Strategies for Evaluating and Improving Latino Youth Development Programs

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Abstract

Latino students in the United States are often portrayed in a negative sense: high drop-out rates, low postsecondary education rates, and high crime rates, to name a few. Youth development programs give Latino students an opportunity to build their strengths and leadership skills to give them the motivation they need to overcome such obstacles in their lives. The purpose of this Applied Research Project is threefold. First, it describes the model of a Latino Youth Development Program through a review of literature. Next, it assesses the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program using practical ideal type components. Finally, the project provides recommendations based on data collected using focused interviews.

Research on literature pertaining to positive youth development programs shows three major components of what programs should offer to students. The practical ideal model of a Latino youth development program includes providing a sound program structure, individual development for the student, and adult interaction.

Results show that the National Hispanic Institute (NHI) provides students with a sound program structure. NHI also provides students with many opportunities to collaborate with the organization as creators of activities and curriculum for the young leaders program, which in turn seems to strengthen their resiliency and leadership abilities. Based on the model, NHI is in need of improvement in the area of adult interaction. Although there are many opportunities to lead within the organization, students are not given adequate time with their parents, with adult mentors, or even with adults in their communities.

About the Author

Ashley Rendon is a native of Round Rock, Texas and graduated from Stony Point High School in 2004. She moved to Chicago, Illinois and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from DePaul University in 2007. While at DePaul, she was a member of Alpha Omicron Pi, an international women's fraternity. After graduation, Ashley moved back to Texas, where she is currently completing her Master of Public Administration degree at Texas State University with a concentration in Legal and Judicial Administration. She currently works for the State Pension Review Board as a Research Specialist. She is married and has a new baby girl, Daphne. Ashley can be reached by e-mail at ashley.n.rendon@gmail.com.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Latino students–now over 18% of the total student population in the United States—
experience lower test scores, higher dropout rates, and attain a lower percent of postsecondary
education than their peers (Villalba 2007 and Bloomberg et al. 2003, S45). Statistics show that as
Latino children make up the fastest growing percentage of students in the classrooms, only
75.5% of Latino high school seniors completed high school in 2008. This is compared to 94.2%
of White students and 86.9% of Black students (childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp). In
addition to lower educational aspirations, Latino students continue to have more risk factors such
as alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual activity, when compared to their peers (Bloomberg et al.
2003, S47).

Youth programs have been developed to prevent risk factors and to counteract low
educational achievement. Although there are many programs currently in existence, Latino
students are often left behind, as they do not often have the opportunity to identify with a
program and have enough time to be positively affected. With a realization that there are
programs available to most students, "there is a need for more research to develop culturally-
sensitive approaches" in order to serve Latino students in particular (Borden et al. 2006, 188).

Youth Programs: From Deficits to Assets

Youth programs developed first from psychological studies that focused on childhood as
a time "fraught with hazards," when children with potential problems needed to get their lives in
order before the problems became worse later in life (Damon 2004, 14). Youth were seen as
burdens to adults and were often portrayed in the media as such. This negative outlook on youth

led to federally funded youth programs in the 1950s and 1960s that focused on preventing negative student behaviors and addressed student "deficits," or weaknesses (Catalano et al. 2004, 99).

A rise in student problems led to the departure from intervention-type programs to prevention programs, "with an emphasis on supporting youth before problem behaviors occurred" (Catalano et al. 2004, 99). These programs, often focused on problems such as drug use, pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, school failure, or delinquent behavior, were evaluated and changed according to their level of success in attaining a positive impact on youth (100). By the 1980s and 90s, practitioners, policy makers, and prevention scientists acknowledged that youth would benefit more from a focus on promoting development of a student rather than preventing or intervening on negative aspects of childhood (Catalano et al. 2004, 99).

As a result of these findings, new programs were developed that focused on student "assets" rather than student "deficits" (Catalano et al. 2004, 101). Researchers such as Norman Garmezy found that children were not as vulnerable as they were thought to be in the past. Garmezy and other researchers such as Emily Werner and Bonnie Benard found that some students were able to overcome adversity in their lives, thus "flourishing in spite of every prediction to the contrary" (Damon 2003, 16). The concept of resiliency became the basis on which youth programs were able to build student assets.

Asset-based youth development programs focus on developing skills that students already possess. According to Damon, "the positive youth development approach aims at understanding, educating, and engaging children in productive activities rather than at correcting, curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies or so-called disabilities" (Damon 2004, 15).

One non-profit organization that has its main focus on asset-based youth development is the Search Institute, located in Minnesota and founded in 1958. A model of student assets has been created by the Search Institute, which describes 40 developmental assets for youth (Benson et al. 1998, 143). The model includes 20 "external" assets and 20 "internal" assets. External assets refer to students' growth experienced through guidance from adult interaction. Internal assets are skills and talents that the students possess and can develop later throughout their lives (Benson et al. 1998, 143). The Search Institute has conducted extensive research on youth, with a mission "to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities" (www.search-institute.org/about). The Institute also provides resources to those interested in student development.

Rodriguez and Morrobel (2004) argue that there is not enough research on Latino youth development, therefore the programs that are most often available to Latino youth are primarily intervention-type and risk-based programs based on the assumption that all Latino children face naturally-occurring or preexisting barriers in their lives (108). They found that Latino youth, to a greater extent to their peers, are influenced by external factors such as family, extended family, and other community members, rather than internal factors. This shapes their ethnic identity (111). Rodriguez and Morrobel discuss the ability to "preempt the need" for risk-based programs by creating more asset-based programs for Latino youth.

This applied research project aims to create an asset-based program for Latino students. It will use the National Hispanic Institute as a case study in order to compare its freshman Great Debate program to the model developed in this study.

National Hispanic Institute

The National Hispanic Institute (NHI) is a non-profit organization that promotes positive

youth development in the Latino community by providing Latino youth with the opportunity to participate in programs to develop their leadership skills. NHI was established in 1979 and maintains its home base in Maxwell, Texas. NHI's reach is not only national, but also provides programs abroad, including programs in Puerto Rico and Argentina. According to the website www.NHI-net.org, "[NHI's] mission and purpose is to engage Latino high school youth in critical learning experiences that further their capacities in self inquiry and introspection" (www.nhi-net.org/pages/mission).

In order for students to be able to participate in the NHI programs, they must have at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale, and must submit an application (www.nhi-net.org/pages/greatdebate.aspx). NHI offers unique programs that begin with admitting high achieving Latino students. The Institute feels that this approach is not often used, thus it reaches out to a different subset of students than other programs (Interview with executive staff member, March 11, 2011). Tuition is required for each program, which pays for room and board at the colleges where the programs are held. Students often participate in fundraising activities with their region in order to help pay the tuition for their program.

NHI provides three main programs which are offered throughout a student's high school years. The freshman program is called the "Great Debate," and is a program that promotes communication skills. There are currently seven sites for the Great Debate, which are currently hosted in Texas, Indiana, Illinois, and Pennsylvania (www.nhi-net.org/pages/greatdebate.aspx). According to an executive staff member, approximately 1100 students participated in the program in each of the last five years. This number has decreased looking further back in the programs history, but still serves a substantial amount of students throughout the nation.

This program gives students a choice of four debate events to participate in:

extemporaneous speaking, mock trial, cross examination, and oratory (http://nhi-net.org/documents/ylc.pdf). Students are trained during the school year for this event until the beginning of summer. The actual Great Debate event takes place in the summer, with four days of regional competitions. There are also Great Debate programs that are not associated with a region, but students are trained and compete all within six days. Each type of Great Debate program is held on a college campus. The topics of each of the events concern the Latino community, for example, the Latino Civil Rights Movement, or Latino Philosophers. With these topics, students learn about their culture and history, while also learning to defend their topic, which builds self-confidence. The students who do not get to the final rounds, known as the sweet 16, are given another opportunity to compete, but as an individual in "adjudication."

In adjudication, student participants are given a question that has to do with a problem in the Latino community and they have little preparation time before answering the question. Students compete against all other students who did not move on to the final sweet 16 rounds, and they are technically competing on an individual level rather than with their region—although they still have support from their region (Interview with executive staff member, March 11, 2011).

Those who are able to get to the last and final round of the debates—places 1 and 2—compete on a stage in front of all of the regions/students. This is a time for the "best of the best" to showcase their debate skills and knowledge of issues in the Latino community. Whether they win or lose, the finalists are asked to compete again, but this time against all other finalists from the other 6 Great Debate programs around the nation, at an event called Celebración (http://nhi-net.org/documents/ylc.pdf).

The Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session (LDZ) is a mock legislative session

that promotes "critical thinking, collaboration, and the ability to influence outcomes" for high school sophomores (www.nhi-net.org). The average retention rate of students "crossing over" or completing the freshman program and moving to the LDZ program the next year ranges from about 20-30% in different regions (Interview with volunteer staff member, March 15, 2011). In the LDZ program, students are on their own to figure out proper legislative rules and procedures in order to pass "bills" pertaining to current issues facing the Latino community. This program lasts for a week and is held at various college campuses across the nation, with one LDZ held in Panama.

The Collegiate World Series (CWS) focuses on the college admission process and the transition from high school to college. Exercises focus on writing and communication skills that students need in order to improve their scores on college admissions tests and interviews. This helps with the transition from high school to college (http://nhi-net.org/pages/collegiateworldseries.aspx).

As these programs are offered throughout the summer months of each year, students are also able to participate regionally in smaller community service and skill-building activities prior to the annual programs. With the Great Debate program, students are asked to be a part of a "region" where they meet for activities and are able to participate on a smaller scale. Students are also given the opportunity to return (become a "coach") after each program to help run programs that they have participated in (Interview with volunteer staff member, March 15, 2011).

NHI also provides a "College Register" which is a list of colleges and universities that are associated with the Institute. The Register was created in 1989 to "increase numbers of students into member institutions and [works] towards developing a new reservoir of Latino leaders to make an impact in the US Latino community" (www.nhicr.org). NHI boasts a 98%

rate of college enrollment by participants, with 90% of those students completing their undergraduate degree in less than five years. More than 67% of those college graduates pursue graduate and post-graduate degrees (www.nhicr.org). According to an executive staff member in the National office, the retention of students attending the freshman program and returning the next year to coach is high, as programs rely on those alumni to run programs they have participated in. Each year hundreds of volunteers are mobilized from its alumni to staff the high school programs.

With the combination of the programs and the college register, the National Hispanic Institute pursues its mission to develop young high achieving, high ability Latino students in order to better the future of the Latino community.

Research Purpose

There are fewer Latino students than non-minority students involved in activities at school or community-based programs (Bloomberg et al. 2003, S45), so there is a need for more programs created for Latino youth that focus on developing the students' assets. The purpose of this research is to develop a practical ideal model for a youth development program for high school Latino students and gauge the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program against this model.

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides background information on positive youth development programs and the National Hispanic Institute. It also outlines the research purpose for the study. Chapter two provides a conceptual framework which is used to develop a practical ideal model for a Latino youth development program. The model consists of three practical ideal categories: program structure, individual development, and adult interaction. Chapter three outlines the

methodology used to collect data from NHI. The research method used in this study is a case

study which utilizes interviews to collect data in order to gauge the effectiveness of the Great

Debate program. Chapter four presents research results from the interviews. Chapter five

provides recommendations and conclusions.

Literature Review

Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature regarding positive youth development programs and the components that construct non-profit youth development programs. From this review, ideal type categories within positive youth development programs are described.

Introduction

Youth development programs in recent years have shifted their approach of developing youth from a prevention or risk-based focus to positive youth development, or asset-based programs (Catalano et al. 2004). Asset-based programs "promote the variety of developmental competencies that young people need to become productive, contributing members of society" (Durlak et al. 2007, 270). Latino students in the United States face many obstacles throughout their school career that can be overcome with the help of their communities as well as through a program that caters specifically to building young Latino leaders. The purpose of this research is to develop a practical ideal model for a youth development program for high school Latino students. A youth development program that focuses on creating a sound program structure, enhances individual development, and encourages positive adult interaction will allow Latino students the opportunity to build their potential as leaders of the community.

Program Structure

A Latino youth development program should first focus on the program's structure in order to establish program intensity, breadth, and duration. Program structure refers to the time devoted to the activities offered within the program. The amount of time allotted to each activity,

as well as the number of activities and amount of time allowed for participation within programs in general have been found to have various effects on students. A properly structured program allows students to have a greater opportunity to grow personally. Structured programs also work as possible prevention to behaviors that are considered unfavorable, such as poor school attendance or drug use (Busseri and Rose-Krasnor 2009). Structured youth development programs should pay high attention to the intensity, breadth, and duration of the activities offered within the program because these three factors have been shown to have positive effects on students when implemented properly.

Intensity

A youth development program is most effective if it gets and keeps the students' attention. Intensity is the amount of time a student puts into participating in a program during the time the program is offered (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard 2005, 97). A student who spends much of his time involved in an activity shows that his intensity level is greater than a student who only attends the same activity for a very small amount of time. Busseri and Rose-Krasnor (2009) have found that the more time a student spends within a program, the more commitment he develops. This is important because the time a student puts into a program enables him to develop his skills in an activity, which may become an essential part of his self-identity (Busseri and Rose-Krasnor 2009). Students who have higher levels of intensity have a greater amount of positive outcomes compared to students who have shown lower levels intensity (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard 2005). Higher intensity in a program is also "linked to less time in either unsupervised risky activities or unproductive activities, both of which have been linked to less positive developmental outcomes during adolescence" (Fredricks and Eccles 2006, 143). However, students with the highest amounts of intensity do not always benefit the most from

extra-curricular programs. Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard (2005) point out that some research

suggests that a moderate level of intensity is best. This may suggest that adolescents who are

heavily involved in one extracurricular activity (for example, a sports team) are constrained from

pursuing other beneficial activities (98). Moderate levels of intensity are subjective to the point

that one must gauge a student's ability to participate in activities as so not to hinder him in

another activity. Latino youth development programs that offer activities many times throughout

the week give students the opportunity to participate more, thus adding to their intensity and

interest within the program.

Breadth

Along with adding activities throughout the week or month to gain students' interest in

the program, there should also be a range of different types of activities to stimulate a student's

talents or skills. A program's breadth refers to "the range of programs and activities in which

youth participate" (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard 2005, 100). A student could choose to

participate in a wide variety of organizations in order to achieve a wider breadth, or he can

become involved in one organization that provides many different programs and activities to

achieve the same kind of breadth (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard 2005).

A program's breadth is beneficial to students because they are given a greater opportunity

to utilize different skills and build upon each of them. This adds to the "scaffolding" that youth

build in order to grow and achieve future goals (Busseri and Rose-Krasnor 2009, 913). Like

intensity, research has shown that students who participate in a higher amount of diverse

activities are more likely to achieve their goals through positive youth development (Busseri and

Rose-Krasnor 2009). The students' investment of time allows them to show their commitment,

while at the same time allows them to build skills as they are participating in many types of

activities utilizing a variety of skills within their program.

It is important for a Latino youth development program to seek out many different objectives—thus adding to the program's breadth—in order to allow children to have positive outcomes after attending a program or activity offered by a program. "Positive youth development programs are approaches that seek to achieve one or more objectives" (Catalano, et al. 2004, 101). Establishing objectives fosters and promotes youth development by calling to a strength that a student maintains. Once a program establishes objectives to promote and foster students' skills and competencies, building activities around them is not difficult. Of their "15 youth constructs," Catalano et al. (2004) found that "all of the effective programs [in their study] addressed a minimum of five positive youth constructs" (115). This means that it is not enough to focus on one or two objectives. In order to be effective, programs must focus their activities on several objectives in order to allow their student participants to develop skills and confidence.

Duration

A program must also focus on gaining commitment from students who may wish to stay in the program for long periods of time by offering long-term programs. "The length of participation over time (usually measured in years)" is duration (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard 2005, 99). The duration of a program differs from intensity in that intensity measures how often a student may participate in a program whereas to the program's total length is the duration. Although a student may show a higher level of intensity within a program and participate in many activities within a month of a program, he might not participate for the full duration of the program. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) have found that "consistent participation in high-quality school and community-based programs is likely to be associated with more favorable developmental outcomes than occasional involvement" (142). This is, again, because a student

devotes more of his time to the program and in doing so, forms a stronger bond with the program and its aspects. Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard (2005) also feel that a program's duration helps a student to benefit from a program more than those who do not attend as long. Youth development programs should give students the opportunity to participate in activities throughout the students' high school years or even after, which means creating activities that last for longer periods of time. Longer programs and activities can build students' dependence on the program to support them throughout those years when they are looking for such support.

When looking at the different ways to structure a program, youth development programs should notice that, while each measure—intensity, breadth, and duration—does well to build a student's confidence in and devotion to a program, the combination of those measures benefits a student even more. Busseri and Rose-Krasnor (2009) point out that "whereas breadth of [structured activity involvement] may be particularly salient during the early adolescent years, the interplay between breadth and intensity of [structured activity involvement] may be more significant towards the end of the adolescent period and during the transition to adulthood" (913). Here, the authors propose to increase the amount of activities (breadth) in order to achieve higher activity attendance (intensity). Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard (2005) take this idea one step further. They found that the students who are given the opportunity to participate in more activities are able to attend more often, and also want to stay involved in the program for a longer period of time (Fiester, Simpkins, and Bouffard, 2005). It is important for a program to contain these three measures of a program's structure in order to create an environment that allows a student to become involved fully within the activities offered, yet not to disrupt other academic or social programs in which a student wishes to participate.

Individual Development

The focus of the Latino youth development program is centered on the students who participate in activities. Once a structure has been formed for programs, the staff should focus on the development of the student participants. Borden et al. found that Latino youth "identified personal development as one of the primary factors that influenced their decision to participate in youth programs" (2006, 199). Focusing on resiliency, supporting growth in the student's leadership abilities, and giving students opportunities to collaborate with the organization allows a Latino youth development program to aid in the development of its participants as well as the program itself.

Resiliency

Youth development programs now focus on students' assets rather than their deficits. One of the primary focuses of a youth development program should be a student's resilience. Resiliency is described as "the ability of individuals to withstand the stressors of life and the challenges to their healthy development" (Perkins, Borden, and Villarruel 2001, 44). A youth development program can play a large role in becoming a support system for students who need help to overcome challenges in their lives. Rather than using prevention models to pinpoint risk factors and focus on what a student does not have, programs can become aware of a student's resilience to overcome challenges in order to build a platform upon which he can build. Focusing on resiliency should be an important factor for Latino youth development programs when considering what kind of situation their student participants can be experiencing in their lives at the moment (Villalba 2007). Although many programs steer clear of focusing on risks or deficits that students may retain, focusing on the concept of resiliency allows a program to provide students with the knowledge and tools to overcome any obstacles that may be put in front of

them throughout life. By giving the student the tools as well as an opportunity to overcome their life's challenges, a program can act as a support system and help those children who need it. This can allow the program to become the facilitator to a student's growth as a person and as a leader.

Leadership

Leadership is a major part of a youth development program. Students who are interested in becoming leaders join youth programs in order to build upon the skills they possess.

MacNeil and McClean (2006) suggest that students are not often given the opportunities to actually become leaders now; rather, they are given skills and goals to set in order to become leaders in the future. The problem that MacNeil and McClean see is that students are not given actual opportunities to be put into leadership situations. It is important for Latino youth development programs to focus on current leadership roles for Latino students. MacNeil and McClean suggest that programs such as those that encourage civic engagement or activism allow children to emerge and build competencies in order to establish themselves and their ideologies (2006, 100). Once the students are able to utilize their skills in a civic activity or to become activists, they can also collaborate with the program.

Collaboration

Student collaboration with the program allows the student to take on a more active leadership role while becoming a major asset within the youth development program and within the community. Perkins, Borden, and Villarruel (2003) stated that "understanding community youth development means promoting factors that provide all youth, regardless of their level of risk, with the critical elements needed for successful development, while concurrently engaging them as full community partners" (45). By allowing the students to become engaged in the program as designers and implementers, both the program as well as the students benefit from

the experience; since the program is given new innovative ideas and the students are able to actively develop their sense of independence and leadership through creating the programs and activities. Perkins, Borden, and Villarruel (2003) add that youth should not only be involved in the program planning stages, but also the beginning, middle, end, and evaluation of programs so that they can have the entire experience of what it takes to truly be involved within an program. This experience will further support them in the future either professionally or within their community.

A youth development program that shows its student participants that they are able to build resilience to challenges, expand their leadership skills, and effectively collaborate with and contribute to the program will effectively develop the student participants in order to move toward achieving the goals and mission that the program set out in the beginning.

Adult Interaction

Although much rests on the behaviors and attitudes of the student participants, adult participation and support is also essential in the development of potential leaders. Larson (2006) points out that adults, "as parents, teachers, policy makers, and mentors…[need to] support and enable youth to control and motivate themselves—to help them mobilize their often-dormant potentials for growth" (678). "Adults" refers to the people within student's lives that are influential to those students. Here, parents and guardians, non-peer mentors, and adults within the community are especially important actors within a student's life because they promote a positive development and provide a role model for a student to look up to. Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins (2005) found that "adult investment in youth not only promotes individual adolescent development, but also ensures the continuation of a healthy civil society" (42). Larson also suggests that "adults are most effective when they support the positive potentials within young

people" (2006, 677). In an ideal program for Latino youth development, adult interaction should be found in the form of parent or guardian involvement, a non-parent mentor, and a community adult in order for the student and the program to grow and succeed.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

Parental and familial involvement is central in the Latino community (Villalba 2007). As parents are seen as central figures in Latino students' lives, it only makes sense that a parent should also be involved in the Latino youth development program. Flores and Obasi (2005) found that students' advancement throughout school and into college can be facilitated through what their parents' expectations are and the activities that keep the parents involved with their student's daily activities. A parent's involvement helps students to aspire to build their own skills and overcome their own challenges. In their study, Flores and Obasi (2005) found that "both parental involvement and parents' modeling through their own educational attainment [contributed] to Mexican-American students' academic achievement" (148).

Parental involvement allows students to spend even more time with them and builds parents' abilities to model good behavior for their children. Parents in the Mexican-American community tend to enhance their children's academic and career development when they are supportive, encouraging, and actively involved (Flores and Obasi 2005, 149). In getting the parents or guardians involved within the program, it gives the parents a tool to be prepared to answer any types of questions that their students may have about challenges they are facing within the program or within their lives. The parents can utilize this tool and move toward a mentor-type relationship with their child.

Adult Mentor

Flores and Obasi (2005) describe a mentor as "a person who provides advice or models a

particular behavior that is valuable to another person" (147). Although a mentor can be any type of person, student or an adult, here the focus is on an adult mentor. An adult mentor is usually employed and can provide "career guidance, professional development, building a professional network, psychosocial support, increasing a sense of one's identity, and economic rewards" (Flores and Obasi 2005, 147). A student who is looking to develop himself is able to ask questions to the adult mentor and feel as if he is getting the right answers in order to better himself.

Flores and Obasi (2005) have also pointed out that "research has suggested that racial and gender similarities between the mentor and mentee can lead to favorable outcomes" (147). In the case of the Latino youth development program, it is important that students are able to connect with an adult mentor that can relate to them, and the best way to do this is to ensure that the students are given the opportunity to have a mentor-mentee relationship with an adult who is also Latino. Once this opportunity is provided by the Latino youth development program, it allows for a greater reliance of the student on the program to provide for guidance and support. Mentors in the Latino youth development program can also provide networking opportunities that can lead to connections with community adults.

Community Adult

A community adult is a person outside the family, who is not employed by the program, and who acts as a guide to show students what they can do when they set their minds to something and follow through. A community adult differs from a mentor because he may only meet a youth once in a particular situation.

Most children do not have connections with community adults, meaning that the students are unable to establish a connection by themselves and thus are unable to utilize a possible

valuable resource (Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins 2005). Community adults, or an adult outside the family, benefits a student because they are able to "[provide youth] with information, assistance, exposure to adult worlds, support, and encouragement" (Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins 2005, 50).

For example, the adults who work in the field that the students aspire to work are able to answer questions about the profession and give insight as to what everyday life is like and the challenges that they faced as children and as adults. By providing students with these sorts of opportunities, a Latino youth development program will be able to allow students to be more prepared for what they want to do in the future. The interaction with a community adult during college tours or potential places of employment can also open the door to various networks today that will be able to benefit students in the future and help them to be more prepared.

Conceptual Framework

The research question asks how close the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program is to an ideal model of Latino youth development program? Shields points out that a conceptual framework stems from problems and promotes solutions to those problems (Shields 1998, 209). Shields and Tajalli state that the practical ideal type "[gauges] the efficacy of program processes" by "[developing] criteria for this judgment and then [collecting] empirical evidence to contrast the reality of the program against the criteria" (Shields and Tajalli 2006, 26). Table 1 shows the conceptual framework as it identifies three ideal type categories and the corresponding literature to support the criteria.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework Table

Practical Ideal Type Category	Supporting Literature
Program Structure • Intensity • Breadth • Duration	Busseri, Rose-Krasnor (2009); Fiester, Simpkins, Bouffard (2005); Fredricks and Eccles (2006); Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004)
Individual Development • Resiliency • Leadership • Collaboration	MacNeil and McClean (2006); Perkins, Borden, and Villarruel (2001); Villalba (2007); Borden, Perkins, Villaruel, Carleton-Hug, Stone, and Keith (2006)
Adult Interaction • Parent/Guardian Involvement • Mentor • Community Adult	Flores and Obasi (2005); Larson (2006); Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins (2005); Villalba (2007)

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided three ideal type categories for developing a model for a positive youth development program for high school Latino students. The Latino youth development program must provide a sound structure that allows for a wide range of activities and programs that are offered several times within a given period of time. The program must also be available for students to participate in programs throughout the entirety of their high school years, and ideally after.

Since a primary goal for most youth development programs is to develop youth into leaders, it is important for the program to provide opportunities and tools for students to overcome any obstacles or challenges they may face in their lives. This opens the doors to allow students to build leadership skills and become active leaders within their communities. With the program's support, students can become partners within the program, which benefits both the

students and the program. Adult interaction with student participants is also important for the practical ideal model of a Latino youth development program. Parent or guardian involvement with the program allows the family to build trust with both the student and program, building a stronger support for the student. The program should also provide and network with mentors and provide opportunities to engage with community adults, since students are often unable to seek out these individuals on their own.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter Purpose

This chapter describes the methodology used to determine the level of adherence of the National Hispanic Institute's (NHI's) freshman Great Debate program to the practical ideal model of a Latino youth development program. This chapter also describes the research method and operationalizes practical ideal type elements in order to collect data. The unit of analysis is NHI and the research method is a case study. NHI staff members at different levels of involvement with students are interviewed in order to compare perceptions of the program's executive staff members to those staff members that work at the regional levels directly with participants. All of the staff members interviewed are given the same interview questions.

Research Method

The research method used for practical ideal type models is the case study. In this case, the NHI staff is interviewed in order to collect data to be measured. Yin points out that "interviews…are essential sources of case study information" (2009, 106). In utilizing the focused interview, perceptions are accessed in order to gain information to compare to the practical ideal model developed in this study. Interviews given to staff at different levels of engagement with student participants help to compare program director perceptions to community level staff members' actions and perceptions.

Babbie points out that a problem with qualitative interviews can occur through the way the researcher frames a question and how the questions are specifically worded (Babbie 2007, 306). He explains that biases can lie subtly within the words of a question, which can force a respondent to answer in a manner that he or she believes the researcher wants the question

answered. Another problem can occur when the respondent begins to get off track from the purpose of the question. Babbie explains that it is up to the researcher to keep on-track and make sure that the respondent stays within the realm of the topic that is being discussed (Babbie 2007, 306).

In this study, only interviews are used to collect data. Another effective technique that can be used to collect data within a case study is direct observation. Babbie explains that in these studies, having a researcher on-scene to observe activities himself is a great advantage (2007, 309). In this study, direct observation is not used because the Great Debate program does not begin to hold meetings until late spring of each year. This was too late in the year to allow the researcher to gather sufficient data.

The strengths of conducting qualitative research lie in the power to observe and record changes that take place over time. Using this kind of research also allows for greater measures of validity than survey and experimental measurements (Babbie 2007, 313). The objectivity of the researcher's perception makes for a less reliable measure, meaning that since others are not likely to have the same exact views as the researcher, he or she may not arrive at the same conclusions upon observing the same behaviors or even asking the same questions (314).

Focused Interviews

In this study, interviews are obtained through the use of telephone interviews as well as in-person interviews. Since NHI is spread throughout the United States, telephone interviews are used for those who are unable to travel for an in-person interview due to distance. This study involves only those executive staff, project administrators, and volunteers who are involved in the Texas Great Debates.

NHI has many different levels of staff, all of which provide different levels of interaction

with student participants. The different staff levels that will be used for this study are portrayed on the NHI website as follows:

The Maxwell office staff (executive staff) includes program directors and executive-level members who are responsible for gathering volunteers to run programs, as well as various other activities that happen at the national level (each office may have many other roles). For this study, one executive staff member was able to participate in an in-person interview. This staff member answered questions from the perspective of the national office of NHI.

Community project administrators are, in most cases, parents of participants and in some cases alumni. These individuals are involved at the regional level and concentrate mostly on the freshman program. Three project administrators were interviewed for this study. Project administrators are important to this study because they deal more directly with the program's structure and interact with the student participants at least once a week.

The last level of staff that is interviewed includes volunteers who range from parents of participants, past participants, and parents of past participants. Most often these volunteers are students who are in charge of creating the curriculum at the regional level, but they can also be older alumni who organize fundraisers and community service, or parent volunteers. Five individuals that fit under the category of volunteers are interviewed.

The operationalization table (Table 3.1) shows the three categories that use focused interviews. Interview questions are listed beside the indicator in each ideal type category. The questions are open-ended in order to gain insight into the creation of components of the NHI Great Debate program and compare those perceptions to the practical ideal model developed in this study.

Contacts were made with the program through its website contact page. From there, potential interviewees were found using the snowball technique of asking for referrals from other interviewees. Since NHI's programs are run primarily by volunteers who frequently change, it was difficult to obtain contact information for potential interviewees. The snowball technique enabled the researcher to utilize the interview to collect data as well as collect contact information for more interviews.

Table 3.1: Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

Ideal Type Categories	*Interview Question*
Program Structure	
Intensity	How often are programs offered during the school month? How often are programs offered during a non-school month? In your opinion, are programs offered often enough during the year?
Breadth	How many different types of activities can one student participate in during a school year? In your opinion, does NHI provide a wide enough variety of activities for students to participate?
Duration	How many years may students participate in NHI programs? In your opinion, does the average student participate enough in programs?

Ideal Type Categories	*Interview Question*
Individual Development	
Resiliency	How familiar are you with the concept of resiliency? Does your organization focus on student risk factors? In your opinion, does the concentration of risk factors take away from or add to the positive development of a student participant?
Leadership	Do student activities focus on building leadership skills? What kinds of activities or programs can students participate in to actively use leadership skills? How do these programs utilize and develop leadership skills? In your opinion, does students' participation in activist or civic activities help or hinder their leadership abilities?
Collaboration	Are students given the opportunity to build or create programs and activities for the organization? What role does the student play in developing new programs and activities for the organization? In your opinion, is student input important in deciding on different activities to offer?

Ideal Type Categories	Interview Question
Adult Interaction	
Parent/Guardian Involvement	How often are programs or activities planned for parents?
	What kind of programs are there for parents within the organization?
	In your opinion, is parent involvement in the program helpful or detrimental to student's development?
Mentor	Does the organization provide mentors for student participants?
	How often do students meet with mentors?
	In your opinion, are mentors effective role models for student participants?
Community Adult	How often are students taken on college visits to talk with administrators?
	How often are students taken to potential work places to talk with administrators?
	In your opinion, do students spend enough time participating in community service projects with community adults?

Human Subjects Protection

The research method in this study is a case study. Since interviews are used to gather data, human subjects must be considered. Subjects were made aware that participation in interviews was voluntary and that they could opt out of participation at any time. In addition, all identification of interview participants is kept confidential and all individual responses to questions are known only to the researcher. An application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and exemption was granted. Refer to Appendix A for exemption approval.

Chapter 4

Results

Chapter Purpose

This research project uses a case study methodology in order to gauge the effectiveness of the National Hispanic Institute's freshman Great Debate program against the practical ideal model of a Latino youth development program. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the NHI program based on the information obtained through interviews of NHI executive staff, project administrators, and volunteers. The interviews were based upon questions relating to program structure, individual development, and adult interaction.

The Latino youth development study overall indicates that the National Hispanic Institute has strong indicators of program structure and individual development. According to interviews of the different staff, adult interaction is not utilized enough by NHI.

Program Structure

Program structure is the first component of the Latino youth development program model. The model contains elements of program structure including program intensity, breadth, and duration. Interviews were used to find the program structure for NHI.

Focused Interview: Program Structure

Focused interviews were used to analyze whether NHI offered programs often enough, with a wide range of activities, and if the programs themselves were available for a long enough period of a student's life.

Intensity

Nine of the nine interviewees answered that students met for an activity or training event at least once a week for the Great Debate program. The Great Debate is the main focus of

various regions in the nation. Texas hosts a Great Debate where regions such as Austin, Rio Grande Valley, El Paso, Houston, and other regions in Texas meet to compete in debate events. During the time before the event, training sessions are held officially at least once a week. Other than these times, unofficial events can be created on the local level for other activities such as community service or social events.

The interviewees also said that during the non-school months, student participants continue to meet at least once a week for training, until the week of the Great Debate. The week prior to the event, students are asked to meet every day for full-day training sessions.

When asked if the programs were offered enough during the year, eight of the nine interviewees answered "yes". The general consensus was that the students are often involved in many other activities with school and other programs. They also felt that if NHI activities were offered more than they already are, students could feel too stressed to do well in one of those programs that they are committed to. One of the nine interviewees, a volunteer, answered "no, only because if they were offered enough, the region would have a full team. Programs are not reaching enough students right now."

Breadth

The interviewees were asked how many different types of activities a participant can participate in during a school year. Each type of staff answered that there is one main program for freshmen, but that other activities "are not very restrictive," and can be added throughout the year, such as community service. Although there is only one program for freshmen, there is a wide range of activities associated with the program because it is formatted around debate, which utilizes skills such as public speaking and concentrates on building self-confidence. Also, each of the debate topics has to do with the Latino community.

Seven of nine interviewees felt that NHI absolutely offered a wide enough variety of activities in which students could participate. One volunteer felt that NHI did not offer a wide enough variety of activities for students, making a comment that "they are closing down programs, like MLP (Mexico Language Program for seniors in high school) and not replacing them." Another volunteer commented that there is not enough support from the executive office in order to allow regions to offer a wider variety of activities to students.

Duration

When asked how many years students can participate in the program, all of the interviewees answered "indefinitely," or as "long as they want". This is because students can participate in programs during each of their high school years, and they can also choose to return each year as a "coach" to train or mentor program participants in programs they have participated in. This involvement can continue through high school and even college. The opportunity to volunteer with the organization is always open to alumni.

Five of the nine interviewees answered that they did feel the average student participated in programs. They felt that students often stay involved in the programs because their friends stay involved. The four interviewees that did not feel the average student participated enough in programs included the executive staff member, a project administrator, and two volunteers. The executive staff member stated that "during their own time [in the Great Debate program], they don't participate enough because they don't realize the benefits until they've gone through it." Other reasons for these answers included the fact that the crossover rate (percent of students who go from one program to the next) is low and students do not return because they think they have already done enough with the program.

Table 4.1 shows the results from the questions pertaining to program structure. The table

shows whether there is in strong support (greater than 80%), moderate support (less than 80%, greater than 60%), or limited support(less than 60%) of the model of a youth development program for Latino students based on the interviews with the NHI staff.

Table 4.1: Program Structure Interview Results

Question	Executive Staff	Project Administrators	Volunteers
Intensity			
How often are programs offered – school month	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
How often are programs offered – non-school month	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Are programs offered often enough	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 4/5
Breadth			
How many different types of activities	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Does NHI provide a wide enough variety of activities	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Moderate Support – 3/5
Duration			
How many years may students participate	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Does the average student participate enough	Limited Support – 0/1	Moderate Support – 2/3	Moderate Support – 3/5

Individual Development

Individual development is the second component of the Latino youth development program model. Elements of this component include student resiliency, leadership development, and collaboration.

Focused Interview: Individual Development

Focused interviews were used to analyze whether NHI provided support for student resilience, leadership development, and student collaboration with the organization.

Resiliency

Although most of the interviewees were not familiar with the term resiliency, upon description of the term, each of the nine interviewees was familiar with the concept. One of the volunteers added that he was "pretty familiar with the term, but not through NHI." Each of the interviewees felt that this concept was a strong part of NHI's philosophy. According to the interviewees, it is the intention of NHI to build upon strengths that students have in order to give them tools to overcome any obstacle they may face.

When asked if NHI focuses on student risk factors, each of the nine interviewees answered that NHI does not focus on risk factors. The executive staff member stated that "while NHI does acknowledge that student risk factors may exist, the goal of NHI is to show students what they are capable of and give them the appropriate tools to put that power to use." One volunteer did mention that on a local level, there are plans for the future of the region to develop a program for at-risk 8th graders in order to help them raise their grade point average (GPA) in order to allow them to participate in NHI in high school. Another comment that was added by a volunteer was that there are many programs for at-risk youth and that NHI prides itself on providing a different program for students who are already successful in school and were very involved in other school activities before becoming part of NHI.

Each of the nine interviewees answered that concentrating on risk factors takes away from positive development of a student. The main reason for this was that there is no way for negative comments to be inspiring for a student. A project administrator added that "concentrating on risk factors makes students take a different direction when they approach a situation, so they begin assessing the situation with a negative outlook instead of positive."

Leadership

All of the interviewees answered that NHI activities do focus on building leadership skills. The executive staff member added that "in the Great Debate program, students are taught speaking skills, how to articulate their thoughts, and are introduced to introspection, which all add up to building leadership skills." The actual event is a showcase of their speaking abilities and their argumentation skills that they have learned. These kinds of activities build self confidence.

All of the interviewees answered that active leadership is most often seen through the act of coaching Great Debate participants. The head coaches, who are past participants of the Great Debate program, are expected to develop the curriculum for the year to come; thus giving them the responsibility to create the entire experience for incoming freshmen. From these curricula, head coaches delegate responsibilities to other coaches to see them through. Coaches have to develop a plan to get participants to listen to them without the experience being too much like school.

When asked how these activities utilize and develop leadership skills, all of the nine interviewees answered that the activities required students to be hands-on. One volunteer added that the program is often "putting students in situations where they are forced to exercise leadership skills sometimes without them knowing."

With the exception of one project administrator, each of the interviewees felt that student participation in activist or civic activities helps their leadership abilities. The most popular response given was that it puts the coach's leadership abilities to use. The executive staff member added that "while NHI is not an activist organization, we are planting the seeds for this type of involvement, and we do see students becoming more committed to improvements in the

Latino community." The project administrator who did not feel activist or civic activities helps students build leadership skills pointed out that "the problem with activism is that it is too extreme and that the activities do not last as long."

Collaboration

Eight of the nine interviewees felt that students are given the opportunity to build or create programs and activities for the organization on the local, or regional, level. The executive staff member noted that in the past there was a set curriculum, but starting this year they are able to open up the responsibilities to the regions themselves. The executive office is not able to do everything, so it delegates responsibilities downward to the regions. Another opportunity is being opened for past participants to develop new possible programs and establish potential new sites for NHI programs. One volunteer felt that the opportunity to create new programs was given, but "it is usually given by someone higher up, and kids are trained not to go for the opportunity. It doesn't happen until you are a head counselor or a project administrator, or higher, and even then, the national office would tear [the idea] apart."

When asked how often student input is asked when deciding on an activity to offer, seven of the nine interviewees answered "very often". Two interviewees, the executive staff member and a volunteer, answered "not too often". As far as developing new programs for the organization, on the regional levels, student coaches are expected to come up with most of the activities for current participants. NHI, on the local level, is seen as a student-run organization, so student involvement to run the program is required. Thus, feedback from parents, students, and other volunteers is very important in order to continue activities for the years to come.

On the national level, students are not given a large role. The executive staff member mentioned that "there are some surveys that are sent out to evaluate programs so that the

executive staff can gauge the current programs, but other than that, students are not involved in the program development on the national level."

Each of the nine interviewees felt that student input is critical in deciding different activities and programs to offer. This is due to the fact that the programs are created for the students and if they are not satisfied with the programs, they will not enjoy them or return to coach. A volunteer stated that "we ask the participants in the beginning what they want to get out of the program." The executive staff member noted that since the founding of the organization, many things have changed and there are new needs that have to be addressed. Without some kind of student input, changes would not be addressed.

Table 4.2 summarizes the results of the focused interviews concerning individual development.

Table 4.2: Individual Development Interview Results

Question	Executive Staff	Project Administrators	Volunteers
Resiliency			
How familiar are you with resiliency	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Does your organization focus on risk factors	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Does the concentration of risk factors take away from or add to the positive development of a student participant	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Leadership			
Do student activities focus on building leadership skills	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
What kinds of activities or programs can students participate in to	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5

actively use leadership skills			
How do these programs utilize and develop leadership skills	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Do student's participation in activist or civic activities help or hinder their leadership abilities	Strong Support – 1/1	Moderate Support – 2/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Collaboration			
Are students given the opportunity to build or create programs and activities	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 4/5
How often is student input asked when deciding on an activity	Limited Support – 0/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 4/5
Is student input important in deciding on different activities to offer	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5

Adult Interaction

Adult interaction is the final component of the Latino youth development program model. Elements within this component include parent/guardian involvement, use of mentors, and community adults.

Focused Interview: Adult Interaction

Focused interviews were used to analyze whether NHI provided adult interaction with student participants including parent/guardian involvement, adult mentors, and community adult interaction.

Parent/Guardian Involvement

When asked how often the programs or activities were planned for parents, seven of the

nine interviewees answered that they are not organized, thus, rarely. One volunteer added that "parent involvement is volunteer-based depending on need. They mostly do food or rides to training." Two interviewees, including a project administrator and a volunteer, answered "once or twice a month, when students are meeting for a training session". One project administrator admitted that "there are really no programs for parents. We have meetings for parent involvement, but there are not a large number of parents that want to get involved."

When asked about programs for the parents within the organization, four interviewees were able to list some responsibilities parents have, as well as some activities planned for parents by the region. Five of the nine interviewees answered "not many" or "non-existent". Programs can vary region to region, but there are not many activities that have been created by NHI specifically for parents. One volunteer stated that "parents are discouraged from interacting with student activities, but they are given their own activities that are relevant to what the students are learning."

Three of the nine interviewees answered that they felt that parent involvement in the program was both helpful and detrimental to student's development. Two of these interviewees were project administrators, and one was a volunteer. Each of these staff members felt that a parent worked well in an administrative setting, working as a parent liaison or finding places to hold activities. The interviewees also felt that if parents became too involved in the actual training sessions, they might try and take over the coaches' roles thus not allowing a student to have that leadership opportunity. The other six interviewees felt that parents make a big difference in a student's experience in the program, so parent involvement is critical. Parents are also often the main reason why students attend NHI programs, initially making their student attend in the beginning, but allowing the student to choose later if he wants to continue.

Mentor

When asked if NHI provided mentors for student participants, most of the interviewees answered yes. These mentorships are not official, but student led. It should be noted that the interviewees mentioned that most often students become mentors of other students, rather than adults becoming mentors. One volunteer mentioned that other volunteers and adult coaches were accessible and could become mentors to students, but more often mentors were provided from peers. One project administrator mentioned that "to have a peer mentor is better than an adult mentor because adult success is assumed or expected. Seeing a peer have that success has more impact." Of the nine interviewees, four mentioned that there were adult mentor-student participant relationships that met unofficially at every training session, with two program administrators commenting that they do not meet often.

Each of the nine interviewees felt that mentors are effective role models for student participants as long as the mentor-student relationship was maintained. Also, interviewees felt that mentors are effective roles models because they have already experienced what student participants are going through, so they can help guide them through this part of their life.

Community Adult

Interviewees were asked how often students were taken on college visits to talk with administrators. Each of the nine interviewees answered that students at the sophomore and junior level programs were given more opportunities for college visits and college fairs in general, but the freshman Great Debate program did not utilize this experience. Most of the interviewees also added that each of the programs (freshman through junior year) is held on a college campus. The executive staff member mentioned that each program makes a point to include an introduction from a university official. One project administrator did mention that their region makes it a

point to go to at least one college visit a year, meeting at a school. A volunteer added that at the local level, college visits are not often advocated, but they are encouraged, which accounts for students visiting at least three colleges by their senior year.

When asked how often students are taken to potential work places to talk with administrators, each of the nine interviewees answered that this does not happen, or if it does, it does not happen often. There was one mention by a volunteer, of an effort to provide students with internships after their programs ended in the summer, but this depends on the parents and other volunteers' efforts to arrange these opportunities. The volunteer stated that "we are not doing it now, but we are planning for more interaction with community adults in the future, hopefully introducing students to lawyers, or judges, for example, or whoever students are interested in meeting." One other volunteer and one project administrator mentioned that they already bring in adults to speak with students, rather than taking students to those work places, which provides for interaction with community adults.

With the exception of two volunteers, each of the nine interviewees felt that students do not spend enough time participating in community service projects with community adults. The executive staff member stated "probably not, but programs deal with the philosophy to give students the want to become engaged in the Latino community." A volunteer mentioned that there should be more community service oriented toward the Latino community, but nowadays community service is a requirement in order to graduate from high school, so students do not spend much time other than those hours that are required.

Table 4.3 summarizes the results of the focused interviews concerning adult interaction with student participants:

Table 4.3: Adult Interaction Interview Results

Question	Executive Staff	Project Administrators	Volunteers
Parent/Guardian Involvement			
How often are programs or activities planned for parents	Limited Support – 0/1	Limited Support – 1/3	Limited Support – 1/5
What kind of programs are there for parents within the organization	Limited Support – 0/1	Moderate Support – 2/3	Moderate Support – 3/5
Is parent involvement helpful or detrimental to students' development	Strong Support – 1/1	Limited Support – 1/3	Strong Support – 4/5
Mentor			
Does the organization provide mentors for student participants	Limited Support – 0/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Limited Support – 1/5
How often do students meet with mentors	Limited Support – 0/1	Limited Support – 1/3	Limited Support – 1/5
Are mentors effective role models for student participants	Strong Support – 1/1	Strong Support – 3/3	Strong Support – 5/5
Community Adult			
How often are students taken on college visits to talk with administrators	Limited Support – 0/1	Limited Support – 1/3	Limited Support – 0/5
How often are students taken to potential work places to talk with administrators	Limited Support – 0/1	Limited Support – 1/3	Limited Support – 2/5
Do students spend enough time participating in community service projects with community adults?	Limited Support – 0/1	Limited Support – 0/3	Limited Support – 2/5

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided research data from focused interviews of staff to assess the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program. The program was shown to meet or exceed two of the three components of the Latino youth development program model requirements. There is opportunity for improvement in the adult involvement category. Chapter five will provide recommendations for improving the program, followed by the conclusion to this study.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this research was threefold. First, it described the model of a Latino Youth Development Program through a review of literature. Next, it assessed the National Hispanic Institute using practical ideal type components. Finally, the third purpose was to provide recommendations based on data collected using focused interviews.

Chapter one provided background information on positive youth development programs and the National Hispanic Institute. It also outlined the research purpose for the project. Chapter two provided a conceptual framework which was used to develop a practical ideal model for a Latino youth development program. The model consists of three practical ideal categories: program structure, individual development, and adult interaction. Chapter three outlined the case study research method used to collect data from NHI, which utilized both in-person and telephone interviews in order to gauge the effectiveness of NHI. Chapter four presented the research results from the interviews.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer recommendations for improving the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program, and then to offer a conclusion from the research that was conducted during this study.

Recommendations

The ideal model of a Latino youth development program was outlined in chapter two with three main components; program structure, individual development, and adult interaction. Table 5.1 shows the three main categories along with the indicators that fall under each category. The recommendations for each category, or component of the model, are next to the

coinciding indicator.

Program Structure

Sound program structure offered by a program is essential in order to allow students to maintain a positive relationship with an organization and actually benefit from the programs that are offered. The National Hispanic Institute offers freshmen students the opportunity to develop skills through offering the Great Debate programs every summer. Although the main program is only offered one time, students who participate in the program become a part of a regional team that establishes sound program intensity by meeting weekly until the Great Debate event. The students choose which type of debate in which they would like to participate, which also decides what curriculum they will follow and what activities that they will participate in during their weekly meetings. The different activities that each event offers establish the breadth of the Great Debate program. Although students are only able to participate as a debater one time during high school, they are given the opportunity to return as coaches throughout the entirety of their high school years in order to train the future classes of freshmen students. This format establishes an appropriate duration of the program.

Individual Development

Student participants' individual development is a key factor in establishing a positive development program for Latino students. Although most of the interviewees were not familiar with the term "resilience" as it is related to youth development, they all agreed that focusing on resilience is part of NHI's philosophy. According to the interviewees, students are encouraged to overcome obstacles in their lives and use NHI as a support system for their growing resilience over hardships. Leadership building is essential to provide Great Debate program participants, although many interviewees commented that students actually learn more leadership skills

through returning as a coach rather than participating in the program as a freshman. Allowing students more opportunities to become leaders as freshmen participants could help with student retention. Finally, NHI's Great Debate program on the regional level encourages students to build curriculum and actually run the program, which in turn encourages more collaboration with the organization on the regional level. If this collaboration opportunity were expanded to the national level of NHI, there could be greater levels of innovative programs to offer a wide variety of students.

Adult Interaction

Adult interaction is the final component of the practical ideal model for a Latino youth development program, and is a key factor in allowing students to network with adults. The National Hispanic Institute offers some programs or activities for parents on the national and regional levels, which allows parents to see what their student is learning and how he is growing. These programs are not often organized on the regional level, so adding programs for parents to the curriculum during their students' meetings could encourage more parents to be involved in the program. Mentors are utilized by the Great Debate program, but it is informal and more often peer mentors rather than adult mentors. Establishing adult mentors for students could allow for a higher amount of peer-mentor relationships. Finally, students participate in community service projects with community adults, but not on a regular basis, or sometimes not at all. The interaction with community adults is often dependent on what the organization can provide on the regional level, with arrangements made by parent or alumni volunteers. Providing more opportunities to connect with community adults may allow students to develop their network for future prospective careers.

Table 5.1 Recommendation Table

Ideal Type Category	Recommendation
Program Structure	
Intensity	Continue to offer meetings once a week.
Breadth	Continue to offer a wide variety of activities.
Duration	Continue to allow students to participate as freshmen, and to return to the program as coaches for the team.
Individual Development	
Resiliency	Continue to support students' resilience.
Leadership	Continue to allow students to run the programs and to mentor other students once they become coaches.
Collaboration	Continue to encourage students to develop new ideas for the organization at a regional level. Encourage students to develop ideas and make it known that new ideas can be accepted at the national level.
Adult Interaction	
Parent/Guardian Involvement	Encourage higher levels of parent involvement. Although parents should not have the same responsibilities as students who run the program, parents should be more involved in the program, possibly through offering more activities that have to do with college preparation and giving an insight into what students are learning in the program.
Mentor	Continue to allow students to develop a rapport with adult mentors. Adult mentors should be established and should meet more regularly. A program or alumni directory could help alumni keep in touch with a nearby region, offering resources to those regions.
Community Adult	Allow students to meet with more adults from the community in order to develop a network with them. Networks with adults can open the doors to further opportunities to work within the community and future work places.

Conclusion

Overall, the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program for high school freshmen

is an adequate development program for Latino youth. As the Latino population continues to

grow, the need for Latino youth development programs also grows. An area of improvement for NHI is students' interaction with adults. Higher interaction levels with parents, mentors, and community adults allows for a higher chance of developing a positive rapport with these adults. This would give students greater opportunities to develop networks for future career plans.

This research established a model for a youth development program for high school Latino students in order to evaluate the National Hispanic Institute's Great Debate program for freshmen students. While interviewing various levels of staff, it became apparent that there are further components that provide for an ideal program. Further research could include an organization's inner structure dealing with more administrative parts of the organization, mainly how the programs are supported by the organization and the level of support given to the regions by the national office. As it was mentioned more than once by interviewees that NHI offers adequate programs to students, it was also mentioned that the national level is disconnected with some regional offices. This shows how programs can be inconsistently offered by a region, if they are offered at all.

Another factor that could be added to the model is the leadership of the region. During the interviews, many of the staff noted that a region relies heavily on the Community Project Administrator, which is a volunteer position and can change at any time. This obviously could affect the program's structure, and possibly what the student learns from the program, so should be used to evaluate Latino youth development programs in the future.

A further inquiry rests on the amount of students who are affected by the NHI programs. While approximately 1100 students participate in the Great Debate each year, the executive staff member mentioned that the number has decreased since its establishment almost thirty years ago. Since the program seems to be an effective predictor of college enrollment, it would be essential

for this program to reach more students, possibly expanding to new areas and including more students.

A greater number of students can benefit from the program if the program were to allow more than just the "best of the best" to participate. Opening the admission to a greater number of at-risk youth would create a higher population for the program to serve. Serving a new range of youth would also give the program an opportunity to revisit the programs' strategies and approaches toward the positive development of young Latinos.

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