SUCCESSFUL HISPANIC MALE FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS AT

A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SOUTH TEXAS: EXPERIENCES THAT

FACILITATE FALL FIRST-TERM STUDENT PERSISTENCE

THROUGH OFFICIAL REPORTING DATE

A Dissertation

by

WILLIAM SERRATA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2009

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

SUCCESSFUL HISPANIC MALE FIRST-TIME-IN-COLLEGE STUDENTS AT

A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SOUTH TEXAS: EXPERIENCES THAT

FACILITATE FALL FIRST-TERM STUDENT PERSISTENCE

THROUGH OFFICIAL REPORTING DATE

A Dissertation

by

WILLIAM SERRATA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Larry M. Dooley
Committee Members,	Fredrick Nafukho
	Homer Tolson
	James Lindner
Head of Department,	Fredrick Nafukho

December 2009

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

ABSTRACT

Successful Hispanic Male First-Time-in-College Students at a Community College in
South Texas: Experiences That Facilitate Fall First-Term Student Persistence
Through Official Reporting Date. (December 2009)

William Serrata, B.A., Texas A&M University;

M.A., The University of Texas at Brownsville

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Larry M. Dooley

The Hispanic population continues to rapidly increase within the state of Texas as well as the nation. However, the Hispanic population educational attainment level lags behind that of the general population. Hispanic males are the lowest educated segment of society averaging less than a high school diploma. The negative long-term economic impact of such low educational attainment levels coupled with the rapid increase of the Hispanic population has been documented by Texas state demographers as well as the U.S. Census Bureau.

The researcher conducted a qualitative study to inform a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitated the persistence of 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students through the official reporting date of their fall first term at a community college in South Texas. An asset model and related conceptual framework, which recognized students as experts, were utilized. Focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and existing data were analyzed utilizing qualitative research methods.

The researcher identified six overarching themes that significantly influenced the students' ability to persist. In addition, analysis of the data produced five barrier themes that these students overcame via the utilization of corresponding knowledge and actions themes. Finally, students provided recommended college changes for mitigating the barriers faced by future Hispanic male students.

The researcher provided conclusions regarding Hispanic male students, recommendations for students, recommendations for colleges and universities serving Hispanic male students, recommendations for the focal community college, and implications for the theoretical model utilized. The researcher recommended expanding this research to other institutions of higher education and notes the national implications for increasing the educational attainment level of Hispanic male students.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in this study. The courage each of you displays by entering the doors of higher education, seeking to be the first in your families to receive college degrees, overcoming the barriers that you have faced all in the hopes of having a better quality of life has inspired me beyond imagination.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my son Nathan. The meaning of your name is 'a gift from God,' and that is how your mother and I feel about you. You are the joy of our lives, and I want you to know that I am more proud of being your dad than anything else I have accomplished, or by the grace of God, will accomplish in the future. You, William Nathan Serrata, will in the not too distant future, be a Hispanic male college student. I hope that this dissertation will be of use to you, other Hispanic male students, and the colleges and universities that will be privileged to serve you and them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

beginning and your commitment to us was always steadfast and true. Thank you so much Dr. Dooley for this journey would never have been completed without you.

Dr. Susan A. Lynham guided me through so much of this process, and I will always be grateful to Dr. Lynham for her knowledge and insight during this long process. I have found that Human Resource Development does indeed have a 'soul' as you so perceptively asked me during my entrance interview. Thank you for your efforts and ultimately thank you for understanding.

Dr. Homer Tolson is an outstanding statistics professor who made stats understandable and yes, sometimes fun. Thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee and for always providing outstanding feedback and guidance.

Dr. Jimmy Lindner has been a great member of my committee. Thank you for serving and for challenging me to work harder and think outside the box, even on my topic.

Dr. Fred Nafukho, you graciously stepped onto my committee as I neared the end of this journey, and I will forever be grateful to you for your willingness to serve.

Dr. Fred Nafukho, department chair, thank you for guiding me through the process and for always being student oriented.

Luzelma Canales has been my partner in crime during the entire journey. We took every single class together, took our oral examinations on the same day, and even defended our proposals on the same day. We have shared far more than a committee, we have shared the ups and downs that come with such a monumental effort as well as the

college-career balancing act that proved challenging. Thank you for being a great friend and for always checking up on me.

Dr. Brenda Cole has been a mentor, a colleague, and most of all, a friend during this process. Your encouragement and willingness to help in any manner – even as the ultimate cheerleader and motivator will never be forgotten, nor will your continuous prayers.

Dr. Rito Silva and the rest of the Valley cohort made the trips to College Station not only bearable but enjoyable. We all have such incredible passion for our communities and for enhancing the quality of life for those who come after us, and we each realized that education is the key. It will be wonderful keeping up with each of you and I know that our paths will continue to cross in the future.

Dr. Shirley A. Reed, President of South Texas College, has not only served as my mentor but has also shaped so much of my career. Thank you for taking a chance on me and for allowing me to lead. Much like our students – you have proven that high expectations for your staff lead to results. You will never fully understand how much of an impact you have had and continue to have on me. Know that it is truly appreciated.

Marilyn Oliva graciously agreed to serve as my editor. Thank you Marilyn for all the guidance and corrections that you made look effortless, always in a timely manner. I could not have done this without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American economy of tomorrow can be expected to be increasingly dependent upon the level of higher education held by its citizens. It is well documented that one's level of income is in direct correlation to the level of education which one holds (Kim, 2002; Murdock et al., 2003). A college degree has become a prerequisite for individual and societal economic prosperity. The benefits of higher education to both social and economic growth have been well explored and documented (Education Commission of the States, 2003). A college graduate will on average earn nearly $1 million more in total earnings over a career than those who do not earn a degree (Education Commission of the States, 2003). Individuals with a baccalaureate degree earn an average of $51,206 a year, compared with $27,915 by those holding only a high school diploma. Individuals with a graduate degree earn approximately $74,602 per year, while those without a high school diploma earn on average $18,734 (U.S. Census, 2005). In addition, it is estimated that 70% of future American jobs will require some type of higher education or training beyond high school (Education Commission of the States, 2003). The case for individuals to take advantage of and utilize higher education in the United States in order to claim a place in at least the American middle class is reinforced by the Education Commission of the States (2003) publication, which stated, "Twenty years ago, a high school diploma was all that was needed to secure a spot in the middle class; today, a postsecondary education is mandatory" (p. 1).

_____

The style of this study follows that of *Advances in Developing Human Resources*.

Much in the spirit of Smith's (1776) The Invisible Hand Theory as noted in *Wealth of Nations*, which essentially stated that a free-market, capitalistic society is best served when an individual partakes in what is best for them, the individual pursuit of higher education also has implications for national economic well-being. By pursuing the self-interest of higher education, the individual contributes to the national good via the increase of intellectual capacity and thus higher wages, which on average are afforded to the individual holder of a college degree. Leon and Nevarez (2007) emphasized this point: "We live in a knowledge economy fueled by sophisticated skills, the kind our universities provide. To sustain our economic base, we will [need to] turn to the growing minority population" (p. 12). The authors thus inferred the call for expansion of minority pursuit of and success in higher education and clearly implied that the absence of such participation and success could be expected to adversely affect the economic well-being of the nation and, as a result, the United States' place in the global economy, which is increasingly contingent upon the intellectual capacity of its minority populations. Thus, in order to maintain and to regain a global economic edge, it will be important to continue to pursue this emphasis as a national priority. Furthermore, since over 70% of all minority students currently pursue higher education within the community college, it is in the best interests of the nation to ensure the success of these students (Haycock, 2006).

While researchers of national data indicate that the proportion of the United States' citizens participating in higher education is relatively stable, the participation rate in higher education is not the case for all segments of the country's population. The U.S.

Census Bureau (2005) indicated that at the conclusion of 2004, a mere 23.8% of the nation's population held a baccalaureate degree. Furthermore, disaggregating this data by ethnicity revealed an alarming pattern for the country's population. While 26.8% of the non-Hispanic white population of America held a baccalaureate degree at the time of the census, only 14.4% of the African American population and 9.6% of the Hispanic population held a baccalaureate degree.

The population of the United States is changing rapidly with regard to race and ethnicity (McCabe, 2000). A majority of the change is attributable to the burgeoning Hispanic population. The U.S. Census Bureau (2008c) brought to light the growing Hispanic population in a recent press release that stated,

> The nation's Hispanic population increased 1.4 million to reach 45.5 million on July 1, 2007, or 15.1 percent of the estimated total U.S. population of 301.6 million. Hispanics remained the largest minority group….With a 3.3 percent increase between July 1, 2006, to July 1, 2007, Hispanics were the fastest growing group. (p. 1)

As the nation's largest and fastest growing minority group, the participation and attainment rates of Hispanics in higher education are cause for national concern. Despite the growth and size of this minority group, they continue to have the lowest educational attainment of all racial/ethnic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Should this educational disparity continue, it is estimated that it will have a significant economic impact. For example, in the state of Texas, this impact is projected to reach the $60 billion range by 2040 (Murdock, 2006). In states (like Texas) where the Hispanic population is on the brink of becoming the majority, the situation is even more critical, as Hispanics will be expected to fill roles within the economy currently held by non-

minority members, a larger percentage than Hispanics of whom hold higher education degrees. Furthermore, due to retirement of the aging non-minority population, it will be increasingly up to the growing Hispanic population to fill the anticipated labor void. However, should the participation and success trends of Hispanics in higher education continue at the current pace, personal income can be expected to fall significantly state-wide.

National Human Resource Development literature has captured a parallel theme of capacity building for developing nations, much in the spirit of increasing the capacity of the Hispanic population, in the United States, in the state of Texas; and most importantly in the region of South Texas where the Hispanic population constitutes over 90% of the total population (Murdock, 2006). The National Human Resource Development parallel theme is brought to light in the following interview quote taken from Byrd and Demps (2006):

> Even in developed countries, there are pockets, regions that reflect a legacy of social and economic oppression, and of unequal education. In the U.S., the Hispanic population in Texas is just such an example, with a notable gap in education levels, achievement and success. Yet, at the same time, in border regions like the Rio Grande Valley (in southern Texas and bordering on Mexico), border industries provide a large source of employment for a largely unskilled Hispanic labour force – a labour force that is attractive to these industries precisely due to their lack of education and job skills (making for an attractive source of cheap low-skilled labour). (pp. 557-558)

The Rio Grande Valley region mentioned in the quote above is home to South Texas College. South Texas College is the focal institution of higher education for this study. Such regions must address the educational attainment of the Hispanic population in

order to continue the development and economic prosperity of not only the region but the state of Texas and nation as a whole.

Minority male populations exasperate the educational participation and achievement issue as fewer and fewer of these groups are participating and persisting in higher education. This trend is clearly reflected in the Pew Hispanic Center Report (Fry, 2002) whose author stated that, "Latinos are now the most poorly educated major population group in the United States. White males average 13.3 years of schooling and black males average 12.2. Latino males lag behind with 10.6 years of schooling" (p. 1). This statistic is of particular concern for Hispanics as there are 107 Hispanic males for every 100 Hispanic females, which is in contrast to the total population equivalent of 97 males for every 100 females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

A large proportion of researchers' studies on Hispanics and higher education have tended to focus on access and participation (Astin, 1971; Gandara, 1986; Olivas, 1982, Hurtado, 1994). Another portion has focused on student retention (minority and non-minority), or more accurately student non-retention, within higher education (Astin, 1982; Nettles, 1991; Tinto, 1993). The backbone of these extant literatures is based on theories by Spady (1970), Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Bean (1980, 1982, 1983) on the departure of such students from higher education. Each of these researchers view students of higher education based upon their characteristics and attitudes in relation to institutional variables such as residence halls, student-faculty interaction, and student social integration within the respective institution. These authors also focus entirely on students who prematurely leave their respective institutions of higher education. They

are in essence studies on unsuccessful such students or higher education student failure research. Their focus is, therefore, one of a deficit model of student-institutional experience, i.e., what went wrong.

Rates of student departure from higher education institutions in the United States continue to be unacceptable. In 1993, 2.4 million students entered such institutions, an estimated 1.1 million of whom left prior to earning a two- or four-year degree (Tinto, 1993). What the research fails to adequately address, however, is that 1.3 million, or 55%, of these same students did in fact earn either a two- or four-year degree. This tendency by researchers to not focus on student success should be explored as these data demand an answer to a number of important questions, including: How did these students manage to successfully persist in college? What skills, knowledge, and experiences enabled them to do so? These data also suggest that much can be learned from this 'successful' national population of students in higher education. Furthermore, since Hispanic males represent the lowest educational attainment subgroup within this population, they particularly merit further study.

Hispanic male student persistence and graduation rates are lower than comparable racial/ethnic groups. This phenomenon is summarized by Haycock (2006): "The gaps [particularly in higher education achievement when considered] by race are also stark, with African Americans between [the ages of] 25 and 29 attaining bachelor's degrees at nearly one half – and Latinos at one-third the rate of Whites" (p. 2). Higher education institutions would be well-served to learn from Hispanic male students who successfully participate and persist at their respective campuses. Such knowledge could

inform strategies and initiatives aimed at increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates for this segment of their student population at these said institutions. The economic impact of doing so and equating the success rates of Hispanic students to the success rates of White students in higher education, in particular for the state of Texas, would be, to say the least, notable (Murdock, 2006).

Researchers pointed to a clear need to study the phenomenon of successful participation and persistence of Hispanic male students at higher education institutions, more specifically, at predominantly two-year, Hispanic majority institutions. The need was fueled by the economic impact that would be realized by increasing the educational success and attainment level for Hispanic males.

The Problem and Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study was of a conceptual nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It pointed to a need to inform a more precise articulation and development of a local model of student success in a very particular setting of higher education – one aimed essentially at bridging the increasingly alarming (due to its potential social and economic impact) disparity in educational attainment among the different race/ethnic population groups in the United States.

A gap in the research addressing what minority students do to be successful at minority-majority institutions of higher education, and more specifically, what Hispanic male students enrolled at predominantly two-year, Hispanic majority institutions do to attain academic success at such institutions, pointed to a need for address and informs

the formulation of the problem statement that was the focus of this study. A more specific description of this problem follows.

The Problem

The role of higher education, and more specifically that of community colleges as agents of human resource development, has been documented within the literature (Lee & Young, 2003; McLean & McLean, 2001). The percentage of Hispanic students currently enrolled in community colleges or two-year colleges in South Texas constitutes over 64% of the entire Hispanic higher education student population in this area of the state (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2009). As noted by state demographer Murdock (2006), the economic future of Texas will become increasingly reliant upon the successful participation of Hispanic students enrolled in higher education.

South Texas College currently the only legislatively mandated community college in the state of Texas, has experienced explosive growth in its student population during its 15 years of existence – from 1,000 to over 22,400 students. Prior to 1993, the area that comprises Hidalgo and Starr Counties was the largest geographic area and encompassed the largest population, over 600,000 people, segment in the state of Texas without access to a community college. As a result, State Senator Eddie Lucio sponsored Senate Bill 251 that stated, "The McAllen extension center of Texas State Technical College System is converted to a joint-county junior college located in Hidalgo and Starr counties to be known as South Texas Community College" (p. 1). Senate Bill 251 was passed and signed into law by former Governor Ann Richards on September 1, 1993.

South Texas Community College, now South Texas College, remains as the only

legislatively mandated community college in the state of Texas.

South Texas College currently ranks fifth nationally in total Hispanic enrollment

(U.S. Department of Education, 2006) and third nationally in the number of associate

degrees awarded to Hispanic students (*Community College Week*, 2009). In light of these

student demographics and its continued growth as an institution, STC serves as an ideal

site for research on, and developing deeper understanding of, student academic success

in higher education institutions among, in general, Hispanic students, and more

specifically, Hispanic male students.

The Problem Statement

On the one hand, the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) data indicate a growing

Hispanic population. While the population percentage of Hispanics is high nationally –

currently accounting for the largest ethnic minority group in the nation at just over 14%

of its total population—it is still higher, at over 35.5%, of the total population of the state

of Texas (Murdock, 2006). The huge gain in the Hispanic population, along with its

anticipated continued growth, means that Hispanics can be expected to be a critical

factor in and have an increasingly larger impact on the economic and social well-being

of the state and ultimately the nation.

Furthermore, an important influencing factor on sustainable economic and social

development is the higher education levels of the economically active population of the

nation and region concerned. This inter-relationship subsequently means that researchers

need to attend to student academic success in institutions of higher education and, even

more particularly, to success rates among minority and Hispanic students in such institutions.

On the other hand, we know the rate of first-time college goers among Hispanics is not only on the rise, but increasingly such students are choosing community colleges as their first entry into higher education, South Texas College being an instance of such an institution with over 95% of its student enrollment being comprised of Hispanic students. What's more, little is known about academically successful Hispanic students, or more specifically Hispanic male students in higher education and what is known (a) has been studied primarily from a deficit perspective, offering little insight on the experiences of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and (b) is based on minority students attending four-year, residential, white majority institutions of higher education. Similar studies at community colleges are even more scarce and for first-time Hispanic male students at minority-majority such institutions of higher education are almost non-existent.

Yet, it is within this sector (male) of the Hispanic population that the fastest growth rate in the nation is taking place. South Texas College represents an ideal site and context from which to begin to study and address this gap in this important area of knowledge and practice because (a) it is a minority-majority institution of higher education and the only legislatively mandated institution of higher education in the state of Texas with 95% of its students being Hispanic and 40% of those students being male; (b) it is located in a state typified by a very fast-growing Hispanic population, meaning that this population group can be expected to have an increasing impact on the well-

being of the state, and exponentially so, in the future; and (c) it provides an opportunity to study the topic of student participation and persistence through such institutions of higher education from the 'success' perspective as well as with a specific focus on experiences of success among Hispanic male students, who typically represent the majority of the minority population under study.

Therefore, the problem statement of this study studying successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College is important to gain a more informed understanding of these students' academic success experiences. The knowledge and deeper understanding of this population will be utilized to inform strategies targeted at improving the retention and academic success rates of these students at this institution, and possibly beyond.

Purpose of the Study

Given the preceding descriptions, this study had a number of purposes. The first was to address the problem stated above through the conduct of research that describes and thereby informs a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students. This was achieved through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through Official Reporting Date at the selected community college (South Texas College). A second was to use this knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College Students at this institution. Thirdly, doing so may potentially enable

greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature.

The Research Questions

In order to accomplish the stated purpose of the study, the researcher formulated two overarching and three supporting research questions to address in the conduct of the study. The first overarching question is:

1. Based on their experiences as a successful first-time-in-college student at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South Texas College), what do such male students identify and describe as having significantly influenced their ability to persist through fall first term official reporting date, and why?

The three supporting research questions are:

1.1. What specific barriers since registration must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College overcome to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and how do they do so?

1.2. What specific knowledge must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College acquire to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and how do they do so?

1.3. What specific action(s) must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College take in order to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and why?

The second overarching research question is:

2. Given their experiences as successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South Texas College), what suggestions would they make to the administration and other leadership of this institution of higher education in order to improve and, therefore, positively impact the persistence rate, through the official reporting date, among this student population group, and why?

Having identified the two overarching and three supporting research questions, it is useful to provide an operational definition of key terms and concepts commonly related or pertaining to the study. These definitions follow.

Operational Definitions

For purposes of clarification of terms frequently used in this study, the following definitions/descriptions are offered:

Barriers – Challenges or obstacles students experience when enrolling in an institution of higher education.

Census Date – The official reporting date for public institutions of higher education in Texas utilized for state formula funding. Students are officially enrolled for the semester if they remain enrolled after census date, the twelfth class day for a fall or spring term.

Community College – Public, open-admission institution of higher education serving the local needs of the community in which it is situated.

First-Time-in-College (FTIC) – A student attending the focal institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. Also includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school) (The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.).

Higher Education (HE) – Postsecondary education at colleges, universities, junior or community colleges, professional schools, technical institutes, and teacher-training schools.

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) – The Higher Education Act, 20 USCA Section 1101a, which defines a Hispanic-serving institution as "an institution of higher education that (a) is an eligible institution; (b) at the time of application, has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students; and (c) provides assurances that not less than 50 percent of the institution's Hispanic students are low-income individuals (The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data system, n.d., Note: low income is defined as 150% of the poverty level as determined by the Bureau of the Census (The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.).

Hispanic Students – Male and female students who self-identify their respective ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, as indicated on enrollment forms. The category of Hispanic students at South Texas College is encompassed primarily by students of Mexican-American descent.

Human Resource Development (HRD) – "Any process or activity that, either initially or

over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge,

expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain,

or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or ultimately, the whole

of humanity" (McLean & McLean as cited in Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 4).

Minority Students – Students who self-identify their respective race/ethnicity as non-

white.

Official Reporting Date – The date for public institutions of higher education in Texas

utilized for state formula funding. Students are officially enrolled for the

semester if they are enrolled after the official reporting date, the twelfth class day

for a fall or spring term.

Student Attrition – Students who fail to re-enroll into the institution and leave the

institution prior to graduation, or successfully transferring to a university.

Student Persistence – Students who have successfully re-enrolled from one college year

to the next. For the purpose of this study, persistence is defined as students at the

selected community college who have successfully remained enrolled beyond

census date of their first term of attendance.

Student Retention – Students who remain enrolled in their initial term and subsequently

reenroll in the next long semester, fall or spring, after initially enrolling at the

focal community college.

South Texas College – "Founded in 1993, South Texas College is accredited by the

Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and schools to

award Baccalaureate and Associate degrees. More than 22,000 students attend STC and a faculty and staff of more than 1,800 serve STC's five campuses. The college offers more than 100 degree and certificate program options." (South Texas College, 2009, para. 1-2).

Successful Students – Students who are enrolled on and after the official reporting date, the twelfth class date at the community college of focus.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) – Created by the Texas Legislature in 1965 to "provide leadership and coordination for the Texas higher education system to achieve excellence for the college education of Texas students" (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d., para. 1).

Further to key terms commonly used in the study, a number of assumptions pertain to this study. They are identified in the following section.

Assumptions

The researcher is the primary tool for data collection and analysis in qualitative research that causes a dichotomy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). As the primary tool, the researcher, "can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. Conversely, the investigator…is limited by being human – that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere" (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). The researcher must, therefore, be cognizant of the potential for bias that past experiences may facilitate.

The researcher in this study has been working at the focal community college for 13 years in student services. Currently, the researcher serves as the Vice-President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management for the focal community college.

Within this context, the researcher, while conducting the study, has made a number of assumptions. These include:

- The students who participated in the study understood the questions posed and responded honestly.
- Interpretation of the responses accurately reflected what was intended by the respondents.
- The findings were applicable to the selected institution.

As with any research study, there are notable delimitations and concomitant limitations applicable to the study. An overview of each follows.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to the academic success and persistence experiences through the first fall official reporting date of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at a Hispanic majority institution of higher education located in South Texas. This delimiting of the study informed a number of limitations to which the researcher needed to attend. The researcher's role as the primary research tool in a qualitative inquiry serves as a limitation to the study findings. The selected community college where the research was conducted is one of the few, if not the only, where the Hispanic population comprises over 90% of the entire student body. As noted in *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), although the findings are not to be "generalized" to

other institutions of higher education serving Hispanic students, it is believed that the

findings will be relevant to other Hispanic serving higher education institutions

regionally and nationally.

Significance of the Study and Applicability to HRD

As noted in the preceding sections of this research study, the United States is

shifting to a knowledge-based society where the vast majority of new jobs will require

higher education. Cited authors have noted that the individual pursuit of higher

education will serve both the individual in terms of earning capacity as well as society in

terms of taxable income for social programs. In addition, there is a recognized

significant demographic shift in terms of population and the population's race and

ethnicity with the Hispanic population experiencing the largest growth nationally and

even more significantly in the state of Texas. Finally, there is an alarming disparity with

inverse demographic of educational attainment leading to an alarming disparity of

educational attainment among race and ethnicity.

The literature that informs or addresses this disparity in academic attainment is

among others informed by models and means of successful student development and, in

turn, by literature, an important proportion of which focuses on successful academic

achievement of students in higher education. This particular set of literature on student

academic success in institutions of higher education in the United States is dominated by

deficit modes that tend to study this aspect of educational attainment from the

perspective and experiences of students who prematurely leave their institutions of

higher education. Similarly focused models that study such student academic successful

perspective, i.e., and thus the opposite perspective, are of a local nature and thus by association need to be localized to individual institutions of higher education. Both these models have been studied and applied in four-year, residential, white majority institutions of higher education even though they may have been studying successful student attainment of minority students.

However, the authors of the literature, outlined in previous sections of this study, clearly indicate that the highest leverage for bridging the disparity of educational attainment among the racial/ethnic groups of the United States resides not in the study and understanding of student academic success in white majority institutions of higher education but rather in those of minority and of minority-majority institutions of higher education.

Therefore, to begin such research on educational attainment in one of the highest impacted states in the United States, namely Texas, it is imperative that the application/implementation of these models be studied in minority-majority, more specifically Hispanic majority institutions of higher education and for the student academic success among Hispanic males in such institutions. One way to begin such a study and the development of new knowledge and insight on student academic success in Hispanic majority institutions of higher education is to focus on this phenomenon as it relates to Hispanic males at predominately two-year, Hispanic majority institutions of higher education, and even more so on such students who are first-time in such college students.

South Texas College is a particularly well-suited institution of higher education in which to locate such a study. This is in part due to the college's enrollment comprised of a 95% Hispanic majority student population and a proportional 40% Hispanic male student population.

The purpose of this study was to address the problem stated in this document through the conduct of research that describes and thereby informs a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persist in the fall first term through official reporting date at the selected community college (South Texas College). A second was to use this knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific expertise model of successful college students at this institution. Thirdly, doing so will potentially enable greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature.

A gap in the research addressing what minority students do to be successful at minority-majority institutions of higher education, and more specifically, what Hispanic male students enrolled at predominantly two-year, Hispanic majority institutions do to attain academic success at such institutions, points to a need for address.

Higher education and the role it plays within Human Resource Development (HRD) has been noted within the literature (Kintzer & Bryant, 1998; Lee & Young, 2003; McLean & McLean, 2001). McLean and McLean (as cited in Swanson & Holton, 2001) defined Human Resource Development as, "Any process or activity that, either

initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or ultimately, the whole of humanity" (p. 4). By conducting this study, namely to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persist in the fall first term through official reporting date at the selected community college (STC), McLean and McLean's definition of Human Resource Development was explored and enhanced.

In addition, developing and understanding the role of National Human Resource Development (NHRD) continues to grow as an area of interest and focus among HRD-related researchers and scholars (Lynham & Cunningham, 2004, 2006). However, it has been noted that even within countries considered to be the most developed, such as the United States, there are areas and regions that continue to lag behind such as South Texas (Byrd & Demps, 2006).

The findings of this study are expected to be helpful in informing the development and implementation of strategies utilized to enhance Hispanic male first-time-in-college student, first-term persistence at the selected community college. Through a deeper understanding of these experiences, it is hoped that the study outcomes will inform community college administrators, in particular student services' practitioners, of possible strategies for this group of students and provide the research to inform such strategies, and in so doing contribute, albeit in a small way, to the increased

success of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and thus increase the strength of the economy of Texas as well as the United States as a whole.

Contents of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five major units or chapters. In Chapter I, the researcher describes an overview of the study, the problem and problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, operational definitions, assumptions, delimitations and limitations, the significance of the study and its applicability to HRD, and the contents of the dissertation. In Chapter II, the researcher provides a structural framework for the study that establishes the boundaries and organization of the review of existing literature related to the problem. The reviewed literature is discussed in the chapter and is followed by a summary of findings from this review. The research questions and their theoretical context, the appropriateness of the selected methodology, the population for the study, data collection and analysis, and the procedures utilized in conducting the study are discussed in Chapter III. In Chapter IV, the researcher provides a discussion of the analysis and findings for each research question and an overview of the findings. Finally, Chapter V contains the researcher's summary and discussion of findings; implications and recommendations for educational administrators, for researchers, and for HRD professionals; implications for further theory refinement and development; and finally, some closing remarks.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the current body of knowledge on the participation and success of the Hispanic population, specifically Hispanic males, within higher education both nationally and in particular Texas and their impact on Hispanic educational attainment begins with an understanding of existing theories and research as it pertains to Hispanic access, participation, and success in higher education. In order to provide such a context for the subject area of the study, namely successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who persisted through official reporting date of their first semester, a framework of the literature review which provided the construct for the study at hand was necessary and is represented in Figure 1. Each of the areas for the literature review outlined informs the need for the study.

Hispanic Population Growth

Nationally

Hispanics now account for over 45 million people within the United States, and the pace of Hispanic growth in the United States continues to exceed all other population growth as noted in a recent press release by the U.S. Census Bureau (2008c), "About 1 of every two people added to the nation's population between July 1, 2006 and July 1, 2007 was Hispanic. 3.3% percentage increase in the Hispanic population…making Hispanics the fastest-growing minority group" (p. 1). The growth in the Hispanic population is not expected to slow, rather it is expected to continue to outpace the growth of all other segments of the population. As such, the total Hispanic population is

expected to more than double in the next 40 years: "Meanwhile, the Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple, from 46.7 million to 132.8 million during the 2008-2050 period. Its share of the nation's total population is projected to double, from 15 percent to 30 percent" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008d, p. 1).

I.   Hispanic Population Growth

    a. Nationally

    b. State of Texas

    c. Rio Grande Valley (Hidalgo & Starr Counties)

II.   Hispanic Educational Attainment

    a. Nationally

    b. Texas

    c. South Texas

III.   Males in Higher Education

IV.   Student Retention Literature

    a. Deficit Model

    b. Asset Model

    c. First Year Importance in Higher Education

    d. First Term Importance in Higher Education
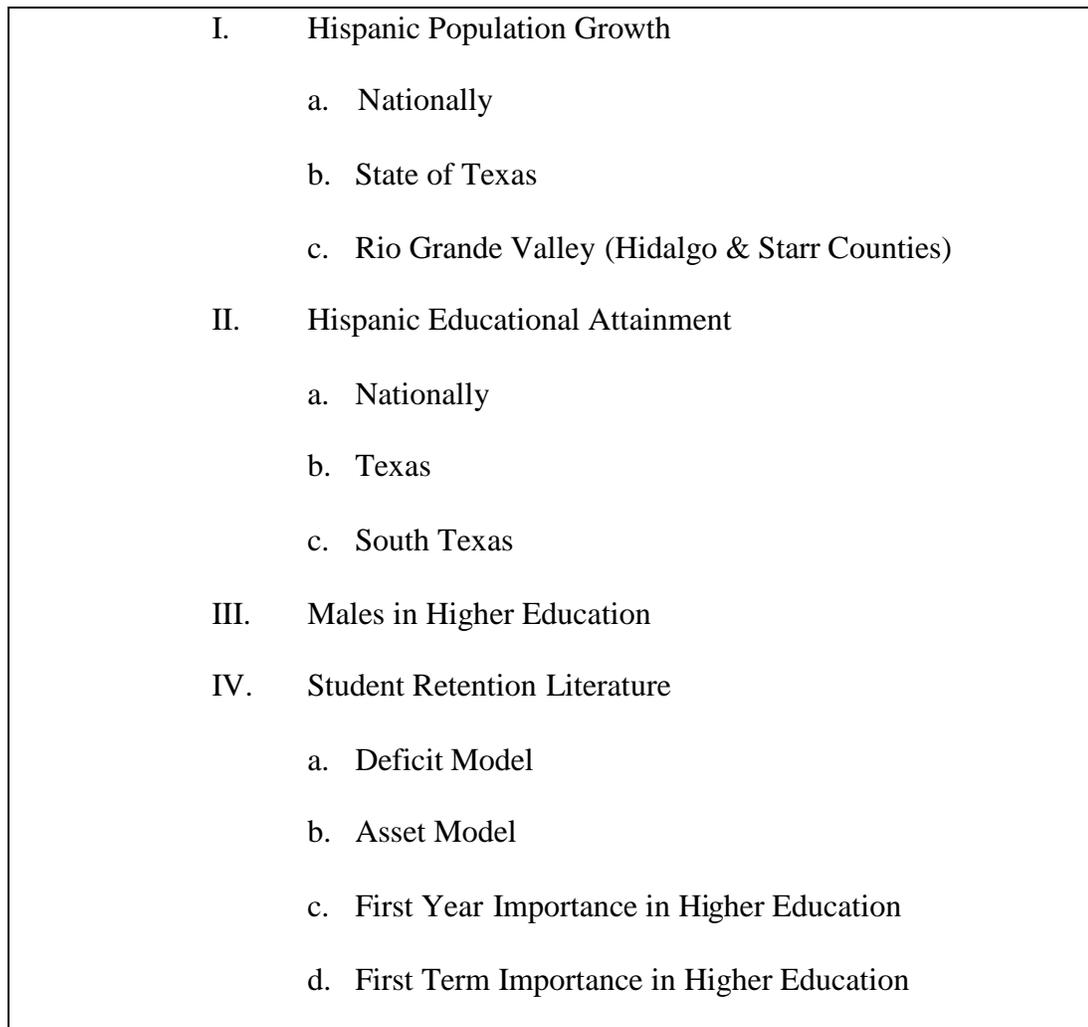
Figure 1. Framework of the literature review.

Of particular note within the growth of Hispanics in the United States is the unique fact that the Hispanic male population continues to outpace the Hispanic female population, "107 number of Hispanic males in 2007 per every 100 Hispanic females. This was in sharp contrast to the overall population, which had 97 males per every 100 females" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008e, p. 2).

It appears that the growth in the Hispanic population continues to exceed even the projections of the U.S. Census Bureau, among whose responsibility is to predict population growth and trends. This was recently illustrated when comparing two press releases issued a mere 36 days apart. The first issued in the month of July 2008, quoted that the Hispanic population was estimated to be 45.5 million and that the projected Hispanic population for 2050 would be 102.6 million. However, that population estimation was revised and upgraded the very next month, August, furthering the notion of a Hispanic population boom:

> The nation will be more racially and ethnically diverse, as well as much older, by mid-century, according to projections released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.
>
> Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54 percent minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children.
>
> Meanwhile, the Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple, from 46.7 million to 132.8 million during the 2008-2050 period. Its share of the nation's total population is projected to double, from 15 percent to 30 percent. Thus, nearly one in three U.S. residents would be Hispanic. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008d)

The growth of the Hispanic population has been greatest in what is known as the Southwest segment of the United States, but by no means has it been restricted to just that geographical region of the nation, nor has it been due to purely to immigration from

other countries, primarily Mexico. In addition, the Hispanic population is a very young

population and, therefore, will have an impact for years to come in the United States.

Each of these points was recently illustrated in a national newspaper:

> Births, not immigration, now account for most of the growth in the nation's
> Hispanic population, a distinct reversal of trends of the past 30 years. The
> Hispanic baby boom is transforming the demographics of small-town America in
> a dramatic way. This natural increase – more births than deaths - is accelerating
> among Hispanics in the USA because they are younger than the U.S. population
> as a whole. Their median age is 27.4, compared with 37.9 overall, 40.8 for
> whites, 25.4 for Asians and 31.1 for blacks.
>
> From 2000-2007, the Hispanic population grew by 10.2 million – 58.6% from
> natural increase. The total U.S. population grew 20.2 million, about 60% from
> natural increase, in that period.
>
> The growth of Hispanic populations in parts of the country where few lived
> previously has intensified this decade. From 2000 to 2005, 221 counties would
> not have grown except for Hispanics. (El Nasser, 2008)

The reality and burden of the economic impact of such a huge segment of the

population being undereducated is clear. Cole (2007) described warnings found in the

writing of several researchers regarding the importance of Hispanic education on the

national economy:

> A current event that increases national levels of concern regarding success in
> higher education and upward mobility specifically of American Hispanics is the
> large demographic shift in this population (Boswell, 2004; Haro, 2004; Kochhar
> & Tafoya, 2005; Laden, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Haro (2004) describes
> his concern about population projections warning that "a relentless swelling tide
> of Latino (Hispanic) students is approaching higher education in America" (p.
> 206). His research indicates that social and cultural conditions make it difficult
> for Hispanic students to gain access to and succeed in high ranking colleges and
> universities. (p. 3)

State of Texas

While the Hispanic population continues to grow nationally, the population's growth is intensified in the state of Texas. This is pointed out by Alvarado and Lynham (2005) who state, "It is predicted that the Anglo population will comprise less than one-half of the state's population by the year 2005" (p. 892).

The demographics for the state of Texas are rapidly changing into a "minority-majority" (p. 9) state with massive growth in the Hispanic population (McCabe, 2000). Should the participation rate in higher education for Hispanic students remain constant, the economic prosperity for the state of Texas is in jeopardy (Murdock et al., 2003). Alvarado and Lynham (2005) provide additional data on Hispanics in Texas:

> According to the Texas State Data Center and Office of State Demographer (2002), in 2000 the state of Texas had the second largest Hispanic population next to California….Also reported by this office, the demographic make-up of the total population for the state of Texas in the year 2000 was as follows: Anglo 53.1%; Blacks 11.6%; Hispanics 32.0; and others 3.3%. (p. 892)

The demographic shift within the state of Texas has been well documented by State Demographer Murdock et al. in their appropriately entitled, *The Texas Challenge in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of Population Change for the Future of Texas*.

Rio Grande Valley (Hidalgo & Starr Counties)

While both the nation and the state of Texas are facing dramatic demographic shifts as the Hispanic population continues to grow, two of the four counties which comprise the Rio Grande Valley, Hidalgo and Starr Counties have long been Hispanic strongholds. Both counties are among the highest proportion of Hispanic population in the nation, "97% Proportion of the population of Starr County, Texas, that was Hispanic

as of 2006, which led the nation. In fact, each of the 11 counties with the highest

Hispanic proportion of its total population was in Texas" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007b, p.

2). Hidalgo County is comprised of an 85% Hispanic population and also ranks within

the top 11 counties in terms of the Hispanic proportion of the total population.

In addition to having such high proportions of Hispanic populations, both

counties are growing at a substantial pace. U.S. Census Bureau (2007a) estimates for

Starr County show the population growing from 53,597 residents during the 2000

certified census date to an estimate of 61,833 for July 2007. This is an increase of over

8,000 or greater than 15%. The growth in Hidalgo County which is among the ten largest

counties in the state of Texas, saw a population shift from 569,463 in 2000 to an

estimated population of 710,514 in 2007 or just under 25%. Both counties grew at a

faster pace than the state of Texas as a whole and grew substantially more than the

nation.

Hispanic Educational Attainment

Nationally

In the Pew Hispanic Center Report, Fry (2004) ties college selectivity to student

success. Fry (2004) also provides a picture of which higher education institutions

Hispanic students are attending:

> Among the best prepared young college students, nearly 60 percent of Latinos
> attend non-selective colleges and universities, in comparison to 52 percent of
> white students. Among students who are less well prepared—those in the second
> to fourth quartile of high school academic intensity (the majority of both
> Hispanic and white students)—nearly 66 percent of Latinos initially enroll in
> "open-door" institutions. Less than 45 percent of similarly prepared white college
> students initially enroll in open-door institutions. (p. vi)

Selectivity matters because college selectivity and college completion go hand-in-hand. Students who are initially enrolled at a more selective college or university are more likely to finish a bachelor's degree than those on the less selective college pathway. This applies to Hispanics as well as other undergraduates.

Cole (2007) found an alignment of research findings regarding the growth of the Hispanic population corresponding to the population's level of higher education and the resulting impact upon the economy:

> The impact that this demographic shift of the Hispanic population will have on educational institutions and local economies….In alignment with Laden (2001), Garcia and Figueroa (2002) agree that to ensure the welfare of our economy and our democracy it behooves individuals, organizations, and communities, to form partnerships with their educational institutions to strengthen them to ensure success in Hispanic educational attainment. They contend that the national gap in Hispanic enrollment in higher education, although narrowing slightly, is still a problem within selective colleges and universities. (pp. 29-30)

The findings by the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (2000) reflect Hispanic student higher education demographics concentrated in a few states and focused on the diversity efforts in those states:

> Just over 50 percent of all Hispanics enrolled in higher education are in two states: California and Texas….In California, Texas, and Florida, the public university systems have eliminated the use of race/ethnicity as a factor in admissions decisions; instead, each has adopted "percentage plans" in an attempt to maintain a level of diversity on campus. Studies are being conducted to determine the overall impact of these plans on Hispanic students. (pp. 36-37)

Texas

The Hispanic population is underrepresented in higher education at both the national level and the state level for Texas (McCabe, 2003). The underrepresentation of Hispanics in higher education in Texas continues to grow (Texas Higher Education

Coordinating Board [THECB], 2000). This point was emphasized in the *Closing the Gaps: The Texas Higher Education Plan 2015*, which states, "The White college enrollment rate of 5 percent continues to exceed the 3.7 percent participation rate for Hispanics and the 4.6 percent rate for Blacks" (THECB, 2000, p. 9). The report further elaborates on the gap between minority groups and their white counterparts:

> At present, a large gap exists among racial/ethnic groups in both enrollment and graduation from the state's colleges and universities. Groups with the lowest enrollment and graduation rates will constitute a larger proportion of the Texas population. If this gap is not closed, Texas will have proportionately fewer college graduates. (THECB, 2000, p. 4)

Cole (2007) described a second study conducted in April 2000, which also indicates the economic impact of the low levels of education among the Hispanic population:

> The seriousness of the educational attainment problem in the state of Texas and its impact on the Texas economy (Benjamin, Carroll, Dewar, Lempert, & Stockly, 2000). The study served to increase awareness and concern among policy makers, and community and educational leaders throughout the State that unless serious initiatives were undertaken to dramatically increase the numbers of Hispanic students enrolling in and obtaining degrees from higher education institutions the state would suffer a serious threat to its economy by the year 2010. (p. 30)

> Subsequent annual updates to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's *Closing the Gaps* initiative show that the participation rate of Hispanic students in higher education in Texas continues to suffer as compared to white students. Cole (2007) addresses the phenomenon:

> Texas colleges and universities are struggling in their response to the THECB challenge to increase Hispanic enrollment in their institutions. As of Fall 2005, the Texas institutions of higher education have realized that it is difficult enough to increase participation rates of Hispanics and that even if they could attain the Closing the Gaps enrollment goals, access to these institutions alone is insufficient. (p. 31)

Chahin (1993) defines participation as current enrollments and degrees awarded to Hispanics. He further states, "The college participation rate is the most important indicator of the status of Hispanics in higher education….Although participation is growing, the Hispanic share of participation (enrollment and degrees) is still far less than the Hispanic share of the general population" (p. 2). Katsinas (1984) concurs with Chahin's claims citing that in 1978, Hispanics accounted for 6% of the population in the continental United States. However, Hispanics only accounted for 3.4% of undergraduate students. The literature currently concentrates on the diversity efforts in selected states based on percent plans and the role of leadership.

The underrepresentation of Hispanics in higher education, trends remaining constant, will only grow as the state of Texas grows more and more diverse (McCabe, 2000). This is also demonstrated by Olivas' (1982) statement, which addresses the plight of Hispanics seeking higher education at a national level:

> Nearly 15 years of civil rights legislation have not substantially improved the condition of Hispanic education, while, ironically, the prevailing illusion of substantially increased access has forestalled necessary changes in exiting systems. Thus, Hispanics find themselves underserved by programs designed to redress inequities, and ill-served by a popular notion that inequities no longer exist. (p. 301)

While Olivas (1982) was pointing out Hispanic participation in higher education at the national level, the situation in Texas, as noted earlier, is exasperated by the population trends, which include a rapidly growing Hispanic segment (McCabe, 2000).

The percentage of Hispanics participating in higher education is not equal to the percentage of Hispanics in the general population and the participation rate of college-aged Hispanic youth is not equal to the non-Hispanic whites' participation rates. Oliva

(2004) states, "One of the most serious higher education policy dilemmas of the current era is how to improve access to college for underrepresented minority students (Attinasi, 1989; Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis [CHEPA], 2003; Fry, 2002; Immerwahr, 2003; Kezar, 2000a, 2000b; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000)," (p. 210). Flagship universities in Texas must address the problem possibly through a review of policies and practices (Oliva, 2004).

The literature demonstrates that current enacted policies and practices that were written with the intent of increasing the participation rate of Hispanics in Texas flagship universities are not fulfilling their respective mission. Oliva (2004) suggests, "Despite its innovativeness and its diffusion into other states, the percent plans were inadequate without other race-based criteria to meeting Texas participation and diversification goals" (p. 225). She contends that existing policies and practices and diversity efforts must be reviewed and revised, or new policies and practices and efforts must be enacted in order to increase the Hispanic participation rate in higher education at Texas flagship universities.

South Texas

The participation rate of Hispanics in higher education, while improving, continues to lag behind the other major racial and ethnic groups in the United States. However, as noted earlier the completion rate for Hispanics in higher education remains stable despite increases in participation. This lack of success in higher education becomes a regional (South Texas), state of Texas, and national concern when the Hispanic population accounts for over 90% of the total population of Hidalgo County,

36% of the total population of Texas, and 15% of the national population. In addition, the Hispanic population continues to be the fastest growing minority and segment of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007b).

Despite the extraordinary growth of the Hispanic population and the unique fact that Hispanic males outpace their female counterparts such is not the case when education is taken into account. Only 13% of the total Hispanic population over the age of 25 holds a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This is the lowest educational attainment as compared to all other population groups as noted in a separate data release, "More than half of Asians 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or more (52 percent), compared with 32 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 19 percent of blacks and 13 percent of Hispanics" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b).

The educational attainment level for Hispanic males continues to lag behind their female counterparts. In 2007, just under 1.1 million Hispanic males aged 25 years and over had attained a bachelor's degree compared to just under 1.22 million Hispanic females aged 25 years and over who had attained a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a). Given that the growth of the Hispanic male population is exceeding the Hispanic female population, the educational attainment gap will continue to grow. In addition the population growth patterns within the United States also paint an alarming picture should the educational attainment level of Hispanics as a whole and of Hispanic males in particular are not addressed.

Cole (2007), referring to Haro's research noted the educational system deficiencies in dealing with the Hispanic population:

The demand for higher education by Hispanics is increasing, "the programs and the machinery to accomplish a successful transition and matriculation through the baccalaureate process and on to graduate work remain static and largely unsuited for this population" (p. 206). (Haro) further states that those Hispanics who have accomplished this task have been rare exceptions to the norm. (p. 29)

Cole (2007) also found that a host of current researchers concur that Hispanics are under-represented in higher education enrollment and degree attainment (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005; Boswell, 2004; Hagedorn, Maxwell, Chen, Cypers, & Moon, 2002; Haro, 2004; O'Brien & Shedd, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Cole (2007) listed her key findings related to Hispanics in higher education in Table 1:

Table 1. Findings Related to Hispanics in Higher Education

Topic of Review	Key Findings
Economic Need for Human Resource Development	National (U.S.) HRD plays a key role in the development of societies. Hispanic educational attainment is critical to the economy – nationally and in Texas. Hispanic is the fastest growing ethnicity in the U.S. Economic need for Hispanic educational attainment with unknowns about Hispanic participation and success in Internet courses creates a situation of need for more research.
Hispanic Access to Higher Education: Comminity College	- Community colleges are the primary community arena for human resource development. - The majority of Hispanics in higher education are found in community colleges.

Economic Impact

In *The New Texas Challenge: Population Change for the Future of Texas*, Murdock et al. (2003) review many of the serious issues facing the state of Texas:

What are the population-related opportunities and challenges likely to impact Texas in the first decades of the 21st Century?

> We generally projected a sober future for Texas if the socioeconomic characteristics (differences in income, education, and program participation) of the fastest growing segments of Texas population did not change. The work suggested that the challenge for the State was to ensure that all Texans had the skills and education necessary to compete in the increasingly international economy and that to fail to meet this challenge could result in a Texas that is poorer and less competitive. (pp. 3-4)

Murdock et al. (2003) bring to light the seriousness of the situation for the state of Texas in their summary that describes the relationship between education and a person's future socio-economic status, which they believe will impact the economic well-being of Texas. The Hispanic population represents the fastest growing segment referenced by Murdock et al. (2003).

Males in Higher Education

Hispanic male student persistence and graduation rates are lower than comparable racial/ethnic groups. This phenomenon is summarized by Haycock (2006), "The gaps [particularly in higher education achievement when considered] by race are also stark, with African Americans between [the ages of] 25 and 29 attaining bachelor's degrees at nearly one half – and Latinos at one-third the rate of Whites" (p. 2).

Excelencia in Education (2007) summarized much of the additional alarming data pertaining to Hispanic males at all levels of the education pipeline including the participation and success in higher education:

High School

- Over 25% of Latino men 25 and over in the United States have less than a 9th grade education, compared to 7% of all males in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b).

- Only 57% of Latino males 25 and over have a high school diploma, compared to 90% of white, non-Hispanics, and 83% of all other non-Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b).

- Latino males are much more likely to drop out of high school than other males. In 2004, 29% of Latino males 18 to 24 years old were high school dropouts, compared to 7% of white males and 14% of black males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005a).

College Enrollment

- While Latino male enrollment in higher education has increased, female enrollment has increased even more rapidly. Latino male enrollment in higher education increased 255% between 1976 and 2004 compared to over 510% for females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005b).

- Latino male representation in higher education has changed. In 1976, Latino males represented 55% of Latinos in higher education. In 2004, 41% of all Latinos enrolled in higher education were male (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004a).

Financial Aid

- In 2003-2004, 62% of Latino male undergraduates received some form of financial aid to pay for college with an average award combining grants, loans, and work-study of $6,870 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004b).

- Latino males were slightly less likely to receive financial aid to pay for college than Latino females. However, males generally received either similar or higher average awards than Latino women in 2003-2004, depending on the type of institution where they enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004b).

College Completion

- Only 12% of Latinos 25 and over have earned a bachelor's degree or higher level of education, compared to 30% of all males 25 and over (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b).

- Latinos 25 and over have similar college attainment rates by gender. However, Latino males under 25 have lower attainment rates than females. In 2004, males under 25 represented 39% of all Latinos awarded bachelors' degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004a).

- The number of Latino males earning college degrees is increasing, but this number has increased more quickly for females. Between 1976 and 2004, the number of Latino males earning bachelors' degrees increased 260%, while females increased 580% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005d).

- The top three degree areas for undergraduate Latino males were social sciences, business, and engineering (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005c).

While the data reflected are indeed alarming, more alarming is the lack of research conducted on the reasons behind such a disturbing phenomenon. Higher education

institutions would be well-served to learn from Hispanic male students who successfully participate and persist at their respective campuses. Such knowledge could inform strategies and initiatives aimed at increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates of this segment of their student population at these said institutions. The economic impact of doing so and equating the success rates of Hispanic students to the success rates of white students in higher education, in particular for the state of Texas, would be, to say the least, notable (Murdock, 2006).

Recent popular literature has focused on the alleged increasing gender gap within higher education participation and success only to discount the possibility of such a phenomenon by summarizing that such a gap does not exist. Instead these articles point to the increasing success of women in all fields and that men are not falling behind, as they continue to participate and succeed at relatively the same historical levels. The researchers gather that we should celebrate the achievements that women are making throughout the higher education spectrum and not be alarmed by the male statistics as they are not an issue. This was summarized by Mead (2006) who stated, "But the truth is far different from what these accounts suggest. The real story is not bad news about boys doing worse; it's good news about girls doing better" (p. 3).

While discounting the overall gender differences in education, Mead (2006) did concede male issues for some groups of males stating, "There's no doubt that some groups of boys – particularly Hispanic and black boys and boys from low-income homes – are in real trouble," (p. 3). The lack of research on breaking down the gender differences by race and ethnicities displays a huge void in the literature.

The lack of Hispanic males participating and succeeding within higher education

has in effect been neglected. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) bring this to light stating,

"Latino males are effectively vanishing from the American higher education pipeline,"

(p. 54). They continue to elaborate on the seriousness regarding the lack of Hispanic

males within higher education as well as the neglect regarding the subject by

summarizing the research and findings of several scholars:

> Even as the number of Latinas'os attending college has actually increased
> steadily over the last few decades, the proportional representation of Latino
> males continues to slide relative to their Latina female counterparts (Castellanos,
> Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). This trend has been especially evident in secondary
> and post-secondary education in recent years, as Latino males are more likely to
> drop out of high school, to join the workforce rather than attend college, and to
> leave college before graduating (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Osegura, 2006;
> Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). In general, proportionally fewer college-age males
> are actually enrolling in college than in years past, and the degree attainment
> gaps between Latino males and females is widening (NCES, 2005; Saenz, Perez,
> & Cerna, 2007). Despite these trends, empirical attention to this issue has been
> minimal, while public outcry has been almost nonexistent (i.e., with a few
> notable exceptions).
>
> Indeed, the public discussion of an academic gender gap is sometimes met with
> skepticism at the thought of a re-framed discussion of traditional gender
> dynamics within education. (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p. 54)

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) continue the discussion regarding a lack of significant

research on Hispanic males in higher education by couching the gap in the literature with

the brevity of the alarming educational attainment for this population:

> In 2004, 28.4% of Latino males 16 to 24 years old were high school dropouts,
> compared to 18.5% of Latino females, 7.1% of White males and 13.5% of
> African American males (NCES, 2005).
>
> Yet, as scarce as our young men are becoming along the higher education
> pipeline, it is even more difficult to find meaningful and timely research focused
> on the causes behind this perplexing trend. There is, however, a growing chorus

of practitioners and scholars that are taking careful notice of this gender gap and what it could portend for future generations of Latinos. (pp. 56-57)

While pointing out the seriousness of the Hispanic male gap within participation and success in higher education, Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) also pointed out the lack of research on the topic and in particular the lack of understanding on such disturbing trends. This practitioner along with this research study addressed both.

The level of participation in education for Hispanic males as compared to Hispanic females is consistent up until the college transition (Table 2) begins as noted by Saenz and Ponjuan (2009): "In either case the story seems to be that Latino males are lagging behind their female peers at critical points of transition as they move through the higher education pipeline" (p. 65).

Table 2. Percentage of the Latina/o Population Enrolled in Any Form of School

Age Group	Latino Males (%)			Latina Females (%)		
	1980	1990	2005	1980	1990	2005
16 & 17 years	81.5	85.5	92.5	82.2	85.3	92.6
18 & 19 years	36.9	40.7	51.8	38.8	47.2	57.2
20 & 21 years	21.4	21.7	25.2	17.6	33.1	35.3
22 to 24 years	10.7	11.2	17.5	12.6	8.4	21.8
25 to 29 years	6.8	4.6	5.6	6.9	8.1	10.4
30 to 34 years	6.2	4.0	2.6	4.1	3.1	6.1

Source. National Center for Education Statistics (2007).
Note: School includes enrollment in any type of graded public, parochial, or other private schools. This also includes elementary schools, high schools, colleges, universities, and professional schools.

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) summarized the data on Hispanic male educational attainment stating, "These findings speak to the vanishing trend faced by Latino males in higher

education. Even as the actual numbers and proportions of Latino males has increased,

these rates have not kept pace with Latina females" (p. 68)

A final point to the summarization of the miniscule literature that exists on

Hispanic males in higher education as well as the need for a deeper level of

understanding of the Hispanic male experience in higher education is well illustrated by

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009):

> The question of why Latino males have more difficulty navigating college as compared to their female counterparts needs to be further examined empirically. Part of the challenge is that there is a scarcity of research that focuses specifically on the Latino male college experience, and most of what we know about Latino males in college is indirectly ascertained from important scholarship that examines the Latina educational condition in postsecondary education. (p. 72)

This researcher via this study addressed the 'why' alluded to via the development of a

deeper understanding as provided by the utilization of qualitative research and

additionally studied Hispanic males in particular as opposed to applying knowledge

ascertained by Hispanic females.

Student Retention Literature

Deficit Model

As noted in Chapter I, the vast majority of research of student retention or more

aptly labeled research on student attrition have focused on why students leave higher

education. These researchers have also focused nearly exclusively on four-year

residential institutions of higher education. This segment of the literature is dominated

by Tinto (1975, 1982, 1997), Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1980), and Bean and

Metzner (1985). A review of such findings by the aforementioned researchers is merited.

Tinto's (1975) seminal work on student attrition sought to address, "two major shortcomings; namely, inadequate attention given to questions of definition and to the development of theoretical models that seek to explain, not simply to describe, the processes that bring individuals to leave institutions of higher education" (p. 89).

The theoretical model formed by Tinto (1975) is based on Durkheim's theory of suicide, "One can reasonably expect, then, that social conditions affecting dropout from the social system of the college would resemble those resulting in suicide in the wider society" (p. 91). Tinto via the model argued that the individual student's commitment to both the goal of completing higher education as well as the commitment to the institution factor along with both academic integration and social integration in a student's decision to persist or dropout. Herein lies the first weakness of such a model as stated by Attinasi (1989), "But an assumption at the outset that dropping out of college is like committing suicide or leaving a job has turned out to be too severe a constraint upon the conceptualizing process" (p. 250).

Tinto's (1975) model entitled "A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College" does not account for external factors on the student's decision to drop out from college:

> But, though it is recognized that a person may withdraw from college for reasons that have little to do with his interaction within the college systems, it is suggested that those impacts will be best observed through the person's changing evaluations of his commitments to the goal of college completion and to the institution in which he is registered. (p. 97)

This explanation of the model determines that any and all external factors are effectively discounted based on the level of the student's commitment to the stated goal of completion and to the chosen institution of higher education. This also narrows the

persistence decision of the student to a yes or no context and ignores the possibility of

why. Attinasi (1989) brings to light the weakness of such a narrow focus as well as the

need for a qualitative approach to exploring student persistence:

> In addition, the models have been developed on the basis of, and tested with, data collected from institutional records and/or by means of fixed-choice questionnaires. These are methods of data collection that effectively strip away the context surrounding the student's decision to persist or not to persist in college and exclude from consideration the student's own perceptions of the process.
>
> Yet, given the present level of our understanding of that decision, it is precisely those characteristics – the context of the decision and the student's perspective on the context – that investigations of student persistence in college must include. What are needed then are naturalistic, descriptive studies guided by research perspectives that emphasize the insider's point of view. (p. 250)

Attinasi points out the inherent weakness of Tinto's model while also establishing the

need for a qualitative approach to student persistence in higher education. In addition to

Attinasi's argument, Tinto's model would not suffice for the Hispanic student population

attending South Texas College or provide an understanding of why these students persist

in higher education.

Finally, Tinto (1975) made the case for both a study focusing on males as well as

Hispanics in his seminal work. With regard to males in higher education, he states, "This

is especially true during the first year of college when most academic dismissal among

males occurs" (p. 105). This provides further merit for conducting a study on male

student persistence in higher education in particular during the first year. Tinto's (1975)

statements regarding the need for minority student persistence in higher education is

more compelling:

> Whether this applies equally well to the various racial minorities that are disproportionately represented in the lower social status categories of college students remains, however, to be determined. First, there is simply too little information regarding the relationship between race and dropout from higher education. It is clear that race is an independent predictor of dropout (independent of both ability and social status), but it is unclear in which ways this aggregate relationship occurs. (p. 119)

This study addressed both gender and racial/ethnic minority attributes as they relate to student persistence in higher education while at the same time seeking to understand why Hispanic male students persist as opposed to simply seeking whether they do persist.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) made attempts to test Tinto's theoretical model first focusing on the student-faculty interaction as a means of measuring academic integration with the institution of higher education when comparing persisters to voluntary non-persisters. Pascarella and Terenzini summarized the findings of the initial study stating: "Discriminant analysis indicated that student-faculty interactions focusing on discussion of intellectual or course-related concerns contributed most to group discrimination" (p. 540).

The second also sought to validate Tinto's model via discriminant analysis:

> The essential purposes of this study have been two-fold: (1) to develop a multidimensional instrument that assesses the major dimensions of the Tinto model; and (2) to determine the validity of the instrument, and thereby the model, in accurately identifying freshmen who subsequently persist or drop out voluntarily. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, p. 71)

Both studies validated, to an extent, Tinto's model pointing to student-faculty interaction as a key variable for student persistence. However, the researchers of both studies treated the student and his/her independent decision to persist of dropout as

inanimate. The student's voice is totally void in this process. In addition, the studies focused on a four-year, residential, majority white institution.

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a much more robust theoretical model specific for non-traditional students in their historic study. In describing their study, they also indicated a key difference between students and institutions of higher education studied by Tinto (1975, 1982, 1987, 1993) as well as Pascarella and Terenzini (1980):

> The purpose of this paper is to describe the rise in nontraditional enrollments, define the nontraditional undergraduate student, and develop a conceptual model of the attrition process for these students. The chief difference between the attrition process of traditional and nontraditional student is that nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional student attrition. (p. 485)

While the research set forth by the authors is further reaching than both works by Tinto as well as Pacarella and Terenzini based solely on the fact that the non-traditional student is explored, this research continues to falter in that the sole subject of the research is not brought to light, namely the point of view of the actual student. The understanding of why a student chooses to drop out of higher education is lacking in this research. Finally, this as well as each of the key pieces of literature reviewed in the preceding paragraphs is conducted from a deficit model approach, i.e., what went wrong.

Bean and Metzner (1985) also provided merit for the study of Hispanic male students at majority-minority institutions throughout their research. First, Bean and Metzner (1985) point to importance of variables outside of both the student and the institution stating, "Environmental variables are presumed to be more important for nontraditional students than academic variables, which leads to the following results. When academic variables are good but environmental variables are poor, students should

leave school," (p. 491). Ethnicity is also stressed in their work, however, they do not point to minority-majority institutions stating, "Empirical studies at predominately white institutions typically measured students' ethnicity" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 497). They also addressed the need to focus on gender stating, "Few studies of nontraditional students were found that compared the reasons why men drop out as opposed to women" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 498).

Ultimately, they point to the need for further research stating, "The most important variables, however, are likely to differ for subgroups such as older students, part-time students, ethnic minorities, women, or academically underprepared students at different types of institutions, particularly 2-year, 4-year commuter, and 4-year residential colleges" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 530).

While some scholars of student persistence and successful participation in higher education in the United States have chosen to study what Padilla et al. (1996) termed "what [such] students do right" (p. 4) (Gandara, 1995; Hurtado, 1994; Padilla, 1991; Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, & Treviño, 1997; Rendon, 1994; Sleet, 2000), an existing segment of researchers have focused on barriers faced by such students of color and how they are able to successfully navigate, and thereby persist through, institutional and other local barriers (Ford-Edwards, 2002; Feagin, Hernan, & Imani, 1996; Padilla, 1991, 2003; Padilla et al., 1997; Sleet, 2000). There remains, however, little corresponding research on Hispanic male students.

Cole (2007) encountered differences in the theoretical models used to try to understand student retention between residential and commuter colleges regarding the variables found to impact retention. Cole (2007) wrote:

> Braxton et al. (2004) developed a modified version of Tinto's model of student departure that in their opinion was more applicable and empirically supported for commuter institutions. Braxton et al. reviewed studies to empirically analyze the major constructs or propositions associated with Tinto's theory and found that studies in commuter institutions showed a stronger empirical relationship between retention, student entry characteristics and academic integration. They believed that Tinto's theory did not sufficiently recognize the significance of these constructs for commuter institutions. (p. 25)

A further point of note regarding the abovementioned recent research studies is that their authors have focused largely on the successful participation and persistence of minority students attending predominantly four-year, residential, and white majority institutions of higher education. This specific focus points to a notable gap in the literature, and thus to a lack of understanding of successful participation and persistence of minority students at commuter, two-year institutions of higher education, and where they constitute the majority student population.

Asset Model

Related Conceptual Frameworks

Two related conceptual frameworks are particularly useful in illuminating this phenomenon. The first is that of Harmon and King's (1985) Expert Systems Theory and the second Padilla's (1991) Expertise Model of Successful College Students. Each framework is briefly described next.

Harmon and King's Theory of Expert Systems

Harmon and King explained the human problem-solving process as the information processing necessary to decide on the sequence of actions that will lead to desired outcomes/goals (Sleet, 2000). Harmon and King stated that knowledge could be sorted into three types: (a) heuristic knowledge, which is acquired through experience; (b) theoretical knowledge, which is gained from formal study; and (c) compiled knowledge, which is both formally and informally accumulated. The authors defined *an expert* as one who could, based on knowledge, solve problems more efficiently and effectively than others, and who was recognized as being able to do so. It was on this theory that the second framework was based, namely, that of Padilla's Expertise Model of Successful College Students.

Padilla's Expertise Model of Successful College Students

The model is based upon the assumption that the individual college campus experience, after entering the college and prior to leaving the college, for students is viewed as a "black box." Padillia (1991) briefly describes the concept as follows, "students arrive at any campus with a wide range of background characteristics, interests, commitments, goals, etc., and join an equally diverse range of potential academic experiences. What happens between these two temporal points, i.e., entering and leaving college, is the black box experience" (p. 4).

Padilla's (1991) black box serves as the student experience between entering a college campus and leaving the same campus:

> The campus experience for students is conceived as a 'black box' in which students who enter the black box with varying characteristics and experiences

leave the black box either with a degree or as dropouts, i.e., without completing a program of study. What accounts for the difference is the students' ability to avoid or overcome the barriers to degree attainment on their campus. (p. 10)

The experience is assumed to be the entire collegiate career for a student at the institution. However, the concept of the "black box" could be utilized for term completion, course completion, or even enrollment completion.

This model assumed that students become experts on overcoming barriers to academic success at *specific* colleges, thus becoming "experts at being successful as students" (Padilla et al., 1997, p. 126) at these institutions of higher education. This expertise is assumed as based on the ability of these academically successful students to acquire and apply a combination of both theoretical (formal) and heuristic (informal) knowledge. Such theoretical knowledge, stated Padilla et al. (1997), is "largely book knowledge that is learned on campus through coursework and formal study" (p. 126). The requisite heuristic (or practical) knowledge, he says, is knowledge "necessary to function competently on campus" (1997, p. 126). Padilla et al. (1997) described the ability "to demonstrate increasing levels of theoretical knowledge…typically acquired through courses and demonstrated through performance on tests or other formal assessment procedures" (p. 126) as an example of theoretical knowledge. Padilla et al. highlight "knowing when to drop a course, rather than fail it" (pp. 126-127) as an example of corresponding heuristic knowledge. Moreover, it should be noted that Padilla's model is one of the acquisition and application of local expertise, i.e., campus/higher education institution specific.

While the application of Padilla's (1991) *Expertise Model of Successful College Students* had been studied for academically successful minority students enrolled in four year, residential, white majority institutions, it had not yet been studied for the same at predominantly two-year, Hispanic majority institutions of higher education, nor has it been so studied for Hispanic male students at said institutions. This research has better informed and will help increase the incidence of academic success of Hispanic male students at predominantly two-year, Hispanic majority institutions, but it has also informed further refinement and development of the theoretical model at this specific kind of campus/institution of higher education, and in turn, its potential transferability and utility to other institutions of a similar nature.

Discoveries from such foci of inquiry enlighten the development of minority students and help bridge the disparity in educational attainment among the different race and ethnic groups of this important source of national human resources. It is in the development of such human resources that the promise of continued social and economic well-being and prosperity of the United States into the future resides.

First-year Importance in Higher Education

The speed with which higher education responds to the needs of its community has been accused of having the same speed that aircraft carriers utilize to make turns in the ocean. While it seems that the first year of higher education for all students has been well documented within the literature and has been very much a university tool for improving the retention and success of undergraduates in their pivotal first year of

attendance, the movement within higher education actually only began in earnest in the

late 1980's as documented by Barefoot et al. (2005):

> If, in the 1970s, anyone had set out to discover and study colleges and
> universities in the United States at which the first year was a high priority, the
> journey would have been difficult. The campuses with any special focus on the
> first year were few and far between. Even as late as 1987, a survey conducted by
> the American Council on Education found that only 37 percent of institutions
> acknowledged taking steps to improve the first year (El-Kawas,1987). Since that
> time, interest in the first year within U.S. colleges and universities has grown
> exponentially. Many campuses have joined that national conversation about the
> first year in an effort to improve student learning, personal development, and
> persistence to graduation. (p. xxi)

Since the late decade of the 1980's institutions of higher education have made concerted

efforts to increase student success within the first year of a student's enrollment as the

data indicates that such efforts have an impact on student success. Once again, the

primary focus on such programs has continued to reside within the four-year residential

campuses throughout the nation. While Barefoot et al. do highlight two community

colleges, the majority of the institutions featured 11 out of 13, to be exact, are indeed

four-year residential campuses.

In an effort to increase the success rates of entering freshmen at colleges and

universities, learning communities have become a tool of choice. Talburt and Boyles

(2005) summarized the reasoning for utilizing learning communities and also explained

what learning communities entail:

> At postsecondary institutions across the United States, concern has risen over the
> quality of undergraduate instruction, particularly for first-year students. Since the
> mid-1990's, numerous institutions have responded to these concerns by
> examining their first-year students' academic and social experiences and
> implementing programs designed to enhance their learning and integration into
> campus life. These programs are intended to raise retention rates, promote
> college student development, and cultivate academic success. One of the most

significant efforts to improve freshman learning has been the development of residential and nonresidential "freshman learning communities" (FLCs) on campuses. (p. 209)

Researchers, based on empirical evidence, have pointed to the importance for the first year of college enrollment as paramount in predicting student success. Tinto (1998) noted this, "justification for the institutional policies they develop to promote student persistence. The result has been the proliferation of a wide variety of 'retention' programs (e.g., freshman year seminars, mentoring programs) designed to enhance the likelihood that students will persist to degree completion," (pp. 167-68).

Learning communities, freshman seminars and mentoring programs are shown to be effective with a general population of students. While Tinto's (1998) work did reference two-year colleges it made no reference to minority students or gender or the subsequent results of freshman year seminars or mentoring programs on such students. This study addressed both population segments.

First-Term Importance in Higher Education

While success within the first year of higher education has been explored and researched as noted in the preceding section, a new level of importance is now being attributed to a student's first semester in higher education and even more specific a students first few weeks of enrollment. This is displayed by the new survey developed by the Center for Community College Student Engagement. The initial instrument developed by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement or CCSSE was a community college version of the survey utilized by universities – the National Survey of Student Engagement. Many

of the initial results from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement

showed that many community colleges were achieving relatively high benchmarks on

student engagement. It was determined that students who are surveyed during the spring

term of their first year in college are in essence 'survivors' of the system. The

development of an instrument to measure what challenges community college students

experience in their very first term began. The staff for the Center for Community

College Student Engagement (2008) described the Survey of Entering Student

Engagement or SENSE as follows:

> The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) helps community and
> technical colleges focus on the "front door" of the college experience. Grounded
> in research about what works in retaining and supporting entering students,
> *SENSE* collects and analyzes data about institutional practices and student
> behaviors in the earliest weeks of college. These data can help colleges
> understand students' critical early experiences and improve institutional practices
> that affect student success in the first college year. (Overview, para. 2)

> The *SENSE* survey includes items eliciting information from students about their
> first impressions of the college; intake processes such as admissions, registration,
> assessment, placement, orientation and financial aid; how they spend their time
> as they begin college; how they assess their earliest relationships and interactions
> with instructors, advisors, and other students; what kinds of work they are
> challenged to do; how the college supports their learning in the first few weeks;
> and so on. (About the Survey, para. 6)

> SENSE is administered during the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall academic
> term to students in courses randomly selected from those most likely to enroll
> entering students. Students respond to the survey in class, and member colleges
> receive survey reports including data and analysis they can use to improve their
> programs and services for entering students. Specifically, SENSE data should be
> useful in improving course completion rates and the rate at which students persist
> beyond the first term of enrollment. (Overview, para. 3)

> The movement to measure student engagement, within a student's very first

semester of enrollment within higher education, in an effort to improve student success

has gained momentum as indicated by the development of such survey tools as SENSE. While the intent is to quantitatively measure the engagement of students who are early in their higher education experience, the survey is still measuring such engagement purely from a statistical perspective. A development of a deep understanding of the student's experience during this is still void and would only compliment the quantitative research currently being field tested by the SENSE survey.

The current study was designed to inform a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college, Hispanic, male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through Official Reporting Date at the selected community college (STC). Furthermore, the study was expected to yield new knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College Students at this institution. Finally, the study will potentially enable greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature. The research questions and methodology are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to develop a deep understanding of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at a community college in South Texas and further to explore the experiences that facilitated these students' fall first-term persistence through official reporting date.

This chapter includes a description of the methodology utilized to conduct this study, including a reiteration of the purpose of the study, the research questions, theoretical paradigm/framework, qualitative research and the rationale for selecting naturalistic inquiry, the research strategies including the research procedures, participant and site selection, sampling, data collection, instrumentation, data analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness.

Purpose of the Study

Given the preceding descriptions, this study had a number of purposes. The first was to address the problem stated above through the conduct of research that describes and thereby informs a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through official reporting date at the selected community college (STC). A second was to use this knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College Students at this

institution. Thirdly was to potentially enable greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature.

The Research Questions

In order to accomplish the stated purpose of the study, the researcher formulated two overarching and three supporting research questions to address in the conduct of the study. The first overarching question was:

1. Based on their experiences as a successful first-time-in-college student at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South Texas College), what do such male students identify and describe as having significantly influenced their ability to persist through fall first-term official reporting date, and why?

The three supporting research questions are:

1.1. What specific barriers since registration must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College overcome to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and how do they do so?

1.2. What specific knowledge must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College acquire to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and how do they do so?

1.3. What specific action(s) must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College take in order to successfully persist through the official reporting date, and why?

The second overarching research question is:

2. Given their experiences as successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male
   students at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South
   Texas College), what suggestions would they make to the administration and
   other leadership of this institution of higher education in order to improve
   and, therefore, positively impact the persistence rate, through the official
   reporting date, among this student population group, and why?

Having stated the purpose of this study and identified the two overarching and
three supporting research questions, it is useful to identify how both the purpose and the
research questions led to the identification of the proper theoretical paradigm to facilitate
the study.

Theoretical Paradigm

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe paradigms and paradigm eras as "attempts to
understand the world" (p. 14). Lincoln and Guba go on to explain a paradigm further by
stating, "Paradigms [a systematic set of beliefs] represent a distillation of what we think
about the world (but cannot prove). Our actions in the world, including actions that we
take as inquirers, cannot occur without reference to those paradigms" (p. 15). It is the
utilization of such worldviews that enable researchers to employ the research paradigm
that best facilitates the study at hand. It is within this light that the research paradigm of
critical interpretive was chosen.

Denzin and Lincoln (2002) stated, "in the first decade of the twenty-first century,
there is a pressing demand to show the practices of critical interpretive qualitative

research can help change the world in positive ways," (p. xii). The researcher utilized

critical interpretive qualitative research in an effort to positively affect the world of

Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at a community college in South Texas.

Qualitative Research Study

The overall purpose of this study was to describe and thereby inform a deeper

understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and

persistence experiences through official reporting date of first-time-in-college Hispanic

male students at a Hispanic majority institution of higher education located in South

Texas. As such, the results of the study allow the researcher to inform a deeper

understanding of the barriers that successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students

at a Hispanic majority institution of higher education located in South Texas face, the

knowledge that they utilize to navigate those barriers, and the actions they employ to

overcome the barriers. The researcher also used this knowledge to inform further

refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College

Students at this institution and potentially enable greater transferability and utility of this

model to and in other institutions of a similar nature. The researcher achieved this

outcome through descriptive, qualitative inquiry into the respective experiences of the

study participants.

As such, the researcher used a general descriptive and qualitative research

method. The nature of and rationale for the selection of this method, and its subsequent

procedure and requirements for quality, are described in the subsections following.

Subsequent outcomes of the study are expected to inform a deeper understanding of

successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college, Hispanic male students through 'thick' description of the participant experiences of successfully persisting through official reporting date of their fall first term by overcoming specific barriers, acquiring specific knowledge, and taking specific action(s) and methodical analysis, synthesis, and presentation of the resulting narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1981).

The researcher provided a description of the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry, key characteristics, and the rationale for selecting this particular paradigm, in the following sections. The paradigm of naturalistic inquiry proved to be the ideal methodology for the research study.

Naturalistic Inquiry Paradigm and Appropriateness for Study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the naturalistic inquiry paradigm as, "The Postpositivist Era" (p. 28), due to research's heavy reliance on positivistic research and studies. They further compare the positivistic paradigm to the naturalistic paradigm. A set of core beliefs, which are referred to as "axioms," encompass the naturalistic inquiry paradigm. These beliefs are fundamental to the naturalistic inquiry paradigm and must be explored in detail. The axioms as defined in Lincoln and Guba (1985) are as follows:

Axiom 1: The nature of reality (ontology).

- Naturalistic version: There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding (verstehen) can be achieved.

Axiom 2: The relationship of knower to known (epistemology).

- Naturalistic version: The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable.

Axiom 3: The possibility of generalization.

- Naturalistic version: The aim of inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of "working hypotheses" that describe the individual case.

Axiom 4: The possibility of casual linkages.

- Naturalistic version: All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.

Axiom 5: The role of values of inquiry (axiology).

- Naturalistic version: Inquiry is value-bound in at least five ways, captured in the collieries that follow:

  Corollary 1: Inquiries are influenced by inquirer values as expressed in the choice of a problem, evaluand, or policy option.

  Corollary 2: Inquiry is influenced by the choice of the paradigm that guides the investigation into the problem.

  Corollary 3: Inquiry is influenced by the choice of the substantive theory utilized to guide the collection and analysis of the data and in the interpretation of findings.

  Corollary 4: Inquiry is influenced by the values that inhere in the context.

  Corollary 5: With respect to corollaries 1 through 4 above, inquiry is either value-resonant (reinforcing or congruent) or value-dissonant (conflicting). Problem, evaluand, or policy option, paradigm, theory, and context must exhibit congruence (value-resonance) if the inquiry is to produce meaningful results. (pp. 37-38)

As the goal of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence experiences through official reporting date of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at a Hispanic majority institution of higher education located in South Texas, each of the

axioms provided were appropriate for the study. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) in axiom 1 contended that realities are not singular and are constructed from the surroundings in which individuals find themselves, thus as the setting for the study was a specific campus of higher education serving over 18,000 students, each student presumably will have their version of campus reality.

The following subsection and sections contain the researcher's detailed description of each of the subsequent parts utilized for naturalistic inquiry, including the rationale for utilizing the naturalistic inquiry paradigm and qualitative methods, research procedures, sample, site selection, participant selection, participant selection process, data collection including the interview process and qualitative methods which the researcher utilized, instrumentation, preparation and data analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Selecting Naturalistic Inquiry Paradigm and Qualitative Methods

The naturalistic inquiry paradigm was the most appropriate for this study as it met all requisite characteristics described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These characteristics included, but were not limited to, determining a focus for the inquiry, fit of paradigm to focus, where and from whom data were collected, instrumentation, data analysis, and accounting for trustworthiness. Each of these areas was expanded upon in relation to the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "The purpose of a research inquiry is to 'resolve' the problem in the sense of accumulating sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding or explanation" (pp. 226-227). Authors of research and studies conducted

on student retention/persistence have focused on *why* students leave their respective

institutions of higher education prior to attaining a degree (Astin, 1982; Nettles, 1991;

Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the research has been primarily quantitative in nature. This

point is supported by Attinasi (1989) who stated, "the models have been developed on

the basis of, and tested with, data collected from institutional records and/or by means of

fixed-choice questionnaires…that effectively strip away…the student's own perceptions

of the process" (p. 250). Understanding the experiences of these students is in line with

the goals of naturalistic inquiry, which seeks to understand context and meaning that has

been constructed by the individual (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Patton

1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that qualitative research methods are ideal for

naturalistic inquiry studies. This contention is due to the site-specific nature of the

conducted study, the human as an instrument, purposive sampling, inductive data

analysis, grounded theory, and emergent design. As such, naturalistic inquiry and

qualitative research methods were a good fit for this study. These research procedures

are further explained in the following sections.

<div align="center">**Research Procedures**</div>

Lincoln and Guba (1985) submitted, "When we assert that qualitative methods

come more easily to hand when the instrument is a human-as-instrument is inclined

toward methods that are extensions of normal human activities: looking, listening,

speaking, reading, and the like" (p. 199). Qualitative research methods were utilized for

this study. The conducted research phenomenon in this study was specific to the

purposefully selected community college in South Texas. Furthermore, qualitative

research methods allowed for certain assumptions or characteristics including but which

were not limited to:

- Focusing on the individual point of view, in this case, successful academic

  participation and persistence of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students,

- Desiring to view a phenomenon holistically and in its natural setting,

- Utilizing the human instrument to serve as the primary research tool (Lincoln

  & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

Each of these assumptions was ideal for the study; as within the context of the study, the

individual point of view of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students was

explored, the research took place within the confines of the selected two-year, Hispanic

majority institution, and the researcher served as the primary research tool for the

research.

The first research procedure to be determined in qualitative research was the

determination of participant selection. A description of the purposeful participant

selection follows.

Sample

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued, "All sampling is done with some purpose in

mind" (p. 199). Thus, 18 study participants were purposefully selected from the total

pool/group of successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college,

Hispanic male students enrolled beyond official reporting date at the selected community

college during the Fall 2007 semester. The majority of first-time-in-college students

enroll in higher education during the fall term of an academic year as reflected on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2008) enrollment reports. Thus, the purposeful term to focus on first-time-in-college Hispanic male students was the Fall 2007 term through official reporting date. The students were contacted individually and were asked to participate in the study. The 18 students who participated in the study were all Hispanic male first-time-in-college students enrolled at the South Texas College Pecan Campus, who successfully persisted through the official reporting date.

Site Selection

In just its fifteenth year of existence, South Texas College has become a nationally recognized powerhouse among community colleges (Carey, 2007). The notoriety along with South Texas College's enrollment growth, student demographics, and involvement in national initiatives have and continue to be studied by a number of national research organizations and is being viewed as a laboratory on how to serve and facilitate Hispanic students. This study has added to the knowledge of how to serve Hispanic male students.

South Texas College's (2004) *Comprehensive Plan: Facing the Future Together* included a section highlighting the history of the college. The only community college to be legislatively mandated in Texas, South Texas College was signed into existence as the fiftieth community college within the state by former Governor Ann Richards in 1993. Prior to 1993, the two-county district comprised of Hidalgo and Starr Counties in deep South Texas did not have access to a community college. It was the largest area both geographically and population wise in the state of Texas without access to a

community college. Since opening in the Fall of 1993, the college has grown from just over 1,000 students and offering 10 certificate programs to over 20,000 students, in Fall 2007, and over 100 degree and certificate opportunities.

In 2005, South Texas College was granted full authorization by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Level II status which allowed the college to offer baccalaureate degrees. South Texas College remains one of only three community colleges in Texas selected to offer baccalaureate degrees. In 2004, South Texas College was one of 27 Round One community colleges selected to participate in the "Achieving the Dream" initiative (Achieving the Dream, 2007). The initiative aimed at closing the achievement gap between students of color and white students in American community colleges demands a culture of evidence based on data driven decision-making. The Achieving the Dream initiative also encourages community colleges to listen to the voices of students via the collection and analysis of qualitative data. It was through this process that focus group methodology, as a means for collecting qualitative data, was introduced to South Texas College.

Serving a student population of over 20,000 credit students during the Fall 2007 semester, South Texas College has become the tenth largest community college in the state. Ninety-four percent of the student population at the college is of Hispanic decent. Thus, South Texas College has the highest percentage of Hispanic students in the nation. Outside of Puerto Rico, South Texas College's enrollment represents the highest percentage of Hispanic students within the United States of America including all American provinces and territories. *Excelencia* in Education (2008b), a non-profit

organization, focused on the higher education advancement of Hispanic/Latino students,

which describes itself in the following manner:

> By 2025, almost one-quarter (22 percent) of the U.S. college-age population will be Latino, a level already reached in California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Yet only 12 percent of Latinos ages 25 and over had earned a bachelor's degree, compared to over 30 percent of all other adults in the United States.
>
> Launched in Washington, D.C. in 2004, *Excelencia* in Education a 501(c) (3) organization – aims to accelerate higher education success for Latino students by providing data-driven analysis of the educational status of Latino students and by promoting education policies and institutional practices that support their academic achievement. (para. 1-2)

The non-profit organization recognizes that the educational attainment of the Hispanic

population is not only of importance to the Hispanic community but also the nation as a

whole:

> Accelerating Latino student success now–and for the next 15 years–is vital to our national interest. To ensure the high caliber of tomorrow's workforce and civic leadership, *Excelencia* in Education links research, policy, and practice to inform policymakers and institutional leaders and promotes policies and practices that support higher educational achievement for Latino students and all students. (*Excelencia* in Education, 2008a, para. 1)

An organization with the sole purpose of advancing higher education among the

Latino/Hispanic community recognized the national importance that South Texas

College has come to possess within higher education and proceeded to invite the

institution to participate in several national studies including Starting Point, and

Accelerating Latino Student Success. The researcher's intent for both studies was to

explore best practices for successfully serving Hispanic students.

Several other national organizations have also capitalized on the growing

national reputation of South Texas College. Among these is the research organization

MDRC (2008) based in New York City. The national research and evaluation

organization's homepage describes itself as follows:

> Building Knowledge to Improve Education and Social Policy. MDRC is a non-profit, non-partisan education and social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve programs and policies that affect the poor. We design and study new approaches to the problems confronting public education; low-income children, families, and communities; and low-wage workers and people with serious barriers to employment. (para. 1)

MDRC currently has two studies that are focused on South Texas College and the

students the college serves. MDRC's (2008) mission states, "MDRC is dedicated to

learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our

research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the

effectiveness of social policies and programs" (para. 1). The Mission of MDRC provides

additional insight into the organization as well as the selection of South Texas College as

the host site for two studies.

An additional national research organization that has chosen to study and partner

with South Texas College due to the college's growing reputation within the higher

education sector is Public Agenda. The Public Agenda (2008) website describes the

organization and its mission as follows:

> For over a quarter of a century, Public Agenda has been providing unbiased and unparalleled research that bridges the gap between American leaders and what the public really thinks about issues ranging from education to foreign policy to immigration to religion and civility in American life. Nonpartisan and nonprofit, Public Agenda was founded by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in 1975. Public Agenda's two-fold mission is to help:
>
> American leaders better understand the public's point of view. Citizens know more about critical policy issues so they can make thoughtful, informed decisions. (para. 1)

Public Agenda selected South Texas College as a partner for public engagement and community conversations related to higher education in the college's service area due to the college's commitment to increasing the educational attainment level for the South Texas region.

In addition to South Texas College leading the nation in the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled, STC has been documented by *Community College Week* (2006) as the 3rd fastest growing community college in the nation among large community colleges. The 'large community colleges' segment utilized for the comparisons is comprised of community colleges of 10,000 students or more. The growth in enrollment over a relatively short 15-year period displays the higher education need within the South Texas region as well as the neglect via the absence of a community college. In addition, the college lends itself as an ideal area to study the burgeoning Hispanic student population in order to provide insight for the rest of the state of Texas as well as the nation as a whole.

While 'Access' via enrollment in higher education is one of the 'Core Values' for South Texas College, another is 'Success.' The college measures student success in a variety of methods including but not limited to successful course completion, fall-to-spring student retention, fall-to-fall student persistence, graduation rates, employer satisfaction, etc. In addition to enrolling such a large number of Hispanic students, South Texas College has a proven commitment to facilitating those students' success as measured by the number of students who graduate from the college. South Texas College currently ranks 41st among the approximately 1200 community colleges in the

total number of associate degrees earned by all students. Furthermore, South Texas

College currently ranks 3rd nationally in awarding associate degrees to Hispanic

students, only trailing the mega-college Miami-Dade College, which is the largest

community college in the nation and El Paso Community College, which was

established in 1971 (*Community College Week*, 2009).

South Texas College has consistently outperformed peer institutions in the

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (n.d.) known as CCSSE. The

origins of the survey are described on the CCSSE website as follows:

> *CCSSE* was established in 2001 as a project of the Community College
> Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin. Major grants from the
> Houston Endowment, the Lumina Foundation for Education, the MetLife
> Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts have supported the work.
>
> *CCSSE* works in partnership with NSSE, a survey that focuses on four-year
> colleges and universities. Established in 1998, NSSE is directed by George Kuh
> and headquartered at Indiana University in the Center for Postsecondary
> Research and Planning. The NSSE survey, administered to first-year and senior
> students in four-year institutions, emerged in response to concerns about quality
> in American undergraduate education and about the lack of emphasis on student
> learning in the major (and highly visible) college rankings in the United States.
>
> From the beginning, though, there was a recognized need for a student
> engagement survey specifically designed for community and technical colleges.
> Thus, *CCSSE* was launched in 2001, with the intention of producing new
> information about community college quality and performance that would
> provide value to institutions in their efforts to improve student learning and
> retention, while also providing policymakers and the public with more
> appropriate ways to view the quality of undergraduate education. (para. 8, 9, 10)

South Texas College began utilization of the CCSSE survey during the Spring 2005 term

and has subsequently out-performed peer institutions within the five CCSSE benchmarks

that CCSSE (n.d.) describes as: "The benchmarks are active and collaborative learning,

student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners"

(para. 1).

Most recently South Texas College was chosen to receive the prestigious 2008

MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award. As described in the press

release issued by Jobs for the Future (2008):

> The award winners were chosen based on their ability to demonstrate determined leadership, innovative programming, and attention to outcomes. The result: clear improvements in meeting the varied learning needs of low-income, first-generation, immigrant, and working students. As part of the award, each college receives a $30,000 grant to continue creating and implementing effective strategies for aiding underrepresented students, as well as using data to target and assess strategies to improve student outcomes.

> MetLife Foundation created the *Community College Excellence Award* to recognize institutions that are helping low-skilled youth and adults enter college to achieve their educational goals. The 2008 winners were selected from nearly 1,200 community colleges nationwide. (para. 2-3)

South Texas College's demographics including total enrollment, Hispanic

enrollment, enrollment growth, number of graduates, number of Hispanic graduates, as

well as the accolades bestowed upon the institution via the selection of participation in

Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, selection for two MDRC national

studies, selection to participate in Public Agenda Community Conversation, and the

2008 selection as one of only two community colleges nationally for the prestigious

MetLife Award for excellence served as strong indicators that the college was an ideal

site selection for a Hispanic student research study. As such, South Texas College was

chosen to facilitate the study of *Successful Hispanic Male First-Time-in-College*

Students at a Community College in South Texas: Experiences That Facilitate Fall First-

Term Student Persistence Through Official Reporting Date.

Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was utilized for this study. As noted earlier, the Hispanic population continues to be the fastest growing and least educated population nationally as well as in the state of Texas where it will soon be the majority population. In addition, the Hispanic male's absence in higher education via their lack of participation and success in higher education is of concern and merits study. As such, participants selected to participate were Hispanic males identified as first-time-in-college students during the Fall 2007 term at South Texas College. In addition, the participants were identified as students who were successfully retained beyond the official reporting date or the twelfth class day at the college. A minimum of three focus groups consisting of four to six participants were anticipated and would be utilized until information began to be repeated or 'redundancy' was reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While data did begin to be repeated by the third focus group, the researcher felt that a fourth focus group was merited and conducted a fourth focus group interview in order to ensure rich data and deep understanding. In total, four focus groups with participants ranging from four to six per focus group were conducted. A total of 18 participants participated in the focus group interviews.

Participant Selection Process

In anticipation of approval from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher began to identify potential Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who had successfully persisted at South Texas College beyond the official reporting date for Fall 2007. As a seasoned Student Affairs and Enrollment

Management administrator, the researcher regularly monitors first-time-in-college student activity and, therefore, had standard reports which are generated via the South Texas College student information system in place. In addition, based on the study focusing on the largest of the five South Texas College campuses, the Pecan Campus, the researcher began to identify Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who had successfully persisted through the official reporting date from the three McAllen high schools. The researcher focused on the McAllen high schools as the previous enrollment trends indicated that the majority of McAllen high schools' students attend the Pecan Campus.

The choice of Hispanic males as aforementioned is of particular interest as Hispanic males are not participating or successfully completing higher education at the same levels as non-Hispanic males or even at levels of Hispanic females. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe purposive sampling stating, "All sampling is done with some purpose in mind. Within the conventional paradigm that purpose almost always is to define a sample that is in some sense representative of a population to which it is desired to generalize" (pp. 199-200). The researcher chose the Hispanic male first-time-in-college student who had successfully persisted through official reporting date at South Texas College as the target population for this research in an effort to shed light on this population in order to facilitate their success at similar institutions of higher education.

In addition to supporting 'generalization,' purposive sampling according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are six other utilizations described in the following manner as taken from Patton :

- *sampling extreme or deviant cases* to obtain information about unusual cases that may be particularly troublesome or enlightening

- *sampling typical cases* to avoid rejection of information on the grounds that it is known to arise from special or deviant cases

- *maximum variation sampling* to document unique variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions

- *sampling critical cases* to permit maximum application of information to other cases because, if the information is valid for critical cases, it is also likely to be true of all other cases

- *sampling politically important or sensitive cases* to attract attention to the study (or, sometimes, to deflect attention)

- *convenience sampling* to save time, money, or effort (pp. 200-201)

The researcher chose to utilize typical cases, critical cases, and politically important cases in addition to generalization for this study. The three types of cases chosen were most appropriate for the study of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who successfully persisted through the official reporting date. This was based on the knowledge that the students who participated would be typical Hispanic male students. These students would serve as a critical segment of the higher education population in light of the fact that the Hispanic population is growing so fast and also due to the disproportionate absence of Hispanic males in higher education. Finally, these students would also be politically important as the Hispanic population continues to be the fastest growing population in the nation and will soon be the majority population in the state of Texas, yet continues to be the least educated population in both the state of Texas as well as the nation.

Data Collection

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "the sources that instrument [researcher] utilizes

may be both human and nonhuman. Human sources are taped by interviews and

observations and by noting non-verbal cues. Nonhuman sources include documents and

records" (p. 267). In order to increase trustworthiness of the findings, both human and

nonhuman sources were utilized. These sources included: (a) focus groups, (b) personal

interviews, and (c) existing data and are expounded on below.

The collection of data for this study occurred over an eight-month period of time

commencing in December 2007 and ceasing in July 2008. Data were collected for this

study via focus group interviewing, personal interviews, and through the utilization of

existing data within the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at South

Texas College, which had also been collected via focus group methodology.

Focus Group Interviewing

Patton (1990) stated, "A focus group interview is an interview with a small group

of people on a specific topic. Groups are typically six to eight people who participate in

the interview for one-half to two hours" (p. 335). Furthering the rationale for using focus

groups, Patton contends, "The focus group interview is, indeed, an interview. It is not a

discussion. Participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional

comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to

say" (Patton, 1990, p. 335).

Upon receiving official word from the IRB on November 12, 2007, the

researcher began to expand his list and made attempts to call students who met the

criteria. In order to meet focus group data needs of at least four students per focus groups, the researcher scheduled eight to ten students per focus group. As the researcher contacted students, he also encouraged them to invite other Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who had successfully persisted through the official reporting date. In order to ensure that students felt that they were in their own setting and thus felt comfortable, the focus group interviews were scheduled in the South Texas College, Pecan Campus, Student Activities Center Building. This is a building designed for students to congregate for meetings, relaxation, or to eat as the building also contains the campus cafeteria. The researcher also utilized a Hispanic male staff member from the Office of Student Life to serve as a scribe in order to fill in the matrix described below. This allowed the researcher to focus on the students' body language, level of engagement, and to ensure that all members were able to participate in the interview. It also allowed the researcher to keep the interview moving along.

Prior to the beginning of each scheduled focus group interviews, the researcher explained to participants the purpose of the focus group interview as it related to the study and provided the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board information sheet (Appendix A) that described the researcher's study. The IRB sheet also provided each student with contact information for the IRB as well as the Chair of the researcher's committee should the student need additional information about the study or wished to express concerns. The researcher ensured that everyone participating was indeed a Hispanic male first-time-in-college student who successfully persisted through official reporting date. The researcher also asked the participants for permission to record the

interview in order to transcribe and analyze the data. The researcher assured each of the participants that they would be anonymous and that the researcher's Chair and the researcher would be the only individuals who would have access to the recordings. In addition, the researcher explained to the participants that the interview would last approximately one hour. The focus group interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 57 minutes. On average, the focus group interview lasted just under 50 minutes.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described "selection to the point of redundancy" as "in purposeful sampling, the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, then sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion" (p. 202). In order to enhance trustworthiness of the data and findings, four focus groups comprised of successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students were carried out until redundancy was established. The researcher's intent was to schedule a minimum of three focus groups in order to reach of the level of 'redundancy' as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). As such the first three focus groups were scheduled. Upon completion of the first three focus groups, the researcher felt that he should have one more focus group to ensure that a level of 'redundancy' had been reached. A total of four focus groups consisting of four to six students were conducted using Padilla's unfolding matrix. The four focus groups yielded a sample size of 18 students.

Padilla's Unfolding Matrix

The "unfolding matrix" influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Freire (1971), Spradley (1979), and Miles and Huberman (1984) was utilized as the method of data collection. Padilla's (1994) suggestion that the researcher utilize the matrix during the focus group discussion was utilized to collect data. Padilla et al. (1997) stated, "a filled matrix becomes a qualitative data set that is subjected to interpretive analysis to develop a concept model for understanding the phenomenon under study – in this case the success of college students on a particular campus" (p. 127). However, in order to maximize the utility of the data, focus group interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed appropriately utilizing Lincoln and Guba (1985) methods. In addition, the researcher found that the matrices alone left out much of the rich data that existed and came through to the forefront during transcription and analysis.

An empty matrix was prepared and displayed, via a post-it flip chart on the whiteboard, prior to the focus group inquiry. The headings were based on the research questions utilized for this study and are as follows: Barriers, Frequency (of those barriers), Knowledge (needed to overcome those barriers), Actions (needed to take in order to overcome those barriers), and Changes (that the focal institution should employ in an attempt to eliminate the barrier). The matrices were filled based on the information and perspective provided by the participants, successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who had persisted beyond official reporting date of the Fall 2007 term. The focus groups' matrices were useful in determining when data were being repeated

and no new information was emerging from the students, thus reaching a satisfactory

level of 'redundancy' as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Semi-Structured Personal Interviews

While focus groups provided initial data, in order to facilitate data triangulation

as well as in an effort to increase the level of understanding and richness of the data,

semi-structured interviews followed with three individual participants selected from the

four focus groups. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the process of data collection via

interviews as follows:

> The purposes for doing an interview include, among others, obtaining here-and-now constructions of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities; reconstructions of such entities as experienced in the past; projections of such entities as they are expected to be experienced in the future; verification, emendation, and extension of information (constructions, reconstructions, or projections) obtained from other sources, human and nonhuman (triangulation); and verification, emendation, and extension of constructions developed by the inquirer (member checking). (p. 268)

Conducting additional individual semi-structured interviews with participants from the

focus groups provided the researcher a deeper understanding of the experiences of

successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who persisted beyond official

reporting date for the Fall 2007 term. In addition to strengthening the study, the semi-

structured interviews allowed for member checking.

The researcher selected three of the 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college

students who successfully persisted through the official reporting date of the Fall 2007

semester at South Texas College to participate in these semi-structured interviews. The

participants for the semi-structured personal interviews were also purposive sampling in

that the students were selected due to some of the contributions they made during their respective focus groups. They provided valuable insights on many of the barriers that were being described by all members of the focus groups, and they also provided unique perspectives on some of the barriers. Upon reviewing notes as well as the filled-in matrices, the researcher determined that these three individuals would provide deeper information that would facilitate his understanding.

At the beginning of the semi-structured personal interviews, the researcher once again explained the purpose of the study, namely, to develop a deeper understanding of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who successfully persisted through the official reporting date of the Fall 2007 semester. The researcher also provided an additional copy of the Information Sheet approved by the Institutional Review Board and asked each of the students' permission to record the interview, while explaining that the interview, would last approximately one hour. The three personal interviews ranged in time between 44 minutes and 60 minutes and on average lasted just over 50 minutes.

Existing Data

Finally, existing data that had been collected by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness via focus group interviewing at the focal community college on successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students were utilized in an effort to establish data triangulation. These data were collected in the Spring 2007 term and also utilized Padilla's Unfolding Matrix. A faculty member from the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences who is a qualitative research expert facilitated the collection, transcription, and analysis of the existing data.

Recording the Interviews

In order to ensure that the rich information from each of the focus groups as well as the semi-structured personal interviews was recorded properly, the researcher utilized two separate audio recorders, an RCA® digital voice recorder with 64 megabytes of memory, which translates up to 26 hours of digital recording, and as a Sony® Microcassette Recorder as a backup. In addition, a Hispanic male staff member from the Office of Student Life served as a recorder filling in the Unfolding Matrix for each focus group. This allowed the researcher to concentrate on each of the individuals participating as part of the focus groups as opposed to writing down his or her respective comments. The researcher also took notes during the semi-structured personal interviews as well as upon completion of each of the focus groups. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher connected the RCA® digital voice recorder to a personal computer and transferred the digital voice recordings, via the Universal Serial Bus (USB) cable, for future transcription as an executable file. The researcher also created a copy of each file into a backup folder within a personal computer. This allowed for one more measure of data integrity as well as simplifying the transcription process. The researcher saved each file with the following protocol for future reference: FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4, PI1, PI2, and PI3.

Interview Procedures

During the focus group interviews, the researcher utilized a prepared Institutional Review Board approved draft questions (Appendix B). These draft questions also influenced the personal interview questions. However, during both the focus group and

personal interviews, the questions utilized were open-ended so as to engage the students to provide insight on the barriers that they faced and overcame. The researcher asked for clarification by utilizing statements as, "Can you speak to that some more," or "Explain that a bit more." The researcher took notes during the interviews of key items discussed, which resonated during the interview either due to the inflection in the participant's voice or the body language displayed by the participant. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher immediately took notes regarding overall impressions of the interview including the participants' level of engagement. The researcher also immediately tested both audio recorders to ensure that they had properly captured the interviews.

Transcribing the Interviews

Utilizing the Digital Voice Manager, which came as part of the RCA® digital voice recorder and included the traditional playback features such as play and pause, allowed the researcher to transcribe each of the seven interviews conducted. The researcher proceeded to sit at a personal computer with a headphone set and set about to personally transcribe each of the seven interviews at a pace of approximately seven hours per every recorded hour. Thus, the six hours of recordings from the seven interviews conducted took approximately 42 hours of transcription time. The length of time required to transcribe the recorded interviews provided the first opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who successfully persisted through fall official reporting date.

While many researchers choose to utilize either computer software to transcribe interviews or hire a professional transcriber, this researcher chose to personally transcribe them as the activity would allow him to partake in his first level of data analysis. This was accomplished due to the deep listening and the required repeated rewinding necessary to accurately transcribe the interview.

The researcher describes the choice and justification of instrumentation utilized for the study in the following section. The paragraphs that follow detail reasoning behind the researcher choosing himself as the key instrument.

Instrumentation

In accordance with one of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) 14 characteristics of operational naturalistic inquiry, the researcher was utilized as the primary research instrument. Lincoln and Guba described the human instrument in detail:

> N [Researcher] elects to use him- or herself as well as other humans as the primary data gathering instruments (as opposed to paper-and-pencil or brass instruments) because it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered; because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases. (pp. 40-41)

As the stated purpose of the study was to inform a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students via the investigation of their respective student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through official

reporting date of the selected community college (STC), the utilization of naturalist paradigm style, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was appropriate. Inherent within the naturalistic paradigm style is the utilization of the researcher as the primary instrument for data gathering.

Insider Perspective

The researcher for this study is a member of the South Texas College executive team and has served as a member of the college's administrative team for over ten years. The researcher has served as South Texas College's Vice-President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management for the past three years and is responsible for all direct student services, student development initiatives, and all enrollment management activities at all five campuses within the college district. The researcher is responsible for all areas within the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management that include the Office of Admissions and Records, Student Information Centers, Student Outreach Services, Counseling and Advising, Student Retention Services, Financial Aid, the Assessment Center, Special Programs, Career Counseling, Job Placement Services, Judicial Affairs, Student Life, Student Welcome Centers, American Disabilities Act Services, and Student Mentoring Services.

During the researcher's tenure at the college, it has become apparent that the male enrollment at the college has begun to dwindle and must be addressed in order to continue serving the community. As a result of being a member of the college's executive and administrative team for the last 12 years, the researcher recognized the biases that were inherent. Thus, the researcher took every precaution to address such

biases. The researcher serving as a member of the college's administrative team also allowed the study to be viewed and administered through the perspective of an insider. The problem was studied from the inside out.

Due to the college's enrollment growth, student demographics, and involvement in national initiatives, South Texas College has been and continues to be studied by a number of national research organizations and is being viewed as a laboratory on how to serve and facilitate Hispanic students (Achieving the Dream, 2007; Jobs for the Future, 2008; MDRC, 2008). This study has added to the knowledge of how to serve Hispanic male students.

Once data has been collected, it must be prepared and subsequently analyzed. The researcher describes the data preparation and analysis utilized for the study in following section.

Preparation and Data Analysis

Data analysis is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as follows:

> Open-ended and inductive for the naturalist, in contrast to the focused and deductive analysis common in conventional inquiry. Since the form of the data that will ultimately be produced by the human instrument is unknown in advance, the data cannot be specified at the beginning of the inquiry. Further, there are no a priori questions or hypothesis that can preordinately guide data analysis decisions; these must be made as the inquiry proceeds. What is at issue is the best means to "make sense" of the data in ways that will, first, facilitate the continuing unfolding of the inquiry, and, second, lead to a maximal understanding (in the sense of verstehen) of the phenomenon being studied in its context. (pp. 224-225)

As such, the data for the study were collected in a manner that allowed the researcher to maximize an understanding of the stated phenomenon; experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male

students in a predominately Hispanic community college. The specific means of data

collection and analysis utilized are described in detail.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a combination of Padilla et al.'s (1996, 1997) "unfolding

matrix" that was influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Freire (1971), Spradley

(1979), and Miles and Huberman (1984) in combination with Lincoln and Guba (1985)

"Constant Comparative Method" as a means for data analysis.

The researcher's initial inclination was to follow Padilla's (1994) suggestion of

utilizing the filled matrices that were collected and filled in by a note taker during the

focus group discussions that the researcher facilitated as complete data sets. This was

described by Padilla et al. (1997) as: "a filled matrix becomes a qualitative data set that

is subjected to interpretive analysis" (p. 127). However, upon review of the first focus

group data-filled matrix, the researcher realized that in order to develop the deep

understanding of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who persisted

through the official reporting date of the Fall 2007 semester was going to be greater than

Padilla's (1991) 'unfolding matrix' alone. This was due to the lack of depth in the

responses that was recorded via the matrices. Thus, the task of transcribing each of the

four focus groups, in addition to the three semi-structured personal interviews, would be

required.

Each of the focus group filled matrices were taken by an official note taker, a

Hispanic male employee of the college who did not participate in the focus group

interviews, were coded, analyzed, and interpreted by the researcher to develop an

understanding of the experiences that successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students have at the focal community college. Padilla et al. (1996) concluded that the participant identified barriers and the subsequent knowledge needed to overcome those barriers provide a local model of both heuristic (or practical) knowledge and actions that successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students have taken at the focal community college. In addition, the focus group interviews were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted.

Semi-structured individual interviews with three members from the focus groups were conducted upon completion of the focus group interviews. Questions were open-ended in order to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences that successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students have at the focal community college. The interviews also facilitated member checks in order to ensure trustworthiness.

Interviews were recorded with permission of each of the three interviewees and were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted. Finally, existing data which have been collected via focus group interviewing at the focal community college on successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students was utilized for triangulation.

As Padilla's 'unfolding matrix' alone was not sufficient to provide the deep understanding of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students sought, the researcher utilized Lincoln and Guba's (1985) Constant Comparative Method of unitizing and coding, categorizing, followed by emerging themes and finally subthemes. Each of these steps, as well as the incorporation of Padilla's 'unfolding matrix,' is described in the following sections.

The researcher's data analysis was completed in a series of phases that included reviewing notes upon completion of each focus group interview as well as each personal interview, reviewing the filled matrix for each focus group interview, transcribing the interviews, reading the transcript, placing initial manual breaks within the printed transcript, unitizing the transcript via online index cards to break up the transcripts electronically without referring to the previously printed and preliminarily unitized transcripts, highlighting key statements in the unitized electronic index cards, comparing the online index unit cards to the previously printed and preliminarily unitized cards and adjusting as needed, utilizing the Lincoln and Guba (1985) method of separating the cards into categories and placing notes on the back cover of the card that characterized the segment of the interview, stacking the cards into categories and merging categories as fit into main themes, then finally re-reviewing all cards that allowed for the formulation of subthemes within the original main themes.

In accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures as well as qualitative research protocol, ethical considerations were attended to in this study. The researcher describes the ethical considerations utilized during the conduction of this study in the following section.

Ethical Considerations

Patton (1990) stated, "the purpose of a research interview is first and foremost to gather data, not change people. The researcher asserted that an interviewer is not a judge. Neither is a research interviewer a therapist" (p. 354). Merriam (1998) elaborated further on the responsibilities of the researcher when conducting qualitative research:

> Although researchers can turn to guidelines and regulations for help in dealing with some of the ethical concerns likely to emerge in qualitative research, the burden of producing a study that has been conducted and disseminated in an ethical manner lies with the individual investigator. (p. 219)

Each of the aforementioned authors stress the importance of ethics and ethical considerations that must be considered and attended to while conducting qualitative research. As such, the following ethical considerations were attended to throughout the conduction and reporting of this study:

- In order to address anonymity, participants' privacy and confidentiality have been protected via the use of aliases or code names such as 'focus group respondent one' or 'interviewee two;'

- Every effort to ensure that participants were protected from psychological harm was utilized.

- Informed consent, in accordance with IRB requirements, was provided to each of the participants prior to any research taking place.

- By addressing each of the mentioned ethical considerations, both participant well-being and richness of the data were tended to accordingly.

Merriam (1998) stated, "in qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings" (p. 213). In order to ensure participants' privacy, but to ensure richness of the data, utilized quotes have been attributed to aliases as opposed to actual names. The researcher is the only person who knows actual participant names. All recorded and related data was housed under lock and key at the researcher's residence.

Reliability and validity must be accounted for in both quantitative as well as qualitative research. The researcher addresses the reliability and validity of the study in the following section.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) surmised trustworthiness in the following manner:

> The conventional criteria for trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Now the questions underlying the establishment of these criteria are also appropriate to ask of naturalistic inquiry:
>
> - How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of the findings of an inquiry for the respondents with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?
>
> - How can one determine the degree to which the findings of an inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents?
>
> - How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) respondents in the same (or similar) context?
>
> - How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry stem from the characteristics of the respondents and the context and not from the biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives of the inquirer? (p. 218)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further suggested four new terms to facilitate naturalistic epistemology:

> proposes that these conventional formulations be replaced with four new terms that have a better fit with naturalistic epistemology; these he [Guba] has named "credibility" (in place of internal validity), "transferability" (in place of external validity), "dependability" (in place of reliability), and "confirmability" (in place of objectivity). (p. 219)

Each of the new terms established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which have a better fit with naturalistic inquiry, were addressed by the researcher as the study was conducted:

- Credibility was addressed in the study via the allotment of adequate time to conduct the study as well as through the utilization of multiple methods for data collection including focus groups, personal interviews, member checks, and the utilization of existing data. Each allowed for triangulation, as data from each of the collection methods was compared and verified. In addition, the use of field notes was utilized as part of the study.

- Transferability or the ability of the findings to be useful in a different context was addressed via the utilization of "thick description."

- Dependability or the findings and interpretations being acceptable and reliable was tested via the use of an external qualitative researcher.

- Confirmability was addressed via the triangulation of data within the study.

Analyses and interpretations of the data collected from these procedures and following the principles outlined above are discussed further in Chapter IV. Results or findings from the study are reported in Chapters IV and V for both the focus group and personal interviews coupled with the triangulation of the existing data.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

During the proposal hearing segment of this wonderful journey, one of my distinguished committee members asked, "William, what 'barrier' could possibly come up for these [Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at a community college in South Texas, who successfully persist through official reporting date of their first-term fall semester] students between the time they register and the official reporting date [twelfth class day] other than payment?" Having served in a Student Affairs administrative capacity for well over a decade, the answers seemed limitless, as the researcher had heard many of them firsthand from students as they requested to be reinstated into their course schedule, or to register late, or even to be dropped at the full refund rate due to a personal issue that had come up unexpectedly. While the researcher had anecdotally heard many of these human stories that were at times very unique, but at other times, seemed to be eerily reminiscent of a story the researcher had heard before, either earlier that semester or perhaps the previous one, the researcher could only hypothesize and speculate on possible scenarios. In addition, the researcher was able to provide some insight on today's community college students and some of the issues that they are facing on a daily basis.

The researcher wanted to develop a deeper understanding of this group of students, Hispanic male first-time-in-college students, for a variety of reasons. The most obvious reason, to develop this deeper understanding, was to meet the "in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy," which is on the

title page of this dissertation. However, beyond the researcher's degree requirements, the reasons run much deeper and have become a personal passion to best serve this growing segment of the general population that happens to also be a diminishing population within the halls of higher education. The topic of concentrating on Hispanic male students was chosen almost nonchalantly as the researcher had seen very little in the literature focusing on male students in higher education, much less Hispanic males. The researcher had seen a concerted effort from scholars and practitioners focusing on African American males at many national conferences, for both Student Affairs/Advisement as well as Enrollment Management professionals, and the researcher began to question and research why nothing on Hispanic males existed. In addition, the data from his own institution in which he serves as the Vice-President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management displayed what he would deem a disturbing trend of serving a student body that was strikingly majority female, which is not representative of the community for which South Texas College was founded to serve.

Finally, the researcher is personally vested in the subject area as he is a Hispanic male student who somehow made it through that first semester in college, though not without facing his share of barriers and wants to develop knowledge within the field to better serve such students. This reason gained additional brevity as during this educational journey, he and his wife were blessed with a son, who in 15 short years will be attempting to navigate the systems of higher education as a Hispanic male first-time-in-college student.

The following segments of this chapter detail the data collection and analysis, for both the focus group and personal interviews, and the findings. Data analysis will be provided via the emergent themes and subthemes utilizing a combination of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant comparative method of transcript analysis in combination with segments of Padilla's 'unfolding matrix' which while adequate to provide a general understanding proved to be insufficient to provide the deep understanding sought. The emergent themes and subthemes also served to answer the research questions that guided this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon the completion of unitizing, coding, and categorizing, the focus group and personal interview data as well as utilizing existing data for triangulation, five emergent themes arose as major factors influencing Hispanic male first-time-in-college students' persistence. In addition, five emergent barrier themes rose to the forefront as well as many subthemes within the main themes. However, prior to providing the emergent persistence themes and barrier themes as well as the corresponding knowledge and action themes and finally the proposed college changes themes, it is important to document all items that students provided. Tables 3 through 6 include the student listed barriers, knowledge/actions, and college changes as well as the listed subthemes, by area of Padilla's 'unfolding matrix,' i.e., Barriers, Knowledge/Actions, and College Action/Solutions. The researcher has also provided Table 3, in which the researcher details the focus group interviews as well as the personal interviews utilizing the numbering and code used for each interview within the study for reference by the

committee. Of note for the committee as well is that all 18 participants were indeed first-time-in-college students.

The researcher utilizes Table 3 to indicate the interview number for each of the seven interviews conducted, the interview code assigned to the interview, and the number of participants who participated in each of the interviews. A total of seven interviews consisting of four focus groups, ranging in size from four to six participants, and three personal interviews were conducted. Both the focus group participants and the personal interview participants were purposively selected based on meeting the criteria of being a Hispanic male first-time-in-college student who had successfully persisted through the official reporting date of their first fall term at South Texas College.

Table 3. Focus Group and Personal Interview Participants

Interview #	Focus Group/ Personal Interview Code	Number of Participants
1	FG1	4
2	FG2	4
3	FG3	6
4	FG4	4
5	PI1	1
6	PI2	1
7	PI3	1
Total – 7		18/3

The researcher utilized Table 4 to indicate the student listed barriers, not in rank order, that resulted from the focus groups and personal interviews conducted. Subthemes are also provided based on key words used by interviewees. In addition, interviewees who selected the barrier or subtheme are also identified.

Table 4. Student Listed Barriers and Subthemes from Interview Participants

Barrier	Subtheme	Interview Participant(s)
1. Transportation	Missing class due to lack of transportation	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4 PI1
	Don't have a ride	
	Auto accident	
2. Work/Job	Balancing work & college homework	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Scheduling classes	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Financial aid is not enough	
	Cost of education	
3. Transition HS to College	College knowledge	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Age differences	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Diversity	
	Feeling lost/alone	
	Fear	
4. Financial Aid	Qualifying process	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4 PI1,PI2, PI3
5. Money/Financial	Time is money	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Getting the money upfront	PI1, PI2, PI3
6. Time Management	Distractions	FG1FG 2, FG3, FG4
	Procrastination	
	Late registration/lines	
	Study time	
7. Family/Home	1st Generation	FG1, FG3, FG4
	Daycare	PI1, PI2, PI3
8. Hispanic Culture	Traditions	PI2, PI3
	Stereotypes	
9. Parking	Late to class	FG1, FG2, FG4
	Planning	
10. Placement Exams (THEA)	Enrollment process (Online)	FG2, FG3
	Developmental courses	
11. Class Schedule/Advising	Can't build a schedule	FG1, FG2, FG4
	Misadvisement	FG2
12. Stress	Language	FG3, FG4
13 Faculty	Don't/can't teach.	FG1
14. Bookstore	Lack of used books	FG2
	Cost of books	FG2
15. Health	Nurse on campus	FG2

Table 5 was created by the researcher to document the student listed

Knowledge/Action themes in response to the student listed barriers identified, not in

rank order, which resulted from the focus groups and personal interviews conducted. In

addition, interviewees who selected the knowledge/action theme are also identified.

Table 5. Student Listed Knowledge/Action Themes Per Identified Barrier From Interview Participants

Barrier	Knowledge/Action Theme	Interview Participant(s)
1. Transportation	Get a ride	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Have a backup plan	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Carpool; bus system	
2. Work/Job	Partake in work-study program	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Get a part-time job	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Set schedule with boss	
	Long-term plans	
	Talk to faculty	
3. Transition HS to College	Meet new people	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Just deal with it	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Make the connection to being the first in the family to graduate from college.	
	Have a positive mindset	
	Stay motivated	
	Get to know the faculty	
	Dual enrollment	
	Use all resources	
	College Success Course	
4. Financial Aid	Work	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	College loans	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Plan for deadlines	
	Follow up	
5. Money/Financial	Save/Budget	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Negotiate	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Live like a student	
6. Time Management	Take College Success	FG2, FG3, FG4
	Use a planner/schedule/short term goals	
	Personal accountability	
	Trial and error	
7. Family/Home	Separate home from school	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Stay on campus	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Rely on friends	
	Move out	
8. Hispanic Culture	Resist cultural traps	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Establish high expectations	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Rely on friends	
9. Parking	Get to class earlier	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Take the shuttles	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Follow students leaving	
10. Placement Exams (THEA)	Study for the exam	FG2
11. Class Schedule/Advising	Stay on campus	FG2
	Utilize mini-mesters	
	Personal accountability	
	Meet with program chair	

Table 5 (continued)

Barrier	Knowledge/Action Theme	Interview Participant(s)
12. Stress	Deal with it	FG1, FG3, FG4
	Take homework to work	
	Join a club	
	Exercise/meditate	
13. Faculty	Communicate with faculty	FG1, FG3
	Suck-up to faculty	
	Switch classes	
	Use tutoring	
14. Bookstore	Create a book network	FG2
15. Health		FG2

Table 6 was created by the researcher to document the student listed College

Action themes in response to the student listed barriers, not in rank order, that resulted

from the focus groups and personal interviews conducted. In addition, interviewees who

selected the College Action theme are also identified.

Table 6. Listed College Action Themes Per Student Identified Barrier From Interview
Participants

Barrier	College Action	Interview Participant(s)
1. Transportation	Provide shuttle buses	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Work with City of McAllen	PI1, PI2, PI3
2. Work/Job	Lower tuition	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Offer more courses at different times	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Increase work-study program	
	Work with employers	
3. Transition HS to College	More tutoring	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Offer workshops	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Hire engaging faculty	
	Require College Success	
	Go to high schools more	
	Offer more dual enrollment	
	Create mentoring programs	
4. Financial Aid	Offer more aid	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	More used books	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Offer loans	
	More communication	
5. Money/Financial	Offer loans	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Expand financial aid	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Lower tuition	
6. Time Management	More tutoring	FG1, FG2, FG4
	Make College Success mandatory	

Table 6 (continued)

Barrier	College Action	Interview Participant(s)
7. Family/Home/1st Generation Student	Offer parent orientations	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Help educate the population	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Newsletter	
	Commercials	
8. Hispanic Culture	Go to high schools more	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Change the mindset	PI1, PI2, PI3
	Set high expectations	
9. Parking	Build a parking garage	FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4
	Build additional lots	PI1, PI2, PI3
10. Placement Exams (THEA)	Offer more practice exams	FG2
11. Class Schedule/Advising	Offer more programs/classes	FG1, FG4
	Offer more advising	
12. Stress/Panic	Provide stress balls	FG1, FG3, FG4
	Wellness Center	
	Facilitate study groups	
	Stress management classes	
13. Faculty	Hire Anglo & Hispanic faculty	FG1, FG3, FG4
	Discipline/incentive faculty	
	Hire caring faculty	
	Faculty training	
	Hire more faculty	
14. Bookstore	Provide more used books	FG2
15. Health	Provide a nurse on campus	FG2

The Interviews

The qualitative research for this study would have been null and void if not for the participants who voluntarily participated in this study. In total, 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students participated and provided rich data utilized to form the findings for this study. In the following sections, the researcher will describe both the four focus group interviews as well as the subsequent three personal interviews conducted to develop a deeper understanding of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who persisted through official reporting date of their first term at South Texas College.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus Group 1 (FG1)

Focus group 1 was comprised of four Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who were all traditional college age, approximately 18-20 years old. Three of the participants were very engaged from the beginning, while the researcher had to ensure during the course of the interview that the fourth participant of the focus group became engaged. The information shared by each of the participants was forthcoming and sincere in an attempt to improve the success rates of their fellow and future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

The interview began by affirming that each of the four participants were indeed Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and registered for the Fall 2007 term at South Texas College. The students' responses to this question developed what later became a theme, time management or procrastination, for all four focus groups as well as the three subsequent personal interviews:

> Researcher – So, what I want to go through is when did you guys register? When did you guys register for the fall semester? Do you remember?
>
> Student – I don't really remember…around July, I think the end of June or the beginning of July.
>
> Student – In May, around mid May.
>
> Student – July also.
>
> Student – Like in August. [Focus Group 1, card #2 of 84]

It must be noted that the Fall 2007 semester at South Texas College began on August 29, 2007, and that registration opened in mid-March 2007.

Focus Group 1 Barriers

The emergent barrier themes identified by the Focus Group 1 included the following:

- Time Management

- Personal/Home Problems

- Job

- Transition From High School to College

- Faculty

- Money/Financial Aid

- Parking

- Family Issues

- Transportation

The students' description of each of the identified barriers are presented in the following sections.

Time management. Time management was a consistent theme throughout the interview process. The reasons, however, were not always due just to procrastination as one would be inclined to believe. These students are faced with such a variety of possible challenges or barriers that could arise without any warning. Focus Group 1 explained time management in several instances:

Student – Going to class.

Student – Distractions from friends. [Focus Group 1, card #4 of 84]

Personal/home problems. Students in Focus Group 1 described personal and home problems with respect to a lack of understanding higher education at home stating, "You're the first generation from your family to go to college – you don't know really how to start or where to start at, um really you're just goin' blind cause you're really don't know anything. [Focus Group 1, card #6 of 84]

Job/work. Three of the four students involved in Focus Group 1 indicated that they worked, and it was a theme that emerged from all four focus groups. The most interesting aspect that the students brought to the forefront on the Job barrier was the fact that they understand that work is a requirement and necessity not as a choice. The key becomes the negotiation of the work schedule with the class schedule:

Student – Job! You would have to put in your school schedule you know try to fit it in. So if you're probably like a full-time, or even a part-time, you go to work five days and go to school maybe two days, you try to make a full, a full schedule and those two days that you go, you have 4 classes; it's not like if it's just two classes a day, it's a lot of work. And then you have a lot of homework and you'll be up late and you can't really…you get real stressed out because you're working and then you have a lot of homework and sometimes you don't get to do it.

[Focus Group 1, card #9 of 84]

Transition from high school to college. Students from each of the focus groups felt strongly that the transition from high school to college indeed served as a barrier.

Focus Group 1 elaborating on the transition or difference between high school and

college described it in the following manner:

> Student – So actually, the first days of school, like you said the first 12 days of
>
> school are actually the hardest because you're adjusting to a whole new setting
>
> and for example if you have morning classes, that could be a big problem. You
>
> know waking up in the morning to something you're going to get used is actually
>
> quite a bit of a challenge. So adjusting to a new surrounding – a new setting.
>
> That's a one of, I consider a big problem. [Focus Group #1, card #12 of 84]

Faculty. Interestingly enough Focus Group 1 was the only one of the four to

straight out state that faculty members at times served as a barrier for Hispanic male

first-time-in-college students. The candor of Focus Group 1 was especially evident when

discussing faculty as a barrier:

> Student – Some instructors they, now you can't get along with them or they
>
> might be smart, but they don't know how to teach. That may be a problem.
>
> Student – Some instructors suck...
>
> Student – Like one of my teachers, he does everything for us okay. Like it's a
>
> Tuesday-Thursday class, and we just go Thursdays, cause Tuesdays it's like we
>
> don't do [crap]. And he's like, we just read a book. He gets off track completely.
>
> He starts talking about something else. [Focus Group 1, cards #28-29 or 84]

Money/financial. South Texas College is located in one of the poorest regions of

not only the state of Texas but of the nation as a whole. It was no surprise for this to

come up as a barrier. It was also evident that financial aid, for which nearly 90% of all

South Texas College students qualify, is not ample to meet the true cost of education or financial needs. Focus Group 1 stated this succinctly stating, "Actually, money is a barrier. You have to work because really financial aid might give you a little money, but it's really nothing compared to what you eat, gas, maintenance around your house, your car and all that. [Focus Group 1, cards #35-36 of 84]

Parking. As a seasoned enrollment manager, I've learned that all students on every campus across the nation will find time to complain about parking. My contention is that if a campus does not have a parking problem, it has an enrollment problem. Focus Group 1 was sure to mention parking as a barrier. However, it is important to note that this focus group did not speak to parking as an issue until about halfway through the interview:

Student – Another barrier with that is actually if you get too late of a class, you can't find a parking space either. Actually, there's a time where if you get here around let's say after 9 or 10 that's it…you're going to have to park on the other side of Pecan. So that's another barrier.

Researcher – Absolutely, that's another barrier, so how many of our students do you think are dealing with that?

Student – (Laughing) – Everybody. 100%, no doubt even the faculty. [Focus Group 1, card #42 of 84]

Family issues. In addition to dealing with what Focus Group 1 entitled Home Problems that pointed primarily to issues with the students' parents, many students are dealing with their very own families:

Student – Maybe a lot of people have kids or family.

Researcher – Family issues.

Student – Day care.

Researcher – How many students do you think, like you guys are dealing with

that?

Student – I say about 75% would have already a kid. There's a lot of older people

here, there are older students as well. [Focus Group 1, card #79 of 84]

The barrier identified by this focus group is rather intuitive as the student

demographic data at South Texas College does in fact confirm that many students do in

fact have families. Having run the registration process at South Texas College for the

last 12 years, the number of students bringing children with them to registration has

continued to grow.

Transportation. The idea that getting to and from the South Texas College

Pecan campus may seem like a remote possibility given the parking situation that is also

described as a barrier by the students of this and every focus group conducted. However,

the reality for many students is that transportation is not only a barrier, but it is a barrier

that affects the entire college population:

Researcher – what kind of challenges or barriers came up between then and

getting through that 12th class day, that September 14th day where we drop

students and some of the guys that may have been in your class aren't there

anymore because they got dropped.

Student – Maybe some people don't have transportation.

Researcher – Okay – good

Student – They probably don't have a car to get here at time or they don't have a ride to school at all and they have to miss out.

Researcher – How many guys do you think are dealing with this, how many of the Hispanic males students we have?

Student – Almost everybody misses at least one day because of transportation…whether it's like you got a flat so I would say like 95 to 100% because everybody misses once, at least once. [Focus Group 1, cards #13-14 of 84]

Focus Group 1 (FG1) Knowledge/Actions

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group interview provided a list of barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe the students on the knowledge/actions they respectively utilized to successfully navigate that barrier. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice in order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. The emergent Knowledge/Actions themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 1.

Time management. Dealing with time management for Focus Group 1 was more apt to providing pat answers and about dealing with or recovering from the circumstances of time mismanagement than actually addressing the behavior itself. In addition, seeking students' knowledge and actions on dealing with the barriers that they

experienced proved to be much more of a challenge. Several levels of probing were utilized in order to get actual actions voiced. The following, beginning with the pat answer and subsequently the methods of dealing with time mismanagement, are Focus Group 1 responses:

Student – You have to think about your future. [Focus Group 1, card #15 of 84]

Student – Suck up to the teachers.

Researcher – Can you elaborate, what does that mean to you?

Student – Sucking up to the teachers?

Researcher – Yeah, what kind of actions are you talking about?

Student – Don't piss them off. Like try to be on their good side.

Researcher – How do you do that? How do you get on their good side?

Student – Pretend like you're actually paying attention to what they have to say.

Student – Do your work.

Student – Some people will like compliment them or stuff like that.

Researcher – But actually complimenting them, talking to them.

Student – Yeah, like getting them, bringing them to your level kind of thing.

Student – Staying after class just talking to them so that they can know that you're at least trying. They'll probably see that and they'll try to help you out. [Focus Group 1, cards #16-18 of 84]

Personal/home problems. Focus Group 1 provided a spectrum of knowledge and actions in order to deal with the Personal/Home Problems barrier theme. Initially, they were relaxation techniques:

Student – I did it by smoking. It relaxes me.

Student – Going over to a friends. Blowing off steam basically. [Focus Group 1, cards #19-20 of 84]

The knowledge and actions then became associated with avoidance of the home problems:

Student – Get a second job so you won't be at the house. So more problems wouldn't accumulate.

Student – Or just stay at school all day.

Researcher – Okay, stay on the college campus.

Student – Like if you have a good job and you have school – stay the whole day at school like I do. I do my homework here. I do everything.

Student – I avoid going home. [Focus Group 1, cards #22-23 of 84]

Job. The knowledge and actions utilized to deal with the barrier of Job by Focus Group 1 was much more concrete and transferable for other students to utilize:

Student – You would have to talk, like a lot of employers they won't want to work with your schedule and all that. So you pretty much have to step down and tell them if you don't give me the schedule that I need for school, well I'm going to pick school over my job so that's how some not all but some maybe will help you out.

Student – Talk to your teachers.

Researcher – Talk to the faculty as far as can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Student – Like when you're likely to turn in something and the job, you have a

job, you have to work that day, tell them if you can turn earlier or late.

Student – Or online.

Student – Or through email. [Focus Group 1, cards #24-25 of 84]

Transition from high school to college. Focus Group 1 offered an interesting

connection that facilitated their respective transition from high school to college

knowledge and actions:

Student – Also, the differences between high school and college is that in college

you got to understand that its money on the line. [Focus Group 1, card #34 of 84]

Student – Only way to overcome it is to actually start doing it, you know. You

got to realize you know how I said, I was previously mentioning with the money.

That's an actual, you have to consider that first of all you know, that time is

money. Especially in a college situation. That's what actually motivated me to

actually wake up on time, get ready, come to school early or on time, and you

know stay on track.

Student – Also, I had to made a connection that you know as one of the first

generation…that a lot of responsibility lies on me, you know, perhaps I'm the

one that could probably help the family, my family the most. So I keep that in

mind also as a perseverance, as a reason to persevere. [Focus Group 1, card #37

of 84]

Finally, Focus Group 1 also provided some practical suggestions for future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students in an effort to deal with the transition from high school to college:

Student – Like when you graduate and when you move up to summer school you get used to it like earlier. [Focus Group 1, card #39 of 84]

Student – If you can't wake up early then get later classes, you know have an actual advice on how to get through some of these.

Student – The cool part about college is like…you can come all week or you can separate your classes or just come on Tuesdays – Thursdays, or Mondays – Wednesdays and like you can quit at whatever time you want. That's the cool part about college. [Focus Group 1, cards #40-41 of 84]

Faculty. Students had a variety of responses regarding the knowledge and actions to take in order to deal with the Faculty barrier:

Student – Just read the book.

Student – Get in groups and stuff.

Student – A lot of people go to tutoring, but sometimes like us like me I don't have any time for that – I have to, to be at work or doing chores at home or something. But some instructors, you'll like bring it to their attention that you're not understanding anything and they'll try to explain it to you still can't understand.

Student – But that's why they tell you their office hours so when you need help you can to and ask them for help.

Student – Talk to an advisor and maybe get changed to another teacher. [Focus

Group 1, cards #30-32 of 84]

Money/financial aid. The focus group offered a limited number of knowledge

and actions to deal with the Money/Financial Aid barrier. What also became apparent is

that the students who comprised the Focus Group 1 understood that employment while

they pursued their respective college journey was a necessity:

Researcher – Okay, money or financial aid that you need. How did you guys get

through that?

Student – Financial Aid.

Student – You have to work because really financial aid might give you a little

money, but it's really nothing compared to what you eat, gas, maintenance

around your house, your car and all that. [Focus Group 1, cards #35-36 of 84]

Parking. The knowledge and actions taken and recommended by Focus Group 1

were obviously learned through trial and error:

Student – A lot of students come earlier or get rides.

Student – I bring the car or my brother drops me off and takes off to work.

Student – I get here earlier, I start at 10, I come at 8. [Focus Group 1, card #43 of

84]

Transportation. Focus Group 1 offered the following knowledge/actions in

order to deal with the Transportation barrier:

Student – I saved money or as for vehicle, save parking, you buddy up, carpool.

Student – Ask somebody like when you need something, and when you need a ride ask an uncle, as a friend. [Focus Group 1, card #44 of 84]

Family issues. Focus Group 1 provided the following knowledge and actions to deal with Family Issues:

Student– Don't have kids before you go to college, because then it's just another hindrance. [Focus Group 1, card #49 of 84]

Student – They would have to find daycare.

Student – Get your mom to baby sit. [Focus Group 1, card #80 of 84]

Focus Group 1 (FG1) College Changes

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group interview has provided a list of barriers and knowledge/actions utilized by the students to overcome such barriers, the next step for the interviewer is to probe the students on possible changes for the institution that they are attending. The changes, which if implemented, would facilitate the navigation of that barrier and thus facilitate student success. In addition, the focus group is asked to provide advice for college changes in order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

It is important to note that this was the part of the interview in which students felt most comfortable in offering suggested changes for the college. It was much more difficult for students to identify knowledge and actions that they utilized and would recommend to other students in order to facilitate success. The emergent College Change

themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 1.

Time management.

Researcher – What could the college do different, what could the college change to help with that…What could the college do there?

Student – You should expand, because some classes are real crowded and well you might, by the time you, everybody is asking for help and by the time they get to you, it's probably too late.

Student – They should get more faculty for like the tutoring. Because when you go for like tutoring, it's like packed. So they should get more staff. [Focus Group 1, cards #68-69 of 84]

Personal/home problems.

Researcher – What about those personal problems you know, having the problems start up? Those kind of home issues? What can the college…

Student – What if they could actually give classes, maybe like little seminars…

Student – Yeah, workshops. [Focus Group 1, card #70 of 84]

Job.

Researcher – What could the college do on jobs? On balancing that schedule, on the stress when you have to miss assignments because of work.

Student – Lower tuition fees, so that we don't stress that much with jobs.

Student – Get more, more, more classes, more times. Because, like I already registered for next semester but man there's a bunch of classes that are already

full and like you're trying to make your schedule and like people right now are

trying to make their schedule they can't get a, like they can't get, they'll make

their schedule and they'll get like one day on Monday, one day on Tuesday, like

they'll have to go all week at all different times. [Focus Group 1, cards #71-72 of

84]

Transition from high school to college.

Researcher – What could the college do to help with the classroom, that

transition?

Student – Get fun teachers. Like teachers that know how to teach, but at the same

time they get to your level, they treat you as an equal not a student. [Focus Group

1, card #73 of 84]

Faculty.

Researcher – What about the instructors? What could the college do to help with

that area?

Student – Discipline them.

Student – Provide incentives for the instructors.

Researcher – Incentives to do what?

Student – Like to teach better. Like.

Student – Maybe tell them you're going to pay them less unless they teach better

or their going to lose their paycheck.

Student – Or maybe they just teach another way and you don't know. Like,

they'll teach you like in high school they'll teach you one way and you come

here and it's totally different, and then you'll be lost. And then some instructors you try to work with them and maybe they'll try to do it like an easy way but for you it's really getting you all puzzled and confused. [Focus Group 1, cards #76-77 of 84]

Money/financial aid.

Researcher – What about the money one guys? How/What can the college do with that one?

Student – More financial aid, more work study. Next question.

Student – Maybe they could provide the books in class instead of buying them.

Student – Yeah, we waste a lot of money on books by themselves. [Focus Group 1, card #78 of 84]

Parking.

Student – Closer parking. Like that little rio on Ivy, they should make that a parking lot.

Student – I think, well, if we're going to expand our classes – let's say we do, we're going to need more of that. For example, let's say that we start using territory on that side (referring to the land north of Pecan) so I guess that would be…

Student – Maybe build a what's it called?

Researcher – Parking garage?

Student – Yeah, where it just keep on going up.

Student – And it get's cheaper for the school as well, because you can build up, but you can't build to the sides. Because there's limited land. [Focus Group 1, cards #74-75 of 84]

Transportation.

Researcher – We're at transportation now, and I see you say it's an issue for almost every single student and you guys came up with good actions and knowledge on how to overcome that. What could the college do to for that?

Student – Maybe they could come up with busses near by where students could just go to them and take them directly to school.

Researcher – *Shuttle system?*

Student – Yeah, shuttle system. Maybe.

Student – They have like one crappy-looking one, like six people and like 20 people just come walking behind it.

Student – I noticed that in the beginning of like the year or the semester STC tries to help out a little bit with a little cars. I've seen that. [Focus Group 1, card #74 of 84]

Family issues.

Student – They could probably open a daycare facility here on campus.

Student – That could actually be a work study for some people so that helps out on that part also. [Focus Group 1, card #80 of 84]

Focus Group 2 (FG2)

Focus Group 2 was also comprised of four Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. However, only three of the four seemed to be of traditional college-aged students; the remaining student was a bit older. Three of the participants were very engaged from the beginning, while the fourth was disengaged from start-to-finish despite the researcher's efforts to increase his participation. The information shared by each of the engaged participants was forthcoming and sincere in an attempt to improve the success rates of their fellow and future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

Again, the researcher began the interview by affirming that each of the four participants were indeed Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and turned to when the students registered for the Fall 2007 term at South Texas College:

Researcher – Okay, the first thing, all of you guys are first-time-in-college Hispanic male students, okay. When did you guys register? Approximately? Do you remember when you registered for this fall semesters?

Student – Middle of August.

Researcher – Okay, middle of August – good.

Student – Probably about a month before classes started.

Researcher – *About a month before classes started, okay no problem.*

Student – About mid-August.

Researcher – About mid-August, okay. Do you…

Student – Right around the same time.

Researcher – Right around the same time, okay. So right about, right before classes.

Focus Group 2 by far, displayed the latest registration patterns of any of the other study participants. Once again, the alarming trend of last minute registration or an 'I think I'll go to college today' attitude was an obvious theme within this group as well. When pressed on the fact that each student registered so late in the process for the Fall 2007 term, the theme of procrastination rose:

Researcher – Let me ask a question. Everyone registered around August?

Students – Yeah.

Researcher – Why August? We opened registration I think in March.

Student – We're dealing with procrastination, really.

Student – And it's not even just registration, it's the entire semester.

Student – And people don't like to wait, stand in line too, I mean if they see a line, they're going to just leave and then come back later. And it's just worse.

Student – Yeah, if you're a procrastinator and you finally sum up the energy to go something and you come and see a line…and just do it another day.

Student – No, and you just lose it. [Focus Group 2, cards #17-19 of 76]

The barrier themes that arose to the forefront from Focus Group 2 are as follows:

- Transition From High School to College

- Money/Financial/Financial Aid

- Schedule Mix-Ups/Advisors

- Time Management

- Transportation

- Parking

- Work/College Balance

- Bookstore/Books

- Placement Exam

The students' descriptions of each the identified barriers are presented in the following sections.

Transition from high school to college. Focus Group 2 found that the higher education process as whole could be intimidating particularly for students who were fresh out of high school. The diversity of students that they experience on a college campus that is exponentially larger than the high school campus that they just graduated from was obviously a concern for this group:

> Researcher – Any other barriers, any other kinds of things that you guys are
>
> dealing with from the first part of the semester?
>
> Student – Most of the students are a lot older than you.
>
> Student – They probably think of me more as a kid than an adult. [Focus Group
>
> 2, card #3 of 76]

Money/financial/financial aid. Financial aid is a critical component of higher education, and as such, it was no surprise when this was the first barrier that Focus Group 2 identified as stated by the students, "Didn't qualify for financial aid. I had problems with financial aid, didn't qualify. [Focus Group 2, card #2 of 76]

Schedule mix-ups/advisors. As a result of registering so late, the students of Focus Group 2 found that barriers existed in the schedule process, and as a result, students found themselves with instances of what they termed advisement issues as displayed in the following:

Researcher – Any other kinds of things any other barriers that you would think of?

Student – During the first two weeks?

Researcher – Yeah, during the first two weeks and on.

Student – The advisor's office messing up on my schedule.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – They said I should be in a remedial English class, and according to my Accuplacer scores, but then when I actually got there my teacher was like, "Well you scored a 7 on your writing so you shouldn't be here." So I had to "P" grade out of the class and I couldn't take another class so I just had this big gap. [Focus Group 2, card #6 of 76]

Time management. Students from Focus Group 2 pointed primarily to the balancing of college and the demands required by being a college student as a barrier that they face daily and how this affects their ability to devote time to study:

Researcher – What other kind of barriers did you guys deal with in there?

Student – I would say study time because usually they book you at the top of their classes and you don't have time to study.

Student – Yeah, I would go with that too. Because say you have morning classes like I do, like I usually take four during the day. [Focus Group 2, card #10 of 76]

The Time management barrier also appeared in the discussion with relation to lines at the college during any of the enrollment processes and the potential impact on the respective student:

Student – And people don't like to wait, stand in line too, I mean if they see a line, they're going to just leave and then come back later. And it's just worse.

Student – Yeah, if you're a procrastinator and you finally sum up the energy to go something and you come and see a line…and just do it another day.

Student – No, and you just lose it. [Focus Group 2, card #19 of 76]

Transportation. The barrier of transportation was mentioned by Focus Group 2 almost as an afterthought, "You'd have to probably go along with transportation" [Focus Group 2, card #11 of 76]

Parking. Once again, parking was an item seen as a barrier by Focus Group 2:

Student – Parking.

Student – Yeah, parking. Parking is bad too.

Researcher – Parking comes up here good.

Student – Because you could show up a even an hour before and then you got to go find parking on the north side, then you got to walk you know [Focus Group 2, card #12 of 76]

Work/college balance. Students from Focus Group 2 were adamant about the issues and trepidation that comes with balancing work and college and in a brutally honest fashion:

Student – Yeah, you also talk about the issue of do I go to class today or do I go to work?

Researcher – Balancing work and school, that's what I heard you say.

Student – Some instructors are very flexible with that if you talk to them ahead of class, maybe let you sit in another class or something. Some teachers are real flexible with that.

Researcher – How many students do you think are dealing with work and school?

Student – I would probably go with about 50% too.

Student – Yeah. [Focus Group 2, card #17 of 76]

The students not only understood that the balancing act that work and college necessitated, but actually in describing the barrier had actually began to build in strategies for dealing with the barrier.

Bookstore. The college bookstore, inventory, and the ability to purchase books were also seen as a barrier(s) for student success.

Researcher – What other kind of challenges do you think students are dealing with or that you dealt with during that process?

Student – We touched on tuition, but also I guess books. We have to, once we actually pay tuition, we have to sometimes debate whether the money should go towards books or sharing, and maybe you know being able to live an extra…

Student – I'm saying about in my classes probably about 50% or 60% don't have

books. [Focus Group 2, card #5 of 76]

The students also made the connection of finances to the availability of used

books offered at the bookstore.

Student – Probably more used books, because what's the point of…

Student – We talked about financial issues here, so if they gave more used books,

it would be more affordable. [Focus Group 2, card #16 of 76]

Placement exam. The idea of having to take a college placement exam in order

to register for courses at the college were seen as a significant barrier for the students

comprising Focus Group 2:

Researcher – Okay, anything else during that period of time, from the time you

guys registered in August through getting through those first few weeks of class?

Student – You also have the Accuplacer, the placement test.

Student – And that's before you get into the class.

Researcher – How many students do you think are dealing with that one, with the

placement exam being a barrier?

Student – I would probably go with 70%. [Focus Group 2, card #4 of 76]

Focus Group 2 (FG2) Knowledge/Actions

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group

interview provided a list of barriers, the next step for the interviewer is to probe the

students on the knowledge/actions they respectively utilized to successfully navigate that

barrier. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice in order to facilitate

success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. The emergent Knowledge/Actions themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 2 (FG2).

Transition from high school to college. Diversity, in particular age differences, played a role in developing the Transition From High School to College barrier and students initially seemed to be light in providing knowledge and actions to deal with the barrier:

Student – You just deal with it.

Student – You deal with it, you know, you have to deal with it. [Focus Group 2, card #21 of 76]

However, students recovered nicely to provide more relevant knowledge and actions to overcome this barrier:

Student – As far as the age difference in the classroom, it is very important that you reach out and attend the first few days of class because they usually make everybody introduce each other, and I recommend that you take a speech class where you can overcome your fear of speaking to complete strangers in front of class. But get to know the older persons, they might have a little wisdom for you. As an older individual. [Focus Group 2, card #23 of 76]

Money/financial/financial aid. Students were very direct in the knowledge and actions that they needed to enact in order to deal with the financial barrier or financial aid stating the following:

Student – That I need to get a job. (laughs)

Researcher – What else did you do as far as figuring out the financial aid process?

Student – I put that I still live with my mom. [Focus Group 2, card #20 of 76]

Students also realized that they must seek other financial opportunities, some practical, some more creative, should they not qualify for financial aid:

Student – Well after I found out that I wasn't going to qualify for financial aid, I applied to various scholarships out there and even though I didn't qualify, you still reapply no matter what. There may be some type of scholarship or government fund that you may qualify for.

Researcher – Anything else? What else did you guys do to overcome the money piece, the financial piece?

Student – You could go carpool, because there's that too. One day you take your car, one day you take the other car. Other than both going because you end up going anyway.

Researcher – So carpool, okay. On the financial piece.

Student – Yeah, cause you save money and time.

Student – If you don't have [money] for the class you may have to sometimes drop the class. I re-did my research on the books, I opted not to buy the books and go and check them out from the library and qualify for that second class rather than buy the books and it paid off dividends on that.

Researcher – So on the money part you…

Student – You have to reshuffle your budget and opt for a class rather than books.

Researcher – Okay, okay, so you checked out books from the library and didn't buy them so you could take an extra class.

Student – Correct. [Focus Group 2, cards #26-28 of 76]

Students had become so creative in stretching their dollars that they utilized the college system in order to facilitate books and an additional course.

Schedule mix-ups/advisors. Students again began with external locus of control mentality on dealing with schedule mix ups:

Researcher – What about on the schedule mix ups? How did you guys overcome that piece?

Student – There's really nothing you can do about it, you have to wait a whole another semester because you're too far in.

Researcher – Just dealt with that one. [Focus Group 2, card #29 of 76]

As the researcher probed further, students began to offer knowledge and actions that were institutionally driven, thus displaying that they had established heuristic knowledge:

Student – Well basically, you just have to take it. If you can't take a mini-mester class to make up for it, you're going to fall anywhere between a semester or a year further back on your program.

Researcher – You mentioned something, if you can elaborate, the mini-mester.

Student – Uh-huh. That basically is a condensed timeframe for your class that you may need that you didn't weren't able to register online. It be I think it's an 8, 10, 12 week program.

Researcher – So part of what you do is look at those mini-mesters and see if you can pick up another class.

Student – Correct. [Focus Group 2, card #31 of 76]

Time management. Focus Group 2 students provided concrete knowledge and actions for dealing with Time Management barrier as a result of procrastination:

Student – Eventually you're going to have to toughen up and stand in that long line.

Student – Usually, if you bring a friend, you don't have to wait a long time.

Student – Usually, you're not going to want to stand there alone, but if you have a friend. [Focus Group 2, card #22 of 76]

Once again, students displayed, in support of Padilla (1991) and Padilla et al. (1997), that they had developed heuristic knowledge of the focal institution:

Student – Utilize every resource at school, from your advisors, to retention specialists, down to the Student Success Center. I mean no matter what don't be a stranger just keep going in there. [Focus Group 2, card #33 of 76]

Student – Actually the best thing to do, what I thought even though everybody makes fun of the Student Success class, it's very important. They touch base on time management.

Researcher – Take the College Success Class.

Student – Correct. No matter what they say, it's a waste of time and money, it's

not because you do pick up a lot of information there. [Focus Group 2, card #35

of 76]

Transportation. Focus Group 2 students were much more pragmatic when

describing the knowledge and actions utilized for dealing with the Transportation

barrier:

Student – Carpool.

Student – That's usually the best way. [Focus Group 2, card #39 of 76]

Parking. Focus Group 2 began with very simplistic views on dealing with

parking but soon turned to much more detailed knowledge and actions:

Researcher – What about parking?

Student – (laughing) Just deal with it.

Researcher – That one you just deal with it.

Student – Get the shuttle from the north parking.

Student – That or you're just going to spend like 30 minutes circling the parking

lot hoping for that one spot.

Student – Or you can know somebody that has a 7:00 class that'll wait for you to

get there (laughing). They'll call you "Hey get over here I'm going to leave."

That's what I usually do sometimes.

Student – What I see people doing is they approach anybody walking, leaving

campus and give you a ride to your car. [Focus Group 2, cards #40-43 of 76]

Work/college balance. It was apparent that students from Focus Group 2 had

lots of experience dealing with the Work/College balance barrier:

Researcher – Okay work gentlemen, balancing school and work. What advice

would you give? How did you guys overcome that barrier…

Student – Usually you should probably talk to your boss first.

Researcher – Talk to the boss first, okay.

Student – Say you're in school and that you have to meet the hours for every day,

you know.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – If you go every day, then you'll have to make it when you get out the

time you get there.

Student – If you have to go to school everyday, then you have to make your

schedule for that too.

Researcher – Okay, so negotiate the schedule.

Student – Yeah, usually you do that before you sign up for your schedule. I mean

for the classes, you would probably talk to your boss first.

Researcher – Okay. What days can I be out?

Student – Something like that.

Student – I would probably think really hard about what your long term is

because even though you're working and you want to go to school, prioritize; the

important things, the necessities, the needs not the wants, and then if you can

budget yourself so that you can work less and go to school because in the long

run, you'll be earning twice as much once you finish your school, than what

you're making in the present time. [Focus Group 2, cards #45-47 of 76]

Bookstore/books. Focus Group 2 was quite creative when dealing with the

bookstore barrier:

Researcher – What about the bookstore and lack of used books? What would

you, what kind of advice would you guys give to other students coming in, other

Hispanic male students coming in to how overcome that piece?

Student – Create a network on anybody taking the class before you, any friends

or family and try to use their book if you can. And then of course go online.

Placement exam. Students were able to offer tangible knowledge and actions for

dealing with the Placement Exam barrier but also touched on the financial barrier

affecting many students:

Student – You have to study for the exam.

Student – I had a hard time finding materials to study like online, you know like

old exams.

Student – Because you have to pay for it.

Student – There's always that issue – you need to pay. You know they provide

you the free crappy test, but it's a cry from the actual exam itself.

Student – If you want it, you're going to have to pay. They want you to pay 30 or

40 bucks for it. [Focus Group 2, cards #24-25 of 76]

Focus Group 2 (FG2) College Changes

Utilizing Padilla et al.'s (1996) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group interview provided a list of barriers and knowledge/actions utilized by the students to overcome such barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe the students on possible changes for the institution they are attending. The changes, which if implemented, would facilitate the navigation of that barrier and thus facilitate student success. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice for college changes in order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

While Focus Group 2 provided much richer examples of the knowledge and actions that they needed to utilize to overcome the barriers that they faced, much like Focus Group 1, they provided much more explicit examples of what college actions were needed to assist in eliminating barriers that they and other students face. The emergent College Change themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 2.

Transition from high school to college. Focus Group 2 students offered a number of suggested college changes for dealing with the Transition From High School to College barrier. The suggestions covered topics such as making the College Success course mandatory as well as age disparities and finally to having college staff follow up with students regularly:

Student – I think so, because even the young high school students who are coming in with hours you know. These college-prep classes you know, they still

don't know what to do once they come in. Or all the classes they took are irrelevant to their major.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – And it is a different lifestyle, I mean here's a kid – he's the youngest in the class. He doesn't know how to be able cope with older students. So the student success is the perfect place to learn those skills. [Focus Group 2, card #62 of 76]

Student – I actually think that they are doing a decent job because it helps the younger crowd motivate them. We've been through all these years of work you know if you don't stay in school, you can be one of us and then you'll be regretting it at the end of your life. If I had known back then what I know now, I would stay in school.

Researcher – Okay. Okay. So that one probably just you already said get to know them so that one really no changes are needed?

Student – I don't think so.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – Well yes and no, it's not really good to be the youngest person in every one of your class. I'm like the youngest person in all my classes.

Researcher – So what could the college do to help with that?

Student – I don't know – I would say probably mix it up a little more. [Focus Group 2, cards #52 - 53 of 76]

Student – I'd say maybe schedule an advisement or Retention Specialists once,

probably at the end of a month. I think it's what about three months per semester,

keep them in check or you know even if it's a five minute, ten minute…

Researcher – Do a follow up?

Student – Do a follow up.

Researcher – Follow up with students. Okay.

Student – I mean in the real world, if you're having problems at work you go to

Human Resources right away. So I think the Retention Specialists should check

in on the students, at least every three or four weeks or so. [Focus Group 2, cards

#68 of 76]

Money/financial/financial aid.

Researcher – What about the ways the college could change to help you guys

with these things. Okay, here's your chance so with the financial aid piece, how

could the college change? What could the college do to help with that barrier?

Student – Very easy, offer alternative loans like Pan American University.

Costep, anything that's out there not just regular financial aid.

Researcher – So college loans.

Student – Stafford loans. [Focus Group 2, card #51 of 76]

Schedule mix-ups/advisors. Focus Group 2 offered the following suggested

college changes for dealing with the schedule mix-up barrier:

Researcher – What about schedule mix-ups, what could the college….How could

the college change or what could the college change to deal with those for you

guys?

Student – I would say double check before when they are signing the papers. I

would say to double check.

Student – I guess also take some accountability for your error. If the advisor or

the school fails to do their job properly, take the next step initiative either go or

send the representative from Admissions to talk to the professor, if he can

squeeze in one more person that's great. [Focus Group 2, card #60 of 76]

Time management. Focus Group 2 offered a very local and tangible

recommendation for dealing with the Time Management barrier:

Researcher – How, what could the college do to change or help with that time

management piece that you guys talked about as a barrier? Now you actually you

told/said, take the College Success class. So offer more of those, what should the

college do? Make it mandatory?

Student – I think so, because even the young high school students who are

coming in with hours you know. These college-prep classes you know, they still

don't know what to do once they come in. Or all the classes they took are

irrelevant to their major.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – And it is a different lifestyle, I mean here's a kid – he's the youngest in

the class. He doesn't know how to be able cope with older students. So the

student success is the perfect place to learn those skills. [Focus Group 2, card #62 of 76]

Transportation. Focus Group 2 offered the following proposed college changes for dealing with the transportation barrier:

Researcher – What could the college do to help with transportation?

Student – Probably create a like a maybe work with the McAllen transportation buses and create sometime of a bus stop here. [Focus Group 2, card #63 of 76]

Parking. While parking was deemed a barrier for virtually all students who participated in both the focus groups and personal interviews, the suggestions were quite practical:

Researcher – Parking. What could the college do to help with parking situation?

Student – Pave the canal in the back.

Researcher – Okay. Pave the canal.

Student – Move HEB (laughs).

Student – No, I think they are doing great as far as trying to acquire more parking for us, but maybe just try and alleviate the walking distance by creating shuttles. [Focus Group 2, cards #64-65 of 76]

Work/college balance. Focus Group 2 suggested increasing the college's federal financial aid work-study program in order to alleviate the Work/College Balance barrier:

Researcher – What, could the college do anything to help with that?

Student – Probably increase the work-study program. I know I applied and looked into it, never heard from them, never you know got any response.

Researcher – So more work-study positions.

Student – Yeah, but you have to have financial aid for that.

Student – Well then overcome that then. You know.

Student – Yeah, because they make sure you have to have financial aid just to get a job.

Student – Which doesn't make sense you know, if they're receiving financial aid, I think us that don't qualify for financial aid, we that don't qualify for financial aid, we should get those job placements, you know because we don't get any financial aid whatsoever.

Student – We should get the job, right. [Focus Group 2, cards #66 - 67 of 76]

Bookstore/books. Focus Group 2 suggested both general and local recommendations to the college for dealing with books:

Researcher – So now we're getting into the books piece right there and that's fine we can go back and forth. What can the college change on that piece to help?

Student – Offer the either the used books and update and expand that PASS program that they have in place right now where a bit more people could qualify. [Focus Group 2, card #59 of 76]

Placement exam. Focus Group 2 was very practical when it came to college changes regarding the Placement Exam barrier:

Researcher – What about placement exams? What could the college do to help with placement exams? What changes could the college make with placement exams?

Student – I would say make – like more time for practice tests like have it on pamphlets where you could go take a practice test.

Researcher – Practice exams on campus.

Student – Yeah well like practice exams, before.

Student – Because even online you have to pay for a practice exam. Make it more affordable, in the long run you're going to be spending a lot of money any way.

Student – Affordable and more accessible.

Researcher – Okay, affordable and accessible. [Focus Group 2, cards #54-55 of 76]

Focus Group 3 (FG3)

Focus Group 3 was comprised of six Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. Each of the students who comprised Focus Group 3 was highly engaged and willing to share information on their experiences at the college. Each of the students in this focus group fit the definition of a traditional college student, thus being much younger. Focus Group 3 was by far the most engaged of all the groups and the most willing and committed to assisting in facilitating student success for their fellow Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

Once again, the researcher began the interview by ensuring that each of these students was indeed a first-time-in-college student as well as getting some background information on when the students began the enrollment process at the college:

Researcher – What I want to do first is make sure this is your first semester at the college right? Everybody's first semester here at STC. An estimation gentlemen about when you registered for this semester?

Student – In high school.

Student – I registered in like about in the beginning of August or the end of July.

Student – I registered at the beginning of July.

Student – I registered when I was still in high school.

Student – I did it like a month before classes started, around mid-August.

Student – In May. [Focus Group 3, cards #1-2 of 108]

The majority of this focus group displayed the same concerning behavior, specifically registering so late in the process, exhibited by the students who comprised Focus Group 2. However, a positive note existed within two of the members of Focus Group 3, they registered for college while still in high school.

The following six barrier themes arose from the interview, as well as the subsequent data analysis, conducted with Focus Group 3:

- Difference/Transition Between High School and College

- Financial Aid

- Transportation

- Balancing Work and College

- Home/Family/1st Generation Student

- Stress/Fear/Panic

The following passages reflect the students' voices in describing each of the nine barrier themes described in Focus Group 3.

Difference/transition between high school and college. Focus Group 3 spent an inordinate amount of time describing the Difference/Transition Between High School and College as it appeared that each member experienced some challenges in overcoming this barrier. In addition, the students in Focus Group 3 would build on each others explanations of what this barrier represented to each of them:

Student – You know what they call it, the aftershock…that you know got to take more responsibility now a little tougher – that's what I felt.

Student – Yeah, I think that the majority of the people deal with that I would say about 85% of the people deal with that.

Student – Like 90%. [Focus Group 3, cards #3-5 of 108]

The students then took time to further explain what this barrier represented and related it to their experiences while in high school in comparison to what they experienced in college:

Student – You learn in high school it's nothing compared to what you learn in college because in high school you go through, through some sort of…it's a process but it's like an everyday process…

Student – A routine.

Student – In college you have no routine, you're single, it's a lot of responsibility. Like in high school the teachers are behind you most of the time. Because they want to keep their scores up.

Student – But in college it's just individual.

Student – Yeah, you're on your own.

Student – They give you your rubric of what you need to do, you got to have it, no excuses, and it's individual. [Focus Group 3, cards #8-9 of 108]

Financial aid. The financial aid process proved to be a challenge for the students of Focus Group 3:

Student – The question that I always made myself was if I was going to get enough financial aid to…

Researcher – Financial – Okay now you're going into…is would financial aid be a barrier?

Student – Oh yeah!

Student – That's what stopped me the most.

Researcher – Okay, so financial aid is a big one, so let's put that one down. Financial, about how many students do you think are dealing with that one?

Student – Everyone.

Researcher – What other kinds of things…

Student – Not knowing like what – where to go to sign up register, or apply for financial aid.

Researcher – The process.

Student – And you have to be asking everywhere in order to get to that one point that you need, because no one knows around you since they're all high school people. [Focus Group 3, cards #6-7 of 108]

Despite students seemingly merging financial aid with the transition from high school to college, enough of their respective statements indicated that financial aid was a barrier in and of itself.

Transportation. While transportation emerged as a theme within Focus Group 3, students seemed to just understand that transportation was a challenge:

Researcher – You talked about something else you talked about transportation, a car, gas. Is that another barrier challenge?

Student – There's people that don't have a car. [Focus Group 3, card #18 of 108]

Transportation also seemed to blend into the balancing work and college theme.

Balancing work and college. Once again, the theme of balancing work and college arose as a barrier for students from Focus Group 3. The students also intertwined the barrier of balancing work and college with the routine that they spoke to within the transition from high school to college barrier as well as the Transportation barrier:

Student – I think that's 95% because like me, I was just like he said you know routine okay, now I have to do this, I have to do that. Where here you have to make your own way, you know your own time management. Work and school and sometimes you have to do your chores at home and you go to…

Researcher – Let's talk about those now, work you said. Would work be considered a barrier? Do all you guys work?

Students – [All nod in agreement]

Researcher – Everybody is working, okay. How many students do you think are having to deal with that? How many male students do you think are having to work?

Student – I think everyone.

Student – I think a big percentage. I mean a lot.

Student – Especially if you have to move, you know your car you need money, you need gas. And then something happens to your car, how are you going to pay for that and then you have to come here, you know. [Focus Group 3, cards #16-17 of 108]

The challenge of balancing work and college seemed apparent for the students who comprised Focus Group 3.

Home/family/1st generation student. The issue of the students' home and family emerged as a barrier theme for Focus Group 3. This theme, while strong enough to merit its own mention, also touched on some of the other barrier themes:

Student – I think one of the problems can be for the problems at home. They have to leave their house, they start doing their own, and they can't handle school…they have to quit in order to work. A better paying job, you know what I mean? [Focus Group 3, card #21 of 108]

Student – I think it's quite difficult because some people, for example, many students can be supporting their family so they already have conflict between they have to work to support their family, but they also have to study. So it's a big problem.

Student – Do you work for you, or do you work for your family?

Student – Do you want to become selfish or, it's all psychological. Your family is going to think that your selfish because you started studying instead of helping them out. Then that's really going to hurt you psychologically, basically all psychological issues between yourself and your family. [Focus Group 3, cards #80-81 of 108]

Students from Focus Group 3 seemed to relate going to college and studying as selfish activities that were not understood by their home/family. In addition to students feeling selfish for studying, they also explained that their families lacked an understanding of higher education, even as an option for their children, also contributed to the challenges that they faced:

Student – The background, you know, a lot of people they come from that, from their parents that didn't go to college. And now they think that the high school, that's it. That's everything. [Focus Group 3, card #40 of 108]

Stress/panic. The stress of college emerged as a barrier for Focus Group 3 students:

Student – I think people panic with their first class.

Student – (laughing) Yeah they do.

Student – They get all these things all of a sudden and then think no this is not for me.

Researcher – What would you say? Say some more about it.

Student – They get stressed. They stress about it. [Focus Group 3, cards #23-24 of 108]

Focus Group 3 (FG3) Knowledge/Actions

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group interview provided a list of barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe the students on the knowledge/actions they respectively utilized to successfully navigate that barrier. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice in order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. The emergent Knowledge/Actions themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 3 (FG3).

Difference/transition between high school and college. Students were quite general in providing knowledge and actions that they utilized in order to successfully navigate the Transition Between High School and College barrier. Additional probing allowed for more robust knowledge and actions to emerge:

Researcher – So that transition, when you guys went through that transition from high school to college, how did you deal with that?

Student – I think mentality. You have to have like a mindset. A good mindset.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Positive mind set.

Student – Yeah positive. Well if you think, if you don't think positive about stuff, you're going to be like all this is too hard, I can't do this. And you're just going to quit.

Researcher – So you have to have a positive mindset.

Student – You have to have hope that you want to, okay, I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a doctor, I mean I'm going to do it whatever it takes. You got to have courage.

Researcher – Okay, you've got to have a positive mindset, you have to have courage.

Student – I guess about when I came and about the attitude, I just considered the classes, as soon as I entered the classes it was like a traditional high school class. I didn't feel any different from high school class. The change is you have to make, I knew it was going to be a lot tougher.

Researcher – You had to have that mindset real ready…

Student – Yeah and I tried to have the most positive thought and I felt really comfortable to think, imagine that I was still in high school. High school, we were there for four years and we might have been used to it.

Student – I think that the people in the classes, your peers. I think that they also influence because, my previous class I was learning in a group and we all had to work together and that's what we did we would help each other.

Researcher – Okay. So some of the knowledge and actions that you would do is work together. Get to know the other students in your class and work together.

Student – Yes, work together. They are in the same class, they all want to pass so they should work together. [Focus Group 3, cards #26-29 of 108]

Students also provided some insight on what they could do while in still in high school in order to ease this barrier for future students:

Student – Getting in harder classes in high school actually is beneficial because you're there with the people expecting to go to college. [Focus Group 3, card #46 of 108]

Financial aid. Focus Group 3 students offered a variety of knowledge/actions to facilitate the successful navigation of the financial aid barrier:

Researcher – What did you guys do to figure that out? And what would you tell, think of it this way, it might help too. Think, if you had your younger brother or your cousins and they were coming through, how would you tell them to deal with that piece on the financial aid piece?

Student – Always tell them to ask their teachers, like there's a lot of dual enrollment teachers that work at the high school and they usually know the date to you have to turn the financial aid application in.

Student – And also, I guess, have a good relationship with your counselors, they help a lot.

Researcher – Okay, good. Which counselors? The counselors at your high school?

Student – At high school.

Student – The career centers in high school, too, because where I came from,

there's only one person that actually knows everything like any college and you

had to make contact with them. Very close contact. Make them your friend

actually.

Student – They might not know in detail, but they'll have contacts to help.

Student – And also to go on your own. You know, like me I came over here, I

would come like once a month.

Researcher – Come over here while you're still in high school.

Student – Yeah, okay what's up what do I have to do next.

Student – I think that's what helped me out, because one of my teachers

pressured me to apply for financial aid, you'll get it. To tell you the truth, I didn't

know what that was. I had no idea. I didn't know the pressure we were going to

have once we came to college, all these financial problems and everything.

[Focus Group 3, cards #30-34 of 108]

Focus Group 3 also provided an example of how exhaustive their efforts were

with regards to ensure that all was in order with their respective financial aid. The

example was shared by many of the students who comprised Focus Group 3 (FG3) and

also illuminated how complicated the financial aid process is and how relevant the

financial aid barrier is for these students:

Student – With financial aid you got to be up-to-date, even after the deadline

passed, because with me this happened. I had everything ready right before the

deadline. Then at the deadline, I went to check and everything was okay. The

deadline passed like three weeks past and I thought I was okay, but I kept getting these bills that I hadn't paid my classes. I talked to financial aid and they told me no, that the classes were going to get paid on this certain date, so I was okay. I'll wait until that day, that day passed and I kept getting bills so what was happening if everything was okay and I kept getting bills.

Researcher – Why are you getting a bill if everything is okay?

Student – Why am I getting a bill if everything was okay? So I went and checked and they like sorry but you need to do some corrections. But, before that they told me everything was okay, then they told me that I had to do some corrections.

Student – So how did that happen?

Student – It happened to me too.

Student – You have to keep up with it no matter if the deadline passes you've got to keep checking. [Focus Group 3, cards #49-50 of 108]

Transportation. While Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered many examples of knowledge and actions in order to deal with the Financial Aid barrier, they were quite succinct with the Transportation barrier:

Researcher – What about transportation guys? We said about half of our students are dealing with that. How did you guys overcome that one? What did you guys…

Student – Carpool.

Student – Carpool. [Focus Group 3, card #72 of 108]

Balancing work and college. Students comprising Focus Group 3 (FG3) were very succinct in the knowledge and actions that they utilized to overcome the Balancing Work and College barrier. It is important to note that students realized that work was a necessity and therefore they had learned the best way to deal with work as it relates to college success:

Researcher – So what did you guys do with that? What knowledge and actions did you do?

Student – Get the work study.

Student – Work study.

Researcher – So if you're going to work, make sure you are a work study. Okay.

Student – Apply for it.

Student – Many people ask me, you know, where you working, I'm working here on campus, and there like I want to work there too. But they don't know what to do.

Student – They don't even know how to apply, nothing.

Researcher – So you guys figured out how to apply for work study, that's one of the things you did and then what else?

Student – One of the things that people don't apply for work study is because they need more money. I have one of my cousins, he quit it because I mean…

Researcher – It was paying enough…

Student – Yeah, it was paying enough. I think that's a problem too. That's why the people are applying here because they need a job.

Student – More hours.

Student – Yeah more hours.

Student – I also think that work is a barrier because people don't sit down to. Like what they do is they schedule their work and then they see if they have time for school. I think they should like plan their school first, and then look for work that goes along with that.

Researcher – Okay, so part of it is plan work around college.

Student – My brother he used to work and he would just tell his boss give me the hours, but just Monday and Wednesdays off because I go to college. And then they would schedule him.

Researcher – Okay, so work your schedule or negotiate the schedule with your boss.

Student – Yeah.

Student – There's some work places where they just schedule randomly. So you need to figure out whether am I going to go to work or am I going to go to school.

Student – Or am I going to finish my project. And we live in an environment where the employer helps you out actually understands your situation and gives you a flexible schedule and then helps you out.

Researcher – So part of it is what, you go talk to them, go and talk to your employer so they know that.

Student – That's one of the good things about working for the school. That you

know, they actually tell you, you can work 19 hours we will work out your

schedule. [Focus Group 3, cards #67-69 of 108]

Home/family/1st generation student. Focus Group 3 (FG3) was extremely

forthright in providing the knowledge and actions that they utilized in order to overcome

the Home/Family/1st Generation Student barrier. The knowledge and actions that they

utilized ranged from observing family struggles to surrounding themselves with people

who were college bound:

Researcher – How did you overcome that? What knowledge and actions did you

do with that guys?

Student – Uh, what I did, I told myself that I wanted to go to college and

graduate from college because if you look at like my parents' background, I'm a

first generation, and they all have struggled like looking for a job, having a job,

and keeping a job. And I looked at that and I was like I don't want to go through

that. So I decided to come to college.

Student – I think that when a person, when a person wants to be successful, that

they'll just go through anything.

Researcher – So you got to have that desire.

Student – I think that my high school counselor helped a lot too. Because in

maybe my junior and senior, first part of my senior year, I was just saying that I

wanted to go for my associates degree. Because no one's going to really like that,

they wanted me to go for it. But especially my counselor was pushing me telling

me that I could do better than that for me to go for my bachelor's and master's degree.

Researcher – So part of what you did was hook up with that counselor and they saw talent.

Student – Yeah, they said I was shooting for something too low.

Researcher – Okay. Cool. So raise your expectations.

Student – Yeah.

Student – I guess also you could be surrounded by people who do want to try because…

Researcher – So part of it is surround yourself with other people who are going to go to college, that's something you could do.

Student – Influencing. They influence you to actually want to go.

Researcher – You got to hook up with friends that are going to go to college too.

Student – Well, well, I kind of got adopted. So my mom she's still going to school, so she's the one actually pressuring me okay, if I can do it, we'll both do it together. And you go for your master's, don't stop with a bachelor's, go higher. [Focus Group 3, cards #42-45 of 108]

Stress/fear/panic. Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered a variety of knowledge and actions in order to deal with the Stress barrier:

Researcher – How are the rest of you all dealing with stress?

Student – Same way, just getting out. Like through the Valley Scholars we have our community service and events. I think that help me out very much, because

you get distracted from all that stress all the work you have to do. You just have

your mentality on something else relaxing.

Researcher – So get involved. Get involved in something.

Student – Don't see college as all work, work, work, work. Although it has to be,

you have to do a lot of work but don't see it as…

Student – It has to be a fun environment.

Student – Yeah, find a way to relieve the stress.

Researcher – Okay, you got to find a stress reliever, some sort of stress reliever.

Student – Always try to look, to look at like the future. Yes there's a lot of work

that I have to do for classes but what's the end result on having my associates.

I'm going to get paid more and just look at the positive things about. Look at the

outcomes of the stress, because if you think like oh my God all this stuff. I have

to do all this work and all this work. Well yeah, you have to do all this work, but

you have to look at the end results of it. Because nothing comes free in life, you

have to work for it. [Focus Group 3, cards #97-98 of 108]

Focus Group 3 (FG3) College Changes

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group

interview provided a list of barriers and knowledge/actions utilized by the students to

overcome such barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe the students on

possible changes for the institution that they are attending. The changes, which if

implemented, would facilitate the navigation of that barrier and thus facilitate student

success. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice for college changes in

order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

The emergent College Change themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 3.

Difference/transition between high school and college. Focus Group 3 (FG3) suggested that the college expand its dual enrollment offerings and subsequently offer a transition program in order to minimize the Difference/Transition Between High School and College barrier:

Researcher – What could the college do to help with that guys?

Student – Offer more classes, offer more dual enrollment.

Researcher – What other things could the college do to help with that? We talked about offering more dual enrollment classes.

Student – The elementary schools they've made the students before the students were all day in the same classroom. Some elementary schools have tried to make the students to be switching from class to class kind of like to assimilate it to high school that way when they transition from elementary to junior high and from junior high to high school they won't see that much of a difference. I guess they should do the same for high school students to college.

Researcher – Okay. Have a transition program.

Student – Yeah, have an environment similar to college.

Researcher – Okay, while you're still in high school, create a similar environment. [Focus Group 3, cards #47-48 of 108]

It is important to note that Focus Group 3 (FG3) began to see the different educational entities: elementary, middle school, high school, and subsequently college, as a system in which the goal should be to develop a seamless transition or pipeline.

Financial aid. Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered the following suggested college actions for alleviating the Financial Aid barrier:

Student – I think that's what helped me out, because one of my teachers pressured me to apply for financial aid, you'll get it. To tell you the truth, I didn't know what that was. I had no idea. I didn't know the pressure we were going to have once we came to college, all these financial problems and everything. So if they could be informed a little bit in high school. Let us know what we're going to go through so we can…

Researcher – Okay. You guys are always ahead of me. I'm going to ask and you're saying get to know more while you're in high school. One of my next questions is well what could the college do to make that better?

Student – Something that they're doing right now. Is doing that college thing where they go to schools and help you apply.

Student – Yeah, they're really doing a good job.

Researcher – So go more to, the college could go more to the high schools with that stuff.

Student – They're helping out there with that situation, [Focus Group 3, cards #34-35 of 108]

While the students were complimentary of the college's efforts to assist with the Financial Aid barrier, they still had additional suggestions to improve the process:

Student – Or maybe doing it, I guess they're already doing it in small groups. Because when they have the whole school together, they don't really pay attention to what the speaker is saying and explaining what financial aid really is.

Researcher – Okay. So the college could change it a little bit to have smaller groups.

Student – Yeah smaller groups or maybe if they can individually so that they can tell then it's really simple. Financial aid is not is not…

Researcher – Take it serious.

Student – Yeah, take it serious.

Student – They could also go more frequently.

Researcher – Okay. Go to the high schools more.

Student – They go maybe once a year, the students would be like okay they won't go to class. But if they keep going they keep setting into the students.

[Focus Group 3, cards #37-38 of 108]

Transportation. Focus Group 3 was very practical in offering potential college changes to deal with the Transportation barrier:

Student – I think for the change in actions, I think it could be the busses. Make it more like easy for the students.

Researcher – Okay. So that would be something the college could do is work with the city on the bus system.

Student – Yeah, because I think people need it. [Focus Group 3, card #74 of 108]

Balancing work and college. Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered two possibilities for the College to implement in order to overcome the Balancing Work and College barrier:

Researcher – Okay, so what could the college do to help with that?

Student – Tell students about work study.

Student – Maybe they could like talk to employers and have specific, a list like of specific companies, that you can apply to. [Focus Group 3, cards #70-71 of 108]

Home/family/1st generation student. Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered a variety of college changes in order to assist students in successfully navigating the Home/Family/ 1st Generation Student barrier. They began with offering suggestions for students who were first in their families to go to college:

Student – And they need, the Hispanic male mentality is panicking, not good at all. Like you said, I think, the college, it would be a good idea for the colleges to go to the high schools and try to start setting up that mind, you know let's try to change. Let's try to bring more students, attraction, to attract students to the colleges. [Focus Group 3, card #39 of 108]

Researcher – Overcoming what you had talked about that Hispanic male mentality and all of you guys said you're the first to go to college. How could the college help with that?

Student – Go to the schools, go to the high schools and talk to students.

Researcher – Go to the high schools more, okay.

Student – Talk about the people that graduated and their success stories, what they've gone through.

Researcher – More success stories. Okay. Go to the high schools more.

Student – Try to go to the high school student's house to their home.

Researcher – Visit to the home, okay.

Student – I believe that it was also a good idea, to give them a schedule and have them a regular school day in college.

Researcher – Spend a day here and see what it's like.

Student – Not the orientation type where they just present you the building or what they do there. Because all that information is just coming in and out, but if you're actually there with the teacher and see the environment for yourself.

Researcher – So actually like a day, spend the day as a student on the campus.

Student – They will probably see that it's similar to high school. Spending time in class, just switching from class to class. [Focus Group 3, cards #105-107 of 108]

In addition to going to high schools, Focus Group 3 (FG3) suggested that the college engage in the marketing of successful students:

Student – Something that you could do to help would be like have like a newsletter and like show experiences of other students and how like what they been going through and how they made it through. And by reading that, students could think, well my problems aren't that bad so I can do it.

Researcher – So send out a newsletters about motivational stories. Here are people that went through that. [Focus Group 3, card #82 of 108]

The students next addressed the college's role in dealing with home issues:

Researcher – What other things gentlemen could the college do to help with that one?

Student – I think that sometimes you have to leave your house. Sometimes you, like you just can't live with your parents anymore. I tell you now I got a 60 on my last government test, because my parents were just like trying to push me away because I'm already 18 or 19 you know they're trying to do that and it makes me not to pay attention at school because I'm paying attention over here because I'm afraid they'll kick me out. I think that what college can do, those houses like Pan Am.

Researcher – Dorms.

Student – Yeah dorms. [Focus Group 3, card #85 of 108]

Stress/fear/panic. Focus Group 3 (FG3) offered a variety of changes that the college should put into place in order to facilitate successful student navigation of the Stress/Fear/Panic barrier:

Researcher – What could the college do to help with that?

Student – I would say set up that buddy system.

Student – That first day you're by yourself, but once you make friends, you don't feel that fear anymore.

Student – You feel a little more support.

Researcher – What else could the college do with that?

Student – Maybe some clubs. [Focus Group 3, cards #78-79 of 108]

Researcher – What could the college do gentlemen to help with that? What could the college do as far as helping with the stress?

Student – Study groups.

Researcher – Okay. Form study groups, or encourage study groups.

Focus Group 3 (FG3) also highlighted college changes regarding faculty in order to alleviate the Stress/Fear/Panic barrier:

Student – I hear stories, I don't know if they're true or not that some teachers they love to know, make sure you feel that pressure. It's a good thing, but at the same time, no because if you stress out, you think it's the end of the world and why am I going to do it and how am I going to do it and sometimes people get so scared that you know what I need to get out and they quit.

Researcher – So what could the college do with those faculty? Training, better training?

Student – Not to scare the students. You know, there are students that get scared.

Student – The action is better training.

Student – Yeah you do. They don't want the advice not to be that hard. There's teachers they might not want to tell them like that. We're all different.

Student – I think that the teachers should be more friendly. In our history honors class, our teacher does give us a lot of work, but he makes it seem like it's for your own good. Like you're learning more and like he doesn't just show up and

tell you, you have to do all this stuff. Like he'll get there, he'll talk to us, he'll

like make friends with us. He'll read about the stuff you have to do and make it

interesting not just like give us the work. [Focus Group 3, cards #102-103 of

108]

Focus Group 4 (FG4)

Focus Group 4 was comprised of four Hispanic male first-time-in-college

students. Each of the students was young and all were engaged and willing to share

information in an effort to assist future students. The students of Focus Group 4 provided

a wealth of information.

Once again, the researcher began the interview by affirming that each of the

students comprising Focus Group 4 was indeed Hispanic male first-time-in-college

students. Upon affirming that, the researcher proceeded to find out the dates of

registration for each of the members:

Researcher – So about when did you register for the fall semester?

Student – I registered sometime, a little bit before the school year ended.

Student – I registered in May…

Student – I registered like two or three weeks before school started.

Student – I registered about the middle of summer II. [Focus Group 4, card #2 of

86]

Once again, each of the students registered no earlier than May for the following

fall term. This last minute approach to higher education was consistent with each of the

four focus groups.

The following ten barrier themes emerged from Focus Group 4:

- College Knowledge

- Family

- Financial Aid

- Money

- Transportation

- Balancing Work/College

- Parking

- Class Schedule

- Stress

- Time Management

Students comprising Focus Group 4 provided the following description for each of the barrier themes.

College knowledge. Students expressed a concern with even knowing where to start as a barrier within the college:

Student – Finding out what to do.

Student – What classes you're going to take, how many you have to take.

Student – Yeah, because a lot of people don't know what to expect when they come to apply for classes. I know that I didn't. [Focus Group 4, card #5 of 86]

Student – Yeah, they expect you to know more than you know because you're fresh out high school, but then you feel lost.

Student – It's always that first semester that is the hardest because if you're being brought into a whole different world. [Focus Group 4, card #15 of 86]

The College Knowledge barrier expanded to show the lack of familial understanding of college as an entity. These are students who are not only the first in their families to go to college but many times the first in their families to graduate from high school.

Student – I mean to me I didn't have anybody like that to tell me anything like that's something if you want to have…I know I didn't know anything. I didn't know anything about the student help center or whatever you know where they have tutors. I didn't know anything about that until the end of the semester. Because like I said, I had to find out where the library was, I had to find out where the lab was, I had to find out where a lot of things were, because I wasn't told. I mean again, again I was scared to ask so I never found out until… [Focus Group 4, cards #65-66 of 86]

One of the students who participated in Focus Group 4 also happened to work part-time in the College Admissions office and summarized the extent of the barrier regarding what students are going through with College Knowledge by stating the following:

Student – I would say that about 80% of students that come to me and tell me okay here's the application, now what. All of them, all of them, only the ones that don't ask me or the ones that are already going to graduate. So all the students that come to me, they give me the application and they're like okay,

'now what?' And I say next on the waiver, have you taken your test? Now you

take your test, go talk to the advisor, and they'll give you your class. Then they

do that and they're like now what. And I say, okay, now you get the call numbers

and the date and times. And they do that, obviously they're not being told what to

do, they're lost, they're lost, they're lost. So there's no one who has been

showing them, showing them… [Focus Group 4, card #74 of 86]

Once students from Focus Group 4 were able to navigate the college enrollment

process, they were then faced with the diversity of the student body that comprises the

college campus, which they also included within the College Knowledge barrier theme:

Student – I would say age difference.

Researcher – Diversity in students?

Student – Diversity in ages. I know, me I'm 19, and I'm one of the youngest kids

in the class, I'm like the baby in the class. Everybody else is past like 22 or 25,

and I'm 19 and I feel like I'm not supposed to be here and it's kind of like…

Researcher – Okay. About how many students do you think are dealing with that

one?

Student – I mean coming straight into college, I want to say like 85-90 because I

don't know, it's just kind of like a fear it's like why am I put into class with all

these older people? It's a little pressure, you know what I mean. [Focus Group 4,

cards #13-14 of 86]

Finally, students within Focus Group 4 also included the fact that dealing with

independence in college also contributed to the College Knowledge barrier theme:

Student – The independence?

Researcher – Yeah like you said, it's all on your own now.

Student – It's tough because okay you're free now, but you're not that free. You know what I mean. Okay you graduated and you don't have to go at 8:00 in the morning and get out at 4:00 in the afternoon, now you could do your schedule, but you're still attached because you still have to work. So I can't party every day, I can't stay up to certain times, so it's not that free.

Student – And it's unfortunate for some of our students that they get to college and they go crazy, and they don't do so well because they get overwhelmed with all this freedom and they just fail. [Focus Group 4, cards #52-53 of 86]

Family. Closely related to the phenomenon of College Knowledge barrier theme are the students' respective families, who for the members of Focus Group 4 also served as a barrier:

Student – And also your parents getting used to you still going to college. Because some of our parents, well mine didn't go to college. They just went to high school and now that I'm in this stage, I'm still continuing my education and sometimes they're like "what are you doing?"

Researcher – So the family, you think family and parents?

Student – The family is a barrier for me. Sometimes they question me, well what are you doing? Why are you working so hard? You're stressed all the time, you're working all the time, you barely have time to eat. Like they question me,

they're like, I'm lost too. Hopefully…I'm trying to figure it out myself. [Focus

Group 4, card #17 of 86]

The students comprising Focus Group 4 went one step further when explaining

their respective families as a barrier by explaining the Hispanic culture:

Student – Also the Hispanic culture, there's a high percentage of Hispanic

parents that didn't have the education that now we're getting. So it's all in that

field that they didn't go to college, they can't really understand what I'm feeling,

and what I'm going through.

Student – They see my going to school, and my parents would say, "no you get

out of high school and then you go to work" and you're like no there are some

better solutions. So you're dealing with that and then all eyes are on you because

your brothers some of them didn't go…

Researcher – You're the first one…

Student – You're the first one to go to college so all eyes are on you and so if you

mess up, I mean they're going to be there…

Student – There's pressure, you know. If I fail, what is that going to show for

everybody else… [Focus Group 4, cards #19-20 of 86]

Financial aid. The realities of needing financial aid coupled with the difficulties

of applying for financial aid, via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA),

were seen as a combined barrier emergent theme:

Student – And the application for the FAFSA. It comes back.

Student – It comes back. Yeah, there's always a need to fix something on the form.

Researcher – Okay, what about the financial aid one? About how many students are dealing with that?

Student – Almost everybody.

Student – Yeah, everybody goes through it. I know I had a hard time and I didn't know whether I was going to receive it or not. [Focus Group 4, card #4 of 86]

Students also associated fear of asking for help with the financial aid process:

Student – They're kind of scared to ask people how to do to get through things. I know for a while I was kind of scared, especially with FAFSA, I was scared to ask, "How can I go about this," you know. I wasn't used to asking people to help me with anything. [Focus Group 4, card #62 of 86]

Money. Focus Group 4 was quite succinct when describing Money as a barrier; however, it is important to note that money was the first barrier that came up during the interview:

Student – I guess to find out where I'm going to get the money. [Focus Group 4, card #3 of 86]

Transportation. Focus Group 4 did indicate that transportation was a barrier:

Student – Transportation

Researcher – Would transportation be a barrier?

Student – Yeah it would.

Student – Absolutely!

Student – I mean I live in Harlingen and I drive to McAllen every day for a 9

o'clock class, and I mean if I have to study at night, I'm already tired. Then I

have to get up in the morning to go to class, and then I'm tired and sometimes I

can't focus in class. It kind of brings you down, it wears you out. [Focus Group

4, card #12 of 86]

Balancing work and college. Work was a reality for the students of Focus

Group 4:

Student – I have a lot of friends who are working right now, because they don't

know where to start. They think they need to work in order to pay off college and

with bills, they're always getting into their bills and stuff, somehow. Like their

transportation, they're trying to pay off cars and they have a lot of payments and

they're worried about that first. That's because they don't know where to go

here, you know. They're not sure where to go.

Student – Because they're focusing on that, they're not focusing on their studies.

Researcher – What about work, you said work too. How many students are

dealing with that that you guys know?

Student – A lot. All my friends

Student – I would say about 98%.

Student – We're all working. [Focus Group 4, cards #7-8 of 86]

Parking. Parking continued to be prevalent in the focus group interviews and

Focus Group 4 was true to form:

Researcher – We talked about parking

Student – Yeah! (laughing) Oh, yeah, parking.

Student – Yeah, you got come like an hour and 30 minutes early just to get a space.

Student – I have an eight o' clock class and I still have to park across on the other parking lot because it's packed. [Focus Group 4, card #34 of 86]

Schedule. The schedule of offerings at the college proved to be an emergent barrier theme for the students of Focus Group 4:

Student – Sometimes they have to wait, I know like uh, that I had to take an anatomy class and I registered early and I found out some friends of mine they weren't able, they had to wait until the next semester because there weren't enough…faculty. [Focus Group 4, card #39 of 86]

Stress. While Focus Group 4 expressed anxiety and stress within the College Knowledge barrier theme they also brought up the stress of college as a separate theme:

Researcher – I heard you say stress too. Is stress a barrier?

Student – Yes, man stress is like all of those put together.

Student – Stress, its always there.

Student – At one point or another, you're going to have it… [Focus Group 4, card #18 of 86]

Students went on later in the interview to describe the stress they encounter within the college:

Student – Again, that's what happens to a lot of people, a lot of freshmen that go

in, oh all this stuff builds up and builds up and then let's say they don't pass a

class…

Student – They freak out.

Student – They freak out and they give up. [Focus Group 4, card #60 of 86]

Time management. Students understood that in order to handle all of the

competing demands that they face they must find ways to effectively manage their

respective time. However, they acknowledged that the lack of this skill is truly a barrier

to their success:

Student – It's really hard for you to work and for you to go to school and still

make time for your studies.

Student – Time management

Student – Yeah, time management.

Student – Work really interferes with that.

Researcher – Okay, about how many students do you think are dealing with that

one, that whole time management piece?

Student – All of them (laughing)

Student – 100%. [Focus Group 4, cards #9-10 of 86]

Focus Group 4 (FG4) Knowledge/Actions

Utilizing Padilla et al.'s (1996) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus

group interview provided a list of barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe

the students on the knowledge/actions they respectively utilized to successfully navigate

that barrier. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice in order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. The emergent Knowledge/Actions themes that related to the barrier themes are relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by Focus Group 4 (FG4).

College knowledge. Focus Group 4 (FG4) was rather simplistic in their knowledge/actions that they utilized in order to overcome the College Knowledge barrier tying the learning curve to the greater goal of a career and higher education would serve as the key to reaching that goal:

Researcher – And how do you deal with that one, how do you figure that one out?

Student – Life!

Student – That's life. You go get educated so that you can make a career, otherwise, you won't, you can't just work part-time your whole life.

Student – I guess a better assistance all around because I mean you're not always going to have mom or dad next to you, "you got to do this and you got to do this." You got to do things on your own and there's got to be a time and a place where you got to do that.

Student – I think we all have to deal with that a little bit. You know we all kind of "oh well, I don't have to do that right now, I can put that aside for a little bit I can go to the movies. I mean…"

Researcher – Just figure it out as you go? That one you just figure it out as you go.

Student – Yeah.

Student – Yeah, but when life comes and kicks your rear end and you're like, "oh I got to get myself together." Life teaches you that part. You can't afford to do that, you figure it out by yourself. [Focus Group 4, cards #52-53 of 86]

It is also of importance to realize that students feel isolated or alone regarding the knowledge/actions necessary to overcome the College Knowledge barrier.

Family. Focus Group 4 (FG4) was quite pragmatic in providing the knowledge/actions that they utilized in order to overcome the Family barrier:

Researcher – All right that family piece. You know we said the family and the culture, that pressure of them, you're the first one. How can, what other actions and knowledge helped you overcome that one? Where they don't understand you guys said, they don't understand it.

Student – Some of it, my friends are in the same position, so we kind of rely on each other to helps us out, to get over that…

Student – El apollo [support]

Student – El animo [encouragement]

Student – Yeah, an accountability partner, you know in a sense.

Student – Well yeah, I look up to some of my friends that they are already receiving, lo estan recibiendo, and I ask them, what did you do? No, well you just

keep going at them. I understand your parents and my parents are the same. We

have to go on.

Researcher – Good. Okay, so your friends helped you with encouraging you.

Student – Encouraging.

Researcher – Giving you guys, like you said, "El animo" [encouragement].

Student – Even a sounding board, like your cousin, an uncle, for them just to

listen. [Focus Group 4, card #56 of 86]

It is important to note that Focus Group 4 (FG4) felt it was necessary to go to

friends or distant relatives as a means of support as opposed to their immediate family in

order to deal with this barrier. This is also attributable to the lack of college knowledge

within the family unit.

Financial aid. Focus Group 4 (FG4) offered the following knowledge and

actions to overcome the Financial Aid barrier:

Researcher – How did you guys get through, what knowledge and what actions

did you do to get through the financial aid piece? How did you get through that?

Student – The orientation at the schools helped a lot.

Student – The counselors as well in high school helped a lot.

Researcher – Okay, what else, what else would you guys do with regards to

financial aid to overcome that barrier?

Student – Keep checking in to…

Student – Keep following up, because I mean if you don't follow up, you just

kind of oh well, it's just going to take care of itself, it's not going to happen. You

need to be persistent about it, you need to stick to it, because if you don't, then

you'll just lose it, you won't get the opportunity. [Focus Group 4, cards #22-23

of 86]

Money. While Focus Group 4 (FG4) identified Money as a barrier the only real

knowledge/action they identified for dealing with it was the financial aid process:

Researcher – Okay, what about money? Along with financial aid, what or how'd

you guys deal with that one or how are you dealing with that one?

Student – All I have is financial aid, if I didn't have that, I wouldn't know how I

would do it without financial aid.

Researcher – So that's another for financial aid you better…

Student – I don't think my parents would be able to…

Researcher – To afford it?

Student – Yeah, I don't know how I would do it.

Researcher – So for the money piece, make sure you apply for financial aid,

make sure you follow up…

Student – Scholarships.

Student – I applied for a couple of scholarships and I received those and I

applied…

Student – Grants.

Student – I applied for FAFSA as well and I mean FAFSA covers me, but you

know, books and stuff.

Researcher – What other kinds of knowledge or actions did you do overcoming that barrier – the money barrier?

Student – Well, all this information, I got from the school because, if my parents had gone they could tell me look this is a good path do this, but I didn't have that.

Researcher – You didn't have that.

Student – I didn't have that, all I had was school and the counselors. The people that came in from all the colleges to talk about financial aid, that's all I had.

[Focus Group 4, cards #24-26 of 86]

It is important to note that while students began with identifying financial aid as the sole knowledge/action for dealing with the Money barrier, they had acquired enough local knowledge to expand beyond the Pell Grant and were attempting to qualify for scholarships and additional grants. In addition, even when identifying knowledge/actions for dealing with this barrier, students continued to identify a lack of college knowledge as a significant barrier that impacts many, if not all, college processes.

Transportation. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided limited knowledge/actions for dealing with the Transportation barrier:

Researcher – What about transportation? How are you guys dealing with that one?

Student – Before I had a car, I would get dropped off by my parents. And I found that it was kind of like, at first I was like what am I going to do later you know? At first it was like that but I found out that now that I have a car parking it's like

woe sometimes getting here a little late. Like getting dropped off by my parents it was kind of like useful. It was like get to class and that's it. [Focus Group 4, card #33 of 86]

Balancing work/college. Focus Group 4 (FG4) offered many cliché type responses for the knowledge/actions needed to deal with Balancing Work/College barrier:

Researcher – What about work guys? That's another we talked about with money and stuff and it could be a barrier. How do you deal with that one, how do you overcome that one, what knowledge and actions?

Student – With working and going to school?

Student – Just take it.

Student – Yeah, you suck it up.

Researcher – You just do it.

Student – Yeah!

Student – A lot of my friends are doing the same thing so, it's kind of something you have to do.

Student – Yeah, just…you have to work and you have to go to school.

Student – You get up in the morning and go and sleep and go…

Student – It's another day you just do it.

Student – Just want to go forward with your life, wake yourself up and have a better life.

Researcher – So you're thinking about a better life, that's part of what helps you

keep going. I got to sacrifice right now and get that done.

Student – Yes!

Student – Also, hopefully the experience for when you get out, I mean it won't

be hopefully as stressful right once you get out into your field whatever you want

to do. You have kind of like some type of work experience already and like

working with pressures on you not just school but also financially speaking you

know. Once you're like graduated, well, you don't have to worry about like

school anymore, hopefully you'll have some experience already. [Focus Group 4,

cards #30-31 of 86]

Once again, it is paramount to note that students comprising Focus Group 4

(FG4) saw work as a necessary evil, a must if college was to be a reality for them. In

addition, they used the prospect of a more prosperous life as a coping mechanism for

dealing with the reality of not having a choice regarding work. They had to work if they

wished to pursue higher education. Finally, a lack of college knowledge permeated the

responses put forth by Focus Group 4 (FG4).

Parking. Focus Group 4 (FG4) realized that parking was a barrier that they

would have to deal with and as such offered the following knowledge/actions for dealing

with the barrier:

Researcher – We talked about parking.

Students – Yeah! (laughing) Oh, yeah, parking.

Researcher – Even though you have a vehicle now, you're still dealing with some issues.

Student – Yeah you got come like an hour and thirty minutes early just to get a space…

Researcher – Okay, so you get here early.

Student – I have an 8:00 clock class and I still have to park across on the other parking lot because it's packed. [Focus Group 4, card #34 of 86]

Once again, the knowledge/actions provided in response to this barrier show a clear development of knowledge as it relates to this specific college campus.

Class schedule. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided the following knowledge/actions that they utilized in order to overcome the Class Schedule barrier:

Researcher – What about that class schedule, you know the size all the different, what classes to take, all that stuff. How did you, what'd you do?

Student – Well all that goes back to time management because some of the teachers have the times you want and then there's another class you need, and it's at the same time this other class is at. So, and it goes back to stress you know – you stress out about it.

Researcher – All of these start kind of start to pile in…

Student – Yeah.

Student – To even think about the classes you're going to have to take, to talk to a counselor, to talk to an advisor or even talk to somebody you know who's in

the program you're going into. Because I'm doing music and I talked to one of

the music majors and

Researcher – So you go and talk to other majors or to instructors…

Student – I said, "hey, what are the basic classes that I need to take at least for

my first semester so I can get those under my feet?" [Focus Group 4, cards #27-

29 of 86]

Students comprising Focus Group 4 (FG4) displayed a myriad of knowledge/

actions in dealing with this barrier including balancing their respective schedules as well

as utilizing college personnel including counselors, advisors, and the faculty themselves.

Stress. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided the following knowledge/actions for

dealing with the Stress barrier:

Researcher – Okay, a big one that you guys talked about that every student is

dealing with that stress and you guys said: you got just learn how to study, you

got to figure it out. Um, anything else? How else are you dealing with that?

Student – The stress?

Student – Um, work also helps us out. Work has its bad side, but working also

has its good side where we can just go to work and it's just a different place and

you put all your problems, your class, your school aside and you're just you

know you feel more relieved because you have all those problems aside and you

can get…

Student – While you're working, school is after the fact. You're not worried

about school, you're not about well I'm doing this assignment.

Researcher – Okay. Okay, what else? How else are you guys dealing with that?

Student – Also, like backing up, go back kinda I meant. You know it's not, just like he said, "it's not always good to like worry," but it's always good to make time for yourself where you can just go to the movies, relax you know, or go to Starbuck's drink a moo-late, just you know to relax.

Student – A little down time, just for yourself.

Student – Yeah!

Student – Because if you don't give yourself that downtime, you're going to burn yourself out.

Student – You use the word stress out.

Student – Again, that's what happens to a lot of people, a lot of freshmen that go in, oh all this stuff builds up and builds up and then let's say they don't pass a class…

Student – They freak out.

Student – They freak out and they give up. [Focus Group 4, cards #59-60 of 86]

While students provided an array of knowledge/actions to facilitate dealing with the Stress barrier, it is important to note two items that they describe. First, they touch on the utilization of work, which they have no choice but to work, as an opportunity to relieve stress. In essence, they are making the best of the hand they have been dealt. Second, the students display knowledge, maturity, and perseverance in describing how some students panic and leave college and essentially imply that they will not fall victim to such panic.

Time management. Focus Group 4 (FG4) explained that the Time Management barrier was overcome by actually learning as you go and thus that was the knowledge and actions they utilized:

Researcher – What about the time management one? How do you deal with that one?

Student – That one is kind of like trial and error.

Student – Well sometimes you don't have time to study for exam or something you know, I mean you get better at it. Like you start learning, oh I work this day and on this day I have an exam, you know. You just kind of learn as you go by.

Student – You try to find out your study habits or the way to study.

Student – Or when you can study.

Student – When you can study.

Student – I need these hours and then when I wake up I can study these hours.

Student – When can I actually sit down, and like okay I can do my work right now.

Student – Or when you take a break at the job or right before going to sleep or when you are eating breakfast I can study at the same time. [Focus Group 4, card #32 of 86]

Students also saw the community college as a place to hone their respective time management skills:

Student – I mean for me applying here to a community college I thought it would help me out more. It would give me a feel of how to how to actually start

managing my classes and how to actually start using my time efficiently to where
I can work at the same time and try and do my homework. Just try, the whole
community college for me is to prepare you for when you do go to the university.
[Focus Group 4, card #11 of 86]

Focus Group 4 (FG4) College Changes

Utilizing Padilla's (1994) model of the unfolding matrix, once the focus group
interview provided a list of barriers and knowledge/actions utilized by the students to
overcome such barriers, the next step for the interviewer was to probe the students on
possible changes for the institution, which they are attending. The changes, which if
implemented would facilitate the navigation of that barrier and thus facilitate student
success. In addition, the focus group was asked to provide advice for college changes in
order to facilitate success for future students who are also Hispanic male first-time-in-
college students.

The emergent College Change themes that related to the barrier themes are
relayed in the following sections as they related to the individual barriers identified by
Focus Group 4.

College knowledge. Focus Group 4 (FG4) addressed the College Knowledge
barrier by suggesting that the college incorporate a number of changes all relating to
developing an understanding of college:

Researcher – Any changes that the college could do to help with that?

Student – Age?

Researcher – Yeah.

Student – I want to say that maybe, but this also goes back to our tuition and the money. Another thing that would probably really help, would be maybe the college can divide us younger students into classes, but then again our classes are going to be too small and then but you see yeah they're going to be small but if you look at the bright side the more small the class, we can understand more. You know.

Student – I guess we could say activities.

Researcher – Okay, the college could offer more activities or get involved.

Student – I know there's student activities here, but I don't really know what they…

Student – Nobody really knows what they are.

Student – No.

Researcher – So the college could do a better job of telling you about them.

Student – Yeah advertising.

Student – You know like little clubs or something like that you know or little activities we're going to have a ping pong tournament or something like you know.

Student – There are but you don't really see them too much.

Student – You don't really know that they're there.

Student – You have to look for them.

Student – Goes back like I said to communications.

Researcher – So communicate more about the clubs is something the college could do.

Student – I think those usually just bring a lot of people together. [Focus Group 4, cards #48-50 of 86]

In addition to suggesting college changes for dealing with the age diversity and involvement segments of the College Knowledge barrier, Focus Group 4 (FG4) also suggested that the college require students to take course work that would assist in teaching college knowledge in particular as it relates to the independence of higher education:

Researcher – How could the college help with that one, on that independence piece? And you guys talked about, you got to just prioritize your time, you know I hear you saying you got to get it, you got to get that education. You're thinking abut the end. I know that so how could the college help you guys with that?

Student – That independence I mean again with that College Success class. It really, I know my teacher she really enforced it, it's all upon you, it's all what you do. Nobody else is going to do it for you; you're going to have to do it for yourself.

Researcher – So the College Success class helped a lot as far as learning these things…

Student – Yeah, it really put things into perspective you know, oh, I'm going to have to do this, I can't ask my sister or somebody to help me out of this, you know. I think yeah that was also enforced, independence was also enforced in

College Success. It's kind of a rude awakening in a sense when all your, you

have all this homework to make up or you have a paper to finish. [Focus Group

4, card #54 of 86]

Family. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided the following college changes to

facilitate the successful navigation of the Family barrier:

Researcher – What about the college, how could the college help with that? What

could the college do to help with that? If anything?

Student – I guess, I mean because I know it would be kind of hard to relate to our

parents about college. I mean if it would be possible to even have a little thing for

our parents to kind of tell them, you know this is what your kid is going to be

going through.

Student – Yeah.

Student – You know what I mean so that it's not like a rude awakening for them

either. Saying, oh well, he has school why does he have school. It comes to

inform the parents as well, along with the student.

Student – Have like an orientation, a parent orientation.

Researcher – Parent orientation.

Student – Yeah, like in high school you have open house.

Researcher – Right.

Student – Like have it for parents, and they can talk to them and tell them this is

what's going on in our college.

Student – And if they have any questions or want to know any information there

you know, can tell them you're son will be doing this…

Researcher – Okay, so have like a parent orientation or an open house. [Focus

Group 4, cards #57-58 of 86]

Focus Group 4 (FG4) felt that it was important for their respective

parents/families be provided with an understanding of college even after students had

enrolled. In spite of the fact that their parents/family were not able to provide guidance

or insight during the college process, the students felt that it was important for their

parents/family to be educated on what high education entails in order to develop

understanding at home.

Financial aid. Students comprising Focus Group 4 (FG4) were extremely

appreciative for having the opportunity to receive federal financial aid, thus they had no

significant recommended college changes for dealing with the barrier:

Researcher – What could the college change to help with the financial aid

process?

Student – Um, well not really much because like financial aid itself it helps a lot

and because of that many, many, many of students, many of us freshmen are

here, you know and if it wasn't for that, I know I wouldn't be here. [Focus Group

4, card #37 of 86]

It is important to note that students identified clear institutional challenges that

comprised the financial aid barrier, yet it appeared that they did not realizing that they

would receive that aid regardless of the institution that they attended and thus were

somewhat timid in providing suggested college changes in order to facilitate student navigation of this barrier.

Money. Focus Group 4 (FG4) felt that the college should engage in increased communication regarding the availability of financial aid, grants, and employment in order to reduce the Money barrier for Hispanic male first-time-in-college students:

Researcher – What about money? What could the college do to help with that area? I heard you guys say, "apply for financial aid, scholarships, grants, jobs. You got to get a job sometimes." What could the college do as far as helping? What changes could we make to help with that one?

Student – Communication, I see…I walk down the halls and I see a lot of flyers maybe they can…and the tvs they give out a lot of announcements. I don't know, a lot of people don't see them I guess. Maybe then can put out more out there, that way we can see them.

Researcher – More communication about jobs, about those kinds of things. Okay.

Student – More communication. [Focus Group 4, cards #37-38 of 86]

Transportation. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided the following proposed college changes to deal with the Transportation barrier:

Student – Some people don't even have cars, they have to like walk.

Student – Come over here on the bus.

Student – Come over here with friends or their parents drop them off. [Focus Group 4, cards #12 of 86]

Student – I know at UTPA they have like these trolley busses and if you have class way across campus what they'll do is they'll take you so that way you won't be late to your class, if you have back-to-back classes.

Researcher – So a shuttle system?

Student – So shuttle busses, or I don't know what they're called. [Focus Group 4, card #36 of 86]

Balancing work/college. Focus Group 4 (FG4) offered the following suggested college changes that they believe would alleviate the Balancing Work/College barrier:

Researcher – Okay, what about work? How are you balancing that one? I mean I, what could the college do to help with that one? I heard you guys say, you just got to be self-motivated, you got to just do it, uh how about the college? How could the college help with that one?

Student – With work?

Researcher – Or can the college help with that one?

Student – Well, there's like a lot of work-study positions right. I guess part-time jobs which there are some offered, right?

Student – Job placement. Work with a job where they can work with your schedule. Because I've had some jobs where they just don't even consider, they think that the job is everything you have, and I'm like no I go to school. I'm not there a 100%.

Researcher – Okay, so more part-time jobs on campus, more work-study jobs. [Focus Group 4, cards #42-43 of 86]

Focus Group 4 (FG4) students also displayed local knowledge regarding jobs that do not take a student's schedule into consideration.

Parking. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided what they envision to be practical suggestions for college changes in order to deal with the parking barrier:

Researcher – What could the college do to help with that? What could the college do to help change that?

Student – With the parking?

Researcher – With the transportation and parking one, yeah.

Student – They could build a bigger parking lot. They have space on the side of the school where they could add…

Researcher – Add parking?

Student – Yeah, more parking.

Student – More parking spaces.

Student – I know at some universities, they have the parking, what do you call them, uh the building? The enclosed parking.

Student – Like a garage?

Student – They put the big garages, instead of going out they go up.

Student – Yeah build up. [Focus Group 4, cards #35-36 of 86]

Class schedule. Students comprising Focus Group 4 (FG4) felt that the college changes should include additional faculty and course offerings in order to minimize the Class Schedule barrier:

Researcher – On the schedule piece, I mean what could the college do to help with that one?

Student – More teachers.

Researcher – More faculty.

Student – More teachers, more teachers, that way we can have more…

Researcher – More sections.

Student – Sometimes they have to wait, I know like uh, that I had to take an anatomy class and I registered early, and I found out some friends of mine they weren't able, they had to wait until next semester because there weren't enough…faculty.

Student – More seats, more seats. Like, for instance, for administration, a lot of students are trying to get their remedial classes and all of them are full…

Researcher – They're booked.

Student – 80 is full and 90 is almost full I mean there all full. And we're checking and no that's closed, that's closed, that time's closed. They get frustrated and they're like, "Okay, well, I'll try it out another time."

Student – I mean for me, me being a music major, they only have three teachers in the music department. I mean I can't even take a specific class for my major that I want to take, because they don't have the faculty or the experience with the faculty to teach me or to give me those you know necessary classes.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – I mean I can still go on and take my classes and get my associates…

Researcher - But it's going to take longer.

Student – It's going to take a little longer, considering because they don't have

them. [Focus Group 4, cards #39-41 of 86]

The students who were a part of Focus Group 4 (FG4) were committed to

completing their programs but also realized that it would take them longer than they

wished due to a lack of faculty and course offerings at the college.

Stress. Focus Group 4 (FG4) utilized the proposed college changes to deal with

the Stress barrier as somewhat of a catch all segment. However, it must be noted that all

of the issues that they used as a basis for college change were indeed stressors for the

students. Finally, the progression of proposed changes is noteworthy. Students once

again, adhering to the Hispanic male culture or false pride of not asking for assistance.

Thus, the focus group began with the thought of changing themselves as opposed to

college changes:

Researcher – How could the college help with that one?

Student – Stress management or something…

Student – That's not, more like, it's more on us where we have to fix that

problem. I guess the college can't really help with that. It's just something, one

of us, some of us that we all go through. You know we need to fix that ourselves

and we need to experience it and that way we can move on; it's one of those

trials and those barriers and challenges you know. We need to break that wall,

that way we can keep on going…

Student – There's a lot of stresses too and people aren't willing to ask anything you know. They're not willing, uh well what if I do this, you know. They're kind of scared to ask people how to do to get through things. I know for a while I was kind of scared, especially with FAFSA, I was scared to ask, "How can I go about doing this," you know. I wasn't used to asking people to help me with anything.

Researcher – You got to ask for help. On the stress one, I heard you say on the financial aid one ask for help.

Student – I guess one of the ways that the college can help us with the stress is counselors. We need more counselors, just like we had in high school. We can go to them every time and ask questions and over here you come to college and you're more independent and you need to go to them, they don't, and you don't know what to do.

Student – You don't know what to do.

Student – Yeah, you don't know what to do and see if we had counselors here, then it would be way easier. They can, they're more experienced with, advising is always good.

Researcher – Okay so more counseling, more advising.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – On like more of a one on one level.

Researcher – Not on, okay one on one level, all right good. [Focus Group 4, cards #61-63 of 86]

During the discussion of proposed college changes in order to deal with the Stress barrier, one of the student participants in Focus Group 4 (FG4) described the scholarship that he is a recipient, the Valley Scholars Program. The Valley Scholars Program is limited to the top 10% of each graduating class and provides qualified students with not only financial assistance but also a much more one-on-one or intrusive approach with the student participants. The description of the services that participants of the Valley Scholar Program receive seemed to cause additional stress for the other participants comprising the focus group:

> Student – I have a, I got this one scholarship, I'm a Valley Scholar, and these people they help a lot. This scholarship club they really do help a lot, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have known about these study groups, I wouldn't have known about the tutors. I wouldn't have known about that I would have just come here knowing about my classes. My classes, that's it. I wouldn't have known about the labs, I probably wouldn't have known where to find the library you know. But thanks to them they, you know you come over here they teach you, they show you around, this and that. So they help a lot.

> Student – I mean to me I didn't have anybody like that to tell me anything like that's something if you want to have the school change something about that. I know I didn't know anything. I didn't know anything about the student help center or whatever you know where they have tutors. I didn't know anything about that until the end of the semester. So…

> Researcher – Let them know.

Student – Yeah let them know.

Researcher – Let more students know about the Success Center.

Student – Again, you know, with the whole like the open house, have a little orientation for the kids. Because, I know I didn't go to the orientation. I guess you could say that's my fault, but I mean the few days, if they do go to the orientation, a lot of them don't know about the help or some of the things that they can get. A simple flyer once a week or something like that you know here…

Researcher – Pass out more flyers.

Student – Pass out more flyers to inform the kids. Because like I said, I had to find out where the library was, I had to find out where the lab was, I had to find out where a lot of things were, because I wasn't told. I mean again, again, I was scared to ask so I never found out until…

Student – And I guess the way the school could help is make a little bit bigger signs to help us.

Researcher – Okay. Better signage.

Student – Because like "C" building, it's a little C and it's on the corner of the building.

Student – On one corner…

Student – (laughing) On one corner, show it it's here. I would say show where everything is.

Student – Or even like a little station, like when you enter a building, this is where everything is.

Researcher – Like a map.

Student – Yeah, like a map, which would inform you this is here.

Student – Or like when you go to the mall or something…

Researcher – Yeah, the kiosk that shows you where everything is.

Student – Then when you get there, there's a big sign. Like the student success center. [Focus Group 4, cards #64-67 of 86]

The suggested college changes, relating to the Stress barrier, that Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided also pointed to the student deficiencies as they relate to College Knowledge and a dire need for students to become acculturated, in a timely manner, with what college is about, the services available, and it must be campus specific.

Time management. Focus Group 4 (FG4) provided an unexpected recommended college change for dealing with the Time Management barrier in that they felt it would be useful for students to take College Success. Currently, the College Success course is required for all first-time remedial students and first-time probation students:

Researcher – How could the college help with that time management piece, as far as you guys said, "Every student is dealing with that one." I heard you guys say, "figure out how to do your study habits, the community college – you get your feet wet," I heard you guys say that.

Student – Well College Success was very useful for time-management.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Take a College Success course.

Student – A class that shows you how to manage your time and it shows you how you're using your time…

Student – Study habits.

Student – And study habits, that class helps out a lot. And it's good that they give it to remedial students that are getting into remedial classes, where they can better themselves.

Student – I mean they have their feet on a better foundation for all your other classes not to mention for that class to pass. It's something you can use for the rest of your classes, for the rest of your college. I mean so it's a good basic class for anybody to take. I mean I'm glad I took it, because it was able to show me, "you can do this," you know, "you can, you're this type of learner, you're a visual learner versus…you can take notes this way, you don't necessarily have to do it this way. It just helps you like really break down and how can you study and how you can put things in perspective so you can put it all in order and you're not so stressed out. You're not so crazy that, "well I have to do this, I have to do that, I have to do this a certain way, I have to do that."

Researcher – Okay, good, so take that College Success class. Anything else that the college could do? Any of you guys?

Student – It takes a lot of skill to manage your time, your school, your money, your everything, and put it all in one day. It takes skill to do that. Because, I know my parents they didn't have time management, they're all stressed out, they're all crazy, and I feel a little bit more relaxed because I have to manage my

work…and I work too, I put my good hours per week and I do my homework and I'm going to school and I'm showing my parents that hey I can do it. It takes skill to manage your…just do it. [Focus Group 4, cards #44-46 of 86]

Once again Focus Group 4 (FG4), during the identification of college changes regarding the Time Management barrier, mentioned the lack of familial college knowledge or role models. Students are forced to model the behavior for their respective parents/family, thus making the college process more stressful for this group of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

Personal Interviews

In an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the data provided by the four focus groups, three additional semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with selected members from the focus groups. The barriers mentioned by the focus group, of which the student was a participant, were reviewed in detail and further clarification was provided via probing. In addition, students were asked to clarify any items that were vague or were allowed to offer additional details regarding the specific barriers as well as the knowledge and actions taken to overcome such barriers. Finally, students who participated in the personal interviews were also asked to provide advice for future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students.

Personal Interview 1 (PI1)

The student who participated in Personal Interview 1 (PI1) was a traditional first-year college student having just graduated the prior June. The student was very engaged

and forthright. He was both humble and a bit nervous. Ultimately, he was brutally honest and willing to provide information in an effort to assist those who would follow him.

Once again, interviews were begun by reestablishing that these were indeed Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and dates of registration for the fall term:

> Researcher – What I'm doing you know that my study is trying to look at successful Hispanic males, you and I, first-time-in-college students which you are and how you were able to navigate the different barriers that you experienced in your first semester. Really between the time you registered and that census date around September 14th getting through there. Okay. So first off, we've already we know that this is your first semester. When did you register, again? I don't remember.
>
> Student – In May. Last week of May.
>
> Researcher – In May, last week of May and you were still in high school?
>
> Student – Yeah. [Personal Interview 1, card #2 of 60]

Once the student had established that he was indeed a Hispanic male first-time-in-college student and that the dates that he had registered, a more in depth review of barriers that he faced as well as the knowledge and actions taken to overcome those barriers were explored:

> Researcher – Good, good. So tell us more about the barriers, you talked a lot about some of the barriers during our focus group. And some of the things that you said were key and that's why I wanted to go over some more of them. And just get a little bit better idea of the kinds of things that came up. So can you just

go through the different kind of things that you think are issues or barriers for students and how you were able to overcome them. [Personal Interview 1, card #3 of 60]

Difference Between High School and College

Personal interview one (PI1) described the Difference Between High School and College in the following fashion:

Student – Well I think that high school shock.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – You know remember that, it's kind of different from changing your routine. Like, when you have to follow orders, like you know high school has a routine set up. Once you go to college, you have to do it on your own. People, some people have problems and…

Researcher – Talk to me more about the kinds of problems, what kind of problems or what does that do?

Student – Well, first and foremost I think to do your THEA, your ACT, the other tests, ACT did I say that right, ACT and SAT there you go. To take those tests, in high school they don't tell you much about them. We're lucky if they're telling you once you're a senior and you know your senior year is actually nothing because in a year you can't do anything. Like me I had problems with my TAKS so I it was like difficult for me, because I had TAKS and THEA and then you know I was nervous. For me it was a little bit late.

Researcher – Okay. So they didn't really start until you were a senior.

Student – Yeah, only certain people do it before well because I guess they know

the top 10. That's what tends to happen most of the time, they only tell those

people.

Researcher – So the counselors tend to focus on that top 10%.

Student – Yeah. [Personal Interview 1, cards #4-5 of 60]

While describing the Difference Between High School and College barrier

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) particularly speaks to the immediate transition from following

directions in high school to being self-reliant in college. As if over a period of a summer,

these students will suddenly be adults. Personal Interview 1 (PI1) also touched on the

placement exam differences between high school and college as well as the apparent

lack of attention from the high school counselor.

Despite the breadth of literature that speaks to the need for higher education for

all students, Personal Interview 1 (PI1) describes the age old phenomenon of student

tracking. College is seen as a possibility for the top 10% of the high school class of

which Personal Interview 1 (PI1) was not a member.

Later in the interview, Personal Interview 1 (PI1) came back to the Difference

Between High School and College barrier:

Student – Well when I started out I was lost, first and foremost.

Researcher – Okay. Let's talk about that.

Student – There was no maps, nothing. And they give you a map over here in

Admissions. But you still feel lost. So I asked at work. Actually, I asked [staff

member from Human Resources] and he helped me out, "okay this is Building

J." I was like there's no map. And then I had to actually for myself actually go around the school to pass every single building on my own. Just like the orientation in May, you saw the map and Building here and building here.

Researcher – Okay, so [staff member from Human Resources] told you, "hey here's all the buildings, here's where you need to go." [Personal Interview 1, card #20 of 60]

Family

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) described his family and family support in the following fashion:

Student – You then my parents they would lend me the truck here and there to come over here to make sure that I would enroll in somehow.

Researcher – So your parents were encouraging you to get into college?

Student – Oh, yes. It was a must.

Researcher – So your parents said college is a must.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Do they, what other kind of support do they give you? They tell you, you have to do it. Do they understand it at all? Did they go to college?

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – They did, okay good. Okay, so both you're parents have gone to college also.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Okay, great. Good, so what kind of other support, did they tell you this is what you are going to experience? Or tell me more about that.

Student – Well they would tell me about it, but then they would be like, "you won't understand it until you do it on your own." My father is that kind of people, "okay you have to do it on your own in order to understand things." So he would leave me on my own. "If you don't get into college, it's your problem." You know. But for instance he would do it for me to get encouraged and motivated and I did it. [Personal Interview 1, cards #6-7 of 60]

Despite Personal Interview 1 (PI1) being one if not the only student who was a second generation college student, his family felt that he should figure out the college system on his own as opposed to providing guidance.

Family continued to be a barrier for Personal Interview 1 as noted in the following segment of the interview:

Student – Get that 'A' you always want, you know. But sometimes you can't you know.

Researcher – Why can't you? Tell me more about that.

Student – Well I have to do my chores you know at home. I literally do everything because my mom she doesn't have the time, because she's still going to school.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – So I always help her out you know by cleaning the whole house, cutting the yard, washing all three cars because now mine's in it too. So time

management is a very strict matter for me you know when it comes to doing all those things. Every Sunday, I have to review, do this – this week. Be safe.

Researcher – How did you learn to do that?

Student – I guess, I guess life you know. They're actually my adoptive parents not my biological parents. I guess it's friends like that got me okay, to work a little harder than before. [Personal Interview 1, cards #21-23 of 60]

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) realized that he would have to sacrifice earning an 'A' in some of his classes in order to keep up with his family obligations.

Finally, the Family barrier would ultimately cause Personal Interview 1 to consider leaving college:

Student – Well now times have changed. All those plans, my family problems have caused me so much that I don't know. You know that's why I asked you about the Air Force. I also like the pilot thing, when I was probably like three years old, I always loved planes, but then I was like I want to be a lawyer. I would like to be a lawyer.

Researcher – And that's why you want to do Government because of that.

Student – Yeah, and try and attend law school. But now that, I don't know, I don't know what's wrong with my family sometimes. (laughing nervously) I laugh because I can't believe they, you know I feel like betrayed you know. I mean not to exalt myself, but I think I do so much trying to help everyone. I like to help everyone, not only at my house, but my grandma all my family. I like to help everyone… [Personal Interview 1, card #51 of 60]

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) continues on his plans to deal with the Family barrier as well as their effect on his progress in college:

Student – So I was thinking maybe it's better, I would be better off if I'm actually away for a while. Maybe the family relationship would be better in years to come. Just so that they can see that I can be successful on my own, not to depend on them anymore. Because they think they have me here, but I'm moving, I'm looking everywhere, where can be another door open so I can just get in and not have problems economically or you know? Because I tell you economically at my house right now, the best thing that ever happened to me. Thank God I have the car, I have a phone, I have everything food everything. But I was saying to one of my friends, how can I be in college studying for my classes and thinking about the problems over here? I can't do that. I flunked my test yesterday, my final test just thinking about the problem. I thought okay, I can't study. I can't just be here and study and thinking about the problem. It's making me go lower and lower. I was expected to get straight As. And my mom she decided to get, the week before finals, and just crash on me big time. So, it did affect me, my scores got affected. So I decided okay if I leave, maybe if I'm away from everything and just concentrate on school you know. Because I don't want quit college, I don't want to do that. [Personal Interview 1, card #51 of 60]

Financial Aid

The financial aid process was a significant barrier for Personal Interview 1 (PI1).
The barrier and the knowledge and actions utilized to overcome the barrier were
described as follows:

Student – Yeah, but then the financial problem came in.

Researcher – Okay, let's talk about that one.

Student – And uh, they needed to fix some problems. They didn't tell me okay,
this is what happened actually like specific detail. They just told me that I needed
to fill out some forms again. So I kind of almost did it again, but it could just be
some corrections. I don't know from what or what. But in the end, they just came
out and yeah you got it and I was like phew.

Researcher – And it was like how close to, when did you start the financial aid
process? When did you start filling out that paper work?

Student – I started March the 3rd.

Researcher – And then, when were you going back and forth when you thought
everything was in order? And then what happened?

Student – In July and it was until like right before I started to work, that was like
two weeks before school started.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – But then it got fixed, so there was no problem.

Researcher – So you started your first application was way back in March and it
didn't get through…

Student – I think they stopped it in, just like the other one.

Researcher – Right before, right in August. And how did you get through that one? I mean because you did it.

Student – My dad's friend is [staff member in the Financial Aid Office].

Researcher – Yeah!

Student – He helped me out a lot because of him I actually got the financial aid, because there were a lot of problems.

Researcher – So [staff member in the Financial Aid Office] is a friend of your dad's?

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Okay, and so when you were having problems, you went to your dad and asked him?

Student – Yeah, well he would tell me, "hey I have a friend that works there. So he can help you out." So I would come to him all the time and he would tell me, "let me do this and this for you." He helped me out. That's how I got through it.

Researcher – So you developed that relationship because of your dad.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – And he kept helping you as far as the paperwork.

Student – He would tell me, "you need to do this, you need to do that." [Personal Interview 1, cards #11-12 of 60]

The Financial Aid process proved to be a significant barrier for Personal Interview 1 (PI1). It was a five-month ordeal for this student, as the student began the

process in early March and was awarded in mid-August. In addition, it appears that it was only resolved due to utilization of a personal relationship within the Financial Aid Office. The trepidation that a non-traditional student enrolling in higher education already is experiencing coupled with such a difficult process only leads to angst and surely does not facilitate student success.

Balancing Work and College

As nearly every student who participated in the focus group interviews explained that work was not a choice but a necessity, Personal Interview 1 (PI1) also described balancing work and college:

Researcher – Okay, so you got all financial aid piece, now tell me about work because I know you work too.

Student – Yes. I work with Human Resources. I was going to work in Financial Aid; I was going to work with [staff member in the Financial Aid Office] there. But then in the end, something happened to…was like we need to work over here, we need to work over here and I needed a job like it was kind of like an emergency because I got into an accident. So I needed to fix the car before school starts, because of my life.

Student – And I wasn't working back then. I was looking for a job.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – So then they told me to do it here, it would be convenient with my classes and everything so that helped me out a lot.

Researcher – Now who told you to do it here? Was this [staff member in the Financial Aid Office] again?

Student – Yes! [Personal Interview 1, cards #13-14 of 60]

Once again, a personal relationship facilitated the successful navigation of dealing with the Balancing Work and College barrier.

Unexpected Personal Issues

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) also presented a unique barrier as well as knowledge and actions that allowed him to overcome the barrier:

Researcher – Now tell me more about, you said you needed a job and you needed to fix your car. So how did that happen? How did you get through that?

Student – Well at the end, the accident wasn't my fault according to the police report.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – But the lady that hit me, their insurance didn't want to pay me back for the damage. And so my dad had to pay for it and thanks to financial aid I paid him back.

Researcher – Pay him back.

Student – And from work too. That's why I think that financial aid is a very good thing because it does help me a lot. A lot of money that I spent on it and nothing for me now, but it like at least…

Researcher – But it at least got you in.

Student – It got me through.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – Because transportation if you can call it that matters. Transportation to school. [Personal Interview 1, cards #16-17 of 60]

While financial aid is intended to assist students with expenses for college, Personal Interview 1, (PI1) due to an unexpected event, was forced to use his financial aid to pay for automobile repairs.

Personal Interview 1 (PI1) was asked to provide advice for future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and provided the following:

Researcher – If you were going to give advice to your, you talked about younger brothers, younger sisters, what advice would you give them on how to overcome barriers that might come up at the start of college?

Student – I think it all becomes when you're in junior high when you know the teachers start talking to you, "okay college this, this, and that." The best thing that ever happened to you right. Since then okay, I believe that you have to set up a very concrete dream of what is it that you want. But, once you get to high school, the years are passing by, I would try to look forward five more years. What could happen in five more years, so when I can advise people is like, let's say, I wanted this lawyer dream since I was eleven years old. What is it I have to do to get there? And if that fails, if that plan fails you have to have a plan B and a plan C you know. Because my plan B was music, I love music. And then plan C always had it for the Air Force, I always loved the Air Force. So I was had it at the end, what happens if A and B fails, I always had C, I still have the C, and that

can be the only chance. So always have plans, what happens if this fails or if that

fails you know. Always try to make sure what's going to happen if something

fails. If I lose everything, okay well I have this, you know. [Personal Interview 1,

card #57 of 60]

Finally, Personal Interview 1 (PI1) offered a sobering sentiment regarding the

barriers as well as the knowledge and actions that he has used to overcome such barriers:

Researcher – Anything else that you would advise students on how to be

successful?

Student – Well, motivation, motivation you know.

Researcher – And motivation…

Student – Motivation, I believe that you have to suffer in order to be succeed, I

believe that. You probably won't have, like right now as a freshman in college, I

won't have a real fancy car or you know the best clothes ever, but like hey you

have to suffer with money a little bit in order to get to that point, and then you

enjoy life. What is called enjoying life, that's what I think. You have to suffer in

order to succeed. [Personal Interview 1, card #59 of 60]

The idea that suffering, not sacrifice, but suffering was a pre-requisite for college

success was a mainstay for Personal Interview 1 (PI1).

Personal Interview 2 (PI2)

The student who participated in Personal Interview 2 (PI2) was also a traditional

first-year college student and also had just graduated the prior June. The student was also

very upfront in providing additional information and was more than willing to provide

responses in an effort to facilitate college success for future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. This student was also very focused on the Hispanic culture and the impact of the culture on both participation and success within higher education.

Once again, the interviews began by reestablishing that this student was indeed a Hispanic male first-time-in-college student and confirming the date of registration for the fall term:

Researcher – Now during the focus group, well, first off, I mean this is your first semester at STC?

Student – Yes.

Researcher – And you registered about when? For the fall?

Student – I registered at the end of the spring semester of high school.

Researcher – Okay, so some time in May. So you were still in high school.

Student – Yeah. [Personal Interview 2, card #2 of 70]

Upon reiterating the study parameters, Personal Interview 2 (PI2) began by summarizing the process that he used to enroll at the community college, which displayed a lack of understanding of higher education as well as a lack of college readiness.

College Knowledge

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) described the decision to attend the community college in the following fashion:

Student – When I was going through enrollment, I wouldn't have enrolled unless they showed up at out school.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – And uh, they talked to us and they're like "okay, STC offers this to us. And this and this, and this, and here's the registration and here's more information." If they didn't give that to us and then I really considered it. I was thinking of going well to the other university – that would be UTPA. But since they came in, they told me and they showed us tuition and everything and I was like, I want to start off there because it's not such a big and scattered campus as the other university. And it's a lot smaller. And now that I'm in here, I said good thing that I chose this because I learned from here and later on I'll be ready to move on to a bigger place.

Researcher – Okay, tell me about that.

Student – Then [they] talked to us and then later on in the semester they came in person with a whole bunch of laptops. And they were like whoever wants to register, and I said I'm going to take the opportunity now that they're here and they could explain me all the process of the application. So we went to online applications and it was easy, they were there to help us, and we did it and now I'm here.

Researcher – No, so no problems with the applications all of that?

Student – No, because they were there with me so I, otherwise, I would have gotten lost, I don't know the website, I don't know the questions. I mean I really don't know, you're a senior but you're still not, I mean it's a totally new environment. [Personal Interview 2, cards #3-4 of 70]

Financial Aid

       Personal Interview 2 (PI2) was explicit in describing the role that financial aid

plays in his respective pursuit of higher education as well as the challenge of the process:

       Researcher – Okay, you did talk about during the focus group, you talked about

       financial aid as a part. So tell me about how financial aid and that process

       worked for you. Because we said that was a barrier for a lot of students.

       Student – Yes, well financial aid is essential to my education, because if I don't

       have, it I don't know what I'd do, I mean, I'd probably do what a lot of friends

       are doing: they work a whole year and work and work and work. And then they

       put off their classes. But the year goes by and they get trapped in work and they

       get trapped in bills. "Okay since I'm working I want to buy me this. I'm working

       so hard," so they buy themselves a car or whatever and then they find themselves

       working more, and more and more and more, until the point that school doesn't

       even fit in their schedule and they just, that's what they continue on. So they

       form the temptation of call it that.

       Researcher – Sure, sure okay for you I know that financial aid is essential

       but talk to me about the process. When did you first apply for financial aid?

       Student – I applied, it's cause all of this, well this is the way I, you know

       someone, that knows someone, that knows someone. So I know the guy that

       worked for financial aid but at UTPA.

       Researcher – Okay.

Student – I know, my friend knew him and uh, he told us, "yeah, why haven't you guys registered?" Well, we don't even know where to start.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – He was like, "that's fine, come. We went to his house, we went to his computer, and he did it everything for us and it's complicated, it's really complicated. And I told him, "okay, what do I need," and he's like, "you need, this, this, and this," and I was like, "whoa, if I didn't have you, where would I find this information?" And he was like, "it's there on the application, it's just that you have to read everything very, very carefully. Because anything you miss will come back to you and it will take time to process." So he told me, "I need your income and I need your mother's income and then I need this and your school and this and that, and that," and he helped us out. And even though he helped us out, I still had that application come back to us and ask for different kinds of income.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – There was an income that my mom had with this company and it was a whole booklet, and then they didn't want that, they wanted this W-2 form and then they wanted this other 1040, it was a lot of things. And when I finally got it, it said you got awarded, I was like, "oh finally, I'm over with that." But next year, you have to reapply. So hopefully I have a little bit of training already with it, so I won't have problems with that. [Personal Interview 2, cards #5-7 of 70]

The complexity of the financial aid process is evident from the detailed summary provided by Personal Interview 2 (PI2). Much like Personal Interview 1 (PI1), Personal Interview 2 (PI2) utilized a personal relationship in order to facilitate the financial aid barrier.

In addition to the complexity of the financial aid process, Personal Interview 2 (PI2) also described the length of time involved in dealing with financial aid, which only added to the challenge:

Researcher – Okay, from that point that you started to getting awarded about how long of a period was that?

Student – I applied in January of 2007, and then I didn't get it, I didn't receive anything, and then I was like, "what's going on, does it take this long?" I asked myself that question in May.

Researcher – So you were already May – you were about to graduate from high school.

Student – I was about to graduate and I was like, "what's going on," and I looked into the application, and looked very into it. I was reading everything and then as I started researching what financial aid was for, I looked at some things and it said, "You're missing this, this, and this." And I was like, "whoa, if I didn't look into it, no one else tells you." You have to be on top of things and then I went back and changed things and I sent it. And then I looked at it again, and we were on vacation, we were in the summer and I still needed other things. Until we were like a month before getting into school, that's when I got a letter for STC

saying that "okay, we got your award" and all that stuff. So I finally got it done

in August. That's when I was sure I got it, but it was until the last moment when

I finished everything. [Personal Interview 2, cards #8-9 of 70]

The financial aid challenge began in January for Personal Interview 2 (PI2) and

was not resolved until August. While the complexities of financial aid are without

question, an eight-month process seems rather excessive.

Difference Between High School and College

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) elaborated on the Difference Between High School

and College barrier:

Researcher – What about, after that piece you talked about in your focus group,

you know the difference between high school and college. All of your group

talked about that. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

Student – The difference between high school and college.

Researcher – Yeah, you guys had said that that was one of the barriers too.

Student – In high school, if you don't have the transportation, they provide it.

And then, the food, if you can't afford the food, they give it to you. Well not give

it to you, you're paying taxes, but they offer it you.

Researcher – Sure, sure.

Student – They offer you the food there, whatever food they can offer and you

eat that. And then you're out by 4:00 and then you have transportation back

home, so that's done. But now in college, you have to worry about your own

transportation, about your own food, about your own supplies – I mean you have

to buy your scantrons. And it's all up to you, everything is up to you. And it's up

to you to succeed and to move on, because nobody else is going to do it for you.

[Personal Interview 2, card #10 of 70]

The transition from a high school environment in which all items are handled for

the student to one of total independence within higher education seemed to be a bit

overwhelming for Personal Interview 2 (PI2).

Balancing Work and College

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) described the challenge of balancing work and college

and how he has overcome it:

Student – Yeah, and I didn't do what my friends were going to do. I was like,

"no, I don't want to fall into that. I was going [to] go fresh out of high school into

college for various reasons." But it's still there in your mind, all the work you've

done and all the exercises in school. And you're coming to college, so your

memory is fresh so you can have an advantage, then working a year and then

coming back. So that helped me out.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – I think I would have probably gotten caught up with work, because

you're winning money and you're at an early age and you're like, "I'm making

this money."

Researcher – Now, you're still working though.

Student – I'm still working.

Researcher – You are working, but you're working part-time. How do you deal with that barrier?

Student – I just work and go to school, and yeah, it's expensive because you add up the gas and the food, you're like well you need to work. As for my financial aid, I used it for books, and for those kind of things. And once I paid off my books, well, that's there's the money and so I have to work to keep going with food and gasoline and other school expenses.

Researcher – Okay, and how do you work that in? What…

Student – Well, you manage you're time, you say, like as for me you have to make your schedule according to your lifestyle. So I say, "the earlier I go to school, the more time in the afternoon that I have to work. And the more time I'll have at night to study. So I'll try to get all my classes in the morning." You do your schedule according to your lifestyle. [Personal Interview 2, cards #14-16 of 70]

Once again, this student described the challenge of dealing with work within the context of college not as a choice but a necessity as well as the temptation to work more in order to receive immediate gratification as opposed to investing time in higher education.

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) also saw the benefits of working on campus as a key to overcoming the Balancing Work and College barrier:

Researcher – You said, you got to class in the morning so you schedule all your classes in the morning.

Student – Yeah, all of them they start at 7:00 and they end like around 10:00-10:30.

Researcher – Monday through Friday, or Monday through Thursday?

Student – Monday through Thursday, yeah. And then by that, I have more time to work in the afternoon, because the office closes at 8:00 I think. So I go to class, I finish class, go to work, and then from work, I go home. But I consider myself very lucky, in the office I'm the most young one, I'm the youngest one in the office.

Researcher – And you work, where on campus?

Student – Yeah, I work on campus, yes.

Student – But for others, I know some that have two jobs and then the time with their jobs, their managers really don't consider some of them that they're going to school. And I have some that they go to school, and they go to work, and they come home late like around 9, 10, 11 at night. Because they work at the mall and that's the time that they close. It's the time that they close that's the problem. [Personal Interview 2, cards #17-18 of 70]

Having a job on campus facilitated the Balancing Work and College barrier as an on campus job would work with the student's schedule as described below:

Student – But lucky for me they told me, "No, we work around your schedule. Whatever time your classes are you can come in, go out, go to your classes, and come back." I mean they are awesome with work, they're great to a great blessing to me and to my work. [Personal Interview 2, card #24 of 70]

Family

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) spoke to the not only Family being a barrier but also the Hispanic culture. He was articulate and descriptive in the ways that Family serve as a barrier:

Researcher – Now what about, you had said that you had to learn all of this on your own too, because your parents didn't go to college, right?

Student – No, my parents didn't go to college.

Researcher – So first…

Student – That's a barrier too.

Researcher – Okay, talk about that.

Student – That's a barrier in the way that, if you've never done something, you're not going to understand it, you know. If your parents didn't go to college, they're not going to understand what finals are. They're not going to understand the stress that students go through to get passing those classes. They're not going to understand it. And I mean it's not their fault, you have to understand yourself that hey they don't understand how this is. So then they see you tired and like I don't know sometimes they ask me, "Hey what's wrong with you, be worried when you have bills and everything." You know, okay, I might not have bills, but I still have my things I have to get done and my school and my tests and that stresses you out. So you don't have that much of a rapport to them, I mean they know it's good and everything. But they can't tell you, "oh, take these classes or do this, and this will help you out in your classes and look for this or look for

that."They can't really tell you and they're the persons that you have at home, everyday. They'll help you if they know, but since they don't, you get this information either from internet or from friends. And that's how you get by. [Personal Interview 2, cards #36-37 of 70]

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) resorted to dealing with friends or going online in order to deal with the Family barrier. He goes on to further explain the frustration as well the knowledge and actions he utilizes to overcome this barrier:

Researcher – How do you deal with that? How do you help them understand, or how do you overcome that?

Student – Um, you can't make them understand because you have to really tell them, "you know what, why don't you go, and why don't you do it?" And well, I'm not going to tell them that.

Student – I say just tell yourself, "hey calm down, don't get mad." Because I get really mad when they tell me you're all stresses, "Estas todo estressado" [You're so stressed out] and you're so young and you're going to get "canas" [grey hair]. (laughs)

Researcher – I got them already.

Student – They tell you that and you just say, "yeah, okay whatever," and just hold on to when I have my career, not a job a career.

Researcher – So how do you I mean you tell yourself don't get upset take it easy tell me more, wait you're going to have your career?

Researcher – So how do you I mean you tell yourself don't get upset take it easy tell me more…

Student – Um-hmm. I my sister said something that I like and she quotes it in Spanish, "Si tu no te animas, nadien te va a animar," What that means is that you have to give yourself that push, I mean if no one is pushing you, you have to do it yourself, and you have to tell yourself keep going you can do it, you can do it, you can do it. And it's just your self-motivation and I think that your self-motivation comes from the suffering of others around you and dealing with those unemployment and medical care and that keeps you going. [Personal Interview 2, cards #38-40 of 70]

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) emphasized that due to a lack of college understanding, his family actually serves as a barrier. His family actually ridicules him for being "stressed out" about college. He is forced to utilize the thoughts of having a career coupled with the suffering that his family has endured due to a lack of higher education.

Personal Interview 2's (PI2) statement regarding a career and how the ambition of attaining such a goal serves to overcome the Family barrier required further exploration:

Researcher – Okay. You talked about you know, not a job that's how you motivate yourself, that you're working on your career. Talk about that.

Student – Well, a career, I mean a job is a job, it's not your job. It's the job you have to do. A career is something you do to enjoy, I mean it's something that you

like and it's something that you want to do for the rest of your life. So imagine

working at McDonald's for the rest of your life, I mean it's not even your

franchise, you know. And you're working it for someone else and you're doing it

if you don't like it – out tomorrow. I mean you don't even have the education to

open doors for other jobs.

Researcher – So that's part of how you motivate, too, hey this is going to help me

get a career.

Student – Yes, and also because I have the hands-on experience. I mean I worked

at McDonald's, I worked at Quizno's, I worked at AppleBee's, I worked at a

shoe store, I worked at I've worked in another country too at a gas station with

uncles. But I've had that experience and I've looked and I've seen that happen.

Researcher – So all of those for you would be jobs, and you don't want a job, you

want a career.

Student – Yeah, I don't want a job, I want a career. A job is, you go work there

whenever you want just leave and start another one and another one. It's not

stable. [Personal Interview 2, card #42 of 70]

Higher education is seen as the passport to a career for Personal Interview 2 (PI2)

and thus facilitates the successful navigation of Family.

Hispanic Culture

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) delved into the Hispanic Culture and how it can serve

as a barrier for many Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. His thoughts provide

a rich description of the struggles that not only a non-traditional, first-generation college

student face, but also provide insight into the conflicts that a first-generation American faces:

> Researcher – Now tell me, you said other things during the focus group that I wanted to ask deeper questions on. You talked about Hispanic males and how, what you said during the focus group is as a culture, we Hispanic males and a lot of times we're not expected to go to college.
>
> Student – Yeah, it's because there's a big difference between Americans, Americans – Caucasians, Hispanics, and Mexicanos. Because to me, I see Mexicanos come into the school and their backgrounds are rich parents. I mean they have, I mean to be a student here, being from Mexico it's expensive. You have to go through so many things, through so many tests just to come to school here, if you're from Mexico. So the students that are here that are Mexicanos – they have parents that have money to have them here. Now Hispanics, in other words, having Mexican parents but being born in the United States.
>
> First of all, you have to look into the history, their parents are Mexican so either they came here somehow (laughing) or they fixed somehow. You know and then they had their kids here. And now you have your parents that are not so wealthy. So then you have the history and the common sense that okay if they're not wealthy, why is it? Oh, it's because they didn't get an education. So now they have a kid and they're raising him here and they're not even so educated. So that's the difference between Hispanics, Americans – Caucasians, and Mexicans, that the minority of us, because we are the minority because we speak both

English and Spanish, that we have the same history as some of our parents, that

came into here, into the United States for to, you know to work. They came in

here to work and that's what they've done since they got here, is just work, work,

work. And the other difference that Mexicanos and Americans is that their

parents are already educated and they're just following up with their kids and

getting them an education. So then we have parents that are not educated and

now it's up to us to make that difference. And most of them follow the steps of

their parents, and because I don't blame them because they're your parents they

raised you so whatever they say you think is right. So sometimes you have to,

and it's hard for a Hispanic for a student like me to tell your parents, "No mom,

you're wrong." And it's really hard because they're your parents and they're like,

"Our father told us to work and that's what we're going to do and you have to."

You have to say, "no, I'm sorry, but your father was wrong and this is the way to

go." And so that's the barrier that you have as a Latino and it's hard because

you're either, I mean, you're not Mexicano and you're not Caucasian, you're

Hispanic, you're both parts. And then it's hard because the views on you are

they're known, I mean, "Oh his parents came in here…" and then you're this and

you're that. So it's hard.

Researcher – So how did you decide? How did you overcome that and how did

you decide that you were going to go to school?

Student – Ummm…To better our lives and to give my kids what my parents

didn't give me. It was just basically that and since I know what they didn't give

me, I know what it is. Okay, they didn't give me this, and that, and that. So okay, I want to give my kids this. So that's what motivates me to keep on going and a better life. I don't want to be working at McDonald's doing all of that, that I already did in my previous years. So I want to get an education.

Researcher – So you think that a lot of us, a lot of the Hispanic males are dealing with that? That their parents didn't go to college…

Student – Yeah, that history of us. [Personal Interview 2, cards #48-52 of 70]

The dichotomy of not only being a first-generation student but also a first-generation Hispanic American seemed to weigh heavily on Personal Interview 2 (PI2). He felt that it required a break from the family tradition of just working and seeking an education in order to be able to break the cycle and thus create a better quality of life for future generations of Hispanic Americans.

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) was asked to provide advice for future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and provided the following:

Researcher – If you were going to be giving advice, you know anything else. What other things, if you could think of that you could give other people as advice on how to be successful? A successful Hispanic male?

Student– (Affirming throughout) Uh – huh. To listen to your elders, listen to your elders, because they've gone through it. Even I as young and this is what your parents tell you, "Nah, you think you know it all, but you don't know nothing." And I tell them that's true right now, and it's scary because yeah adults sometimes make mistakes, but it's up to you to differentiate the situation. So

listen to your elders and listen to what is convenient to you. If they say don't

party out before a test, don't do it. They know best. And just be careful with what

you think, you might think you know it all, but you don't know nothing.

Researcher – Now what about, when you say that because I mean that's how we

were all raised too to listen to…what about when you say that listen to your

elders but when your parents don't know about college. How do you deal with

that one?

Student – You listen to other people that do know. You listen to other people that

do know. [Personal Interview 2, cards #61-62 of 70]

After earlier describing Family as a barrier, Personal Interview 2 (PI2) still

advised to listen to elders, however, clarifying that it would be elders that have gone to

college.

Finally, Personal Interview 2 (PI2) spoke the dilemma of being Hispanic and

how it can be a struggle, as well as the advice he would provide to others dealing with

such an issue:

Researcher – Anything else?

Student – Well, that's all just, just that was important the difference…well, your

studying Hispanics right?

Researcher – Yeah.

Student – Well, I think that's where the focus should be, because you're in the

middle and…

Student – Yeah, and that's why we are the minority too because…and we have to put the example for the rest of the United States because we know both English and Spanish and we can probably speak it fluently. And if you were raised in Mexico, you know Spanish and you come here and you begin to learn English. But as being a Hispanic, your parents speak Spanish then you go to school and they speak English.

Researcher – Tell me more, you said something real key and we'll wrap up after this. But you said you have to be the example for the rest of the U.S. on the Hispanics.

Student – Yes, because we're viewed as your parents came from Mexico and they're stealing our money or sending money to Mexico. And this problem with the borders and all of this and you're kind of like, eyes are on you, what are you American or Mexican. Who are you supporting America or Mexico? Well, I live in the United States and I'm a U.S. citizen so, and you just have to be very careful on what you say and what you think.

Researcher – Your ancestors.

Student – Your ancestors in Mexico, so you're in the middle and they're just watching everything and just get educated, get educated because when you start talking, you look bad for America and you look bad as a Mexican. So if you say something stupid, you look bad as a Mexican and then they stereotype you, "oh you stupid Mexican" (laughing). Or if you're saying American, you look stupid too because, I mean what are you? So just get educated and show them that

you're educated for they won't start attacking the rest of us, it's not our fault. If

you want to be stable, get educated, know what you're talking about and you'll

have that advantage, that you know both points of views. [Personal Interview 2,

cards #63-67 of 70]

Personal Interview 2 (PI2) felt that education was not only the key to climbing

the social ladder in America, but also the key to facilitating the struggle of being

Hispanic.

Personal Interview 3 (PI3)

The student who participated in Personal Interview 3 (PI3) was also a traditional

first-year college student and also had just graduated the prior June. The student was a

bit shy and more reserved when providing responses, however, was willing to provide

responses in an effort to facilitate college success for future Hispanic male first-time-in-

college students. This student was unique in that he was the youngest of his siblings who

had already made it through the higher education system in South Texas.

Once again, the interview began by reestablishing that this student was indeed a

Hispanic male first-time-in-college student and confirming the date of registration for

the fall term:

Researcher – I don't remember what you had said, around when did you register?

Student – Um, July. [Personal Interview 3, card #3 of 52]

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) wasted no time going into the types of barriers faced during

the enrollment process. However, he was very short in his description of those barriers.

Finances/Financial Aid

The first barrier that Personal Interview 3 (PI3) identified was related to finances and the role of financial aid within the higher education process:

Student – I think a lot of people they have in their financial economic state they have trouble coming to school because they can't pay for the classes.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – If they, if they come to school and they end up not succeeding, they're going to lose all that money. And they could use that money for something else. So I think that they might prefer to…just use that money on something.

Researcher – Can you say some more about that? Just tell me a little bit more.

Student – Something else about financial aid – a lot of people don't know about it. Mostly high school, they think everything, since everything is paid in high school, they have no idea what's going on. And I think that should be on our side maybe, at least one year before, maybe not even junior year, junior year. Because if they're told junior year, uh senior year they're going to say, "Okay, I'll just wait to the last month, maybe summer." But that's too late, you know, the deadline is way past, before that. [Personal Interview 3, cards #4-5 of 52]

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) elaborated further on the personal financial barrier that he faced:

Student – Yes, well they told us. Well I had no idea I didn't know if I had to pay them out of my pocket then get the money or how it was going to work. I had to come back and talk to financial aid and that's when I received a letter to verify.

So I took it in and they told me that, I think it was by the 19th that financial aid was going to pay for your classes. [Personal Interview 3, card #44 of 52]

In addition to the concerns regarding the finances of higher education, it is also apparent that college knowledge regarding the financing of higher education is lacking with Personal Interview 3 (PI3).

Transition Between High School and College

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) spoke to the transition between high school and college stating the following:

Student – It was, the transition between high school and college was a big difference. We have, I guess, a little bit more liberty here in college. But I think it was, it was a good thing. Because it helps us grow more responsible, it helps us learn that it's for our good, and that we have to attend class because we're paying for it. And because it will help us out in the future.

Researcher – Now how did you figure all that out? I mean I think that's great that you did that, but again you're the successful student. And I see students that don't make it and don't figure that out. How did you understand all of that?

Student – I think it was just sticking it out, just staying there, and not quitting I guess. [Personal Interview 3, cards #9-10 of 52]

It is important to note that Personal Interview 3 (PI3) provided a cliché response on how he figured out or overcame the transition barrier.

Fear

Personal Interview 3 explained that part of the Transition From High School to College barrier involved fear and trepidation. He provided an insight into the actual fear that students experience when transitioning from high school to college and related it to the process of going from one level of education to the next:

Student – I had fear.

Researcher – Tell me about it then.

Student – It was just like when you're going to move from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school, you have no idea what it is, but you have to do it. So you have to learn the hard way of just going through it, then learning. I went through it because I had no idea what STC looked like, I didn't even know where it was. So I had to go through my friends.

Researcher – Okay. So this is part of how you, that change that you're talking about elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to college um so you depended on your friends to help you with that.

Student – Um-hmm. But that was my first time at STC, I had never come to like a what do you call it…like a tour. So I had no idea what it was because I had never seen it before. So it was just like boom – it's there. In high school if I would have come and toured it, maybe I would have known more, and I wouldn't have been as lost as I was.

Researcher – Okay, now talk to me about that lost piece, how did you figure it out? Now first off, how lost were you, what couldn't you find classes or what was the lost piece?

Student – The first time I came to STC, I only knew the, I think it's the K building, the Admissions building. That's the only building I knew.

Researcher – Okay.

Student – I had no idea what the rest of the campus looked like. So I didn't find out until, until orientation. But I was still kind of lost. I started to know STC better after a few weeks of coming to class. [Personal Interview 3, cards #37-38 of 52]

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) is very explicit in identifying that he did not really know the college campus until a few weeks into the term. This sense of not knowing only adds to the challenge of higher education for such students.

Balancing Work and College

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) described the Balancing Work and College barrier as well as the advantage of participating in the college's work-study program as a way of overcoming that barrier:

Student – Well basically, a good thing is that it's a work study. They have flexible schedules. So if I ask for two days off, they'll give it to me. I think that's a very important factor there, because most jobs don't have that flexible schedule. I have a friend in particular, he's working for a hotel and he doesn't have that kind of flexible, his schedule. He did ask for a day off, the days he

comes to school. But after that, he works all day long from morning to night. He

doesn't have time to do his work or anything. [Personal Interview 3, card #11 of

52]

It is noteworthy that Personal Interview 3 (PI3) has realized that the work-study

program is the best work option due to its flexibility with students, therefore, allowing

the balance needed in order to facilitate this barrier.

College Knowledge

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) spoke at length regarding the lack of college

knowledge that he felt during the early part of his experience in higher education:

Researcher – Anything else that happened in those first few weeks of class?

Student – I guess one thing that the teachers have, well some of them, they try to

scare you in the first class. As soon as you get there, they start telling you all

these things, the syllabus. And most people panic and they say, "nah, -this isn't

for me." And they just drop out. Well they just basically go over it you know.

"We're going to do this, this, and that. Research papers, we're going to read this

number of books," but the thing is that I think it's all in your mind, you know. If

you see it and you say, "Wow this is too much." But what you're not seeing is

that you don't have to do it all in one week. It's all a process. So you follow that

process and you'll be okay. [Personal Interview 3, cards #18-19 of 52]

The seemingly overwhelming experience of a faculty member going over the

entire semester expectations during the first week of class caused a feeling of fear,

anxiety, and panic that Personal Interview 3 (PI3) picked up among his classmates. In

addition, it appeared that Personal Interview 3 (PI3), himself, was forced to engage in a process aimed at talking himself into believing that he would survive those initial stages of transitioning from high school to college.

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) went on to explain the lack of preparation for the transition between high school and college as it pertained to the very first steps of college enrollment, as well as possible college solutions, in the following fashion:

Student – I think the long lines are caused because those students not being prepared. If they would have done it before, those big lines wouldn't be there because they wait until the last minute. So maybe the college could have those, what they have now that they take the Outreach that they go to the high schools and fill out the applications and everything. But I think they should do it not, the senior year because senior year as I said they're just thinking, "this is my year to relax. I don't want to think of anything." Maybe do that but with the juniors. They have to start getting ready, even though they're not going to go into the college the next semester but maybe get them to start thinking, of what they need to do and what they have to do and by when. [Personal Interview 3, card #34 of 52]

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) acknowledged that the college had reached out to the senior class at his particular high school but suggested that it should be done even earlier in their high school careers as juniors due to the fact that seniors in high school believe that they have earned a right to relax and not worry about the future, per se.

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) described the unknown aspect of college as it relates to the transition between high school and college in the simplest of terms. This began with the registration process:

Student – About the registering, I had no idea how to register for class.

Researcher – Okay, good tell me about that. So in high school, you took some dual enrollment classes, but they did all the registration for you.

Student – Yeah.

Researcher – Ahh. Okay, So how did you figure out the registration process?

Student – Well I figured K Building.

Researcher – Okay, that's a start.

Student – That's the building to register, so we came in and luckily we found some people we knew from La Joya, and they were there in line so we just asked them. And they told us you go through an advisor first, then you can register.

[Personal Interview 3, card #40 of 52]

The depth associated with the lack of understanding college and the registration process was resolved by chance. Seeing some colleagues from his former high school was a fortunate event for Personal Interview 3 (PI3). It also emphasized the fact that this student was looking for someone or something familiar in order to facilitate the transition from high school to college.

Family

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) described his family and the role they played in his pursuit of higher education in the following method:

Researcher – Now did you parents go to college?

Student – No.

Researcher – So tell me about that how did you help explain that? I mean they know it's important and they're telling you, "hey we'll help you as much as we can." But how did you figure it out? How did you decide I need to go to college?

Student – Well first of all, well, just by what they tell me you know. They talk to me and tell me, "you don't want to end up like us. We're at minimum [wage] and we're having all these problems trying to pay all these bills." Like my dad tells me, he's barely making enough to pay bills and make enough for food. There's no extra money. So they try to tell me, "if you want a better life, you better get a career." [Personal Interview 3, card #31 of 52]

While Personal Interview 3's (PI3) family did not function as a barrier per se, they had no knowledge of college to pass on whatsoever. Their only experience with college is that it seems to provide a financial escape from minimum wage employment for their son, and thus, was thought of as a possible salvation. Personal Interview 3's (PI3) parents also viewed higher education as the path to a career and not just a job.

Hispanic Culture

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) described the Hispanic Culture as a barrier for many students due to the inherent traditions of Hispanic families. One of those traditions, stereotypical or not, is working and was mentioned by Personal Interview 3 (PI3):

Researcher – Anything else that you can think of, that you think that you went

through and you think other Hispanic male students are dealing with and how

you overcame them and how we can help them overcome some of those barriers?

Student – I think most, most Mexicans I guess, Hispanics, are very traditional so

most of their parents tell them – right out of high school start working." Or either

they think that way my parents are working, making good money I'm going [to]

work too. And most of them they have their own businesses. So why am I going

to go to college if we already have our business. I guess I'll just work.

Researcher – So you think that's a big barrier work and right away going straight

from high school to work?

Student – I think it is.

Researcher – How did you overcome that one?

Student – I guess on my parents' advice just to stick to school.

Researcher – And what do you think the college could do to help other Hispanics

or Mexican Americans to deal with that one?

Student – Just go talk them I guess. Have other students go give their experiences

so they can see how it's done. It's not bad. College career is a better choice.

[Personal Interview 3, card #49 of 52]

Once again, Personal Interview 3 (PI3) provided a quite simplistic response on

how the college could assist in building a college-going culture among the Hispanic

population. The thought that simply speaking to Hispanic youth about the relationship

between college and a career seemed to be somewhat of a stretch; however, Personal

Interview 3 (PI3) did manage to suggest that other students should lead the way via learned experience. It is also important to note that Personal Interview 3 (PI3) seemed to imply that college, for many, had never been a legitimate option.

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) was provided an opportunity to give advice to future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students in an effort to facilitate their success:

Researcher – What kind of advice would you give them?

Student – I think I would just let them know start from early in high school everything. Because most people, a lot people say, "I'll just start thinking senior year, start getting ready for college." But once you get to senior year, everyone's just trying to lay back. The way they think is senior year is my year to relax so I'm not going to do anything. So summer comes, they take off or something, so they're not, so in July they're trying to get everything done. Trying to get financial aid and trying to get their classes. They're trying to apply to get accepted at STC. So I think they should start off earlier in high school. [Personal Interview 3, card #28 of 52]

Personal Interview 3 (PI3) maintained the theme that college preparation should begin early in high school and not procrastinate until the senior year of high school. His reasoning was that most seniors have a mindset that they have worked so hard to get through high school that they feel entitled to coast through the senior year and thus will be behind in beginning the college process.

Existing Data

The South Texas College Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, as part of the Lumina Foundation Achieving the Dream initiative, led the college in two distinct barrier studies. The barrier studies were conducted in an effort to develop a greater understanding of student-perceived challenges to their respective success and also to provide the college with the knowledge needed in order to implement a myriad of initiatives to mediate the student-identified barriers and thus facilitate student success.

2005 Barrier Study

During year one of the Achieving the Dream initiative the college conducted 25 focus groups, collectively comprised of 200 students, and collected 387 student essays in an attempt to identify barriers to student success. The students who participated in the 2005 barrier study were a cross-section of students, both male and female students representing each of the college's five campuses.

The resulting qualitative analysis of both the focus group data as well as the student essay content analysis yielded the following top eight barriers for students attending South Texas College during the Spring 2005 term:

1. Money

2. Lack of Information

3. Work /Job Time Management

4. Facilities/Equipment

5. Child/Daycare/Family

6. Course Offerings

7. Developmental/THEA

8. Technology

2007 Barrier Study

During year three of the Achieving the Dream initiative, the college conducted a follow-up barrier study in order to both identify the current student perceived barriers as well as determine if the myriad of initiatives implemented had an effect on the original 2005 barriers. In 2007 the college conducted 27 focus groups, collectively comprised of 234, and collected 333 student essays in an attempt to identify barriers to student success. Once again, students who participated in the 2007 barrier study were a cross-section of students; both male and female students representing each of the college's five campuses.

The resulting qualitative analysis of both the focus group data as well as the student essay content analysis yielded the following top eight barriers for students attending South Texas College during the Spring 2007 term:

1. Instructor Issues

2. Child/Family

3. Course Offerings

4. Developmental/THEA

5. Work/Job Time Management

6. Personnel

7. Money

8. Lack of Information

Comparison

Figure 2 displays the top eight barriers for both the 2005 and the subsequent 2007 Barriers Studies as well as the change in the barriers identified by students. The top four barriers identified during the 2005 study all fell in rank during the 2007 study as they were the focus of the initiatives implemented by the college.
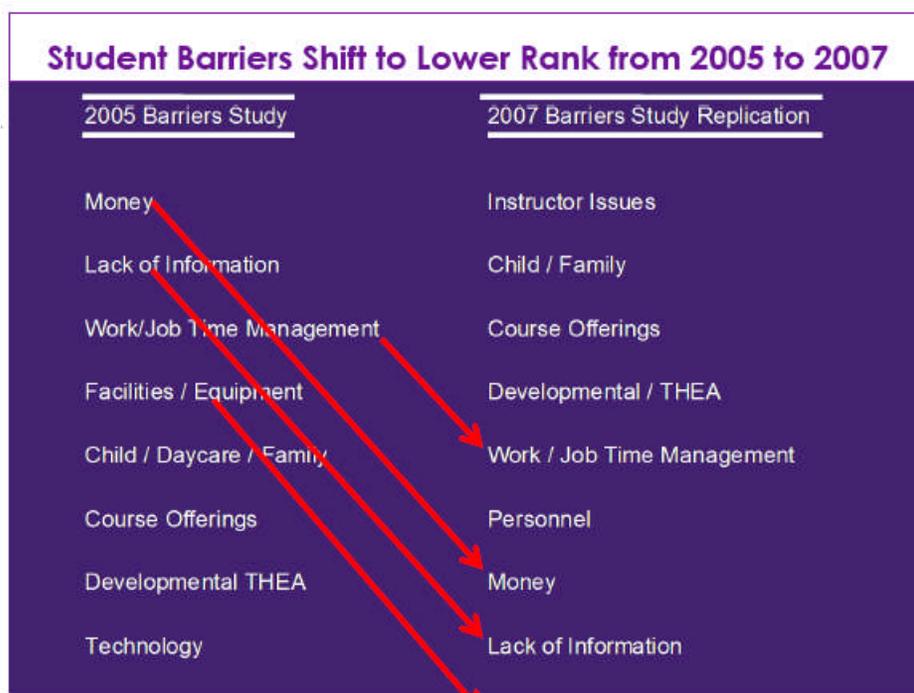

Student Barriers Shift to Lower Rank from 2005 to 2007

2005 Barriers Study	2007 Barriers Study Replication
Money	Instructor Issues
Lack of Information	Child / Family
Work/Job Time Management	Course Offerings
Facilities / Equipment	Developmental / THEA
Child / Daycare / Family	Work / Job Time Management
Course Offerings	Personnel
Developmental THEA	Money
Technology	Lack of Information

Figure 2. Top eight barriers for both the 2005 and subsequent 2007 barriers studies.

It is important to note that the data collected for this dissertation were collected during the Fall 2007 term and all students who participated in this study were indeed Hispanic male first-time-in-college students attending the Pecan Campus.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to (a) first, address the problem through the conduct of research that describes and thereby informs a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through official reporting date at the selected community college (STC); (b) second, to use this knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College Students at this institution; and (c) third, to potentially enable greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature.

In order to accomplish the stated purpose of the study, the researcher formulated two overarching and three supporting research questions to address in the conduct of the study. The first overarching question was:

1. Based on their experiences as a successful first-time-in-college student at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South Texas College), what do such male students identify and describe as having significantly influenced their ability to persist through fall first term official reporting date, and why?

The three supporting research questions were:

1.1. What specific barriers since registration must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at South Texas College overcome to

successfully persist through the official reporting date, and how do they

do so?

    1.2.   What specific knowledge must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic

male students at South Texas College acquire to successfully persist

through the official reporting date, and how do they do so?

    1.3.   What specific action(s) must successful first-time-in-college Hispanic

male students at South Texas College take in order to successfully

persist through the official reporting date, and why?

The second overarching research question was:

2. Given their experiences as successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male

students at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (South

Texas College), what suggestions would they make to the administration and

other leadership of this institution of higher education in order to improve

and, therefore, positively impact the persistence rate, through the official

reporting date, among this student population group, and why?

Persistence Influencers

The Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in both the

focus groups as well the personal interviews and triangulated via the existing

institutional data identified and described the following information as it relates to

having significantly influenced their ability to persist through fall first term official

reporting date in this institution of higher education, and why:

- College as a way out – Seeing a college education as a way out or as a means to avoid financial struggles,

- Career –Wanting a career as opposed to a job,

- Breaking the cycle – Being the first in the family to graduate, making the family proud,

- Deferred Gratification – Suffering now in order to be successful later,

- Animo (Motivation) – Having a positive outlook/mindset,

- Planning

It is important to note that each of the items listed by the students are abstract visions of what their respective futures could be via a college education. They are not tangible or concrete tasks – with the notable exception of planning. These items serve as inspiration and motivation for the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students' success in higher education.

College as a Way Out

Focus group students as well as personal interviews felt that college was the way to ensure a successful financial future and avoid the circumstances of their respective parents, which entailed living paycheck-to-paycheck. College was a means to an end and, therefore, used as method to reach financial security. These respective students were not attending college in order to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. On the contrary, they saw college as a way out of financial straits.

Career

Tied to seeing "College as a way out," was seeing college as a means to garnering a career as opposed to a job. The students saw college as a vehicle to developing a career and not just a minimum wage job.

Breaking the Cycle

Participants in the focus groups as well as the personal interviews utilized the intrinsic motivation of being the first in their respective family to graduate from college. Many of the students were the first in their families to graduate from high school and wanted to continue their education and be the first to complete a higher education degree. Graduating from college would allow these men to be a source of pride for their families and in turn begin a new cycle or expectation that their siblings or children would then follow their footsteps of participating and subsequently graduating from college.

Deferred Gratification

The focus group students as well as the personal interviews spoke to the fact that a significant part of their ability to persist through the official reporting date at South Texas College was the fact that they had realized that they had to live like a student. This entailed both the realization that they should focus on college and not work; however, it must be noted that 17 of the 18 participants worked at least part time while enrolled, as well as understanding that their financial aid should be used wisely. The students spoke specifically to items such as automobiles and clothing and the fact that they were willing

to sacrifice the new vehicle or the latest fashion in order to stretch financial aid or part-time employment dollars as far as possible.

Animo (Motivation)

Students described motivation in many different fronts as well as the role that motivation played with respect to each of the other five items that influenced their ability to persist through the official reporting date of their first fall term of attendance at South Texas College. From self-motivation to seeking motivation from others, these students utilized it to push themselves through the many trials and tribulations that they faced as first-generation college students.

Planning

The one concrete item that the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who successfully persisted through official reporting date at South Texas College identified as influencing their ability to persist was having a plan. These students had a plan, whether written or conceptualized in their mind. The plan began with the idea that college was a reality and a necessity in order for them to reach their goals. The plan then went on to influence study habits, scheduling – both course scheduling and work scheduling, as well as the program of study that they chose.

The Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in both the focus groups as well the personal interviews and triangulated via the existing institutional data provided the following information as it relates to South Texas College barriers to their respective success in higher education between the time they registered through the official reporting date for the their first fall term.

Barriers

While many barriers were mentioned by each of the focus groups as well as the personal interviews and in turn, additional barriers were discovered via the analysis of existing data, the following five barriers resonated to the top of the themes formulated during the transcription and qualitative analysis of the data:

- Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

- Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

- Balancing Work and College

- Family/Hispanic Culture

- Transportation/Parking

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

Successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students described the stark differences between high school and college as being a significant barrier to their respective success at the focal community college. The transition from high school to college was not a smooth transition for these students. These students also referred to the lack of college knowledge that they themselves had as a barrier that they were forced to overcome in order to successfully persist through the official reporting date. This barrier influenced many of the other barriers that they referenced during both the focus group and personal interview process. Whether it be the financial aid process or utilizing college resources at their disposal, Hispanic male first-time-in-college students did not understand the college system or how the college operates.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

Financial aid and the process to apply, qualify, and receive financial aid for higher education was also a significant barrier for Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College. Students consistently did not know their respective status with financial aid and were unsure of receiving aid until right before classes for their respective first term of attendance began.

Balancing Work and College

The vast majority, 17 out of the 18, of the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in the focus groups as well as the personal interviews worked out of sheer necessity. The financial situation for each of the students and their families demanded that they work while attending college. Balancing the demands of both work and college proved to be a significant barrier for these students, however, one that they learned to overcome. These students worked because they had to, not out of choice.

Family/Hispanic Culture

The families, while well-intentioned, served as a barrier to the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students due to a lack of understanding of what college entailed. The students described their respective families, parents in particular, as lacking college knowledge and, therefore, unable to assist the students navigate the college system, much less assist them with academics. The lack of familial college knowledge caused tension between the student and his parents as parents developed unrealistic expectations of the students' time constraints and responsibilities since "they were only going to

college." It must be noted that the students described their parents as encouraging them to pursue higher education but having no idea what that entailed.

In addition to Family, Hispanic male first-time-in-college students described the Hispanic Culture, cultivated by their family, coupled with the subsequent expectations for Hispanic males to contribute to the family finances and to immediately, upon graduation and exit from high school, enter the workforce as a barrier to their respective success.

Transportation/Parking

Hispanic male first-time-in-college students described transportation as a barrier that every student experiences and furthermore will be forced to miss class due to a lack or trouble with transportation. The lack of reliable public transportation within the service area of the college only added to the barrier. Additionally, the college itself has not transportation within or between campuses, which enhanced the barrier. Finally, when students did have adequate transportation, the barrier was still pronounced via the challenge parking that vehicle proved to be at the Pecan Campus of South Texas College.

The Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in both the focus groups as well the personal interviews and triangulated via the existing institutional data provided the following information as it relates to knowledge and actions utilized to overcome the college barriers, described in the preceding paragraphs, which presented themselves between the time they registered through the official reporting date for the their first fall term at South Texas College.

Knowledge/Actions

While many knowledge and actions were mentioned by each of the focus groups as well as the personal interviews, the following knowledge and actions as they relate to five overarching barriers resonated to the top of the themes formulated during the transcription and qualitative analysis of the data.

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

The four focus groups along with the three personal interviews as individual data sets seem to provide very ambiguous or even clichéd knowledge and actions for the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier. Examples of such responses were phrases such as 'You just got to do it,' or 'Just deal with it,' and finally, 'You have to have a positive mindset.' Such phrases are more motivational than actual true knowledge and actions that would equip these students or other Hispanic male first-time-in-college students with tools for success.

However, collectively, the responses provided for the knowledge/actions used to overcome the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier were very enlightening. These responses included tangible and well-thought-out items that would facilitate the successful navigation of this most prominent of the five overarching barriers.

The collective knowledge and actions, which were more tangible, included references to working in groups or seeking guidance from returning or second year students. In addition, the collective responses spoke to engaging faculty and beginning the college process during high school via dual enrollment courses or more rigorous high

school courses in order to be college ready and thus overcoming the barrier while still in high school. The knowledge and actions also included taking a College Success Course or Learning Frameworks course, while non-credit bearing, which provides many student success strategies, tips, and actions. Finally, the focus groups and personal interviews provided knowledge and actions focusing on having a plan for success in order to overcome the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier. This included touring the campus and utilizing all available resources on campus.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

The four focus groups and three personal interviews provided knowledge and actions for overcoming the Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process barrier, which both dealt with the fiscal segment of the barrier as well as the cumbersome process of completing financial aid. Items included practical approaches such as working with high school counselors to begin the financial aid process to asking questions. They also referenced persistence in continuously checking up on their respective financial aid process as well as knowing and understanding the financial aid deadlines. This entailed repeated visits to the South Texas College Financial Aid Office and often relying on a personal relationship with someone who worked at a college financial aid office in order to facilitate the cumbersome and nearly overwhelming process of completing and receiving financial aid. Students exhibited exasperation when describing both the barrier as well as the knowledge and actions to overcome the barrier.

The knowledge and actions also included budgeting strategies including items such as 'living like a student' as well as being creative and borrowing books in order to facilitate payment of an additional course.

Balancing Work and College

The focus groups and personal interviews provided substantial knowledge and actions in order to successfully navigate the Balancing Work and College barrier. The most prominent of all the items provided was talking to their prospective employer and negotiating a schedule that allowed for an actual balance to occur and opting to chose college over work if balance was no longer possible. Students also warned of seeking part-time employment as full-time employment would not allow for such balance. The students also referenced speaking to their respective faculty about their work demands in order to help facilitate this barrier. Additionally, students referenced budgeting to also facilitate the necessary balance. Finally, students encouraged on-campus or work-study jobs as a knowledge and action that would facilitate this barrier.

Family/Hispanic Culture

The focus groups and personal interviews offered practical knowledge and action approaches to deal with the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier. Included in these approaches were items such as staying on campus rather than going home and having to be confronted by the barrier, as well as surrounding themselves with other college-going students to help offset the family barrier. Additionally, the students often utilized negotiating types of knowledge and actions for dealing with this barrier by attempting to

explain the college system to families including the fact that it is only for a period of time.

Students also utilized motivational knowledge and actions to successfully overcome the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier including higher self-expectations and a desire to be the first to complete a college degree. Finally, students utilized as a worst case knowledge and action of leaving their parents' home if they were unable to successfully navigate the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier.

Transportation/Parking

The students who comprised the focus groups as well as the personal interviews were extremely practical when it came to providing knowledge and actions for overcoming the Transportation/Parking barrier. These knowledge and actions included asking family and friends for rides to campus, carpooling, or utilizing public transportation.

Students also offered practical knowledge and actions for dealing with the parking portion of the Transportation/Parking barrier. These included getting to campus early in order to find parking or following students who were walking towards vehicles in parking lots.

The Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in both the focus groups as well the personal interviews and triangulated via the existing institutional data provided the following information as it relates to college changes recommended to facilitate the college barriers, described in the preceding paragraphs,

which presented themselves between the time they registered through the official reporting date for the their first fall term.

College Changes

While many college changes were proposed by each of the focus groups as well as the personal interviews, the following recommended college changes as they relate to five overarching barriers resonated to the top of the themes formulated during the transcription and qualitative analysis of the data.

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

Students offered concrete and practical proposed college changes for facilitating the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier. Those that resonated to the top during the analysis of the qualitative data included: college-initiated student workshops, orientations and mandating a College Success Course for all Hispanic male first-time-in-college students, expanding and enhancing college sponsored high school programs and outreach services, and enhancing engagement opportunities for students via trained faculty as well as additional student clubs and organizations.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ additional communication strategies including a thorough explanation of the financial aid rules and regulations to assist in facilitating the Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process barrier. In addition, students suggested that the college provide additional financial aid opportunities including loans. Finally, students suggested that the college

facilitate the availability of additional used books to assist with the Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process barrier.

Balancing Work and College

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ fiscal and flexible strategies to facilitate students' successfully navigating the Balancing College and Work barrier. These suggested strategies included; maintaining affordable tuition in order to offset the number of hours needed to work, flexible course scheduling in order to accommodate student work schedules, expanding campus employment opportunities so that students could work on campus, and working with employers to negotiate work flexibility for students.

Family/Hispanic Culture

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ additional communication and outreach strategies to facilitate students successfully navigating the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier. The communication strategies suggested should include establishing an expectation within the community that Hispanic students participate in higher education. The communication strategies should incorporate profiling successful Hispanic students via print, radio, and television mediums. The outreach strategies suggested include going to the high schools more often in order to increase the number of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. Finally, students suggested that the college offer a familial orientation or workshop that would focus on explaining the benefits and requirements of college.

Transportation/Parking

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ additional transportation options and construction strategies to facilitate students' successfully navigating the Transportation/Parking barrier. The suggested college changes include offering a shuttle/busing mode of transportation for students through the college or via a partnership with the City of McAllen. The suggested college construction strategies included building a parking garage or additional parking lots for students to utilize.

This chapter provided a description of the methodology utilized to conduct this study, as well as a comprehensive discussion of the findings. These findings relative to the purpose of the study as well as the implications for students, colleges, and the theoretical knowledge regarding Hispanic male student success will be summarized in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study had a number of purposes. The first was to address the problem: studying successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College in order to gain a more informed understanding of these students' academic success experiences, through the conduct of research that describes and thereby informs a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who persisted through official reporting date at the selected community college (STC). This was completed through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective. A second was to use this knowledge to inform further refinement and development of the specific Expertise Model of Successful College Students at this institution. Thirdly, doing so potentially enabled greater transferability and utility of this model to and in other institutions of a similar nature.

Higher education institutions have long been resistant to change. It is a system that was established in the seventeenth century (1636) with the founding of Harvard. In addition, it was a system that was established not for the masses but for the elite and privileged to cultivate and develop a sense of self-exploration and meaning. It was not established with the intent of career or community development for the students who entered through those ivied doors.

The founding of the first community college in 1903 was an attempt to extend the opportunity of education all be it a 'scaled down' version to the middle class.

Today's society and economy demand that a level of higher education be reached in order to even stake your place within the middle class. As such, higher education can no longer be about just the privileged few and citizens of means, rather we must ensure that a quality education is a must for all that choose to enter the system, despite their pedigree. Valverde (2008) spoke to this point stating, "higher education leaders must recognize that higher education is no longer a privilege for the top ten or twenty percent of high school graduates as defined by academic capability, usually grades and standardized test scores" (p. 217).

The changing demographics within the region of South Texas, the state of Texas, and the United States of America will ultimately demand that the higher education system change in order to accommodate the students it serves. The economic link to the increased educational attainment of the Hispanic population in Texas has been well documented. The state of Texas' higher education plan, 'Closing the Gaps' sets out goals for participation, enrollment in college, and success, graduation from college, for white students, Hispanic students, and African American students. The Perryman Group (2007) indicated that accomplishing the goals established in the plan would have an immense economic impact:

> The payoff to achieving the objectives of "Closing the Gaps" is enormous. By 2030, it includes annual gains (in 2006 dollars) of $489.6 billion in total spending, $194.5 billion in gross state product, and $121.9 billion in personal income, as well as 1,023,281 permanent jobs. (slide 6)

With an enrollment approaching 24,000 students, 95% who happen to be Hispanic, South Texas College stands to play an instrumental role in facilitating both Hispanic

student success while also leading the state of Texas' participation and success goals as listed in the state's plan, 'Closing the Gap,' for higher education.

Contribution to the Literature

Gandara and Contreras (2009) in their book entitled, *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies* note the extent of the Hispanic male's education dilemma stating, "As disturbing as the picture for Latinos as a whole, the situation is even more serious for Latino males. In most areas of schooling, females now outperform males, a trend that is even more pronounced among Latino students" (p. 26). While noting the disturbing trend, Gandara and Contreras offer no research on the Hispanic male experience.

This study explored the experiences of Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who successfully persisted through the official reporting date of their first fall term in higher education. These experiences shed light on the educational practices of higher education institutions in order to facilitate student success. It also provides insight on student practices that facilitate student success and may be transferable to other colleges and universities with similar populations.

Increasing Hispanic male student retention rates at colleges and universities nationally will contribute to the upward social mobility concerns cited by Boswell (2004); Cole (2007); Haro (2004); Kochhar and Tofoya (2005); Laden (2001); The Perryman Group (2007); U.S. Census Bureau (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a,b,c, 2009). The higher education success of Hispanic male students will in turn facilitate economic prosperity for the South Texas region as well as the state of Texas and assist in avoiding

the economic peril noted by Benjamin, Carroll, Dewar, Lempert and Stockly (2000); Murdock et al. (2003); and Perryman (2007).

Hispanic male students much like the Hispanic population as a whole in Texas are choosing to attend community colleges for a variety of reasons; facilitating their success once they have chosen a community college was part of the auspice for this study. Increasing the success rates of Hispanic male students at community colleges, in particular at a community college in South Texas, addresses the concerns raised by Fry (2002); McCabe (2003); and Murdock et al. (2003).

Facilitating Hispanic male student success at community colleges should in turn increase the educational attainment level of Hispanics as a segment of the total population. Increasing the educational attainment level of this group will assist in dealing with the dilemmas that are noted by Chahin (1993); Katsinas (1984); McCabe (2000); and Olivas (1982).

Finally, this research has provided insight into the Hispanic male experience in higher education – a segment that is sorely lacking in the existing literature as noted by Saenz and Ponjuan (2009). Hispanic male research and application of findings should contribute to enhancing the educational attainment levels of this segment of the population, which is currently the lowest of all groups Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura (2006); *Excelencia* in Education (2007); Haycock (2006); Saenz, Perez, and Cerna (2007); and Saenz and Ponjuan (2009).

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Findings related to the stated purpose of the study will be discussed within the framework of the two overarching and three supporting research questions.

Purpose 1 & Research Question 1: Major Factors Influencing Hispanic

Male Student Persistence

The 18 successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in the four focus groups as well as the personal interviews coupled with the existing data provided an outstanding venue for gaining a more informed understanding of these students' academic success experience at South Texas College. This deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students was enhanced by investigating these 18 Hispanic male students, who persisted through the official reporting date of their first fall semester at South Texas College, success experiences from the emic perspective.

The students were honest and forthright in sharing experiences that influenced their respective ability to persist through the official reporting date. The Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who participated in both the focus groups as well the personal interviews and triangulated via the existing institutional data identified and described the following information as it relates to experiences having significantly influenced their ability to persist through fall first-term official reporting date in this institution of higher education, and why.

College as a Way Out

Seeing a college education as a way out or as a means to avoid financial struggles served as a major influence of persistence for these 18 students. This was illustrated best by Focus Group 3 (FG3):

Student – Uh, what I did, I told myself that I wanted to go to college and graduate from college because if you look at like my parents' background, I'm a first generation, and they all have struggled like looking for a job, having a job, and keeping a job. And I looked at that and I was like I don't want to go through that. So I decided to come to college. [Focus Group 3, card #42 of 108]

Career

These students explained that the desire to have a career as opposed to a job also served as a major influence of persistence at South Texas College. They explained the difference between a job and a career via their own personal experience or by witnessing their respective family members. Personal Interview 2 (PI2) illuminated this point:

Student – Well, a career, I mean a job is a job, it's not your job. It's the job you have to do. A career is something you do to enjoy, I mean it's something that you like and it's something that you want to do for the rest of your life. So imagine working at McDonald's for the rest of your life, I mean it's not even your franchise, you know. And you're working it for someone else and you're doing it if you don't like it – out tomorrow. I mean you don't even have the education to open doors for other jobs. [Personal Interview 2, card #42 of 70]

Breaking the Cycle

The students who participated in the study were very adamant about being the first in their family to graduate and as a result of their desire to make their family proud. This was summarized best the students comprising Focus Group 1:

Student – Also, I had to made a connection that you know as one of the first generation…that a lot of responsibility lies on me, you know, perhaps I'm the one that could probably help the family, my family the most. So I keep that in mind also as a perseverance, as a reason to persevere. [Focus Group 1, card #37 of 84]

Deferred Gratification

These 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students expressed that sacrifice and suffering now as a college student was a prerequisite in order to be successful later in life. Personal Interview 1 (PI1) eloquently alluded to this:

Student – I believe that you have to suffer in order to be succeed, I believe that. You probably won't have, like right now as a freshman in college, I won't have a real fancy car or you know the best clothes ever, but like hey you have to suffer with money a little bit in order to get to that point, and then you enjoy life. What is called enjoying life, that's what I think. You have to suffer in order to succeed. [Personal Interview 1, card #59 of 60]

Animo (Motivation)

Students who participated in the Focus Group interviews as well as in the Personal Interviews felt that having a positive outlook/mindset was a major factor in

their ability to persist beyond the official reporting date of their first fall term at South

Texas College. Personal Interview 2 provided the best example of Animo:

> Student – Um-hmm. I – my sister said something that I like and she quotes it in
>
> Spanish, "Si tu no te animas, nadien te va a animar," What that means is that you
>
> have to give yourself that push, I mean if no one is pushing you, you have to do it
>
> yourself, and you have to tell yourself keep going you can do it, you can do it,
>
> you can do it. And it's just your self-motivation and I think that your self-
>
> motivation comes from the suffering of others around you and dealing with those
>
> unemployment and medical care and that keeps you going. [Personal Interview 2,
>
> cards #40 of 70]

Planning

The 18 Hispanic male students pointed toward planning as a major factor

influencing their ability to persist through the official reporting date of their first fall

term at South Texas College. Personal Interview 1 (PI1) explained this persistence

influencer best:

> Student – What is it I have to do to get there? And if that fails, if that plan fails,
>
> you have to have a plan B and a plan C you know. Because my plan B was
>
> music, I love music. And then plan C always had it for the Air Force, I always
>
> loved the Air Force. So I was had it at the end, what happens if A and B fails, I
>
> always had C, I still have the C, and that can be the only chance. So always have
>
> plans, what happens if this fails or if that fails you know. Always try to make

sure what's going to happen if something fails. If I lose everything, okay well I

have this, you know. [Personal Interview 1, card #57 of 60]

It is important to note that each of the items listed by the students were abstract

visions of what their respective futures could be via a college education. They are not

tangible or concrete tasks – with the notable exception of planning. These items serve as

inspiration and motivation for the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students' success

in higher education. They should be capitalized upon by college recruiters and college

personnel tasked with student recruitment and retention.

Planning or having a plan for college was paramount for the 18 students who

served as the cornerstone for this study. The plan began with an epiphany that college

was both a reality and a necessity and influenced all other aspects of their college career.

Supporting Question 1.1: Barriers

Padilla (1991) was correct in his theory that all students experience barriers and

that the barriers are contextually unique to every college campus. Students will either

overcome those barriers or the barrier will cause the student to drop out of the college

system. Student retention rates at community colleges are less than spectacular. As open-

admissions institutions of higher education, community colleges serve as a beacon of

higher education opportunity.

Students learn early within the time of enrollment about the many barriers that

exist at any institution of higher education. While many barriers were mentioned by each

of the focus groups as well as the personal interview and in turn, additional barriers were

discovered via the analysis of existing data, the following five barriers resonated to the

top of the themes formulated during the transcription and qualitative analysis of the data

for successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College:

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

The 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students described the Transition or

Difference Between High School and College as a significant barrier to their success.

They explained that all requirements: food, transportation, expectations, schedules, etc.,

were handled for them while in high school and yet upon enrollment in college, they felt

completely on their own. Being a first-generation college student, a trait shared by 17 of

the 18 students, exasperated this barrier in light of the fact that their respective families

lacked college knowledge.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

During the analysis of the data, the Money barrier listed by most of the focus

groups and personal interviews was merged with the Financial Aid/Financial Aid

Process barrier that all students experienced. This was due to the fact that students

mentioned that financial resources was a barrier for each of them and financial aid was

expected to be a key to dealing with their fiscal restraints. Unfortunately, financial aid

itself served as a significant barrier due to the complexity of the application and the

corresponding process.

Balancing Work and College

As these Hispanic male first-time-in-college students were all experiencing fiscal

challenges coupled with the complexity of financial aid and the financial aid process,

they were forced to deal with balancing employment and their respective college

schedule. These students worked out of sheer necessity and thus the competing demands of work and college served as a barrier to their respective success at South Texas College.

Family/Hispanic Culture

The College Knowledge barrier that was merged with the Transition or Difference Between High School and College barrier was exasperated by these students' family and culture. While each of their respective families encouraged these students to attend college, they also had expectations for males in the Hispanic family to contribute to the family earnings. In addition, the lack of college knowledge within the students' families contributed to these students feeling isolated even with their own families.

Transportation/Parking

Students described Transportation as a challenge and barrier for every Hispanic male first-time-in-college student enrolled at the South Texas College Pecan Campus. It was understood that every student would miss at least one class due to transportation. Parking was merged into the Transportation barrier due to the fact that every focus group and personal interview mentioned parking as a barrier. And while they spoke to the parking barrier in half-amused manner, they did describe the time, planning, and negotiating skills necessary to deal with parking even when transportation was available.

Supporting Question 1.2 & 1.3: Knowledge and Actions

Once barriers are identified, students must rely on existing knowledge or develop the needed knowledge and subsequent actions to overcome the barriers that are

presented by or within the institution of higher education. The knowledge and actions are specific to the five barrier themes identified.

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

The four focus groups along with the three personal interviews as individual data sets seem to provide very ambiguous or even clichéd knowledge and actions for the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier. However, collectively the responses provided for the knowledge/actions used to overcome the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier were very enlightening. These responses included tangible and well thought out items that would facilitate the successful navigation of this most prominent of the five overarching barriers.

Students described the knowledge and actions utilized to overcome this barrier as forcing themselves to have a positive mindset and staying motivated. They would repeatedly remind themselves that, 'You just got to do it/just deal with it.' Additionally, they reminded themselves to make the connection between the struggle the barrier caused to being the first in the family to graduate from college.

They students utilized group work/buddy up as well as asking those who have gone before you – returning students/second year students for guidance. They took action to get to know the faculty. An knowledge and action recommended was to get an early start in college through dual enrollment – thus experiencing college while still in high school. They also described the necessity to tour the college campus and once on campus to use every resource available to them. Finally, these students recommended

taking the College Success Course, planning for the term, and taking harder classes in high school to prepare for college.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

The four focus groups and three personal interviews provided knowledge and actions for overcoming the Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process barrier, which both dealt with the fiscal segment of the barrier as well as the cumbersome process of completing financial aid.

Students comprising the focus groups and personal interviews described the knowledge and actions utilized to overcome this barrier as : trying to budget or utilizing creative budgeting skills. In addition, they stated that they worked with counselors while still in high school and once they were enrolled in the college, they worked with the financial aid office and asked lots of questions about the process. Students also stressed the need to know the financial aid deadlines, to stay on top of the process continuously by checking up on the process and then by following up until their financial aid was finalized. Students also explained that they lived like a student in order to stretch their financial aid. Finally, students stated that they worked with students who had gone through the process before.

Balancing Work and College

The focus groups and personal interviews provided substantial knowledge and actions utilized in order to successfully navigate the Balancing Work and College barrier. The knowledge and actions utilized by these students to overcome this barrier included talking to their employers about their schedule or talking to their instructors

and overcoming this barrier by understanding that they may have to move out of their parents' home in order to be successful in college.

Transportation/Parking

The students who comprised the focus groups as well as the personal interviews were extremely practical when it came to providing knowledge and actions for overcoming the Transportation/Parking barrier. The knowledge and actions utilized to overcome this barrier included asking friends and family for rides, carpooling with friends also enrolled at the college, and utilizing public transportation. Transportation to campus served as a barrier to these students but even when transportation was accounted for they explained that parking further challenged their success. They dealt with parking by getting to campus early for parking and by following students who were leaving toward the parking lot to find a space.

Research Question 2: Hispanic Male Student Recommendations for

Administrators (College [South Texas College] changes)

Upon the identification of barriers to success as well knowledge and actions utilized to overcome such identified barriers and given their experiences as successful first-time-in-college Hispanic male students at a Hispanic majority community college in South Texas (STC), the 18 students who comprised the four focus groups and three personal interviews were asked what suggestions would they make to the administration and other leadership of this institution of higher education in order to improve and, therefore, positively impact the persistence rate, through the official reporting date, among this student population group.

While many college changes were proposed by each of the focus groups as well as the personal interviews, the following recommended college changes as they relate to five overarching barriers resonated to the top of the themes formulated during the transcription and qualitative analysis of the data.

Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge

Students offered concrete and practical proposed college changes for facilitating the Transition or Difference Between High School and College/College Knowledge barrier. The suggested college changes included offering more tutoring at the Center for Learning Excellence on the Pecan Campus. Students also suggested offering workshops and orientation for future Hispanic male students in order to mitigate the transition between high school and college. Students believed that the college should hire engaging instructors to ease the transition. These 18 Hispanic males first-time-in-college students also felt that it was in the best interest of future students to require the College Success Course or orientation course so that these students would learn the skills needed early in their college career. Students suggested that the college go to the high schools and have a college orientation for high school students while they were still enrolled in high school in order to get them a jump start on understanding college. Expansion or offering more dual enrollment opportunities to high school students was also a recommended college change. These students suggested that the college contact future Hispanic male first-time-in-college students more often during their first term of attendance and that the contacts should be personal phone calls. Finally, these students suggested the creation of

a mentoring program and additional clubs in order to facilitate the transition between high school and college for future Hispanic male students.

Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ many changes in order to facilitate the Financial Aid/Financial Aid Process barrier. These changes included offering additional aid to future students as well as providing additional used books in order to mitigate this barrier. Students also suggested providing student loans including additional emergency loans that would provide a short-term solution when these students were dealing with the length of time needed in order to process financial aid. Finally, these students suggested that the college embark upon an initiative to facilitate students' understanding of the financial aid rules and regulations including information on paying money received through financial aid back. They also believed that the college should provide additional communication mechanisms regarding financial aid so that future students would be well informed about financial aid and the financial aid process.

Balancing Work and College

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ several changes in order to facilitate the Balancing Work and College barrier. These changes included exploring the possibility of lower tuition so students would not have to work. Students also mentioned the possibility of offering additional classes at different times in order to facilitate the balance between work and college. Students believed that the college should increase the college work-study program and

advertise it to the student body so that more students are aware of the program and its benefits. Finally, students requested that the college provide additional student employment opportunities on campus, and if once those opportunities were exhausted, that the college work with employers to offer flexible schedules for these students who have no choice but to work.

Family/Hispanic Culture

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested that the college employ a number of changes in order to facilitate the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier. These students believed that the college should facilitate a change in the mindset of Hispanic families and the Hispanic Culture by visiting the local high schools more frequently. The region is over 90% Hispanic, and these students felt that the high schools provided an ideal venue for providing such information. The students felt that the college should continue to grow by enrolling more Hispanic male students. The 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students felt that the college must work to establish the expectation that Hispanics must go to college. These students believe that the college could help educate this population by offering additional workshops for families and parents by implementing a robust parent orientation. Finally, these students believed that the Family/Hispanic Culture barrier could be overcome by the college promoting and profiling other successful Hispanic male students in a newsletter and by producing additional commercials highlighting South Texas College graduates.

Transportation/Parking

The student focus groups along with the personal interviews suggested the college implement a variety of changes in order facilitate the Transportation/Parking barrier. These changes included providing additional on-campus transportation options for students such as a shuttle system to assist in dealing with the transportation barrier. Specific college actions suggested by students to deal with parking, which students noted elevated the transportation barrier, included building a parking garage, as well as building additional parking lots. Finally, the 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students recommended that the college work with the city of McAllen to offer additional public transportation, which would mitigate the Transportation/Parking barrier for future students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Upon the conclusion of this long journey that included an overview of the study, the identification of the problem, a review of existing literature as well as identification of a gap in the literature that this dissertation filled, the methodology utilized, the analysis of collected data, several items became clear about Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College.

Hispanic male first-time-in-college students have a strong desire for higher education. They see higher education as a hope for a better life, an opportunity to break the poverty cycle, and a path to the middle class. However these students lack an

understanding of the higher education system or college knowledge, which if left to chance, endangers their opportunity for success in college.

In addition, the majority of the students who were interviewed for this study were first-generation college students and therefore their respective families, while well-intentioned, exhibited unrealistic expectations for these students with regard to college effort. This disconnect between the Hispanic Family/Culture and higher education exasperates the Hispanic male first-time-in-college students' lack of college knowledge and feeling of isolation as a first-generation college student.

In order to mitigate the lack of college knowledge among Hispanic male first-time-in-college students as well as the Hispanic Family/Culture disconnect, colleges and universities should develop initiatives to foster college knowledge while these students are still enrolled in high school. Once these students are on a college campus, the college should target services, in particular mentoring services, toward these students.

Tools such as learning communities that Talburt and Boyles (2005) explored as well as freshmen year seminars/college success courses and mentoring programs summarized by Tinto (1998) must be employed within the first term of attendance for Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. Tinto (1998) spoke to this need for early intervention:

> Finally, to the degree that involvement matters, we also know that involvement matters most during the first year of college. Attrition is, for most institutions, most frequent during the first year of college. Nearly half of all leavers depart before the start of the second year. It therefore follows that the impact of involvement upon persistence is greatest in that year, especially during the first ten weeks when the transition to college is not yet complete and personal affiliations are not yet cemented. (p. 169)

It is important to note that Tinto's (1998) work was not specific to Hispanic or male students but this study proved that the tools mentioned by Tinto are recommended by the researcher for this growing segment of the student population. In addition, Tinto indicates that in order to maximize the impact on student persistence, the treatment should be implemented within the first ten weeks of the students' first term of attendance. The researcher for this study indicated that the intervention should begin prior to college enrollment but not later than the first 2.5 weeks of the first term of attendance.

Recommendations

Recommendations based on the results of this study are provided for each of the constituents who played major roles in this study. This includes students, higher education administrators, the focal community college (South Texas College), as well as for Padilla's (1991, 1994) Model. These recommendations are referred to as implications for each of the constituents in the following sections.

Implications for Students

Students have a responsibility to utilize any and all college resources that will facilitate their success. This includes taking an orientation, college success, learning frameworks course during their first semester of attendance at any institution of higher education regardless if the course is a credit bearing course. This becomes paramount for first-generation college students who enter higher education with little or no college knowledge.

Hispanic male first-time-in-college students who are also first-generation students should actively seek to enroll in such a college success course. In addition, Hispanic male first-time-in-college students should balance their proud culture with an understanding that utilizing any and all college resources is not a sign of weakness but actually a sign of strength and good consumerism as the tuition and fees that these students pay, regardless if they are assisted via federal financial aid or pay out of pocket, fund many if not all college resources designated to facilitate student success. These resources include college success or tutoring centers, college counselors and advisors, any and all retention services, any and all student services including financial aid offices, and most certainly the college faculty themselves.

Implications for Higher Educational Administrators

Colleges and Universities With Hispanic Male Enrollment

In an era of increased accountability, all institutions of higher education must strive to facilitate student success. Gone are the days that colleges and universities ask students to look to their left and look to their right and realize that only one of them would be there the next semester. The stakes have risen for all players within higher education and funding must be balanced with the accountability embraced by all constituents including taxpayers, legislators, governors, parents, and students.

Community colleges, despite open admission policies, are also under increased scrutiny to increase student success rates, regardless of the students' academic pedigree, gender, race, or ethnicity.

Colleges would be well served to develop a culture of evidence based on the analysis of student success data, disaggregated by any and all student segments including gender. The analysis of the data should then drive the decision-making process of where to distribute resources in order to implement a myriad of initiatives, all of which must be measured, to facilitate student success.

Colleges and universities, in particular community colleges, should initiate an expansion of targeted services for all students, with intentional initiatives based on segments of the student population driven by the student achievement data.

South Texas College

South Texas College, serving a student body of over 22,000 credit students of which 95% are Hispanic, has undergone transformational change as a result of the Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count national initiative. Use of data regarding student success has become a staple in the college's day-to-day operations. While the college has established a culture of excellence based on evidence, it must be noted that student success measures based on gender were not reviewed regularly, if at all, until this dissertation neared completion.

In a continuing effort to facilitate student success, each of the college vice presidents reviewed their respective segments of the board-approved college polices from a student success lens, i.e., did the policy facilitate student success and if it did not, then should the policy be revised. The college's practice of allowing late registration was one policy/practice that was revised as result of the review.

The college underwent a reorganization of the Division of Student Services and Development as well as a review of the types of services provided to students in an effort to facilitate student success. Chief among the services revised was the college's advisement process.

Despite all changes, the data provided by the 18 Hispanic male first-time-in-college students emphasize the need to continue to review polices, procedures, and practices in order to increase the likelihood of facilitating student success in college.

The analysis of the student focus groups, personal interviews, triangulated with existing data suggested the need for implementing the following items at South Texas College in order to facilitate Hispanic male first-time-in-college persistence and subsequent success:

- Make College Success Class for all first-time-in-college students mandatory,

- Develop and implement a mentoring system for Hispanic male students,

- Initiate an extensive study of the financial aid process at South Texas College through the lens of the student via the use of focus groups,

- Explore the possibility of expanding the college's campus work study and direct wage employment opportunities for students.

- Enhance the college placement office to facilitate student employment with employers who will display flexibility with students and their college course schedule.

- Enhance the college's efforts to develop a 'College-going Culture,' which incorporates college knowledge, within the region of Hidalgo and Starr counties.

The 'College-going Culture' coupled with college knowledge requires further explanation. During the process of writing the college changes themes in Chapter IV, the researcher stated that it was important to note that this was the part of the interview in which students felt most comfortable in offering suggested changes for the college. It was much more difficult for students to identify knowledge and actions that they utilized and would recommend to other students in order to facilitate success. This in and of itself represents a void in college knowledge/readiness that reaches far beyond cut scores on a college placement assessment. It speaks to the lack of understanding of what college constitutes or is, how it works, what it means, what resources are available, how to utilize those resources, and how to navigate the college system. This void was apparent in every student who participated in this study. It stems from the fact that nearly all of the students (17 of 18) who participated in the student focus groups were the first in their respective families to attend college.

This will be a crucial aspect for college and universities to address when attempting to recruit and retain Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. The programs, orientations, and workshops offered by institutions of higher education must be cultivated in order to ensure that this knowledge is attained by students and their respective families, preferably while the student is still in the K-12 system, but no later than within the first couple of weeks of a students first term of attendance in a higher

education institution. Ensuring such knowledge will enhance a student's ability to be successful in higher education.

Purpose 2: Implications for Padilla's Model/Theory

Padilla's Model (Expertise Model of Successful College Students)

Padilla (1991) and Padilla et al.'s (1997) Expertise Model of Successful College Students, which is informed by Harmon and King's Expert Systems model, served as a basis for this dissertation in order to research Hispanic male first-time-in-college student persistence from an asset model as opposed to deficit model. The deficit model of researching student persistence has been informed most notably by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993, 1996) in his seminal piece "Dropout from Higher Education: A theoretical research of recent literature," and subsequent pieces that have focused on student departure. The earliest article that the researcher found on student departure dates back over a century as noted by Currell's (1904) article, Why Do Students Leave College Before Graduation?:

> Statistics reveal the fact that a much larger percentage of students graduate in the northern than in the southern higher institutions of learning. If these are facts, it would appear that we of the South can neither induce students to enter our colleges and universities in large numbers, nor graduate a relatively large number of them after they have entered. The question for discussion, therefore, would seem to be both timely and pertinent. (p. 246)

The focus on student departure has done little, statistically speaking, to change the persistence rates of students within higher education. Therefore, a shift in focus from the deficit framed inquiry of why students leave to the asset framed focus of why students stay through official reporting date, through course completion, through the first semester of college, through the first year of college, through to the second year of

college, and finally through graduation, may be wise for policy and decision makers at institutions of higher education.

Padilla's (1994) Expertise Model of Successful College Students utilizes the 'unfolding matrix' as influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Freire (1971), Spradley (1979), and Miles and Huberman (1984) to facilitate data collection. While the 'unfolding matrix' did in very general terms identify barriers, knowledge/actions, and college changes, it displayed some serious weaknesses for providing the rich data necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at South Texas College.

The need for recording and subsequent transcription as well as a review and analysis of the data allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences that Hispanic male first-time-in-college students at a community college in South Texas utilized to facilitate their persistence from registration through official reporting date.

It would stand to reason that the matrix coupled with the recording, transcription, and subsequent analysis of the data would provide the same increased richness of data for other populations.

Finally, Padilla's (2003) Black Box theory simplifies the student/college experience into a vacuum nonexistent of any external forces or influences, i.e., it is a closed system. The Black Box theory, in order to be utilized to the fullest and in essence facilitate student success, must be modified to account for influencers or forces outside the student/college system. Many of the emergent barrier themes described by the student participants of this study were outside of the student/college black box/closed

system and, therefore, seem outside of the control of either the student or the college's

control to impact. These include the student's family, the Hispanic culture,

transportation, and non-college employment.

Implications for Future Research

The researcher would be remiss if he did not recommend further research on the

Hispanic male population at all levels of higher education including: universities both

tier one research as well as regional universities, public and private, as well as other

community colleges in which Hispanics are not the majority.

In addition, males in higher education must continue to be researched as the

landscape of higher education continues to shift to serving a majority female population.

The research of the male population should be disaggregated by race and ethnicity and

should focus on African American and Native American populations, whose educational

attainment is nearly as low as that of the Hispanic male population.

Finally, it would be irresponsible to suggest that such research come at the

expense of continuing the rich research on females in higher education. The research and

subsequent programs implemented based on researching females in higher education

have proven to be fruitful and research on replicating such programs for minority males

in higher education is highly recommended.

Implications for Human Resource Development

In addition to the implications for additional research described above, the

implications of this research in the field of Human Resource Development can best be

provided via the summary of policy implications, a paradigm shift for higher education

practitioners, and national implications.

Policy Implications

Today's college student has changed from what we in higher education expect.

The days of the traditional 18-24 year-old college student fresh out of high school, who

enrolls full-time, into a residential university campus is diminishing annually. Today's

student, in particular at the community college, will be a student who is older, works at

least part-time, goes to college part-time, has a family, and is not academically proficient

in all core competencies, therefore, needing remediation. Students at the community

college are attempting to balance college and all the other items listed to an extent that

they must be budget savvy just to take an extra class versus buying books as noted in

Focus Group 2:

> If you don't have [books] for the class you may have to sometimes drop the
> class. I re-did my research on the books; I opted not to buy the books and go and
> check them out from the library and qualify for that second class rather than buy
> the books and it paid off dividends on that. You have to reshuffle your budget
> and opt for a class rather than books. [Focus Group 2, card #28 of 76]

Community colleges must establish policies, procedures, processes, and practices that

will facilitate student success in all aspects of the college system so that students do not

have to weigh buying books for one class or taking two classes without books for either

and hoping that the reserve stacks at the library will have the texts available for use.

There are many national policy implications that have the potential to impact

Hispanic male first-time-in-college students. One specific policy implication is the

recent increase in Pell Grant funding initiated by President Obama's administration. As

over 80% of all students at South Texas College are on some form of financial aid, the increase in the individual award amount as well as the increase in funding for the program, facilitates these students' pursuit of higher education. This investment in human capital is a direct link to Human Resource Development.

Paradigm Shift for Higher Education Practitioners

The researcher hears reference to this concern all too often at South Texas College framed in phrases and statements that he has coined the 'If only' paradigm statements. "If only our students were college ready, if only our students did not work, if only our students went to school full-time, if only they did not have families" (personal conversations). The truth of the matter is that many of the students of South Texas College do face these and many other barriers/challenges and they still believe that higher education is of such importance that they strive to overcome those barriers/challenges, and still walk through the doors of South Texas College. The researcher refers to our students as heroic and challenge the faculty, staff, and administration of South Texas College to recognize that our students value higher education and the hope of a better quality of life that could be facilitated by the successful completion of college. We have an obligation to facilitate their success – for the success of South Texas College will be measured by the success of the students we serve.

The paradigm of higher education must change and change rapidly if we are to serve the students of today. The student of today, in particular the student of the community college where we proudly serve as open admission institutions, will come

through our doors with much different expectations than when the higher education system was founded.

While there are notable exceptions or resisters to such change, in order for Texas and subsequently the nation to maintain its economic standing, changes must be implemented. A segment of the change will be reflected based on the changing students served. Institutions of higher education must be willing to change with the changing student body. Valverde (2008) illustrate the change needed stating, "If students of color will be the new majority on campuses across the country, then colleges and universities will have to transform themselves, adopt new paradigms, and reverse the minimal progress of Latino students" (pp. 14-15).

Among such paradigm shifts must be the establishment of programs that will facilitate student success. Higher education institutions must partner with independent school districts to develop robust high school to college transition programs that facilitate the development of college readiness/college knowledge in order to facilitate success in college. It is important to note that college readiness or college knowledge is so much more than cut scores on a college placement exam; it is a thorough understanding of college. This would include the offices, the services, the programs, and the processes that encompass a college campus. Furthermore, college knowledge would include the student utilization of those offices, services, programs, and staff in order to facilitate these students' success.

Cultural understanding will also be a paradigm shift that higher education professionals will have to encompass within the establishment of such said programs. A

resistance to asking for help, in particular for male Hispanic students, is part of the cultural understanding that will be necessary. An example of this was part of the Focus Group 4 when a student described, "you know I wasn't used to asking people to help me with anything" [Focus Group 4, card #62 of 86]. Many times within the Hispanic culture, asking for help is seen as a weakness in particular for men. Therefore, campuses will have to implement programs that will reach out to Hispanic students as opposed to waiting for them to come into our respective offices.

A Final Thought/National Implications

The success of the burgeoning Hispanic population is no longer limited to the interests of a regional, state, or even a group of states known as the Southwest. The Hispanic/Latino phenomenon and the inherent success of this segment of the United States' population should now be a national priority for the future of America will very well be intertwined with this population. This point was eloquently illustrated by Cisneros' (2009) book, *Latinos and the Nation's Future*:

> The central message of this book is that this phenomenon of Latino potential is of such scale that it is no longer a side-bar interest; it is now a basic shaping force of the American future. Therefore, we advise that it is in the nation's interest to undertake the full integration of this population, to harness its market growth, to develop its educational potential, to engage its community-building energies, and to transform it into the backbone of the next American middle class. These are things Latinos are working hard to accomplish on their own, but as in the case of every other rising group in the American saga, the United States must be open to that prospect in its policies and attitudes and must do so in modern ways that reflect the particular realities of our time. (p. xiv)

The educational attainment of the Hispanic population will play a critical role in facilitating the social mobility described. Human Resource Development theorists, practitioners, and educators must work hand-in-hand to impact the progress of this

population. After all, the development of human capacity will serve as one of if not the most important legacies for the field.

This study has identified Hispanic male student barriers, displayed student actions that facilitate student success by navigating those said barriers, and has provided student recommended college changes for facilitating future student success. Such knowledge will facilitate the educational attainment of the Hispanic male population and address the concerns noted by Cisneros (2009), Cole (2007), Laden (2001), and Garcia and Figueroa (2002).

REFERENCES

Achieving the dream. (2007). *Success is what counts. October, 2007.* Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.achievingthedream.org/docs/SUCCESS-counts-FINAL-11.6.pdf.

Alvarado, M., & Lynham, S. A. (2005, February). *Experiences of Hispanic executives in the USA workplace: An exploratory overview of current knowledge and understanding.* Paper presented at the 2005 Academy of Human Resource Development Conference, Estes Park, CO.

Astin, A. W. (1971). *Predicting academic performance in college.* New York: The Free Press of McMillan.

Astin, A. W. (1982). *Minorities in American higher education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Attinasi, L., Jr. (1989). Getting in: Mexican Americans' perceptions of university attendance and the implications for freshman year persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 60*(3), 247-277.

Bailey, T., Calcagno, J. C., Jenkins, D., Kienzl, G., & Leinbach, T. (2005). *The effects of institutional factors on the success of community college students.* New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

Barefoot, B. O., Gardner, J. N., Cutright, M., Morris, L. V., Schroeder, C. C., Schwartz et al. (2005). *Achieving and sustaining institutional excellence for the first year of college.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, *12*, 155-187.

Bean, J. P. (1982). Student attrition, intention, and confidence: Interaction effects in a path model. *Research in Higher Education*, *6*, 129-148.

Bean, J. P. (1983). The application of a model of turnover in work organizations to the student attrition process. *Review of Higher Education*, *6*, 129-148.

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985, Winter). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research, 55*(4), 485-540.

Benjamin, R., Carroll, S., Dewar, J., Lempert, R., & Stockly, S. (2000, June). *Achieving the Texas higher education vision.* New York: Council for Aid to Education.

Boswell, K. (2004, November/December). Bridges or barriers: Public policy and the community college transfer function. *Change,* pp. 22-29.

Byrd, M., & Demps, E. (2006). Taking a look at national human resource development (NHRD): Interviews with Gary McLean and Susan Lynham. *Human Resource Development International*, *9*(4), 553-561.

Carey, K. (2007, September). America's best community colleges: Why they're better than some four-year universities. *Washington Monthly*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/ feature/americas_best_community_colleg.php.

Castellanos, J., Gloria, A. M., & Kamimura, M. (Eds.). (2006). *The Latina/o pathway to the PhD: Abriendo caminos.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2008). *About SENSE.* Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.ccsse.org/sense/aboutsurvey/index.cfm.

Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA). (2003). Asking questions of college preparation: Nine propositions. *The Navigator: Directions and Trends in Higher Education Policy, 2*(2), 1-2.

Chahin, J. (1993). *Hispanics in higher education: Trends in participation.* Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED357911).

Cisneros, H. G. (Ed.) (2009). *Latinos and the nation's future.* Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press.

Cole, B. S. (2007). *Human resource development of Hispanic students in a large Hispanic – majority community college in South Texas: Student entry characteristics as predictors of successful course completion and retention in face-to-face and distance education.* ProQuest Information and Learning Company. (UMI No. 3281044).

Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). (n.d.). *About CCSSE – Overview*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.ccsse.org/aboutccsse/aboutccsse.cfm.

Community College Week. (2006). Special report: Fastest-growing community colleges. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.ccweek.com/news/articlefiles/180-CCW120307-Pgs1-23.pdf.

Community College Week. (2009). Top 100 associate degree producers 2009 edition,
    associate degrees all disciplines – Hispanic. Retrieved September 4, 2009, from
    http://www.ccweek.com/news/common/ccwtop100-09-Hispanic-AS.pdf.

Currell, W. S. (1904). Why do students leave college before graduation? *The School
    Review, 12,* 246-252.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2002). *The qualitative inquiry reader.* Thousand
    Oaks, CA: Sage.

Education Commission of the States. (2003). *Closing the college participation gap: A
    national summary*. Retrieved August 26, 2006, from
    http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/educationIssues/ECSStateNotes.asp.

El Nasser, H. (2008, June 29). *USA Today*. Retrieved September 5, 2009 from
    http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-06-29-hispanics_N.htm.

Excelencia in Education. (2007, January). *Latino males in higher education.*
    Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from
    http://www.edexcelencia.org/pdf/LatinoMales-factsheet-2007.pdf.

Excelencia in Education. (2008a). *Welcome. Bienvenidos! Your information source on
    improving Latino educational success.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved
    August 2, 2008, from http://www.edexcelencia.org/default.asp.

Excelencia in Education. (2008b). *Who we are & what we do.* Washington, DC: Author.
    Retrieved August 2, 2008, from
    http://www.edexcelencia.org/pdf/OrgFactSheetApril2008.pdf.

Feagin, J. R., Hernan, V., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at white colleges and universities*. New York: Routledge.

Ford-Edwards, J. (2002). Towards a theoretical model of minority student success: Successful Black students and their perspectives on the variables that promote and retard their retention. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *63*(03), 875A. (UMI No. 3046032).

Freire, P. (1971). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Herder & Herder.

Fry, R. (2002). *Latinos in higher education: Many enroll, too few graduate.* Washington DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Fry, R. (2004). *Latino youth finishing college: The role of selective pathways.* Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

Gandara, P. (1986). *Bilingual education: Learning English in California.* Sacramento, CA: Assembly Office of Research.

Gandara, P. (1995). *Over the ivy walls*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gandara, P., & Contreras, F. (2009). *The Latino education crisis: The consequences of failed social policies.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Garcia, E. E., & Figueroa, J. (2002). Access and participation of Latinos in the University of California: A current macro and micro perspective. *Social Justice* *29*(4), 47-59.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

Hagedorn, L., Maxwell, W., Chen, A., Cypers, S., & Moon, H. S. (2002). *A community college model of student immigration, language, GPA, and course completion*. Washington DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471578).

Harmon, P., & King, D. (1985). *Expert systems*. New York: Wiley.

Haro, R. (2004). Programs and strategies to increase Latino students' educational attainment. *Education and Urban Society, 36*(2), 205-222.

Haycock, K. (2006). *Promise abandoned: How policy choices and institutional practices restrict college opportunities*. Washington DC: The Education Trust.

Hurtado, S. (1994). The institutional climate for talented Latino students. *Research in Higher Education*, *35*(1), 21-41.

Immerwahr, J. (2003). *With diploma in hand: Hispanic high school seniors talk about their future.* San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education/Public Agenda.

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. (n.d.). *IPEDS glossary*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary.

Jobs for the Future. (2008). *Two community colleges win national "Excellence Award." Recognized for leadership in serving students of all ages and backgrounds.* Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.jff.org/Content/Newsroom_ Press+Releases_Two+Community+Colleges+Win+National+%93 Excellence+Award%94+_Detail.html.

Katsinas, S. (1984, May). *Hispanic student and staffing patterns in community colleges*. Paper presented at the Hispanic Roundtable Talk of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Phoenix. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED248904).

Kezar, A. (2000a). Does it work? Research on early intervention. *ERIC Review, 8*(1) 9-12.

Kezar, A. (2000b). Putting it all together: An action plan. *ERIC Review, 8*(1), 39-40.

Kim, J. (2002). Learning and earnings: How college matters in earnings gap between Hispanic workers and non-Hispanic White workers. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 1*(2), 125-143.

Kintzer, F. C., & Bryant, D. W. (1998). Global perceptions of the community college. *Community College Review, Winter98, 26*(3), 35-56.

Kochhar, R. S., & Tofoya, S. (2005). *The new Latino South: The context and consequences of rapid population growth.* Paper presented at the Immigration to New Settlement Areas, Washington, DC.

Laden, B. V. (2001). Hispanic serving institutions: Myths and realities. *Peabody Journal of Education, 76*(1), 73-92.

Lee, E. W. C., & Young, E. C. M. (2003). Pioneering the community college movement in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 22*(2), 147-158.

Leon, D. J., & Nevarez, C. (2007, March). *Models of leadership institutes for increasing the number of top Latino administrators in higher education*. Paper presented at

the second annual American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education Conference, Costa Mesa, CA.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lynham, S. A., & Cunningham, P. W. (2004). Human resource development: The South African case. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 6*(3), 315-325.

Lynham, S. A., & Cunningham, P. W. (2006). National human resource development in transitioning societies in the developing world: Concept and challenges. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 8*(1), 116-135.

McCabe, R. H. (2000). *No one to waste: A report to public decision-makers and community college leaders.* Washington, DC: Community College Press.

McCabe, R. H. (2003). *Yes we can! A community college guide for developing American's underprepared*. Phoenix, AZ: League for Innovation in the Community College and American Association of Community Colleges.

McLean, G. N., & McLean, L. (2001). If we can't define HRD in one country, how can we define it in another? *Human Resource Development International, 4*(3), 313-326.

MDRC. (2008). *Building knowledge to improve social policy.* Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.mdrc.org.

Mead, S. (2006, June). *The evidence suggests otherwise: The truth about boys and girls.* Washington, DC: Education Sector.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Murdock, S. H. (2006). *TAA future focus seminar*. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from http://www.txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/presentations/2006_10_18_TAA_Future_Focus_Seminar_Dallas.ppt.

Murdock, S. H., White, S., Hoque, M. N., Pecotte, B., You, X., & Balkan, J. (2003). *The new Texas challenge: Population change and the future of Texas*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004a). *Institutional postsecondary education data survey*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004b). *National postsecondary aid study. Undergraduate survey*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005a). *Digest of education statistics, 2005, Table 105*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005b). *Digest of education statistics, 2005, Table 205*. Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005c). *Digest of education statistics, 2005, Tables 259, 262*. Available from http://nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005d). *Digest of education statistics, 2005, Tables 261, 264, 267, 270, 273*. Available from http://nces.ed.gov/.

Nettles, M. T. (1991). Racial similarities and differences in the predictors of college student achievement. In W. R. Allen, E. E. Epps, & N. Z. Haniff (Eds.), *College*

in Black and White: African American students in predominately White and historically Black public universities (pp. 75-91). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

O'Brien, C., & Shedd, J. (2001). *Getting through college: Voices of low-income and minority students in New England. The New England student success study.* Braintree, MA: Nellie Mae Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED451770).

Oliva, M. (2004, April). Reluctant partners, problem definition, and legislative intent: K-16 policy for Latino college success. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 3*(2), 209-230.

Olivas, M. A. (1982). Federal higher education policy: The case of Hispanics. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 4*(3), 301-310.

Padilla, R. V. (1991). Assessing heuristic knowledge to enhance college students' success. In G. D. Keller, J. R. Deneen, & R. J. Magallan (Eds.), *Assessment and access: Hispanics in higher education* (pp. 81-92). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Padilla, R. V. (1994). The unfolding matrix: A technique for qualitative data acquisition and analysis. In R. G. Burgess (Ed.), *Studies in qualitative methodology* (Vol. 4, pp. 273-285). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Padilla, R. V. (2003). *Chicana/o college students: Focus on success*. San Antonio, TX: Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED458059).

Padilla, R. V., Treviño, J., Gonzalez, K., & Treviño, J. (1996, April). *The unfolding matrix: A dialogical technique for qualitative data acquisition and analysis*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York.

Padilla, R. V., Treviño, J., Gonzalez, K., & Treviño, J. (1997, March/April). Developing local models of minority student success in college. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(2), 125-135.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1977). Patterns of student-faculty informal interaction beyond the classroom and voluntary freshman attrition. *Journal of Higher Education, 48,* 540-552.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1980). Predicting freshman persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *Journal of Higher Education, 51,* 60-75.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (1981). *Creative evaluation*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (1985). *Culture and evaluation. New directions for program evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

The Perryman Group. (2007). *A tale of two states – and one million jobs!* Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Reports/PDF/1345.PDF.

President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. (2000, September). *Creating the will: Hispanics achieving educational excellence*.

(A report to the President of the United States, the Secretary of Education, and the Nation). Washington, DC: Author.

Public Agenda. (2008). *Helping Americans explore today's issues. Who we are.* Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.publicagenda.org/whoweare.

Rendon, L. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education, 19,* 33-52.

Rendon, L., Jalomo, R. E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 127-156). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Saenz, V. B., Perez, P., & Cerna, O. (2007). *Examining the pre-college attributes and values of Latina/o college graduates* (HERI Research Rep. No. 3). Los Angeles: UCLA, Higher Education Research Institute.

Saenz, V. B., & Ponjuan, L. (2009). The vanishing Latino male in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 8,* 54-89.

Sleet, D. P. (2000). Assessing knowledge and actions employed by African American college students in overcoming barriers to academic success: A local model based on Raymond Padilla's expertise model of successful minority college students. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, I(05), 1765A. (UMI No. 9973400).

Smith, A. (1776). *Wealth of nations*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

South Texas College. (2004). *About STC. Comprehensive plan: Facing the future together.* Retrieved March 15, 2007, from http://www.southtexascollege.edu/about/comp_plan/pdf/comp_plan_04.pdf.

South Texas College. (2009). *About STC: South Texas College fact sheet 2009-2010*. Retrieved August 2, 2009, from http://www.southtexascollege.edu/about/factsheet/pdf/fact0910.pdf.

Spady, W. G. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange*, 1, 64-85.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Swanson, R. A., & Holton, E. F., III. (2001). *Foundations of human resource development.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Talburt, S., & Boyles, D. (2005). Reconsidering learning communities: Expanding the discourse by challenging the discourse. *The Journal of General Education, 54*(3), 209-236.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). (2000). *Closing the gaps: The Texas higher education plan 2015*. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/pdf/0379.pdf.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). (2008). *Texas Higher Education Enrollments.* Retrieved September 4, 2009 from http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Reports/XLS/1637.XLS.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). (2009). *Institutional Targets for Closing the Gaps in Participation.* Retrieved September 4, 2009, from http://www.webmail.southtexascollege.edu/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.txhighereddata.org/reports/performance/ctgtargets/ctgtargets_pdf.cfm?Goal=1.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). (n.d.). *Board information*. Retrieved March 15, 2007, from http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Board/.

Tinto, V. (1975, Winter). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. *Journal of Higher Education, 53,* 687-700.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1996). Persistence and the first-year experience at the community college: Teaching the new students to survive, stay, and thrive. In J. N. Hankin (Ed.), *The community college: Opportunity and access for America's first-year students* (pp. 97-104). (Monograph No. 19). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 68,* 599-623.

Tinto, V. (1998). Colleges as communities: Taking research on student persistence

    seriously. *The Review of Higher Education, 21*(2), 167-177.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004a). *Current population survey, annual social and economic*

    supplement. October 2004. Retrieved from

    http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsoct04.pdf.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004b). *Current population survey. March 2004.* Retrieved from

    http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsmar04.pdf.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2005, March 28). *College degree nearly doubles annual earnings,*

    Census Bureau reports (news release). Retrieved August 2, 2008, from

    http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/

    releases/archives/education/004214.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2006, May 10). *Nation's population one-third minority* (news

    release). Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.census.gov/Press-

    Release/www/releases/archives/population/006808.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2007a, August 9). *More than 300 counties now* "*Majority –*

    minority" (news release). Retrieved August 1, 2009, from

    http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/

    archives/population/010482.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2007b, July 1). *County population estimates.* Retrieved August 2,

    2008, from http://www.census.gov/popest/counties/CO-EST2007-01.html.

U.S. Census Bureau (2008a, January 10). *Educational attainment in the United States: 2007.* Retrieved August 2, 2008, from http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/education/cps2007.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2008b, January 10). *One-third of young women have bachelors' degrees* (news release). Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/ archives/education/011196.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2008c, May 1). *U.S. Hispanic population surpasses 45 million, now 15 percent of total* (news release). Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/ archives/population/011910.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2008d, August 14). *An older and more diverse nation by midcentury* (news release). Retrieved August 1, 2009, from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/ archives/population/012496.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2008e, September 8). *Hispanic heritage month 2008: Sept. 15-Oct. 15* (news release). Retrieved August 1, 2009 from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/ facts_for_features_special_editions/012245.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2009, April 27). *Census Bureau releases data showing relationship between education and earnings* (news release). Retrieved August 1,

2009, from http://www.census.gov/Press-

Release/www/releases/archives/education/013618.html.

U.S. Department of Education. (2006). *2006 enrollment survey.* National Center for

Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Retrieved

August 2, 2008, from http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/

tables/dt08_238.asp.

Valverde, L. A. (2008). *Latino change agents in higher education: Shaping a system that

works for all.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEET

INFORMATION SHEET

Successful Hispanic Male First-Time-in-College Students at a Community College in South Texas: Experiences that Facilitate Fall First Term Student Persistence through Census Date

You have been asked to participate in a research study seeking to understand experiences of successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college students which facilitate fall first term student persistence through census date. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a successful Hispanic male first-time-in-college student who has persisted through census date. A total of 40 people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to inform a deeper understanding of the experiences that facilitate successful academic participation and persistence of first-time-in-college Hispanic male students through investigating these student success experiences from the emic perspective of those who persisted through census date at the selected community college.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a Focus Group Interview, which will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours long, along with 5 to 7 other Hispanic male first-time-in-college students and possibly take part in an individual interview, which will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours long. All interviews will be audio taped. Participants will be limited to those agreeing to be audio taped. This study will take 1 to 1.5 hours if selected to participate in a Focus Group Interview and an additional 1 to 1.5 hours if selected to participate in an individual interview. Once data are transcribed and analyzed, an additional hour may be necessary to review the information with participants. The risks associated with this study are minimal and unlikely. The benefits of participation are no specific benefits associated with participation in this study.

You will receive no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

This study is anonymous. Anonymity of responses will be ensured via the use of pseudonyms and coded responses. Audio tapes will be destroyed 24 months after collection ensuring that no direct link between participants and data collected exists. All documents and audio tapes will be kept under lock and key. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only William Serrata and Susan A. Lynham will have access to the records. Audio tapes will be utilized for the study and only William Serrata and Susan A. Lynham will have access to the audio tapes which will be used for education purposes, and will be erased 24 months upon completion of the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or South Texas College. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the University/College, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact William Serrata at (956) 872-6495 or Dr. Susan A. Lynham at (979) 862-4347 with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board - Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Melissa McIlhaney, IRB Program Coordinator, Office of Research Compliance, (979) 458-4067, mcilhaney@tamu.edu.

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the information sheet for your records.

APPENDIX B

DRAFT QUESTIONS

Proposed Draft Questions for Focus Group Interviews

**(Questions will influence Personal Interviews
With Selected Focus Group participants)**

Note: Prior to conducting the focus group interviews, participants will have been contacted informing them of the location and time of the focus group. They will be greeted by the Researcher/Facilitator and informed that the interview will be done within 1 to 1.5 hours. In addition, they will be asked/informed of the audio taping that will occur during the focus group interview. Participants will be informed that information provided will be done so via anonymity. Finally, they will be asked if they have any questions before starting.

Proposed draft questions* are as follows:

1. Is this your first semester in college/higher education?
2. When did you register for Fall 2007 South Texas College classes?
3. Did you encounter any barriers from the point you registered through Census Date?
4. Describe the barriers that you encountered from the time you registered through Census date?
5. How did you overcome the barrier(s) that you faced?
6. Have any of the rest of you experienced a similar barrier(s)?
7. What percentage of Hispanic male students do you believe encounter such barriers?
8. What knowledge do Hispanic male students need to have to overcome such barriers?
9. What actions do Hispanic male students need to take to overcome such barriers?
10. What changes could South Texas College make to try and eliminate or minimize such barriers for other Hispanic male students?

*Please note that the same draft questions apply to the existing focus group data that will be utilized as part of the proposed research.

VITA

William Serrata
South Texas College
Student Affairs & Enrollment Management
3201 W. Pecan Blvd.
McAllen, Texas 78501

EDUCATION

2009	Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Human Resource Development Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
1999	Master of Arts, English, The University of Texas at Brownsville Brownsville, Texas
1993	Bachelor of Arts, English, Texas A&M University College Station, Texas

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2005 – Present	Vice President for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management, South Texas College, McAllen, Texas
2000 – 2005	Dean of Enrollment Services & Registrar, South Texas College McAllen, Texas
1997 – 2000	Director of Admissions & Registrar, South Texas Community College McAllen, Texas
1996 – 1997	Compliance Specialist, South Texas Community College McAllen, Texas
1994 – 1996	Administrative Analyst, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, Brownsville, Texas

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (Strategic Enrollment Management Community College Coordinator); Southern Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers; Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (Executive Board Member 2002-2004); Texas Workforce Education Leadership Committee; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Committee (Strategic Enrollment Management)

This dissertation was typed and edited by Marilyn M. Oliva at Action Ink, Inc.