,

Many times, especially if a student comes to us in their junior (especially in their senior) year, we tell them, "you probably will not graduate because you're missing World History, U.S. History, and you have to take Government and Economics." And then if they're ELD and all of those have to be bilingual classes, they can't take those classes in credit recovery or anywhere else because they're not bilingual classes. It's really hard. And sometimes parents or caregivers, they're OK with that. They just want their student in school.

While having a sizeable portion of students enter high school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade is a phenomenon specific to schools in the border region, administrators, faculty members, and counselors must come together to find ways in which to better help this enclave of students succeed academically. Not providing necessary assistance for the aforementioned students runs the risk of this subgroup not being in a position to continue their education at a local community college. Failure to inform and prepare students for a post-secondary education can have negative long-term implications, including: low educational attainment, stagnant property values, and poor quality schools, among other effects. If the trend continues, the border region's economic outlook will fall far short of its potential in this global economy.

Suggestions for improving course selection strategies include counselors and teachers being more involved in their students' decision-making regarding class enrollment for the following semester. Based on what study participants indicated, it is common for regular and ELD students to feel that their classes are too easy. Thus, being more meticulous in the course selection process with the help of teachers and counselors when selecting classes would benefit students. Similarly, teacher expectations of students should be raised within the classroom so that students learn to expect more of themselves, and can appreciate being intellectually challenged.

Access to the AP Spanish Language and Literature classes should continue to be granted to students from all academic programs. In addition, the course offerings should be disseminated more extensively to the Guerrero High School student population given students' command of the Spanish language and the importance of bilingualism & Spanish literacy in the border region. Given that focal students reported their AP Spanish Language class being comparable in rigor to middle school Spanish in Tijuana, all ELD students should either take the AP Spanish Language course or the AP exam. *Tijuanense* students should also enroll in AP Spanish Literature in order to earn college credit with by passing the AP exam, and to make their courseload more intellectually stimulating. Expanding AP Spanish enrollment would, of course, require an additional AP Spanish teacher.

We invest in the education of these young men and women with the hope that they contribute to our society; however, these students will struggle to continue their post-secondary education if they are not equipped with the know-how of what is required

of them. At a minimum, I strongly recommend that all students receive college information during their advisory or English class. Incorporating information about college requirements, and emphasizing that students take a more active role in educational decision-making, into the ELD curriculum would also help those students become more informed.

*Tijuanaense* students are not ones to challenge authority and, when coupled with the desire to stay in classes that they feel comfortable in, they can remain inappropriately placed for the rest of their high school career. As Marisol explained, she was unaware that she needed to speak up if she felt a class was too difficult. “That was one of the things I learned here as well,” she said, “that you have to do everything on your own.” In theory, teachers should notice when a class is not challenging enough for a student. We cannot rely on teacher observations to monitor class placement, but we can certainly emphasize it. Thus, it would also behoove the school district to make the ELD and mainstream curriculum more challenging.

Future avenues of research on *transfronterizos* in the U.S. education system, and Latinos overall, include the much-needed investigation of the navigation of the educational institution and its requirements at the elementary or middle school level. While elementary school may seem premature, parents should be well informed of what lies ahead with regard to high school and college requirements. Disseminating this information more effectively to parents not educated in the U.S. is crucial in order to raise expectations and equip students and their families with an arsenal of college-related information. While research on tracking at the high school level has been well documented, Conchas (2001) states that almost no research exists on tracking in elementary and middle school as the source of this problem. By investigating early origins of tracking, perhaps future consequences can be better prevented.

There is currently no cross-border collaboration between Guerrero High School and schools in Tijuana, Baja California. Ms. Gómez indicates that we could better serve Tijuana-educated students by,

Identifying some of the major schools that send students here [from Tijuana] and having an open communication with them, and really trying to see, ‘Hey, are there courses or is there curriculum that you guys offer where we can maybe start practicing some reciprocity and really understanding where these students are coming from?’ And part of that would be to open the lines of communication with these schools. They are run by professionals, they are run by educated people, and they have their own standards and their own curriculum, and why not talk to them about it?

Despite the expanding literature on academically successful Latinos, success stories are still uncommon. Policymakers and practitioners must find ways to replicate success stories with a larger number of Latino students. According to Gonzalez (2013), one way to achieve this goal is to find ways to de-track America’s schools so that Latino students are not unintentionally trapped in lower tracks and shut out of higher college preparatory tracks. Programs such as AVID, a vital way at Guerrero High School for students to

become prepared for college and knowledgeable of college requirements, has become so successful that it now serves as an institutional mechanism for tracking students. Another way to provide better opportunities for Latino students is to offer an adequate amount of AP and honors classes at schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged students (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002), and to ensure that students have equitable access to enroll in such classes. Guerrero High administrators could also revisit the budget to allocate an additional AP Spanish teacher so as to make it a norm to enroll in AP Spanish courses.

At Guerrero High School specifically, it would significantly help students with no prior educational experience in the U.S. to have a trustworthy liaison at the school that they could meet with to ask questions. Guerrero High counselors are assigned approximately 430 students each; therefore, it is difficult for counselors to develop a relationship with every student and be available to properly guide all of their students down the appropriate path given their interests. A cultural liaison would also serve as a confidant with whom students can discuss personal issues and concerns.

Although significant gains have been made in the numbers of Latino students who enroll in college, there is still a large discrepancy in the educational outcomes of Latino students when compared to other groups. Latinos still graduate from four-year universities at a rate less than half that of Anglos and the numbers of Latinos in AP and honors courses are still disproportionate compared to their Anglo peers. If researchers, practitioners, and policy makers want to achieve equity for Latinos in education, then more must be done to provide college-related information and develop a more equitable educational experience for all students.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### **Focus & Control Student Interview: Intake Form - August 2014**

1. Tell me about your morning routine Monday-Friday before getting to school.
2. At what age did you start school in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_
3. At what grade did you start school in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did you know how to read in Spanish before starting school in the U.S.?  
Yes                      No
5. Did you know how to write in Spanish before starting school in the U.S.?  
Yes                      No
6. Did you know how to speak Spanish before starting school in the U.S.?  
Yes                      No
7. How do you feel about this school? What do you like/dislike about it?
- 7a. Did you like the school you attended before SYHS? What did you like/dislike about it?
8. What is your G.P.A.? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you think you work hard enough in school?                      Yes                      No
- 9a. What motivates you to work hard in school?
10. Who has helped you choose classes? How?
11. Has your counselor recommended classes to take?                      Yes                      No  
Courses: \_\_\_\_\_
12. Which has been your favorite class? How is/was it different from the rest of your classes?
13. Do you have homework assigned every day?      Yes                      No
- 14a. Do you complete your homework?                      Always                      Sometimes                      Never
- 14b. If 14a is yes, does anyone help you with homework?      Yes      No
- 14c. Did anyone help you with homework before high school? Who?      Yes      No      \_\_\_\_\_
- 14d. Does anything make it hard for you to complete your homework?      Yes      No      \_\_\_\_\_
15. How was it decided for you to attend high school in the U.S.?
16. What are your plans after graduating from high school?
17. How do you feel about college?

18. Will you go to a 4-year university?            Yes            No

19. Who expects you to go to a 4-year university? \_\_\_\_\_

20. Do you know what the academic requirements are to go to a 4-year university? If so, describe.

21. Do you spend time with your school friends outside of school?    Yes            No

If yes, what do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

22. What should the school and your teachers know about you in order for you to succeed?

23. In what ways do you feel supported by the school? In what ways do you wish the school would better support you?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Counselor Interview October 2014**

- 1) What can be done at this school to better help students reach their college potential?
- 2) Please describe the school registration process for new students and subsequent class placement.
- 3) What is the nature of contact between the school and the parent with regard to class placement for new students?
- 4) For students previously educated in Tijuana, what **Spanish** class would they typically enter here at Guerrero High School?
- 5) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **English** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 6) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **Math** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 7) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **History/World Culture** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 8) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **Natural Science** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 9) How is it determined whether a student will enter **AVID** or not?
- 10) How is it determined whether a student will enter **Medical Pathways** or not?
- 11) How is it determined whether a student will enter **AP Spanish** or not?
- 12) How is it determined whether a student will enter **Spanish for Spanish Speakers** (versus regular Spanish)?
- 13) Can any improvements be made to the course placement process? If so, what?
- 14) In what ways, if any, are new students' transcripts from Mexico used?
- 15) Please describe the ELD program.
- 16) How do you measure whether the ELD program is effective? Do you think the ELD program is a success?
- 17) Please describe how the ELD program is supported by the school/district and how it can be better supported (i.e., materials, personnel resources).

- 18) What percentage of students passes the CELDT in 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Is the percentage of students passing higher or lower in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grade?
- 19) Do you collaborate with any other staff members regarding the education of newcomer students?
- 20) The UC system requires no more than one year of ESL-type courses be used to meet the English requirement within A-G. If a student is placed into ELD 1/2 when they begin high school, can they expect to be accepted into the UC/CSU system?  
Yes                      No
- 21) Approximately how many students are assigned to you based on your portion of the alphabet? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### **Focus Student Interview October 2014 & Adapted for June 2015**

#### **FAMILY BACKGROUND & EDUCATION**

1) What level of education (or grade) has your FATHER completed?

Elementary: \_\_\_\_ grade  
Some college

Middle School: \_\_\_\_ grade  
College Graduate

High School: \_\_\_\_ grade  
Advanced Degree

1.A.) In which country?

Mexico

U.S.

1.B.) Does he speak English?

Yes

No

2) What level of education (or grade) has your MOTHER completed?

Elementary: \_\_\_\_ grade  
Some college

Middle School: \_\_\_\_ grade  
College Graduate

High School: \_\_\_\_ grade  
Advanced Degree

2.A.) In which country?

Mexico

U.S.

2.B.) Does she speak English?

Yes

No

3) Did either of your parents read to you when you were growing up?

Yes

No

4) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

5) How many siblings do you have?

→ \_\_\_\_ Brothers; Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_ Sisters; Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

→ Only child

5.A.) What level of education (or year in post secondary education) has each of your older siblings completed?

→ \_\_\_\_ Brothers; Level of education: \_\_\_\_\_;

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_ Sisters; Level of education: \_\_\_\_\_;

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

5.B.) Of your older siblings, who is in school now?

→ \_\_\_\_ Brothers; School: \_\_\_\_\_;

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters; School: \_\_\_\_\_;  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

5.C.) If not in school, are they working? Where?

→ \_\_\_\_\_ Brothers; Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

→ \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters; Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

6) How many cousins do you have that go to school in the U.S.?

→ \_\_\_\_\_; Ages: \_\_\_\_\_

6.A.) Of your cousins who have gone (or go) to school in the U.S., what level of education (or year in post secondary education) has each of them completed?

Cousin #1:

Cousin #2:

Cousin #3:

Cousin #4:

Cousin #5:

Cousin #6:

6.B.) Of these cousins, who is in school now?

Cousin #1

Cousin #4

Cousin #2

Cousin #5

Cousin #3

Cousin #6

7) What is your parents' annual income?

<\$10,000

\$45,000-\$49,999

\$10,000-\$14,999

\$50,000-\$54,999

\$15,000-\$19,999

\$55,000-\$59,999

\$20,000-\$24,999

\$60,000-\$64,999

\$25,000-\$29,999

\$65,000-\$69,999

\$30,000-\$34,999

\$70,000-\$74,999

\$35,000-\$39,999

\$75,000+

\$40,000-\$44,999

## **AVID**

8) Have you ever been in AVID?

Yes

No

8.A.) If so, when did you first start? Did someone recommend you enroll in AVID?

8.B.) When/How did your enrollment in AVID happen?

## **POST SECONDARY PLANS**

9) Which colleges will you apply to during your senior year?

9) Do you know what you want to study after high school?

Yes

No

Field: \_\_\_\_\_

10) Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? Yes No

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

### **FRIENDS**

11) How many friends do you have at this school? \_\_\_\_\_

11.A.) How did you meet each one of them?

11.B.) How long have you been friends for?

12) How many friends do you have at other schools in San Diego? \_\_\_\_\_

12.A.) How did you meet each one of them?

12.B.) How long have you been friends for?

13) How many friends do you have in Tijuana high schools?

13.A.) How did you meet each one of them?

13.B.) How long have you been friends for?

14) Do you talk to any of your friends about homework? Yes No

14.A.) If so, which friends?

15) Do you talk to any of your friends about which classes to take? Yes No

15.A.) If so, which friends?

16) Which classes have you chosen because your friend(s) was going to be in it?

17) Why that class?

18) Do you talk to any of your friends about college? Yes No

18.A.) If so, which friends?

### **RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS**

19) Do any adults (teachers, coaches, counselor, etc.) know that you wake up early because you live in Tijuana? Yes No

20.A.) If so, which ones know?

21.B.) If not, is there a reason you haven't told them?

22) Do you look up to any adults on campus? Yes No

23) Do you look up to any adults outside of school? Yes No

## EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

24) Do you participate in any sports at school? Yes No  
Which sports? \_\_\_\_\_

25.A.) If yes, how did you decide to participate in that sport?

25.B.) If yes, did you join that sport because another friend encouraged you to?

Yes No

25.C.) If not in school sports, why not?

25.D.) Do you participate in any sports outside of school? Yes No

25.E.) If yes, how did you decide to participate in that sport?

26) Do you participate in any organizations/clubs at school? Yes No  
Which ones?

27.A.) If yes, how did you decide to participate in that organization/club?

27.B.) If yes, did you join that organization/club because a friend encouraged you to?

Yes No

27.C.) If no organizations/clubs, why not?

27.D.) Do you participate in any organizations/clubs outside of school? Yes No

27.E.) If yes, how did you decide to participate in that organization/club?

28) On average, how many hours of sleep do you get each night?

3 4 5 6 7 8 9

## APPENDIX D

### FOCAL PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **3 Guiding Questions:**

*What are parents' beliefs and values about their children's education?*

*What are their perceptions of schools in the United States?*

*What are the implications of their perceptions and experiences for advancing newcomer students' education?*

- 1) Tell me about your son/daughter as if I had never met him/her.
- 2) What grade level did you complete? In which country?
- 3) Why did you decide to enroll your child in school in the U.S.?
- 4) Why did you choose San Ysidro High School?
- 5) What are your expectations for your son/daughter during high school?
- 6) What are your expectations for your son/daughter for the future?
- 7) What do you know about the procedure to get from where you and your son/daughter are now to what you want for the future (#9's answer)?
- 8) How do you define success?
- 9) What do your children learn from you based on your values and actions?
- 10) Do you have a job? If so, what do you do?
- 11) What is your family's average annual income?

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <\$10,000         | \$45,000-\$49,999 |
| \$10,000-\$14,999 | \$50,000-\$54,999 |
| \$15,000-\$19,999 | \$55,000-\$59,999 |
| \$20,000-\$24,999 | \$60,000-\$64,999 |
| \$25,000-\$29,999 | \$65,000-\$69,999 |
| \$30,000-\$34,999 | \$70,000-\$74,999 |
| \$35,000-\$39,999 | \$75,000+         |
| \$40,000-\$44,999 |                   |
- 12) Has SYHS offered resources for parents to learn more about opportunities after high school?

|     |    |              |
|-----|----|--------------|
| Yes | No | I don't know |
|-----|----|--------------|

13) Have you attended any meetings or workshops for parents related to your goals for your child? (*i.e., info sessions about post-secondary options, college application workshop, FAFSA info, etc.*)

Yes                      No

14) If yes, what did you learn? If not, why did you not attend?

15) In what ways do you support your child as a high school student?

16) Do you know what your child wants to do when s/he grows up?

17) Do you know what a student has to do in order to be accepted into a university? (*i.e., tests, A-G requirements*)

Yes                      No

18) Do you know about FAFSA? Financial aid for college?

Yes                      No

19) Have you ever met with your son/daughter's counselor?

Yes                      No

19.A.) If yes, what did you think of them? How did they treat you? Do they speak Spanish?

20) Do you know any adults who work at SYHS?                      Yes                      No

21) What has been your impression of your child's high school?

22) How is middle school in the U.S. different from school in Mexico?

23) How is high school in the U.S. different from school in Mexico?

24) Do you know (or have an idea) of what it costs to go to a university in the U.S.?

Yes                      No

25) Do you know if low-income students get assistance to pay for a college education?

Yes                      No

26) What is your monthly rent? \_\_\_\_\_

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS**

27) How many **close friends** do you have that live in **Tijuana**? \_\_\_\_\_

27.A.) How did you meet them?

28) How many **close friends** do you have that live in **San Diego**? \_\_\_\_\_  
28.A.) How did you meet them? Are they all in San Ysidro?

29) How many **relatives** do you have that live in **San Diego**? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are they all in **San Ysidro**?                      Yes                      No

30) Would your son/daughter have been able to attend SYHS without those relatives or friends living here?

31) Do you and your **friends** talk about anything related to education in the United States? If so, with who? What about?

32) Do you talk to your **relatives** about anything related to education in the United States? If so, with who? What about?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Administrator Interview March 2015**

Guerrero High School has received numerous achievement awards in the short time (13 years) it has been open. Can you tell me about the awards the school has received since its inception?

You have been the principal here since this school opened its doors. What was your strategy in recruiting teachers? Staff?

What percentage of your faculty/staff speaks conversational Spanish?

What are your strengths as a principal?

In what ways do you seek to improve as a principal?

Did you play a role in getting an MTS bus stop placed at the high school's freeway exit?

What can be done at this school to better help students reach their college potential?

What is the current policy aimed at helping students who were previously educated in another country?

What components of the district's newcomer policy are working well?

What are some of the challenges that Guerrero High School is facing with regard to academic performance?

What are some key school-level issues that you have focused on improving?

What are some of the challenges that Guerrero High School is facing with newcomer policy? Its implementation? Its results?

What changes would you like to see made with regard to the education of students who were previously educated in Tijuana?

Does the student handbook include information on how to get into honors/accelerated courses?

How do you suggest we better help Tijuana-educated students achieve the best education possible?

If you were to receive a modest grant, what policies would you make, if any, in terms of the services provided to students who have no prior educational background in the U.S.?

## APPENDIX F

### **Counselor Interview October 2014**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What can be done at this school to better help students reach their college potential?
- 2) Please describe the school registration process for new students and subsequent class placement.
- 3) What is the nature of contact between the school and the parent with regard to class placement for new students?
- 4) For students previously educated in Tijuana, what **Spanish** class would they typically enter here at Guerrero High School?
- 5) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **English** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 6) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **Math** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 7) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **History/World Culture** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 8) For students previously educated in Tijuana, how is their **Natural Science** class placement determined here at Guerrero High School?
- 9) How is it determined whether a student will enter **AVID** or not?
- 10) How is it determined whether a student will enter **Medical Pathways** or not?
- 11) How is it determined whether a student will enter **AP Spanish** or not?
- 12) How is it determined whether a student will enter **Spanish for Spanish Speakers** (versus regular Spanish)?
- 13) Can any improvements be made to the course placement process? If so, what?
- 14) In what ways, if any, are new students' transcripts from Mexico used?
- 15) Please describe the ELD program.

16) How do you measure whether the ELD program is effective? Do you think the ELD program is a success?

17) Please describe how the ELD program is supported by the school/district and how it can be better supported (i.e., materials, personnel resources).

18) What percentage of students passes the CELDT in 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Is the percentage of students passing higher or lower in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grade?

19) Do you collaborate with any other staff members regarding the education of newcomer students?

20) The UC system requires no more than one year of ESL-type courses be used to meet the English requirement within A-G. If a student is placed into ELD 1/2 when they begin high school, can they expect to be accepted into the UC/CSU system?      Yes

No

21) Approximately how many students are assigned to you based on your portion of the alphabet? \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX G**

### **AVID Teacher Interview March 2015**

- 1) How is it determined whether a student will enter AVID or not?
- 2) Can any improvements be made to the AVID admit process? If so, what?
- 3) Please describe the AVID program.
- 4) How do you measure whether the AVID program is effective? Do you think the AVID program is a success?
- 5) What can be done at this school to better help students reach their college potential?
- 6) Please describe how the AVID program is supported by the school/district and how it can be better supported (i.e., materials, personnel resources).
- 7) How do you suggest we better help Tijuana-educated students achieve the best education possible?
- 8) If the school had extra funds, what policies would you make, if any, in terms of the services provided to students who have no prior educational background in the U.S.?
- 9) What makes this school's AVID program nationally recognized?
- 10) How common is it for students from Tijuana to enter the AVID program?

## APPENDIX H

### **Ricardo's Reflection of Universities Visited Through The AVID Program**

#### UC Riverside

- UC Riverside is amazing. The plaza in the middle of the campus makes the university feels like being in the city. The campus environment feels great. Most of the people use bikes as a way of transportation which brings the idea of a wealthy campus.

#### UCLA

- Last year I had the opportunity to go on a field trip to UCLA and it immediately caught my eye/interest. The environment felt just like home: everyone was collaborating, everyone seemed to be satisfied, and there was just too much going on. The campus left me amazed. Along with feeling like home, UCLA seems to have something for everyone, meaning that in UCLA you will find something to be happy about. For example, there's a lot of clubs, you will definitely find one that fits with your personality

#### UCSD

- UCSD is an amazing university. Everyone knows what to do which makes the environment feels great.

#### USD

- USD is an awesome university, however it didn't caught my attention at all. Throughout the campus tour all i was able to smell was incense. It felt more like a church rather than home.

#### Cal poly san luis obispo

- we didn't got a campus tour, but the university looks amazing from the outsider. Looks like a community.

#### Csu Monterey

- CSU Monterey is a small campus, but it isn't a problem in terms of social life. Which seems nice. However its climate doesn't adapt with me, its too cold.

#### Uc santa cruz

- UC Santa Cruz is one of the most beautiful universities i ever seen. Being in the middle of the forest is simply special. The environment feels amazing.

#### San francisco state

- San Francisco State is and amazing campus too. We didn't got to observe the whole campus and couldn't observe how the environment felt when surrounded by the students because campus was closed. (Holiday)

#### Uc Berkeley

- one of my favorite universities. The campus feels exactly like being in home, it is so amazing and it's huge. The library and the tower gives the university a whole different look. I really enjoyed the the campus tour.

San jose state

- one of the most beautiful campus i ever seen.

SDSU

- SDSU is places at my last option because of the Compact for Success. If i had to, i would definitely attend because of the quality of education i would be receiving. However, SDSU didn't had what i was looking for in a university: an environment that fits with my personality and students enjoying the campus.

CSU fullerton

- Fullerton is an amazing university. The environment feels great and the quality of education is outstanding. CSU Fullerton is my second option.

CSU dominguez hill

- such an amazing university, the look of the university looks like a modern place. The glass windows at every building give an special touch. As far as the environment, it didn't catch my attention.

USC

- such a good looking university. The book store is huge and amazing. However, i didn't liked how the environment felt.