EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF NEEDS, MENTORSHIP, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

ON STUDENT SUCCESS AMONG HISPANIC COLLEGE STUDENTS AT AN

ESTABLISHED HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION IN CENTRAL TEXAS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Sociology
December 2015

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. In memory of my grandmother, Antonia Nava Sanchez, who never fulfilled her dream of pursing higher education but made me promise I would so she could realize her dream through my success. To my grandfather, Raul Sanchez, for emphasizing the importance of education during all those long walks to school during my childhood. I was listening. To my siblings, Jonathan, Gabriel, and Amanda, who I turn to for inspiration, encouragement, laughter, and love. Watching you three grow up is my greatest joy. To my mother, Aida Flores, for raising me to be relentless while pursuing my dreams and instilling in me the values of perseverance and determination. Lastly, to my Dad, Guadalupe Garza, and Cindy for their sacrifices, support, and love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With my deepest gratitude, I would like to thank all those who had faith and encouraged me to bring this research study to completion.

I am deeply indebted to my thesis chair, Dr. Gloria Martinez-Ramos, for her valuable feedback, guidance, encouragement, patience, and advice.

I gratefully acknowledge the members of my committee, Dr. Joseph Kotarba and Dr. Roque Mendez, for their time, feedback, and support.

Sincerest appreciation is given to the affiliate group of university faculty, staff, and graduate students committed to the improvement of higher education opportunities for Hispanics for collecting the data used in this study.

I would also like to thank the team at the Center for Diversity and Gender Studies for the countless words of encouragements, cups of coffee, and inspirational conversations. I thank the Director, Dr. Audwin Anderson, for his mentorship and encouragement.

Above all I owe a great debt of gratitude to my family for their never-ending love, support, and sacrifices. Special thanks to my best friend and partner, Dallas Foster, for his love and invaluable encouragement throughout my graduate program. Lastly, thank you to my cats, Marble Marx and Baxter Bourdieu, for keeping me company during all those late night writing sessions.

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ABSTRACT

As the number of Hispanics in higher education increases, it is crucial to understand their experiences, needs, and social support that will retain them in higher education (Santiago, Galdeano and Taylor 2015). Research has shown that despite social, cultural, and academic challenges (Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002), Hispanic students derive support from peers, family, and faculty members (Baker 2013). Yet, there is little research on Hispanic student experiences and engagement in extra-curricular activities such as leadership, mentorship, and participation in cultural events. The aims of this study is threefold. First, to examine what socio-cultural student characteristics are related to student engagements in extra-curricular activities. Second, to explore what forms of social capital students draw from home and Hispanic student organizations. Thirdly, to understand the perceptions of students in regards to factors that contribute to their retention, success, barriers, and challenges in higher education. A secondary data analysis was conducted on a sample of 214 Hispanic college students from the 2014 Hispanic Student Campus Climate Survey conducted by an affiliate organization at a public four year Hispanic Serving Institution in Central Texas. Results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis in this study show their patterns of engagement in a diverse college environment, leadership, and forms of social support such as mentorship. Although Hispanic college students reported having high aspirations and optimism, they reported facing many challenges, barriers, and unmet needs such as mentorship. Sources of social support and mentorship from their family and their participation in Hispanic student organizations and other institutional agents contribute to their sense of belonging in a college environment and student reported wanting more. This study reinforced the importance and value of culturally responsive support resources, such as mentorship and other forms of institutional support promotes the retention of Hispanics in higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to recently released figures the Hispanic population in the United States has grown by 43 percent, approximately 4 times the growth rate of the non-Hispanic sector (U.S Census 2011). Currently, about 17 percent of the U.S population is Hispanic. This figure is projected to double from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128 million in 2060. This means that one in three U.S residents will be Hispanic by 2060. The growing population of Hispanics is most characterized by its youth. Twenty percent of all young people ages 18 to 24 in the U.S are Hispanic (Fry and Lopez 2012). It is imperative that Hispanics attain a higher education to compete in a growing global economy. However, recent college completion rates indicate that much work is needed to ensure that Hispanics enroll and complete their college degree. Certainly, attending to the sociocultural factors that contribute to their success is necessary to increase social mobility and the overall quality of life for this large population in the United States.

Hispanics' access to higher education has been a concern for sociologists studying education (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Ream and Rumberger 2008; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith 2014). Rapid population growth and initiatives to broaden access have contributed to increased enrollment of Hispanic students in community colleges and universities throughout the United States. From 1972-2011 the percentage of Hispanic college students increased from 2.9 percent to 16.5 percent (Pew Research Center 2012). Clearly, there have been some improvements in improving access to higher education. However, these gains are unmatched by increases in degree attainment (Lopez and Fry 2013). As of 2013 only 14% of Hispanics had earned a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 33% of non-Hispanic Whites (Stepler and Brown 2015). Nevertheless, it is

apparent that the faces of American universities' are rapidly changing. These changes make it crucial to explore what can be done to understand the experiences, needs, and strengths of Hispanic students.

This thesis contributes to the literature on Hispanics in higher education by shedding light on the experiences of students engaged in Hispanic student organizations, hereafter HSOs, at a Hispanic Serving Institution. Research on Hispanic students engaged in extracurricular social and cultural organizations is scarce. Much less is known about the experiences of Hispanic students matriculating in institutions newly labeled as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). HSIs have an enrollment of undergraduate full time students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic (U.S Department of Education 2014). At least 50 percent of Hispanic students must require need-based assistance (Murphy 2013). As Hispanic enrollment increases so has the number of HSIs (Garcia 2013), thus the need to explore how HSIs are supporting Hispanic students' success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was:

1. To examine what socio-cultural student characteristics are related to student engagement.

2. To explore what social capital assets, if any, students draw from their home and HSO communities.

3. To examine the perceptions of students in regards to factors that contribute to their retention and success, needs, and challenges.

This study examined the experiences of Hispanic students matriculating at a recently designated Hispanic Serving Institution through a mixed-methods preliminary

analysis of the Hispanic Student Campus Climate Assessment (HSCCA). The HSCCA is an existing data set created by a group of volunteer staff, faculty, and graduate students affiliate to their university and committed to the improvement of higher education opportunities of Hispanics at a public, four-year, HSI. The affiliate group asked questions to determine the level of student's general satisfaction with their college experiences and to identify areas of improvement. The theoretical framework used for this paper was Tara Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Yosso's framework was helpful in understanding how participants drew upon and applied social and cultural assets from the community and their HSO to navigating higher education.

The quantitative analyses provided descriptive and bivariate statistical analyses. The qualitative content analyses of responses to open ended questions provided a thematic way to provide a rich description and deeper understanding of the experiences of Hispanic university students that would have otherwise remained unnoticed if only quantitative analysis were used. Overall, the purpose was to explore the experiences of Hispanics in higher education so that university administrators and student support services may further understand how to better work towards retaining and graduating Hispanic students.

The following broad research questions guided this study:

1. What student social-cultural characteristics are related to student engagement?

2. What do students' perceptions of their higher education experience reveal about their social capital assets found within their home and HSO communities?

3. What do students perceive to be factors that contribute to their retention and

    success, needs, and challenges?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this thesis is Tara Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model (2005). Extracurricular student organizations focused on the Hispanic culture (HSOs) can be thought of as marginalized communities. Participation in this type of organization is a form of social student engagement and may impact persistence and retention among members.

Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth is a re-imagination of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of capital. He was interested in understanding social mobility and power and explained that social and cultural capital are resources that aid in social mobility and can be inherited and reproduced through family and participation in education (Bourdieu 1984). While Bourdieu sought to explain how the accumulation of social and cultural capital impact educational outcomes the modern of application of his concepts have been called into question by several scholars (Yosso 2005; Gosine and Islam 2014) who suggest that, by placing much attention on capital held by the dominant class, the contributions and usefulness of social and cultural capital within minority communities are over looked, underutilized, and under analyzed.

Lack of cultural capital is said to have negative political, social, and educational consequences that hinder the success of minority students within educational institutions (Murjani 2014). However, despite the many socio-cultural, political, and economic barriers minority students face many still graduate from high school, college, and even pursue post-graduate education. Literature highlighting barriers among minority students is plentiful and while it is essential to study these barriers, scholars (Winkle-Wagner

2010; Gosine and Islam 2014; and Murjani 2014), many of whose works are rooted in critical race theory (Yosso 2005), argue that it is essential to also highlight ways in which minority students tap into different, or non-traditional, forms of capital while seeking educational opportunities that ultimately lead to success.

By highlighting collective agency in the creation, exchange, and accumulation of cultural capital Yosso expanded on the traditional application of Bourdieu's capital as largely an individual element inherited from the family (Lu 2013). Yosso conceptualized community cultural wealth as a critical race theory challenge to traditional interpretations of Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital. She did this by identifying six fluid forms of non-dominant cultural and social capital minority students use in order to overcome obstacles fueled by stereotyping and racism (Murjani 2014), navigate educational settings (Luna and Martinez 2012) and ultimately graduate.

- Aspirational capital: remaining hopeful and aspiring to reach goals despite the odds and barriers
- Linguistic Capital: language and communication skills gained from one's community and brought to the college environment
- Familial Capital: Useful cultural knowledge and resources obtained through interaction with family and community networks which emphasize a sense of community history
- Social Capital: Networks consisting of peers and other social relationships
- Navigational Capital: Skills useful to navigating social institutions that may not be culturally response to Hispanic/Latino spaces, strategies on how to navigate societies' institutions
- Resistance capital: Capital that stems from social justice advocacy and aimed at securing equal rights

Student engagement can be seen a means to tap into various forms of capital helpful while navigating higher education. Analyzing student's perceptions of their

college experience through this lens may provide a means to understand what forms of community cultural wealth students draw from their home and HSO communities.

Hispanics in Higher Education

In order to address the low graduation rates of Hispanics in U.S institutions of higher education, scholars of all backgrounds have conducted research on a broad range of factors that impact student learning. The historically low levels of achievement experienced during pre-college education, and the academic, financial, social, and personal barriers faced once in college have all been found to uniquely impact the trajectories of Hispanic students in higher education.

In order to understand these implications and to strategize interventions we must take a step back and look deeper at the experiences of Hispanics from the beginning of their educational path. This is necessary to better understand the current issues surrounding the in-and-out of college experiences that influence access, motivation, persistence, and more importantly the graduation of Hispanics.

Looking at pre-college educational experiences has revealed much about how students will fare in college. In their synthesis of research, theory, and practice concerning Hispanics in higher education, Nora and Crisp (2009) prompted scholars to pay attention to the experiences of Hispanics before college. They explained that the educational disparities among Hispanics begin at the pre-k level, are consistent throughout K-12 education, and continue throughout higher education. These experiences have been found to shape motivation to enroll in college and how student fared once enrolled.

Many studies have highlighted the association between cognitive factors such as academic achievement and preparedness and college enrollment (Zarate and Gallimore 2005). For example, Swail and colleagues (2005) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to analyze high school preparation and its influence on postsecondary educational attainment among Hispanic students. They found that Hispanic students were consistently underprepared before, during, and after high school. By looking at their early educational trajectories the reasons why Hispanics face significant academic barriers if and when they make it to a community college or four-year institution can be better understood. It is important for scholars to pay attention to the lasting impacts of the K-12 experience because they impact how students will navigate higher education.

However, the pre-college educational experiences of Hispanics are just as complex and multi-faceted as those they experience at the higher education level. Nora and Crisp (2009) argued that studies that focus on cognitive factors such as academic achievement in high school do not reveal much about the non-cognitive measures that predict and influence Hispanic student participation in higher education. Some factors include lack of networking involving college graduates, financial aid/tuition issues, acculturative stress, levels of parental support, and transfer student status (Perez and Ceja 2010).

Certainly pre-college experiences provide insight as to how/why Hispanic students face difficulties in completing a college degree. Tienda (2009) explained that for Hispanics risk factors such as lack of academic preparation, low parental educational attainment, low socioeconomic status, and lack of awareness are central factors that

influence both access and graduation. However, much more is left to be understood about factors that impact success in higher education for this population. Moreover, more information on the unique ways they experience and perceived support, motivations to persist to completion, and obstacles, are needed.

A review of recent statistics on these post-secondary experiences revealed high dropout rates and low graduation rates. In 2012 only 14.5 percent of Hispanics aged 25 and older earned a bachelor's degree. In comparison, 51 percent of Asians, 34.5 percent of Whites, and 21.2 percent of Blacks had earned one (Lopez and Fry 2013). Although Hispanics have not fared well in post-secondary institutions, various efforts have been made to further assess and understand the experiences Hispanics higher education. These efforts involve work by higher education research centers, universities, and national higher education societies across the nation aimed at shaping resources and interventions offered to students. This thesis aims to add to that literature by using an asset based perspective to highlight the strengths of Hispanic students, and a review of what they perceive to be barriers, motivations, and sources of support.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

The designation of Hispanic Serving Institutions emerged in the 1980s. HSI's are 2-year or 4-year institutions of higher education whose academic programs lead to a degree. HSIs must be recognized by the U.S Department of Education or accredited by a regional accrediting body (Murphy 2013). The concept was created on the premise that universities and colleges enrolling a large amount of Hispanic Students would eventually adapt their practices to better serve those students (Exelencia Education N.d).

Despite this assumption many researchers remain critical of HSI's progress in creating a more supportive environment focused on supporting Hispanic students (Santiago 2012). Similarly, many critique the label "Hispanic serving institution" because it implies that the institution has already changed its practices to meet the needs of their Hispanic population (Santiago 2012). Enrollment alone should not be a marker of serving Hispanic students. Medina and Posadas (2012) argued that actual institutional support is necessary to ensure graduation while Santiago (2012) urged HSIs with effective institutional practices to share that information with newer HSIs and emerging HSIs. Moreover, Santiago (2012) argued that the criteria to be designated as a HSI be expanded to include intentionality to better serve the Hispanic populous.

There are many reasons why more attention should be placed on the Hispanic student experiences in HSIs. For example, less than half of Hispanics pursing higher education are enrolled in four-year universities (Arbona and Nora 2007). However, the majority of Hispanic students who are enrolled in four-year universities attend public HSIs. Specifically, HSIs make up about 8% of all colleges and universities but they enroll more than 50% of all Hispanic students (Garcia 2013). HSIs have received public attention as they expand in number (Laden 2004). However, because the application of this designation is a relatively new initiative, there is limited research on how Hispanic students perceive their experiences at HSIs. Analysis of Hispanic students attending HSIs is timely and necessary. Moreover, it is imperative to understand whether these institutions are adapting their practices to better serve and support their large Hispanic student bodies.

Several studies have found that the experiences are negative. This may be because many of the institutions that enroll large numbers of Hispanic students still predominantly operate in ways that reflect White norms (Hurtado and Ponjuan 2005). Hispanic students who attend such institutions have consistently reported feeling unwelcomed by faculty and peers, marginalized, isolated, unsupported (Strayhorn 2008), and excluded (Nuñez 2009). Not only do Hispanic students feel alienated but they also report feeling unprepared or inadequate. These experiences of subtle and overt forms of exclusion have been found to hinder a student's ability to develop a sense of belonging and engagement within their campus community (Nuñez 2009).

Garcìa (2012) further described the negative and difficult experiences faced by Hispanics at HSIs and offered suggestions on how Hispanic Serving Institutions can commit to "move beyond being Hispanic-enrolling and become Hispanic-Serving in a provocative sense of the word" (p199.) Similarly, research by Medina and Posadas (2012) suggested that some HSI campuses have severe limitations such as an unwelcoming environment, lack of preparedness on behalf of mentors, and lack of insight on behalf of administrators. Garcìa (2012) argued that HSIs need to commit to becoming transformative, all-inclusive institutions with well-prepared mentors, role models, and administrators. Likewise, Santiago (2012) concluded that HSIs must make an effort to understand the strengths and needs of Hispanics; intuitional culture must reflect this effort by adapting curriculum design, services, and investing in effective resources.

Studying Hispanic students at an HSI in Texas is important because Texas ranks second in the United States in terms of Hispanic population. Thus, the experiences of

Hispanics in higher education in Texas reflect central aspects of the Hispanic higher education experience throughout the United States (Vega and Martinez 2012).

Campus Climate

One way to analyze the experiences of Hispanics in higher education is by examining the learning environment by assessing the campus climate (Dey 2009). A clear, concise, and consistent definition of campus climate is not apparent in the literature. Hart and Fellabaum (2008) reviewed 118 campus climate studies and found that although "campus climate" is used often in higher education research concerning issues of diversity and multiculturalism, those who use the term rarely explicitly define it. Put simply, campus climate is used to describe how individuals perceive the environment of their university or college campus (Reid and Radhakrishnan 2003). Campus climate and campus culture are often used interchangeably (Cress 2002).

The need to assess campus climate evolved from the need to address several issues concerning campus diversity (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, and Cuellar 2008) and as a means to study the experiences of particular groups of underrepresented students. Subsequently, various dimensions of campus climate have been analyzed such as those focused on academics, spiritualism (Rockenback and Mayhew 2014), issues on race (Hurtado et al 2008), and disability status (Hurtado, Carter & Kardia 1998) to name a few. As disparities in higher education continue to exist campus climate research has emerged as fundamental to the efforts to enhance diversity processes and outcomes (Worthington 2008). Thus, measuring campus climate is essential for universities who strive to become functional multicultural environments (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, and Cuellar, 2008) such as HSIs.

Campus climate research is largely conducted by someone affiliated with an institution that is either completing a duty designated to them because of their job or because of their commitment to diversity and multiculturalism (Hart and Fellabaum 2008). Just as a variety of stakeholders measure campus climate, it has been measured using an assortment of methods. In a qualitative content analysis of 155 studies on campus climate Hart and Fellabaum (2008) found that the majority of studies on campus climate have a large quantitative component. However, Allan and Madden (2006) assert that climate is not always fully understood using predominantly quantitative methods.

Numerous researchers have found that Hispanic students report their perceptions of campus climate more negatively than their White peers. Furthermore, for minority students, negative perceptions of campus climate have been associated with aversive outcomes including poor academic performance (Reid and Radhakrishnan 2003).

Medina and Posadas (2012) analyzed the perceptions of seven Latino students who participated on a panel concerning their experiences at an HSI. Key issues that influenced their perception of campus climate included: culturally related issues such as culture shock and cultural expectations; feeling as if there was little direction; and, the importance and desire for peer, faculty, and staff mentoring. These students also offered suggestions for improving the campus climate: more culturally related events, peer mentorships, and the promotion of existing support programs for Latinos.

HSIs are in a position to serve as examples of successful outreach for Hispanic students (Santiago 2012). Given their prevalence further research on how students within those institutions perceive their campus climate is necessary in developing such outreach initiatives.

Social and Cultural Factors and Student Success

   Student engagement. Student engagement is multifaceted and complex. It plays a

large role in student outcomes, learning, and overall achievement (Kahn 2014). Research

on student engagement aims at explaining student success. In a review of student

engagement literature, Lester (2013) synthesized various definitions of engagement and

concluded that despite this term's prevalence in higher education research, a concrete and

agreed upon definition does not exist within the literature. Kahu (2013) reviewed

literature on student engagement and indicated that there are four approaches used in

engagement research: behavioral, psychological, socio-cultural, and holistic. While

Lester's (2013) review of literature categorized student engagement research into three

realms: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. These reviews suggests that although

student engagement is an ever evolving construct there a few common ways to approach

it.

   For this thesis I employed Ella Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework of

engagement, antecedents, and consequences which draws on and attempts to synthesize

various theories and research on student engagement. Kahu's framework is the product of

a thorough review of prior research on student engagement, and highlights:

- Structural influences: university (culture, policies, curriculum, assessment, and discipline) and student (background, support, family, life load)
- Psychosocial influences: The relationship between the university (teaching, staff, support, workload) and the student (motivation, skills, identity, self-efficacy)
- Engagement: Affect (enthusiasm, interest, and belonging) Cognition (deep learning, and self-regulation) Behavior (time and effort, interaction, and participation)
- Proximal consequences: Academic (learning and achievement) and social (satisfaction and well-being)
- Distal consequences: Academic (retention, work success, and lifelong learning) and social (citizenship and personal growth)

- Social cultural context: political and social environment (culture, power, policy, and economics).

This conceptual framework was chosen because it is student centered, highlights wider socio-cultural influences, and argues that "student engagement is more than just an internal state" (Kahu 2013 p. 766) and "student experience is embedded within the socio-cultural context and shown as influenced by characteristics of both the student and the institution" (p. 766).

Rethinking success. Defining student success is a multi-step endeavor on account of all the outcomes associated with the concept. Cuseo (2012) deduced that student retention, educational attainment, academic achievement, student advancement, and holistic development are key indicators of student success in higher education. Furthermore, he contended that "student success may be best defined as a holistic phenomenon that embraces the multiple dimensions of personal development and the multiple goals of higher education" (p. 2). Moreover, when personal validation self-efficacy personal meaning, active involvement, social integration, personal reflection and self-awareness are present, students are more likely to experience success (Cuseo 2012). Most of the studies on student success ignore the success of Hispanic students. Scholars argue that beyond enrollment, degree completion should be seen as a measure of success for Hispanics in higher education (Contreras and Contreras 2015). This is further amplified by the achievement gap that stubbornly persists concerning the retention and graduation rates of Hispanics as compared to other students.

In terms of predicting the likelihood of Hispanic students' persistence, Contreras and Contreras' (2015) suggested traditional models of success are less relevant to Latinos due to their unique experiences. Latino students, many who had already earned 30 credit

hours, were found to drop out of college at high rates after their 2nd year. This counters common thinking that first year success is predictive of future college success. Cuseo (2012) explained that poor academic achievement is not responsible for the dropout rates of students in general. Although the majority of drop outs, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, are in good academic standing at the time of departure, it is important to note that Hispanic students drop out at a higher rate than most. As previously mentioned lack of academic preparation, exposure to risk factors (low parental educational attainment, low socioeconomic status) and lack of awareness are influence whether or not Hispanic students graduate (Tienda 2009). The remaining issue to discern is to understand what situations typically motivate Hispanic students, in particular, to persist in college.

Some scholars have suggested that regardless of background student engagement is key to understanding graduation and retention (Tinto 1987; Kuh 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). In fact, Kuh (2003) argued that "what students do during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to college" (p.1). However, Hernandez, Mobley, Coryell, Yu, and Martinez (2012) found in their critical race theory and quantitative critical examination of a commonly used student engagement survey, that traditional means of assessing student engagement may not fully capture the culturally unique experiences of student engagement for Latino students.

For Hispanic students, engagement related to cultural background (Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora 2000) and relationships with faculty and staff (Hernandez, Moley, Coryell, Yu, and Martinez 2012), family, and peers have been found to be important to their experiences in higher education. These unique experiences of student engagement may provide key information on how Hispanic students persist in college (Hernandez et.

al 2012). Hispanic students have used involvement in extracurricular activities as an avenue of student engagement.

     Student involvement in extracurricular activities. Considerable research has been conducted on the factors that contribute to the success of university students. Moreover, research has shown that, despite social, cultural and academic challenges, Hispanic students derive support from involvement with peers, family, and faculty members (Baker 2013). Involvement in on-campus student organizations in particular enables students to feel less isolated (Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002) and are beneficial to students. This is important because, as Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) explained, "research on college students shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development" (p.410). Similarly, Astin (1984) argued that involvement is central to learning and institutional effectiveness and explained that it consists of the energy (psychological and/or physical) a student dedicates to their academic achievement. In their in-depth paper exploring the theories and concepts behind student success, Wolf-Wendel and colleagues (2009) thoroughly examined the meaning of student involvement, integration, and engagement and how they've been studied. They found that the majority of research on involvement concentrated on extracurricular activities involvement.

     Extracurricular activities such as participation in Hispanic student organizations (HSOs) (Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002) have been found to be crucial to students' exploration of their ethnic identity and helpful in building relationships and friendships both within and across groups (Ortiz and Santos 2010). Hispanic student

organizations are multidimensional and may include general Hispanic organizations, political clubs, groups related to specific nationalities, or Greek organizations.

It is not surprising that student engagement in the form of involvement in extracurricular social organizations and activities has been found to be beneficial to Hispanic students given that it has been linked to higher sense of belonging (Hurtado and Carter 1997). Generally, involvement in student organizations has been found to have positive impacts on the academic performance of Latinos but some organizations have influenced them poorly or not at all (Baker 2013). Thus, more research on Hispanics involved in student organizations in Hispanic Serving Institutions is needed to assess how participation in Hispanic student organizations influences college trajectory.

The concept of involvement is particularly relevant to this research because the participants in the sample was largely collected by Hispanic students who are involved in extracurricular HSOs. These organizations have been referred to as minority based organizations (Baker 2013), co-ethnic student organizations, and ethnic organizations (Park 2014). Researchers have described that they provide social support and connections with faculty, staff, and or/mentors (Barajas and Pierce 2001).

Peers. Students from under-represented groups typically feel less engaged and integrated within their university (Hurtado and Carter 1997) and their involvement in extracurricular social communities serves as an avenue to becoming engaged and obtaining peer and faculty support, particularly for under-represented (Davalos 1999), and first generation college students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini 2004). Beyond providing social support, bonds with peers are associated with better academic performance because they help shape a more positive campus climate (Hurtado, Clayton-

Pedersen, Allen, and Milem 1998). Similarly, Torres and Solberg (2001) explained that

effective relationships with peers are important to achieving success in college because

they minimize or prevent feelings of alienation and marginalization. This is further

illustrated in Benmayor's (2002) analysis of first generation, Mexican-origin students'

oral histories, which found that participants relied on student organizations as cultural

avenues of support.

One concern about ethnic organizations is that they may reduce the likelihood for

minority students to form relationships with students of other ethnic/racial groups

(Goldsmith 2004). However, Park (2014) found that although involvement in ethnic

student organization decreased the chance of friendships with people of another race, a

student's race/ethnicity was a stronger indicator. Overall being Latino (a) was strongly

related with interracial friendship. These findings suggest that Hispanic students may

reap the benefits of cultural support through participations in ethnic organizations and

still maintain friendships across ethic/racial groups. This is important considering that

exploration of one's ethnic heritage is positively related to adjustment to the university.

For example, Toews and Yazedijian's (2009) longitudinal multi-method study on

predictors of college success, found that "students who were more adjusted had explored

their ethnic heritage and committed to the role it would play in their lives" (p.366). This

study implies that ethnic student organizations can be considered positive towards student

success.

A report by Excelencia in Education (2008) identified effective cohort based

support programs aimed at improving academic success of new students by providing

learning communities, tutoring, and developmental enrichment. These initiatives yielded

increases in retention. Among the programs highlighted by Excelencia, several focused on bringing together the Hispanic community. For example, California State University, in Dominguez Hills, a HSI, implemented the Latina Juantas/Nosotras program to provide Hispanic females with a chance to come together alongside faculty and staff mentors to discuss their unique experiences as college students. Although there are some concerns that Hispanic students involved in ethnic organizations may alienate themselves, the literature suggests that, generally speaking, Hispanics are more likely to seek out interracial friendships than other ethnic groups. Thus that concern is minimalized. Moreover, the research indicates that the positive impact of participation in these groups outweighs the potential negative impacts.

Faculty and staff relationships. Although students obtain benefits through participation in ethnic organizations, many scholars have found that peer relationships alone are not enough to ensure student success. Interactions with faculty and staff are necessary and have been found to be related to academic success (Baker 2013 and Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, and Thomas 2009). Pascarella (1980) conducted an in-depth and critical synthesis of research concerning the association between student-faculty interactions and student outcomes. He summarized literature conducted prior to 1980 and found that statistically significant positive associations existed between informal student-faculty interactions and "career plans and educational aspirations, satisfaction with college, intellectual and personal development, academic achievement, and college persistence" (Kam and Sax 2009). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) included formal student-faculty interactions and expanded the search to 2000s. They reported similar findings in that the student faculty interactions had significant-positive association with

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college outcomes including educational attainment, subject matter competence, and career choice/development (Kam and Sax 2009). Similarly, interaction with faculty (Kim and Sax 2009) and involvement in mentoring faculty-student mentoring programs (DeFreitas and Bravo 2012) are related to more positive college outcomes such as increased academic achievement and student development (Kim and Sax 2009). Although the work of Pascarella (1980) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate that, generally, student-faculty interactions, both inside and out of class, are related to positive outcomes other scholars have noted that these outcomes are conditional and vary based on student characteristics such as race and gender (Kam and Sax 2009). As a result of the first generation status of the majority of college going Hispanics, it can be argued they are in even greater need of guidance from faculty and staff.

Within the research on what types of university environment support is most helpful for the success of Hispanic students support from peers and faculty and staff has been found to be of importance to students (Baker 2013 and Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, and Thomas 2009). Several studies highlight the importance of faculty taking the lead in supporting student achievement, particularly for those who do not have access to supportive familial or social networks (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, and Thomas 2009).

Griffin (2006) found that racial/ethnic minority students were better able to overcome barriers when institutional support matched their personal efforts. For Latinos, having faculty of color as mentors is beneficial. Santos and Reigadas (2002) reported that those Latino students who participated in a faculty mentoring program had increased college self-efficacy. Moreover, they found that those with co-ethnic faculty mentors reaped the strongest benefits. Students who participate in ethnic student organizations

have beneficial relationships with faculty and staff advisors which aids the campus in the identification of student academic and social needs (Dunkel and Schuh, 1998)

In terms of HSIs, Medina and Posadas (2012) explained that both students and faculty expressed the importance of recruiting and retaining Latino faculty because it reflects the overall student body. They further concluded that a larger Latino faculty presence would provide better opportunity for culturally responsive mentoring. It would follow that recruiting and retaining Latino faculty would provide better opportunity for mentoring Latinos in HSIs. However, there is little research on how Latino faculty and staff view their responsibilities as faculty and staff in an HSI. In her dissertation on the campus climate of a HSI Cortez (2011) found that some faculty members did not understand the benefits of being a HSIs. Hispanic students are more likely than other students to express negative campus climate, feelings of isolation, and lack of direction (Strayhorn 2008 and Nuñez 2009). It is therefore crucial for Hispanics to engage in peer and faculty/staff/mentor support (Cejda, Casparis, and Rhodes 2002).

Familial impact. Involvement in social extracurricular organizations is particularly important for students whose culture values interdependence, sense of community, and family over individual success (Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002). There are numerous studies of how forms of support outside the university setting impact college students. Some argue that high prevalence of first generation status/low parental educational achievement influence the college trajectories of Hispanics in negative ways, making student engagement more challenging but necessary. However, other scholars have found that familial influences may positively impact the student engagement and overall college trajectory for Hispanic students.

Historically, some have argued that education was not valued or encouraged within Hispanic families (Luna and Martinez 2012). Critical race theory scholars have often employed Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework to understand how Hispanic students benefit from the support systems within their communities (Yosso 2005, Perez 2014). Also, others have started documenting the educational implications of the funds of knowledge found within marginalized communities such as families in the United States-Mexico Borderlands (Saathoff 2015)

Family support and encouragement has been found to influence the educational trajectory of Hispanics even before beginning college. In a studying concerning the educational aspirations of Chicana students, Ceja (2004) discovered that although the majority of their parents lacked formal college education, participants reported motivation from their parents as influential to them pursing higher education. Several studies indicate that regardless of the level of parental education, many Hispanic students' decisions to attend and persist in a university setting are motivated by familial encouragement and support. For example, in a study that examined Hispanic students at HSIs, Ceja, Casparis, and Rhodes (2002) found that non-college educated attending family members were considered major influences on participants' decisions to attend college.

The research on the influence of family on college success/achievement is overwhelmingly positive although some scholars report negative effects. Some of the positive impact of strong familial support on Hispanic students include a better ability to network and build relationships of support with professors and student peers (Torres and Solberg 2001). Furthermore, these relationships have been found to be instrumental to

understanding sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy among Hispanics in college. Torres and Solberg (2001), in a correlational study, found that perceived availability of familial support was strongly associated with college self-efficacy. Surprisingly, they found that familial support was not associated with levels of stress. However, their overall conclusions support the belief that familial support facilitates a self-identity that views challenging aspects of university life as challenges instead of threats.

In contrast, some scholars find that familial support is not extremely influential on the experiences of Hispanics in higher education. Although they acknowledge that family members are important sources of encouragement and support prior to college, some argue that once immersed into a college setting interactions with family members may hinder academic success because these relationships occur outside the college environment (Baker 2013). In a longitudinal multi-method study on predictors of college success for Hispanic and White students, Toews and Yazedijian (2009) found that, contrary to other studies, parental attachment was not related to college adjustment. However, for Hispanic students, it was correlated with self-esteem and acculturation and they explain that acculturation may have an indirect influence on adjustment. Some argue that familial encouragement has little impact even prior to college and that mothers' educational expectations were not associated with college enrollment (Perna and Titus 2005).

It can be argued that familial obligations that stem from a collectivist community influence Hispanic students negatively as they experience college. Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, and Burgos-Cienfuegos (2015) conducted an exploratory study on the Latino first generation college experience and home-school value conflicts between family

obligation and individual academic achievement. They used a hypothetical scenario to gauge whether students prioritized familial or academic demands and found that although students tended to prioritize school, family-induced inner conflict and stress was highly experienced.

Related to familial impact, the issue of remaining at home instead of attending college has been examined. Desmond and Turley (2009) used data from the Texas Higher Education Opportunity Project to assess preferences to stay home for college. They found that Hispanics, regardless of parental education level, ranked the highest in perceiving living at home during college as important. Although an interesting finding, this study did not thoroughly take into account financial/socio-economic factors such as money saved if a student stays home for college.

Some studies indicate that homesickness is a common theme among Hispanic students (Torres and Solberg 2001). The construct of homesickness can be understood as a form of culture shock (Poyrazli and Lopez 2007) characterized by a sense of grief and yearning about the feelings brought about by thoughts of home. Additionally, homesickness is characterized as the responses to being away from familiar settings, friends, family, and significant others (Pyrazlie and Lopez 2007). It has been found to be particularly problematic for students who are new to a university setting because it is related to a longing for familiar environments (Poyrazli and Lopez 2007). Given that Hispanics typically grow up within a collectivist family setting the role of homesickness in their college trajectories merits additional attention (Torres and Solberg 2001) and has been a point of concern in recent research aimed at understanding their needs. Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, and Burgos-Cienfuegos (2015) found that although larger distance

from home resulted in less direct conflicts with family, negative reactions included

extreme homesickness and conflicts concerning whether to spend money on educational

expenses or whether to travel home.

3. METHODOLOGY

Instrument

Secondary data were derived from the *Hispanic Student Campus Climate Assessment (HSCCA) 2014*, an anonymous survey conducted by a university affiliate group of staff and faculty committed to the improvement of higher education opportunities for Hispanics at a public, four year, Hispanic Serving Institution in Texas. The affiliate group conducted this survey to identify the needs of Hispanic students in the institution. The goal was to determine the level of student's general satisfaction with their college experiences and to identify areas of improvement. The data from the HSCCA were collected in the spring of 2014.

Sample Demographics

The sample of this study comprised of convenient sample of self-identified Hispanic students enrolled at a mid-size public Hispanic Serving university in Central Texas in the spring of 2014. The majority of the students were involved in extracurricular organizations related to the Hispanic culture. Students were asked to complete a survey online through an electronic portal familiar to students at the university. The survey consisted of twenty-four questions that were quantitative and open ended qualitative. Students were asked a battery of questions regarding their demographic backgrounds, leadership participation, satisfaction, key challenges, and needs as students. A total of 214 students completed the survey. Random sampling was not used in this study, therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the larger Hispanic student

body. Although an important limitation; it does not reduce the potential usefulness in understanding the perceptions of Hispanic college students.

Univariate Analysis

The majority of the questions asked in the assessment yielded nominal data and descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the demographic characteristics of the participants, various frequencies were calculated (see Table1). A preliminary analysis included a series of chi square tests to determine if there was a relationship between socio cultural-student characteristics and student engagement. The social and cultural factors student characteristics variable were sex, transfer student status, language heritage, first generation status, and participation in mentorship program status. Those variables were obtained through select questions and answer options. The answer choices for "Is mentorship important to you?" were recoded to reflect whether students were involved in a mentorship relationship or not. My focus was on whether a student participated in a mentorship program, not whether they viewed mentorship as important or not. Therefore the answer choices were recoded so that and "Yes: I have a mentor" and "No: I have a mentor" reflected being involved in a mentorship relationship. The answers "Yes: I do not have a mentor" and "No: I am not interested in having a mentor" reflected no participation in a mentorship program. (See Appendix A for a copy of the Assessment Questions)

As previously mentioned, I am guided by the conceptual framework of student engagement described by Kahu (2013). Experiences related to cultural events, leadership activities, and scholarship recipient status are connected to student engagement because they are part of the student experience influenced by student and institution

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characteristics. The dependent variables related to student engagement and

conceptualized as follows: are participation in cultural events, involvement in leadership

activities, awareness of leadership activities, awareness of courses related to the Hispanic

culture, and scholarship recipient status.

Chi-square statistics were computed to detect whether the differences between

groups observed were statistically significant.

Ho: There is no relationship between socio-cultural student characteristics

and student engagement factor for HSO members.

H1: There is a significant relationship between socio-cultural student

characteristics and student engagement factor for HSO members.

The software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was

used to analyze the data. I calculated a frequency table for each predictor see Table 2.

Univariate and bivariate analysis was conducted to examine specific demographic group

differences within the sample with key student engagement factors such as mentorship,

leadership, and financial aid.

Qualitative Analysis

The data for the qualitative analysis consisted of responses to the open ended

questions in the HSCCA. The data were analyzed using content data analysis to capture

student's own thoughts and feelings about their experiences as Hispanic college students.

The open-ended questions in the HSCCA were unstructured and possible answers

were not proposed or pre-determined as a set of response categories. Thus, each

respondent provided answers in her or his own words, allowing for an analysis of deeper

meaning. The data from these open ended questions provided me with the means to

answer my research questions in ways that couldn't be captured in the questions with fixed response options.

In preparing for data analysis, I took the time to thoroughly read each open-ended question. A downloadable file with all data included in the HSCCA was used to arrange questions on an Excel spreadsheet. The Excel spreadsheet was accessed using a password- protected computer. Once the data were formatted to the Excel spread sheet, I followed Charmaz's (2006) suggested data analysis strategy for initially coding data: remain open, stay close to the data, keep your codes simple and precise, construct short codes, preserve actions, compare data with data, and move quickly through the data. After the initial coding, I began the focused phase of coding that includes making decisions about which initial codes made the most analytical sense in categorizing data into themes and identifying overlapping connections (Charmaz (2006). Within the Excel sheet several charts were created in order to organize themes. Each of the four open-ended questions below were analyzed using content analysis to identify issues and themes that reflect students' experiences. The text responses to these open-ended questions range from one word to several sentences. Emergent themes are organized by question in the following chapter.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In order to provide a portrait of the group of student participants, I ran univariate analyses for demographic characteristics. The participants in this study were diverse, representing a variety in ethnic backgrounds, age, and classification. In terms of basic demographic characteristics, of the 214 participants, the majority were female 148 (69%), senior (41%), non-transfer students (68%). Most respondents indicated that neither of their parents had earned a bachelor's degree. This means that 72% were first generation college students. The majority of students were employed (65%), of whom most indicated that they were employed off campus (40%). The majority of the students' family structures included both parents living a home (61.7%). Most students were not scholarship recipients (74%). A summary of the demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant Demographic Characteristics

(N=214)	N	%
Gender n=211		
Female	148	70.1%
Male	63	29.9%
Classification n=210		
Senior	88	41.9%
Junior	59	28.1%
Sophomore	37	17.6%
Freshman	11	5.2%
Graduate student	15	7.1%
Transfer Status n= 211		
Non Transfer	143	67.8%
Transfer	68	32.2%
First Generation Student Status n=209		
Yes	153	73.2%
No	56	26.8%
Place of Employment n=211		
Off campus	84	39.8%
Not Employed	75	35.5%
On campus	44	20.9%
Both on and off campus	8	3.8%
Family Parent Structure at Home n=206		
Both Parents Living at Home	127	61.7%
Single Parent	56	27.2%
Living Independently	17	8.3%
Living with Family Members	3	1.5%
Living with Other Legal Guardians	2	1.0%
Scholarship Recipient Status n=211		
No	156	73.9%
Yes	55	26.1%

A few questions asked about culturally related topics such as racial/ethnic identity and whether students were monolingual or bilingual. The majority of students were either bilingual or fluent in Spanish (70%). Respondents were given the option of identifying with any of 11 ethnic/racial heritage categories. Eighty-five respondents selected Mexican American as one of their choices, followed by Latino/a (75), Mexican (66). More than half of the students (58%) had participated in cultural events at the university. A little more than half (56.4%) were unaware of courses that focus on Hispanic/Latino (a) culture.

Table 2 Cultural Demographic Characteristics

(N=214)	N	%
Language Heritage n=211		
Bilingual/fluent in Spanish	147	69.7%
Not Bilingual/fluent in Spanish	64	30.3%
Participate in Cultural Events n=214		
Yes	124	57.9%
No	90	42.1%
Aware of courses that focus on Hispanic/ Latino(a) History or Culture n=211		
Yes	92	43.6%
No	119	56.4%

     Chi Square tests of independence were used to determine if there were relationships between independent variables (mentorship, transfer student status, language, first generation college student status, and sex) and dependent variables (involvement in leadership activities, participation in cultural events, awareness of leadership activities outside HSO, awareness of courses related to the Hispanic culture, and scholarship recipient status) A total of 25 chi squares were computed. The majority of the results indicated that there are no significant group differences among groups. Chi squares were used because the variables under study were categorical and the expected frequency count was at least 5 in each of the contingency tables. The results are organized in tables by independent variable. Some chi squares yielded statistically significant group differences.

     There were no significant different between males' and females' involvement in leadership activities, participation in cultural events, awareness of leadership development, awareness of Hispanic related courses, and scholarship status. Although the group differences are not significant, it is important to highlight that females were more involved in leadership activities compared to males, however, males reported participating in cultural events more than females. More females were aware of

leadership development, on other hand, more men were aware of Hispanic courses and were scholarship recipients compared to females.

First generation students and traditional students did not differ significantly in terms of participation in cultural events, awareness of Hispanic courses, and scholarship recipient status. Although the group differences are not significant it is important to briefly outline frequencies. This information proved to be useful when discussing the qualitative findings. First generation and traditional students appeared to be involved in leadership activities and participating in cultural events at similar levels. First generation students were more aware of leadership development opportunities outside their student organization. They were less aware of Hispanic courses offered. The majority of first generation college students did not receive scholarships.

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether transfer students or non-transfer students differed in terms of awareness of Hispanic courses. The Pearson Chi-Square value was statistically significant. We can conclude that there is a relationship between transfer and non-transfer students and awareness of Hispanic culture, X^2 (1, N=209) = 4.752, p < .05. Looking at Table 4 it can been seen transfer students were more likely to be aware of courses related to Hispanic or Latino history or culture (54.5%) than non-transfer students (38.5%).

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether transfer students or non-transfer students differed in terms scholarship recipient status. The Pearson Chi-Square value was statistically significant thus there is a significant relationship between transfer and non-transfer students and whether one is awarded a scholarship X^2 (1, N=210) = 10.244, p < .001. Non-transfer students were more likely to

be awarded scholarships from the university (32.4%). Transfer students and non-transfer students did not differ in terms of involvement of leadership activities, participation in cultural events, and awareness of leadership development

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual students differed in their participation in cultural events at their university. The Pearson Chi-Square value was statistically significant. We can conclude that there is a relationship between language spoken and participation in cultural events, X^2 (1, N=211) = 4.500, p < .05. This means that participation in cultural events at the university varied as a function of language. In Table 5, 68.8% of non-bilingual/Spanish speakers participated in cultural events, whereas only 53.1% of bilingual or Spanish speakers participated in cultural events.

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual students differed in their awareness of leadership development opportunities outside their student organizations. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (1, N=207) = 4.103, p < .05. This means that being aware of leadership opportunities outside of their organization varied as a function of language. About 80% of monolingual students were aware of development opportunities outside of their organization while only 65.7% of bilingual students were aware.

Monolingual and bilingual students did not differ in terms of involvement of leadership activities, awareness of Hispanic courses, and scholarship recipient status

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether participation in a mentorship relationship and involvement in leadership activity were independent of each other. The Pearson Chi-Square value was statistically significant.

Therefore, we can conclude that there is a relationship between participation in a mentorship relationship and involvement in leadership activities, X^2 (1, N=207) = 5.379, p<.05. Mentees were more likely to be involved in a leadership activity. Interestingly, more than half of (53.1%) participants had not been involved with any leadership programs at their university. Most of the participants reported not having a mentor (77.3%). Of those who reported having a mentor, 61.7% reported involvement in leadership programs. Whereas of those who did not have a mentor only 42.5% had been involved in leadership programs.

A chi square test of independence was performed to investigate whether participation in a mentorship programs and awareness of leadership development opportunities outside HSO were independent of each other and was statistically significant. Therefore, here is a relationship between participation in a mentorship relationship and awareness of leadership development opportunities outside an HSO, X^2 (1, N=205) = 6.811, p<.01. Interestingly the majority of students appeared to be aware of leadership development opportunities outside their HSO and those who had mentors were more likely to have awareness. Specifically, of those who reported having a mentor 85.1% reported awareness of leadership development opportunities outside of HSO, whereas only 62.2% of those who did not have a mentor were aware of opportunities

Table 3 Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Sex and Involvement in Social, Cultural Activities and Having Received a Scholarship

Sex	Involvement in Leadership Activities n= 209		Participation in Cultural Events n= 211		Awareness of Leadership Development n= 207		Awareness of Hispanic Courses n= 209		Scholarship Recipient n= 211	
	Involved	**Not-Involved**	**Yes**	**No**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Yes**	**No**
Female	48.6% (71)	51.4% (37)	55.4% (82)	44.6% (66)	71.9% (105)	28.1% (41)	43.8% (64)	56.2% (82)	23.0% (34)	77.0% (114)
Male	41.3% (26)	58.7% (37)	61.9% (39)	38.1% (24)	65.6% (40)	34.4% (21)	44.4% (28)	55.6% (35)	33.3% (21)	66.7% (42)
P Value	.959 (p=.328)		.763 (p=.382)		.825 (p=.364)		.007 (p=**.**935)		2.461 (p=.117)	

Table 4   Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Reporting First Generation and Involvement in Social, Cultural Activities and Having Received a Scholarship

	Involvement in Leadership Activities n= 207		Participation in Cultural Events n = 209		Awareness of Leadership Development n = 205		Awareness of Hispanic Courses n = 207		Scholarship Recipient n = 209	
	Involved	**Not-Involved**	**Yes**	**No**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Yes**	**No**
Yes	46.1% (70)	53.9% (82)	58.2% (89)	41.8% (64)	72.7% (109)	27.3% (41)	41.1% (62)	58.9% (89)	26.1% (40)	73.9 (113)
No	45.5% (25)	54.5% (30)	53.6% (30)	46.4% (30)	65.5% (36)	34.5% (19)	51.8% (29)	48.2% (27)	23.2% (13)	76.8% (43)
P Value	.006 (p=.939)		.354 (p=.552)		1.011 (p=.315)		1.908 (p=.167)		.186 (p=.666)	

*p= < .05, **p=< .01,***p=< .001

Table 5   **Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Being a Transfer Student and Involvement in Social, Cultural Activities and Having Received a Scholarship**

	Involved in Leadership Activities n=209		Participated in Cultural Events n = 211		Aware of Leadership Development n = 207		Aware of Hispanic Courses n = 209		Scholarship n = 210	
	Involved	**Not-Involved**	**Yes**	**No**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Yes**	**No**
Yes	48.5% (33)	51.5% (35)	50.0% (24)	50.0% (34)	65.2% (43)	34.8% (23)	54.5% (36)	45.5% (30)	11.8% (8)	88.2% (60)
No	44.7% (63)	55.3% (78)	61.5% (88)	38.5% (55)	71.6% (101)	28.34% (40)	38.5% (55)	61.5% (88)	32.4% (46)	67.6% (96)
P Value	.274 (p=.601)		2.516 (p=.113)		.892 (p=.345)		**4.752* (p=.029)**		**10.244** (p=.001)**	

Table 6   **Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Language and Involvement in Social, Cultural Activities and Having Received a Scholarship**

	Involved in Leadership Activities n = 209		Participated in Cultural Events n = 211		Aware of Leadership Development n = 207		Aware of Hispanic Courses n = 209		Scholarship n = 210	
	Involved	**Not-Involved**	**Yes**	**No**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Yes**	**No**
Bilingual	47.6% (70)	52.4% (77)	53.1% (78)	46.9% (69)	65.7% (94)	34.3% (49)	46.2% (67)	53.8% (78)	25.3% (37)	74.7% (109)
Monolingual	43.5% (27)	56.5% (35)	68.8% (44)	31.2% (20)	79.7% (51)	20.3% (13)	39.1% (25)	60.9% (39)	28.1% (18)	71.9% (46)
P Value	.291 (p=.590)		**4.500* (p=.034)**		**4.103* (p=.043)**		.920 (p=.338)		.178 (p=.673)	

*p= < .05, **p=< .01,***p=< .001

Table 7   **Chi-Square Analysis Comparing Having a Mentor and Involvement in Social, Cultural Activities and Having Received a Scholarship**

	Involved in Leadership Activities n= 207		Participated in Cultural Events n= 208		Aware of Leadership Development n= 205		Aware of Hispanic Courses n= 207		Received a Scholarship n= 208	
	Involved	**Not-Involved**	**Yes**	**No**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Aware**	**Unaware**	**Yes**	**No**
Yes	61.% (29)	38.3% (18)	68.8% (33)	32.1% (15)	85.1% (40)	14.9% (7)	45.8% (22)	54.2% (26)	33.3% (16)	66.7% (32)
No	42.% (68)	57.5% (92)	53.1% (85)	46.9% (75)	65.2 % (103)	34.8% (55)	42.8% (68)	57.2% (91)	33.3% (16)	75.6% (121)
P Value	**5.379* (p=.020)**		3.672 (p=.055)		**6.811** (p=.009)**		.141 (p=**.**707)		1.523 (p=**.**217)	

*p= < .05, **p=< .01,***p=< .001

The following are the results of the qualitative analysis of the responses to the open ended questions. Key themes are in italics followed by descriptions and quotes.

One issue that was asked was what served as encouragement to remain at the university. Various themes emerged from the students' responses. For example, positive interactions, diversity, academics, the campus environment, and resources were reported as sources of encouragement to remain at the university.

People

The majority of respondents emphasized relationships and social connections by citing "people" as sources of encouragement. Many of respondents listed that "the people" encouraged them to remain at the current institution without providing more information in regards to who those people were. Although, for many students, the people they cited as encouraging were described broadly, they were described very positively, for example:

> "…amazing people, and understanding teachers."
>
> "…from the moment I arrived not only was the campus and view incredible but so were the people."
>
> "I have met so many people that had influenced me so far."
>
> "I love the people I've met here."
>
> "The diverse faculty and staff and motivating professors."
>
> "The people. They are open and laid back yet willing to help. I also find people who are passionate about what they do. "

Others specified particular people at the university as their sources of encouragement. Specifically, students cited friends, faculty, staff, teachers, and advisors as those people. Many participants viewed encouraging participants, advisors, and staff as encouraging. Some students described the ways in which professors made them feel important:

"I've had great professors that encourage me to keep on getting an education here."

"Great and friendly instructors, and advisors, and all staff in general."

Among the responses that highlighted people as sources of encouragement, many emphasized the benefits of being involved in extracurricular student organizations. Generally speaking participants described these organizations as supportive, motivational, and a highlight of their overall college experience. Similar to this participant many described their involvement in student organizations as important:

"…but the one thing that has encourage me to stay at this beautiful campus is one of the organizations I'm in. The officers along with the older members have made my college experience amazing!"

Most merely stated that their student organization was encouraging but did not specify which organization they were referring to or how they gained encouragement from the organization a sub group of these respondents described their organization as useful many cited Greek organizations.

Family

The theme of family emerged from many students responses. Some described the university's proximity to home as a motivator for staying at this particular institution. Being able to help family have a better future was mentioned a few times. Several students described making their parents proud as encouragement to remain at the university. The response of one student captured that sentiment:

My family is what keeps me here at [institution]. Being the first in my family to graduate from college with a bachelor's degree is what reminds me to keep on pushing every day to keep my grades up and make everyone proud. I knew I would be the one to do it and I have to keep it up.

Aspirations

Accomplishing some sort of goal was the second most common response. Among those who described reaching a goal as their source of encouragement to remain at the university, goals included, finishing their degree plan and graduating, obtaining a good career after graduation, and shaping a better future. Several of these responses read like statements of self-affirmation:

> "I am encouraged to remain at [this university] because I want to prove to others but mostly to myself that I can and will succeed and reach my goals."

> "The fact that I will let no one discourage me from achieving my goals"

Others described that their goal was to "prove people wrong" by persisting in higher education:

> Education is very important to me and since most of my family has not attended college I want to prove to everyone that besides having many obstacles, it's possible. I also want to have a good career and make a difference in my community.
> …trying to prove all the statistics wrong about Hispanic males.

Diversity

The diversity among faculty, staff, and students within the university was the third most commonly reported source of encouragement. Students explained that they were encouraged because they enjoyed the "diversity of people", "the rich diversity", "being a part of a rising university filled with diversity", "growing diversity and focus on inclusivity", the "diversity amongst the students and organization", and because "the university does its best to have diversity".

While these students indicated diversity as a motivator only a few went into detail about how or from who this diversity manifests:

> "I am encouraged by the diversity of the study body and faculty here and truly feel like we receive a diverse and complete education here."

> "The diversity. In the quad all types of people congregate with one another My classes are very diverse which offers variety when it comes time for discussion."

> "The amount of diversity here is incredible. So far everyone I have met has been welcoming and respectful. I think that there is a greater appreciation of cultural differences here than in other campuses."

Within these responses a few students reflected on negative experiences related to diversity:

> "Despite a select group of student who make Hispanics feel unwelcomed at [institution], there are many people who work with the university to make Hispanic students want to stay."

Academic Major

The availability of a good academic major program, and classes emerged as a theme. Many students cited the prestige of their particular department: "my major, Geography", "the great business program", "I love the school and my major is well known to get good jobs and network connections from this school", "Communication Design at [this institution] is very competitive but there is a lot of good connections from this school". Along the same lines, others cited their university's "research programs".

Campus

Student commonly cited that university's campus. They cited both aspects of campus climate and the physical campus as sources of encouragement along with the surround community within the city: "the natural beauty of the city", "diverse environment" of campus, "the environment of the campus", and the "area the university is located" capture the essence of student's responses that fell into the theme of the campus being encouraging.

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Resources and Affordability

Access to resources and affordability, although less prevalent, emerged as a theme. Students described "so many resources", "the fact that organizations being started here at [name of institution] with the main goal in providing resources for Hispanics", and "that there is help on campus for whatever you need" as sources of encouragement to persist at their university.

Emergent themes were related to the experiences specific to first generation college student, financial problems, problems related to friends, family, and home, cultural issues, and difficulty adjusting. A subgroup of participants reported obstacles particular to the experiences of transfer and international students also arose. Few students reported isolated obstacles while the vast majority reported obstacles that intersected with various aspects of student life.

Being the First in the Family to Go to College

The theme of being a first generation college student intersected with several obstacles. Students frequently reported that not having any family members who attended college resulted in a lack of advice and an increase in fear of the unknown. One participant explained that her biggest obstacles stemmed from her first generation student status, "being the first person in my family to go to college, no one knew just how much of a struggle it would be. I learned to manage my money properly and had to get a job while attending school and being involved in three organizations." First generation college students reported on obstacles of minimal financial support, difficulty during the

transition from high school to college, developing a study habit, and finding resources on campus.

Lack of Information about Financial Aid

An overwhelming majority of students explained that their biggest obstacles were related to financial issues such as navigating the financial aid process, locating and obtaining scholarships, lack of knowledge on how to make fiscally responsible decisions, working one or more jobs, finding work, and lack of financial help from parents. Moreover, the majority of students who reported financial needs to cover tuition and cost of living as an obstacle explained how this struggle intersected with various aspects of their student life such as balancing time among studying, maintaining a good GPA, and being involved in their student organization. Accounts of financial obstacles were reported with a deep sense of worry, concern, and frustration. Some students reported that knowing that their parents had financial difficulties as stressful.

A sub group of students explained that international student status was a barrier in obtaining a job. Of those students some noted that international students are limited to securing work on campus. Others added that this was a severe obstacle because international students do not qualify for federal financial aid and are thus ineligible for work-study positions on campus, further limiting their chances of obtaining work.

Relationships: Home, Friends, and Family

Adjusting to being away from home was a common obstacle. Homesickness, difficulty finding a 'home away from home', trouble building friendships, and missing family were reported as obstacles. Participants explained that they were family oriented.

Several participants reflected on their homesickness and added that involvement in student organizations served as a buffer.

"Feeling like Minorities".

Several students indicated "feeling like minorities" within the institution and being in a community that was not predominantly Hispanic. Beyond that, some students provided specific details about ways in which feeling intimidated or unwelcomed was an obstacle. For example one participant explained "there isn't a sense of community and people aren't nice at all". Similarly a participant said "There are so many judgmental and rude people that belittle minorities". Issues of related to culture such as culture shock and language barriers arose within these responses. These cultural barriers impacted students negatively by limiting ease of communication or connection between them and professors, and the ability to convey opinions in class. A few students who reported these communication obstacles also acknowledged the importance of cultural diversity at universities and the usefulness of being able to communicate with people from different backgrounds.

Adjustment/ Work-Life Balance

The issue of adjusting to and creating a balance among work, academic, and extracurricular life was an extremely prevalent occurrence among participants. Anxiety and worry over realizing the difficulties associated with maintaining a high GPA while working through college was a common theme. As one participant reported that accepting they might not earn a 4.0 GPA every semester because they work 55 hours a week and go to school full time was an obstacle. An extremely common obstacle reported was balancing academic achievement with involvement in extracurricular activities. Of

the students who reported issues adjusting several expressed that high school did not prepare them adequately for college.

Mentorship by Professors.

When explaining what they felt were obstacles the desire to have a mentor and not finding one until later on in their college career was a prevalent theme. Students expressed the desire to form relationships with "people of higher authority", professors, and tutors, in order to become informed "of all the possibilities" and "opportunities" offered at the institution. These students expressed frustration over having to "go out and search" for these resources themselves. A few students explained that there were particular mentor related barriers because of their status as transfer or international students.

Subgroups: International and transfer.

A small sub group of students provided very specific obstacles related to their status of either international or transfer students. As far as obtaining employment on campus, international students commonly reported issues related to claiming residency, obtaining a scholarship, and preparing for life after graduation. One participant explained their frustration over the obstacles faced as an international student and frustration with mentors, "The mentors have no knowledge on how to treat an international student. The thought of having to explain what every form I need to fill out before and after graduation exhausts me".

Transfer students also reported different experiences than non-transfer students. Some simply stated that "being a transfer student" was an obstacle. While others went into detail about the obstacles particular to their transfer student status:

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"As a transfer there was not really an orientation…I wandered for over a year trying to discover things…seems like I paid my tuition and the school was like 'here is your schedule, good luck."

"[The university] doesn't really have a lot of things for transfer students."

"Transferring to [the university] and having to start new not knowing anyone or anything at all."

Reflection

A lot of students reported obstacles they had faced as a student and then reflected on how they overcame them. Students reported involvement in their student organization as beneficial in overcoming obstacles. Several students explained that the obstacles they reported were most prevalent during their first years of college. Many of the reflective responses explained that they overcame these obstacles with time and the support of their student organization. Of these student several expressed lamentations and a sense of regret concerning becoming knowledgeable on various opportunities and resources "later on" or "too late".

Physical Environment

A few students reported obstacles related to the physical environment of the campus such as commuting between two of the institution's campuses, understanding the campus bus system, time wasted finding parking and navigating construction. These obstacles were frustrating to participants because they were time consuming and further complicated an already difficult adjustment to college life. This type of feedback was commonly paired with an explanation that time management was difficult due to the difficulties in balancing many aspects of student life such as work, academics, and extracurricular activities.

The affiliate organization who conducted the assessment asked students what can be done to better enhance their experience at the university. The need for increasing way to embrace Hispanic history and culture, programing that facilitates social engagement, increasing the awareness of the affiliate organization, and mentorship and guidance emerged as themes within the student responses.

Sense of Togetherness and Embrace Hispanic History and Culture

The desire for a means to facilitate celebration of culture, "togetherness", sharing of information, and unity among the Hispanic student body emerged as themes within the responses to what The Faculty and Staff Organization could do to enhance their student experience. Students advised The Faculty And Staff Organization to "embrace culture even more", "help make the school more aware that we are a Hispanic Serving Institution", "bring awareness to courses that focuses of Hispanic history and culture", and "be more culturally united" and to "build a strong Hispanic community". For example, one participant wrote the following:

> "Organize Hispanic Leadership Conferences….that will open doors for Hispanics here…and allows Hispanics to meet one another to create networks."

> "Provide more opportunities for student organizations to network with each other."

> "Provide more resources and build a strong Hispanic community."

Programming That Facilitates Social Engagement

Overall, students most commonly reported that The Faculty and Staff Organization could enhance Hispanic student experience by organizing more events on campus for the Hispanic student population. Students suggested events such as "mixers",

"cultural awareness events", "festivals", and "socials" to name a few. Participants explained that these events could raise awareness of the "many Hispanic cultures out there", "celebrate the Hispanic community", "bring the Hispanic student body together", and make the Hispanic students "feel more at home". Additionally, other students suggested that these events would facilitate networking and dissemination of information on resources and a way of "letting know students about Hispanic clubs and opportunities". Several students stressed that importance of having a means to share and exchange information regarding various student resources:

> "Provide resources for students and let all student know of everything that is available for them on campus."

Increasing Awareness of the Faculty and Staff Organization

In line with this notion of bringing together people to bring attention to various resources and opportunities, visibility of The Faculty and Staff Organization emerged as a common theme. Students urged The Faculty and Staff Organization to "become more noticeable", "make themselves more apparent", "be more visible on campus in assisting organizations", and "advertise more opportunities and offers for Hispanic students". A few students seemed to suggest that there were resources untapped on by Hispanic students and asked the Faculty and Staff Organization to assist in sharing that information. One student urged the Organization to "provide opportunities… to help us all connect to each other". Some student suggested The Faculty and Staff Organization provide an avenue to serve the outside community as well. For example, one participant suggested that they take advantage of Hispanic students' ability to speak two or more languages to help the community while also striving to "be a better leader, social server, and student."

Mentorship and Guidance

The desire for mentorship, professional development, and career preparation programs was also a prevalent theme. Students asked that the Faculty and Staff Organization provide mentors and resources to help with navigating college and life past graduation. Help for navigating the Hispanic college experience included "meetings on how to overcome obstacles being a minority" and assistance "to make them feel more welcome so they don't keep leaving back home because they feel uncomfortable". They requested "workshops geared to Hispanics," "mentor workshops," and "awareness that resources exist". Some student explained that mentors are needed to enhance their student experience because "it's hard having to find your way on your own," "mentorship opportunities for faculty/staff to students is a great thing and would be very effective in helping students succeed," and could "further enhance stay in college."

Students were asked what they missed from home. Many respondents reported that they perceived the university as different from their hometown culture. Several students reported that they felt Hispanic culture is the norm at their university and they miss being with people who are familiar to them. Many students indicated that they missed the food prepared by family, and other aspects of the Hispanic culture

The Importance of a Family Support System

The majority of students expressed that they viewed their family support system as important. Several added that they missed being the familiar surroundings of their "home".

> "I miss the culture because it is primarily Hispanic and I am just used to that. Everywhere I go there are Hispanics, Mexican food, music, etc. I

miss being with people that share the same background and have similar values."

A common theme found when analyzing the question "What do you miss from home" was a strong sense of longing for familiar interactions with friends and family, many times both. Participants expressed missing their families and receiving social support from them and reported dealing with the emotions connected with not have their family support system. Many explained that they missed their support systems. As one student stated:

> "I miss my family the most. Leaving for college really made me appreciate how much they are there for me and support me."

Homesickness and Food

Within the responses of this question many participants indicated that they missed food and other aspects of their culture. Specifically, many participants cited home cooked meals prepared by mothers. This matters because students connect their identities and memories with Hispanic culture and traditions with eating home cooked food, "I miss the Hispanic culture and atmosphere from back home. I'm from South Texas and it's basically over 90% Hispanic and so all my life I've been around Hispanic people, food, music, values, etc. I miss being with people from the background with the same values." Although students embrace the different cultures at the university they have to adapt to a new cultural environment. Many students join Hispanic student organizations to find and form community with other Hispanic students to overcome these unique challenges they face in their college experience.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research on persistence indicates that student engagement is key to overall achievement in college (Kahn 2014). Participation in extracurricular organizations, such as HSOs, is a form of social student engagement (Kahu 2013, and Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002). This study explored the socio-cultural characteristics that are related to other forms of student engagement for HSO members.

Involvement in extracurricular organizations is particularly important for students whose culture values interdependence, sense of community, and family over individual success (Delgado-Romero and Hernandez 2002). My findings matched Delgado-Romero and Hernandez's (2002) observation, and revealed that Hispanic students view participation in HSOs as a proxy for a family/community unit. For this sample, the family and community was an overarching theme that intersected with each form of student engagement and appeared in each analysis of open-ended questions. These findings support the idea that Hispanic students draw aspirational capital from familial and community bonds (Ceja 2004). Despite the fact that this sample consisted largely of first generation college students (73.2%), parents were cited as sources of encouragement to remain at the university. These findings add to a growing body of literature on the impact family has on decisions to attend college. For example, Cejda, Casparis, and Rhodes (2002) found that non-college educated family members were major influences on Hispanic student's decisions to attend college. In this study non-college educated parents were cited as influential on persistence in college. Many students framed overcoming barriers as a source of growth, and welcomed that challenged in order to graduate and make their parents, families, and friends proud. This supports Torres and Solberg's

(2001) findings that family support is strongly associated with self-efficacy and helpful in viewing barriers as challenges instead of threats. Given that, it was not surprising that proximity to home was also a reason to remain at that particular university. This multifaceted phenomena concerning the importance of family and community was further illustrated in the very emotional responses to the question "What do you miss from home?" in which respondents viewed being away from their mother and father as difficult. Many participants compared their support system at home to the minimal support system at their university. Given that 61.7% of this sample came from a home structure with both parents living at home the responses explaining that parental connection as something they missed most about home is not surprising.

Many students reported that the relationships formed within their student organizations countered homesickness and filled the need for a sense of family away from home. This supports the CCW idea that these networks are valuable to helping Hispanic students develop culturally based college survival skills (Luna and Martinez 2012). Researchers have found that Hispanic students at HSIs request more culturally related events (Median and Posadas 2012). HSO's provided a means to celebrate and appreciate the Hispanic culture while tapping into linguistic, social, and resistance capital. Overall, non-transfer students had a more difficult time obtaining navigational capital. However, they were especially open about the benefits they drew from their HSO community.

Based on student responses it is clear that these communities of HSOs facilitated the transference of cultural, social, aspirational and more importantly some forms navigational capital by facilitating friendship and support networks that shared resources.

However, although the majority of participants explained that their involvement in the HSO was extremely beneficial they also elaborated on the need for more institutional support and persistent support networks throughout participant's college experiences.

When considering the qualitative and quantitative findings together we can see that students' responses are filled with aspirational capital and high hopes for achieving success in the form of graduation. However, the findings illustrate that the majority of respondents do not have access to important resources necessary to facilitate further student engagement such as mentors, awareness of cultural courses, scholarships, a sense of community, and other forms of navigational and social capital. Overall, involvement in HSOs appeared to only somewhat counter these disparities because other needs expressed by participants cannot be easily met through interactions with peers. To their social and capital detriment, participants appeared to be less able to access resources related to academic development, career preparation, and professional development through their involvement in HSOs.

Support services should be aware of the socio-cultural characteristics related to student engagement. The open ended responses indicated that one form of navigational capital students draw from their HSOs are information on opportunities such as leadership development outside their HSO. Although the majority of students were aware of leadership development opportunities outside their HSO those who had mentors were more likely to have awareness. Taken together these findings suggest that mentorship further helps the transference of navigational capital. This is interesting because overall, the majority of students in this dataset reporting not being involved in a mentorship relationship. Actually, only 23% of the sample had a mentor.

Mentorship was more likely to yield students aware of leadership opportunities outside of their HSO. In terms of actual involvement in leadership programs significant differences among mentees and non-mentees were also found. Interestingly, more than half of (53.1%) participants had not been involved with any leadership programs at their university. Students who had mentors were more likely to be involved in a leadership activity (61.7%). A plethora of literature has emphasized the importance of mentorship for marginalized student populations, particularly mentorship from faculty. Furthermore, the qualitative findings showed students desired mentorship, professional development, and career preparation programs. This and the chi-square findings concerning mentorship further emphasize the need for institutional mentorship to help students obtain the social and navigational capital outside their HSO. Another prevalent need that could not be met by peer-to-peer capital from HSOs was financial support. The majority of students in this study were employed, reported trouble balancing school and work, and requested more opportunities to earn money. A significant difference was found between non-transfer and transfer students in terms of scholarship recipient status. Non-transfer students were less likely to have received a scholarship from their institution.

Beyond mentorship and financial resources, students reported that the faculty and staff affiliate organization could facilitate an avenue for the celebration of the Hispanic culture. This is interesting because the majority of students (56%) reported that they were unaware of courses focused on Hispanic/Latino(a) history or culture. Interestingly, a chi square showed that transfer students (55%) reported awareness of these courses more than non-transfer (39%) students. Thus, in this aspect they are more engaged than non-transfer students. This finding is interesting because the qualitative findings largely show

that transfer students had difficulties navigating university life in general and accessing programs and resources. More research is needed to explore the subgroup of transfer students.

Despite a long list of needs and barriers, participants had much to say about reasons they remain at the university. Hispanic students often face challenges with sense of belonging or feeling attached to their university (Reid and Radhakrishnan 2003). Campus climate perceptions have been found be associated with sense of belonging and student engagement (Hurtado and Carter 1997). While much of the literature on campus climate indicates that Hispanics often view their campus climate negatively the students in this study reported many positive perceptions of their campus climate. While some research on HSIs asserts that Hispanics in these institutions report largely negative experiences an overwhelming majority of students who took the HSSCA reported that the diversity and warmness of faculty, staff, and peers, encouraged to remain at their university.

This sample of students both appreciated diversity and embraced their own cultural background. The importance of connecting with other students from similar cultural backgrounds was an extremely prevalent theme among the open-ended responses. The qualitative findings somewhat counter the quantitative results which showed the majority of students (56%) surveyed were not aware of courses related to Hispanic culture. However, most students (58%) had participated in cultural events.

The majority of the students (69.7%) were bilingual or fluent in Spanish. Several scholars have indicated that the ability to speak Spanish is beneficial for Hispanic students in education. For example, Arbona and Nora (2004) found that students whose

first language was Spanish were more likely to attend college. Also, in her work on the Community Cultural Wealth framework, Yosso (2005), explained how linguistic capital recognizes communicating in more than one language as an asset. Moreover, that bilingualism and fluency in Spanish for a college student may serve as a cross-cultural skill students use to disseminate information to each other for resources. However, the Chi Square tests showed that students who were bilingual were less likely to participate in cultural events and less likely to be aware of leadership development outside of their student organization. Deeper analyses is necessary in order to understand the complexity between language spoken and student engagement.

This study provided preliminary support for much of what is already known concerning the ways Hispanic students adapt to the university setting and learn to navigate their higher education experience. However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the association student characteristics and social engagement is more clearly understood. Nevertheless, the findings collaborate the notion that minority populations possess and transfer unique forms of non-dominant, cultural capital. This study emphasized that despite rich and useful sources of aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital found within the communities of family and friends "back home" and HSOs many barriers and needs are present. Many of the students explained they were able to ultimately access necessary resources to successfully navigate college, but also elaborated on the challenges encountered along the way with frustration and a sense of regret. Students suggested that these needs can be alleviated with mentorship and other forms of institutional support. Specifically, student request for mentors and mentorship was related to social engagement in the form of awareness and

involvement in leadership activities. However it is troublesome that the majority of participants (74.8%) did not have a mentor. Thus, this should be something HSIs take into consideration when creating resources for Hispanics.

The experiences of Hispanics in higher education is complicated by the fact that Hispanic students hold high aspirational capital and optimism while simultaneously plagued with barriers and unmet needs. This paradox is illustrated in data that show young Latinos are optimistic but also face serious disparities such as higher drop out and poverty rates than non-Latinos (Pew 2009). Support services staff at universities must be aware of this paradox explained in the Pew Research Center's 2009 report: "when it comes to self-identity, most straddle two worlds". When asked what the affiliate group could do to improve Hispanic student experiences at the university, respondents provided suggestions and details on the barriers they had encountered. Interestingly, within those very responses, many of those students added that they were hopeful that the university had available resources and eventually they would find a way to tap into them. However, the quantitative findings suggest that many of the students in this sample had yet to tap into several forms of student engagement. This leads me to conclude that providing necessary and culturally responsive support for Hispanic college students continues to be a formidable challenge for universities throughout the United States. Hispanic Serving Institutions are further being challenged to think critically on what it means to truly be a Hispanic *Serving* Institution versus merely being a Hispanic *Enrolling* University and information about the needs of Hispanic students is necessary. Awareness of the strengths students draw from HSOs can be helpful in meeting those needs. Clearly HSOs are an avenue for the transference of helpful non-dominant forms of capital. However, more

attention should be placed in providing students with institutional support in order to meet academic, financial, and cultural needs.

Limitations

There are potential limitations that must be considered. The key limitations in this study involve concerns with causality, the population surveyed, and data size. First, measuring the association between student characteristics and student engagement variable does not permit causal inference. Nevertheless, by establishing a relationship between variables, the quantitative analysis is an exploratory step in research concerning Hispanic university students. Those surveyed were students in higher education who had access to the community of a student organization and peers. Participants in this study reflect a group of students who simultaneously experience the benefits of the social capital gained through participation in university programming aimed at student organizations and the marginalization of being a minority student. This is a limitation because although many Hispanic students experience oppression and injustice at a university these participants ability to gain access to a student organization dedicated to embracing the Hispanic culture provides resources that most Hispanic students do not have. The sampled of university students surveyed was a small convenient sample. However, the study does validate previous research on the importance of cultural and social capital on navigating college. Moreover, the findings provide important suggestions for further research concerning Hispanics in higher education.

Implications for Research

While I acknowledge the limitations of small non-representative sample size, and use of solely bivariate analysis, I also believe the findings of this thesis justify additional examination. Further research is necessary to explore what additional demographic characteristics are associated with student engagement. The questions used to determine student engagement were limited to social engagement. Future research should attempt to include other dimensions of student engagement. Additionally, institutional data could be requested from institution in order to increase the richness of the demographic data related to socioeconomic status, grade point average, academic standing, etc. Institutional characteristics and data may helper in further explaining findings concerning student engagement. Also, questions concerning sexual orientation and gender identification would help capture the experiences of the LGBTQI community, an under studied group within the Hispanic population.

Since I used an existing data set I was restricted to pre-existing variables for analysis. A diverse set of questions and scales can be used to provide a way to conduct more robust statistical analyses. Likewise, the qualitative portion could be enhanced with follow up focus groups and in-depth interviews to follow up on student's responses or ask for clarification. In terms of the sample studied, instead of a single cross sectional study, a longitudinal study with a representative sample of the Hispanic student population with the institution is recommended. This would also add to the literature concerned with the evolution of HSIs and also strengthen generalizability of the study. Lastly, further research should be conducted with students of other races/ethnicities. This would allow for comparison across groups and would add to the overall literature concerning

community cultural wealth. The suggestions provided would allow for a more detailed

interpretation of data and greater understanding of the experiences of Hispanic students at

an HSI.

APPENDIX SECTION

Hispanic Student Assessment Questions Used for Analysis

- What is your sex/gender? Female / Male

- Are you a transfer student? Yes / No

- Are you bilingual or fluent in Spanish? Yes / No

- Do any of your parents have at least a four year college degree? Yes / No

- Is mentorship important to you? Yes: I have a mentor / Yes: I do not have a mentor / or No: I have a mentor / No: I am not interested in having a mentor

- Have you been involved with any leadership programs at [Institution]? Yes / No.

- Have you participated in any cultural events at Texas State? Yes / No

- Are you aware of leadership development opportunities outside of your organization at [University/Institution]? Yes / No

- Are you aware of courses that focus on Hispanic/Latino (a) history or culture at [University/Institution]? Yes /No

- Have you received any scholarships from Texas State? Yes / No

- What encourages you to remain at [institution]?

- What are the biggest obstacles you have encountered at [institution]? (Please Describe)

- What else can [this organization] do to enhance your student experience?

- What do you miss from home?

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