UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES IN THE PERSISTENCE, RETENTION, AND COMPLETION OF LATINX HSI COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this single phenomenological case study was to examine the importance of an FYE or College 101 seminar and why this topic matters to Latinx students' success. The research took place in a two-year Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) located in the Southwest part of the United States. The overarching question was: *How can First-Year Experiences (FYEs) or college seminars bridge the gap of retention, persistence, servingness and completion for Latinx students in higher education?*

A total of 18 Latinx students were interviewed and provided valuable information about their experiences to assert the study findings. Four major themes were created from analyzing the interview transcripts: 1) cognitive factors, 2) social factors, 3) institutional factors, 4) FYE course content and lack of servingness. The findings supported the challenges of Latinx students to fit in a college environment and comply family expectations. The majority of the participants were first generation. Many of them expressed mental health as a major struggle to cope with the demands of school and at home responsibilities. In general terms participants expressed their main struggles with navigational skills, time management skills, sense of belonging, social capital, financial struggles, immigration status, balancing school with work, and student services. The findings also support the lack of curriculum and instruction to serve their needs with a racial/ethnic cultural enhancement perspective.

Another part of the findings reveals that the FYEs may be an important point of intervention to the transition of Latinx college students. Latinx students were exposed to services that assisted them in their academic journey. In addition, the FYE provided the basic skills of college preparedness and navigational skills.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Latinx Population and Implications

According to the Pew Research Center (2021), the Latinx population has increased to 61.1 million in 2020 in the United States, roughly 20% of the total U.S. population. The U.S. Latinx population has diverse ethnic origins, with Mexican origin accounting for 36 million persons, followed by Puerto Ricans at 5.4 million. In addition, there are five other groups of more than 1 million, including Salvadorians, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, and Colombians. The population of foreign-born Latinx has grown to 65.5% in 2015, up from 59.9% in 2000.

This population growth has had significant implications for U.S. higher education. Latinx college enrollment has increased from 2010 to 2019, from 2.9 million to 3.6 million (Pew Research Center, 2021). Most Latinx students entering college now are U.S. born compared to years past when the majority of Latinos were foreign-born (Pew Research Center, 2021). In 2020-2021, there were 559 (18% of all institutions in higher education) Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and 393 emerging HSIs. The federal HSI legislation designation is given to institutions that enroll 25% or more of Latinx undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE). Emerging HSIs are those institutions close to the 25% FTE undergraduate Latinx enrollment threshold and are expected to be full HSIs as the Latinx student population grows (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022). Together, these institutions are important because they enroll 66% of all undergraduate Latinx students (Excelencia in Education).

This growth and presence of Latinx students in higher education means colleges must consider how they can support these students, particularly in the area of student retention.

According to Excelencia in Education (2018), from 2004 to 2014, the degree completion rate for Latinx students including part-time, transfer, stop out, and students from two and four-year colleges was 47%. It was 63% for White and Asian students. The graduation rate of Latinx students was 41%, compared to 52% for their White counterparts, corresponding to and 11% achievement gap. Among four-year HSIs, the completion rate of Latinx students was 51% and the persistence rate was 23% at four-year colleges; however, among two-year HSIs the completion rate was 34% and persistence was 24% (Santiago, Taylor & Calderon Galdeano, 2016). These achievement gaps are important to explore because they may be related to cognitive, social, institutional factors at play in the experiences of Latinx college students. Since many Latinx students are enrolled in HSIs, whether or not an institution is actually serving its Latinx students and not just enrolling them-"servingness" – is also an important phenomenon to explore (Garcia et al., 2019).

How Higher Education Institutions Have Attempted to Close Equity Gaps

One of the main ways that higher education institutions support students is through the offering of essential student services during their transition to college, such as advising, tutoring, mentoring, personal counseling and career counseling, among others (Swail, 2004). Much of the field of higher education has been dedicated to understanding whether and how these services affect underserved students' (e.g., first generation college students, students of color, and low-income students) likelihood of persistence, completion, drop out due service access or service efficacy (Nunez, 2011; Shumaker & Wood, 2016; & Schneider, 2022). However, it is important to note that resources for deploying these services at community colleges are constrained or limited. As a result, graduation rates at two-year colleges are below 39 percent nationally (Klemping et al., 2019).

Counseling and advising are one of the primary services that college rely on to increase student attainment. Wlazelek and Coulter (1999) conducted a study to explore the impact of academic counseling to students who were on academic jeopardy (GPA at 2.0 or below). They found out that counselors' interaction with students is associated with increasing retention rates specifically to those students who are on academic warning, probation, and suspension. Kadar (2011) explained that academic advising is not only the process of designing an academic plan for students, but also an opportunity to explore personal goals and any issues impacting their success. This holistic way of advising students is described as "developmental academic advising." Student support services that are well designed for target populations can bridge the gap of persistence, retention, and completion. Nonetheless, the majority of student services offered in higher education are designed to help students individually (academic advising, career counseling, financial aid, tutoring, counseling and psychological services, etc.), but it is unrealistic that every student will be helped every time they encounter an issue.

In particular, the role of college counseling centers including academic and mental health counseling are important services that promote academic persistence and retention among Latinx students. Tovar (2015) described the importance of institutional agents (faculty, counselors, and student services personnel) and the programs created on community college campuses to increase interactions between Latinx students and institutional agents. These interactions have been labeled in the literature as living-learning communities, faculty mentoring, developmental academic advising (process of advising the student with a holistic point of view), and guided pathways (Abrica & Dorsten, 2021; Community College Research Center, 2015; Kadar, 2001; & Philpott & Strange, 2003). The common theme of these authors is that interactions with institutional agents have assisted Latinx students with navigating higher education and

influenced them to persist and complete. For these reasons, First Year Experience (FYE) courses could bridge the gap of retention and completion by educating students on how to successfully navigate their educational journey.

FYEs in Higher Education

FYE courses are one way to provide connection to an institutional agent and help students. With the goal of assisting students, some community colleges have adopted FYEs to bridge the completion gap especially for minoritized students (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). FYEs or First Year Seminars (FYS), as commonly referred, have proliferated across higher education. These are courses designed to support students' transition to college and prepare them to be successful by incorporating skills related to time management and studying, and also, to familiarize them with the college environment and on campus resources (Karp et al., 2015). For the vast majority of students, FYEs courses are designed to facilitate students' learning about the tools and resources to be successful in an inclusive environment (Kimbark & Richardson, 2017). In addition, FYEs assist students with self-discovery, including choosing a major or learning more about it, and with time and finance management, critical thinking skills, and communication skills.

Most of the research on FYEs has been analyzed with quantitative approaches, and the students' voices have been neglected, especially at the community college level. Furthermore, racially minoritized students and low-income students are more likely to enroll in community colleges (Shumaker & Wood, 2016; Crisp and Nora, 2009) and their retention, completion, and transfer rates are much lower compared to White and more affluent students (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). For this reason, the achievement gap needs to further be analyzed as an opportunity gap because inequalities in the educational system favors White students over

minoritized students (Garcia, 2019). FYEs are potentially very important in the effort to support these marginalized students within their academic journeys. Even though there has been research on the impact of FYEs on first- year enrolled students and their experiences, there is a lack of research on Latinx students and their experiences on these courses. Enrollment trend of Latinx students will continue increasing in the coming decades, and higher education institutions must accommodate these students with select student's services for them to be successful.

Overview of the Study

This phenomenological and case study will examine the importance of FYEs or College 101 seminars in community colleges and why this topic matters to Latinx students' success. The overarching question for this study is: How can FYEs bridge the gap of retention, persistence, servingness and completion for Latinx students in higher education? Subsequently, I present an overview of the literature considering the history/background of FYE courses and how these courses could bridge the gap between of low retention and completion rates for Latinx students. Furthermore, I explore the retention issues such as cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx college students experienced in one community college located in the Southwest part of the United States who completed and non-completed an FYE seminar course during the spring and fall of 2022. The first-year seminar course at this particular community college is not required to be taken by freshman students; rather, it is optional. Academic advisors, counselors, recruiters, or friends recommend the course. On many occasions, students who were not doing well academically (GPA below 2.0) are also encouraged to enroll for this first-year experience course, hoping it would bring different personal and academic perspectives to the students' goals.

Goals of the Study

One of the goals of this study is to pose solutions to a retention, progression, and completion problem that has been heavily analyzed but without proposing solutions specifically for Latinx community college students. The vast majority of minoritized high school graduates enroll in community colleges because these institutions are more accessible and have open door policies (Turcios-Cotto & Millan, 2013; & Krogstad & Fry, 2015). Thus, I will conduct in-depth interviews with Latinx students who completed and did not complete an FYE course in order to capture their experiences with FYE courses. With the data collected, recommendations will be provided on how to better assist this population of students.

Research Questions

These are the questions for this phenomenological and case study to explore the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education.

1. What are the academic, social, and institutional issues facing Latinx students in the first year of college, and how do these factors influence their persistence and retention in community colleges?
2. How do FYE courses at a two-year HSI serve Latinx community college students?
3. What are Latinx students' experiences in these FYE courses?
4. What supports do Latinx students in FYE courses believe they need to be successful to complete their educational goals?

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction: The Latinx Population in the U.S.

There are some countries in Latin America where social and political issues have forced their citizens to immigrate to the United States looking for better life opportunities. Although, the intention of this research is not to dwell into the political and anti-immigration sentiments well-ingrained in the United States for obvious political agendas, it does provide a different analysis why people from the so-called North Triangle Countries (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) have more people immigrating. To this end, it is difficult to pose real solutions to an achievement and completion gap of Latinx students without knowing the antecedents. The U.S. government has called for more economic investment to these North Triangle Countries to find solutions to climate change, education, health barriers, and workforce development. In addition, the U.S. government has announced a call to action and to set an agenda to find the root causes of migration (The White House, 2021). Until solutions are found, community colleges have open door admission policies, and these institutions will be enrolling students who personally have experienced opportunity gaps or traumas from their countries of origin, or who are from families and communities with these histories and experiences.

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2021), Central Americans have immigrated to the United States for an array of reasons including displacement and economic instability caused by civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s, in which the U.S. Government was directly involved by providing financial aid, combat training, and weapons. This was the case of Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador that endured civil wars. As a result, the Central American immigrant population significantly increased between 1980 and 1990. In addition,

Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and Earthquakes in 2001were additional environmental factors that caused more people to immigrate to the United States. To provide a perspective on immigration trends from the North Triangle Countries beginning 1980s to 2000s, the statistics indicate that in the 1980s, a total of 196,674 immigrated, in the 1990s this number incremented to 800,095, and in the 2000s, the total immigrating population was 1,580,853 (Gibson & Jung, 2006). However, environmental factors such hurricanes and droughts continue to impact Central American Countries and the rest of Latin America, and people are more likely to continue immigrating. What is important for higher education institutions is to be aware of these environmental changes, immigration trends, and demographic shifts. It is the only way to prepare for the new incoming Latinx students and understanding their needs to prepare them for the workforce.

Another important factor to consider for higher education institutions is disaggregating the data to find out the completion rates of Latinx students considering their country of origin. According to Nguyen et al. (2017), disaggregating the data accordingly to educational attainment of the Latinx population is not a common practice. The data is usually presented in such of way that characterizes every Latinx in one single box (Latinx, Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican). However, the authors pointed out the educational attainment per country of origin. In the case of Guatemalans, 75.7% have a high school diploma or less, and only 8.55% have a earned a bachelor's degree and higher. For Salvadorians, 74.7% have a high school diploma or less, and 8.23% have earned a bachelor's degree and higher. In the case of Hondurans, 74.0% have a high school diploma, and 8.98% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. For Mexicans, 68.5% have completed a high school diploma, and 9.93% have earned a bachelor's degree and higher. The statistics are different for Cubans, 51.3% have a high school diploma, and 24.68% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. As stated previously, data disaggregation of the Latinx

population provides the opportunity for higher education institutions to understand the diverse experiences of the students they are serving. The authors explained that labeling Latinx students as a homogenous group may lead policies and interventions to fail because they are not intentional considering individual groups.

Latinx Students in Higher Education

It is important to find solutions to the problem of why Latinx students do not persist, progress and graduate considering that the enrollment of students in higher education keeps increasing every year. The enrollment of Latinx students in higher education has increased each year between 2000 to 2018, from 1.4 million to 3.4 million (NCES, 2020). According to the Pew Research Center, in 2013, nearly half (46%) of Latinx students of all ages enrolled in community colleges, and it is important to explore the challenges they face to be successful (Krogstad & Fry, 2015). The authors further explained that Latinx students choose community colleges for affordability purposes, considering that family incomes are below $40,000. Another reason is that community colleges have open-door policies, and this is an incentive for students who are less ready for college. The third reason has to do with geography considering many Latinx students live in states with large community college systems (Krogstad & Fry, 2015).

As stated previously, it is critical to explore the challenges Latinx students are facing in higher education to persist, progress and graduate. Swail (2014) emphatically stated that finances related to the cost of tuition was one of the main drivers for students' attrition. In addition, the author argued that more students drop out because they do not have the academic-related skill sets to succeed. In other words, they are underprepared for academic course work, and this issue is more apparent in open admission institutions where many students are placed in remediation courses for math and English. According to Swail (2014), students are more likely to experience

attrition if they have the following characteristics: part-time students, low GPA, non-traditional, non-white, first generation, low income or independent, being a single parent, attend an Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) or Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), delaying entry to college after completing high school, lower level, or high school mathematics, and working more than 20 hours per week. For students with two or three risk factors, they have just a 34% chance of graduating within six years and drops to 30% when students possess four or more risk factors (these risk factor percentages are based on four-year college graduation rates). The bottom line is that students with multiple risk factors have less chances of being successful completing their degrees. One risk factor not listed by Swail has to do with the mental health of the students, which is an important factor in the decision to continue or drop out (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Another factor is related to the lack of information higher education institutions have about the students they serve, in regards the risk factors Swail outlined. It is difficult to provide proactive student services when the institution does not have a clear picture about who they are serving. One will make the analogy that higher education institutions are shooting in the dark without specific demographic information.

Achievement Gap of Latinx Students

Much has been written regarding why Latinx students are not completing their higher education goals at higher proportional rates compared to White students and other minorities. Although Latinx student graduation rates have increased significantly since 2010, the number of graduates still lags compared to other groups (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Excelencia in Education (n.d) has noted that the Latinx population is projected to increase 25% by 2030; however, only 24% of Latinx students 25 years and older have earned an associate degree or higher compared to 46% of White and non-Hispanic adults. In addition, the report stated that graduation rates of Latinx

students at two-year institutions is 2% lower compared to their White and non-Hispanic peers. The graduation-rate disparities are much higher at four-year institutions, with a significant 12% difference between Latinx and White graduates. Accordingly, FYEs may be important for understanding and addressing the retention issues and lower graduation rates of Latinx students compared to other ethnic groups. The truth of the matter is that the root of the problem has been overly analyzed without posing real solutions.

The goals of this literature review are to examine and summarize the issues Latinx community college students face and why first year experience courses can be important for their success, development, and retention. The literature review explores this phenomenon considering three retention barriers: institutional barriers (providing or not providing FYE courses), cognitive development of students (the academic knowledge students bring to the institution), and social factors (connections on and off campus). According to Swail (2004), it is important to understand "the student experience" that involves cognitive, social, and institutional factors. Swail's (2004) Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement dives into these factors and variables that lead to student attrition.

The Development of Social Capital for Latinx Students

One of the risk factors for Latinx students is the fact that many of them are first-generation, and they are less likely to complete a degree. Among adults 22 to 59 whose parents did not complete high school, only 20% have graduated with a bachelor's degree. Subsequently, if only one parent completed a bachelor's degree, 60% of adults have finished a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, if both parents have graduated with a bachelor's degree, 82% have at least completed a bachelor's degree. (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Parental education is one indicator of social capital, which Tovar (2015) defines as the "social networks and interpersonal relationships" students develop to feel supported throughout their academic journey. Given the importance of social capital, institutions of higher education have implemented programs and practices that can develop students' social capital. Schwartz et al. (2018) conducted a mixed methods explanatory sequential study in a four-year university to investigate a novel intervention that "focused on the development of skills and attitudes to empower first-generation college students to develop their social capital on-campus" (p. 1). This was a summer bridge program (Connected Scholars Program), and the intervention was delivered in a sub-group with planned lessons. The instructors hired to teach the summer bridge program were trained to make sure the lesson plans were taught in the appropriate manner. The study results indicated students who participated in the intervention showed practicable attitudes in seeking support with their instructors, and they also earned higher GPAs at the end of the first year in college. As such, the connections first-generation students developed with faculty and staff on campus were extremely valuable for their social capital. Moreover, research studies suggested that supportive interactions both inside and outside of the classroom benefited the student's retention, completion, and well-being (Garriott, et al., 2015). Tovar (2015) explained that Latinx students' interactions with faculty and other institutional agents (counselors, advisors, tutors, librarians, etc.) at community colleges was extremely important because the frequency of interactions has a positive effect on achieving higher grades and retention rates. Moreover, the relationships Latinx students developed with institutional agents and with specific programs at community colleges helped them access educational resources and information as they navigated their educational journey (Tovar, 2015).

Limitations for First-Generation Latinx Students

Students' social capital is developed by interacting with institutional agents, participating in social activities on campus or creating interpersonal relationships; however, they also encounter barriers that prevent them from accessing these important resources in college (Tovar, 2015). In general, first-generation Latinx students enter college without important knowledge on what to expect academically and socially, which is only part of the problem. In addition, first generation students have other accrued problems such as food insecurity, are more likely to juggle a job with school, register and pay tuition late, and send money to family members (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). As expected, these economic constraints make college more difficult both academically and socially. It is not surprising that first-generation students opted out of participating in social activities planned by their institution; they simply do not have the time and resources to spend compared to other economically stable students (Wilkins, 2018; Garriott et al., 2015). The main theme is that it is not uncommon for first-generation students to skip social activities on campuses, but this should not be a reason for higher education institutions to dismiss their academic needs.

First Generation College Latinx Students and Barriers to Success

First generation college students are those students whose parents or guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree (Garriott et al., 2015). First generation Latinx college student enrollment has increased overtime, but the degree attainment is lower compared to other ethnic groups. In comparison, 51% of Latinx students completed their bachelor's degrees in six years compared to 59% of their White counterparts. In addition, Latinx students have lower percentages of full-time enrollment at four-year universities compared to their peers who identified as White or Asian (Clayton et al., 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018). The authors added the

benefits of understanding the demographic backgrounds of Latinx students because they present additional challenges to completion. In this regard, Latinx students were more likely to be first generation and often experienced adjustment difficulties at predominantly White institutions. Some of the adjustment issues that influence their academic experience had to do with lower academic preparation, lower GPAs in their first year and higher attrition rates compared to continue generational students, experience difficulties in choosing a major, face different expectations of their college experience, having varying level of parental support, exhibiting lower-income brackets, and being less active in extracurricular activities (Garriott et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2018).

Wilkins (2018) elaborated on the reasons why first-generation students fell out of place in a middle- and upper-class university. Although, the study was predominately of first-generation White students, the qualitative study concluded that they had trouble engaging in the university culture. Part of the adjustment problems had to do with not having the financial means to fit in. Moreover, the parents did not understand the college-going process, and first-generation students did not seek their parents for guidance and emotional support considering the parents' lack of understanding.

There are additional adjustment factors to consider as pointed out by Wilkens (2018) such as the college environment and the culture of the institution regardless of students' ethnic background. It is essential to point out that if White first-generation students have difficulty with adjustment in a predominantly White institution, Latinx first-generation could have more significant obstacles to complete their educational goals. As the students transition to college, higher education institutions need to provide resources to mitigate the challenges related to social and cultural capital.

Family Achievement Guilt, Social Capital, and Instruction

Other associated challenges facing first-generation Latinx students are connected to family achievement guilt and lack of social capital. Garriott et al. (2015) observed family achievement guilt among students who transitioned to higher education from communities and families who value interdependency. From a student's psychosocial theory perspective, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) described interdependency as conflicting emotions of self-development considering emotional freedom from the desire of being approved by others, solve problems, and make decisions. Interdependency is a balance between the "need to be independent and the need to belong" (p. 22). First-generation students experience a cultural shock with the norms and policies of independency that are prevalent in college campuses such as declaring a major, enrolling for classes, maintaining good academic status, and pursuing internships. Thus, students may struggle with the curricula, institutional policies, classroom norms, and teaching practices (Wang, 2014). The environmental supports on and off-campus have been identified as critical to first-generation students' success and life satisfaction. The theoretical normative model discussed by Garriott et al. (2015) examines the well-being of students in predicting their academic and life satisfaction. The research study results were positive considering that self-efficacy supports outcome expectations (applying for financial aid may provide the resources to pay for college), and academic progress gives academic satisfaction, which leads to life satisfaction. Schwartz et al. (2019) explained social capital has been associated with positive outcomes for first-generation students such as retention, higher GPA, and positive feelings about school. As students transition to college, their social capital diminishes leaving behind high school friends and their home communities. The authors emphasized that social capital weakens with low-income, minority, and first-generation college

students. Higher education institutions need to recognize that first generation Latinx students are vulnerable and more prevalent to drop out in their first year when they transition from high school to college. (Garriott et al, 2015).

The exploration of family achievement guilt is important for this study because it could be a factor why Latinx students decide to drop out. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) explained that first-generation students' family achievement guilt is based on the opportunities available to them but not to their family members. Latinx students experienced more guilt compared to other ethnic groups. Research revealed that interdependency was more prevalent for Latinx students (Garriott et al., 2015; Covarrubias, Fryberg, 2015). This conclusion is not surprising because Latinx students value family unity and equality. Hence, family achievement guilt was a barrier to college completion because Latinx students contemplated the possibility of dropping out to help their family members. Another explanation to family achievement guilt involved students feeling responsible for the family financial shortcomings while the students were away attending college. There was a significant correlation that first generation Latinx college students came from low-income families. With all the challenges first generation students face and in particular Latinx students, it is important to explore the experiences related to achievement guilt and social capital and how these relate to first-year experiences. These are essential factors that could impact retention, progression, and graduation at community colleges. In addition, Garriott et al. (2015) concluded that longitudinal research is needed to study the relationship between environmental support, self-efficacy (internal resources), and academic progress for first-generation students especially in their first-year school when students make decisions of continuing or dropping out.

Racialized Experiences of Latinx Student in Higher Education

There are many angles this topic of racialized experiences could be addressed for Latinx students in higher education. Although, this is not mixed methods research, it is important to point out some discrepancies within the "Big Data" of the literature.

Big data are defined as algorithms programed to predict future behaviors of individuals, and decisions or interventions are made based on these predictions (Gillborn, Warmington & Demack, 2017). The authors emphasized that statistics on racialized group experiences are "frequently mobilized to obfuscate, camouflage, and even to further legitimate racist inequalities." With this concept in mind, many higher education institutions provide statistics on Latinx students comparing them to their White counterparts. However, the problem has been camouflaged because institutions do not talk about opportunity gaps.

Research has also addressed opportunity gaps for Latinx students in higher education and racialized experiences in education. Garcia (2019) addressed this issue of opportunity gap by highlighting an inequitable funding model (different funding formulas for community colleges, universities, and school districts, and school zoning) that contributes to an opportunity gap and supports a "racialized education system." Garcia also pointed out that higher education institutions need to be desegrated considering that racialized systems values more predominantly white institutions while the system devalues minoritized institutions (e.g., HSIs, HBCUs and Tribal Colleges and Universities). It is a way to preserve white supremacy through funding discrepancies and minimum ACT score admission requirements to white elite institutions. In addition, racialized knowledge and "white ways of knowing" are transferred from faculty to students without validating their ways of knowing. It is a cynical cycle that is never checked because students become future leaders in post-secondary institutions, policy advocates at the

local and federal level, and future scholars who transmit white knowledge into practice and white policies. This cynical cycle is the root of the problem in higher education because nobody questions statistics that are gathered and disseminated to maintain the status quo of whiteness (Garcia, 2019).

Another way of recognizing racialized experiences of Latinx students in college has to do with their sense of belonging. Maldonado Dominguez (2019) eloquently stated how a sense of belonging for Latinx students is strongly correlated with improving retention rates and academic achievement. A sense of belonging for Latinx students relates to the support and resources they perceive and have access on campus. If students feel unimportant and marginalized while both attending a white institution and not identifying with the faculty, they are more likely to drop. The author also indicated that only 17% of Latinx students have completed a bachelor's degree compared to a 62% of Asian Americans, and 40% for European Americans. Thus, it is important to identify meaningful ways to foster Latinx students' sense of belonging to reaffirm their rightful place in academia to assist them with retention and graduation.

Maldonado Dominguez (2019) discussed how desegregating the data is important to develop a sense of belonging on Latinx students. In the Southwest of the United States, the Mexican culture is predominantly and constitutes 63% of the total Latinx population. The Latinx population is extremely diverse (difference races and mixed races); however, Latinx are homogenized by the dominant culture as Mexican to undermine and erase their complex group experiences. In this context, Maldonado Dominguez points out that there is a lack of literature of Central American students in higher education because Latinx students are bundled with the prominent culture. This homogenization argument makes sense considering that many institutions disseminate statistics based on the achievement gap of the predominant group, which

the numbers could be skewed positive or negative. The struggles of Salvadorian, Honduran, Costa Rican, Cubans, Venezuelan, and Colombian students just name a few are overshadowed. One of the goals of this study to explore variation in first year experiences by country of origin or heritage.

Latinx Students Sense of Belonging from a Cultural Perspective

Students' sense of belonging in higher education institutions is a topic discussed in the literature but rarely strategized as significant to retain students. Hurtado and Carter (1997) stated that understanding students' sense of belonging may be the single most important aspect of students' success, if institutions are genuinely interested in learning about their students' social and academic experiences, which, in turn, impact them positively or negative. In this regard, the authors proposed three questions that are important to be considered when analyzing this topic from a Latinx student perspective: 1) How can colleges be accountable for the success or failure of their students when their cultures are not part of the institutional culture? 2) Do the students see themselves as marginal to the dominant culture on campus? 3) What are the factors that "contribute to the students' sense of marginality, and does this sense of marginality contributes to students' lack of success in college?" (Hurtado & Carter, p. 324). The authors pointed out that perhaps higher education institutions need to redefine sense of belonging for populations of students who have been historically marginalized.

Latinx Familismo Values and Culturally Integrated Support Systems

For Latinx students, family ties and support systems are important while transitioning to college. Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2013) indicated that cultural values such as "Familismo," defined as strong family ties and the family comes first when support is needed over one's personal desires, could impact the educational attainment of Latinx students. This cultural belief

has implications especially for first-generation Latinx students because they might drop out of college in order to support their family financially (Duenas & Gloria, 2017). Similarly, Latinx students might encounter difficulties adjusting to the college environment when being away from family. Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) proposed a university counseling center (UCC) model focusing on a "psychosociocultural perspective." That is, when counselors counsel Latinx students, the main focus should not only be psychological pressing issues, but also discuss what kind of support systems they are missing (e.g., faculty mentors, family support), cultural factors (e.g., acculturation, ethnic identity), and environmental struggles as feeling marginalized into the dominant culture. Moreover, the authors argued that UCC providers need to consider psychosociocultural issues as the basics for counseling Latinx students because traditional psychotherapy approaches have failed in meeting the needs of minoritized students.

Research in higher education has oftentimes used deficit approaches to explain the low attainment of Latinx students instead of using a psychosociocultural approach. Thus, cultural values and grades are mentioned often in research rather than emphasizing institutional oppressions, microaggressions, and low set of expectations by faculty and administrators (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). Similarly, the authors argued that having support (e.g., significant others such as family, peers, and faculty) or belonging influence Latinx students to continue enrollment and persist with their higher education goals. Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2013) explained that there is a lack of understanding of Latinx students from a psychosociocultural context. To reinforce this point, they analyzed the phase, "ser buen educado" which literally means to "to be well educated." Ser buen educado has different connotes in Spanish when directed as a comment to someone close to you (family member) or valued (friend). It means to have formal education, have respect for other people, be well

mannered, and have high moral system. From this cultural perspective, many Latinx children and adolescents create social goals involving the family and, in many cases, disregard academic goals.

Latinx's Pre-College Environments and Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging for Latinx students also needs to be analyzed from a pre-college racial segregation perspective. Saenz (2010) pointed out that minoritized students usually come from pre-college environments (e.g., schools and neighborhoods) that are segregated by racial and socioeconomic barriers. In this regard, the benefits for minoritized students who attend college are, in fact, to interact with peers from different backgrounds if the conditions are provided. These cross-racial interactions have positive benefits to students because they disrupt these pre-conceived notions of other ethnic groups. Thus, attending more diverse institutions is important. In addition, the authors stated that these cross-racial interactions also prepare students to live in a more pluralistic and just society and most importantly motivate them to continue with their higher education goals. Similarly, Nunez (2011) explored sense of belonging and support for first-generation Latinx sophomores who enrolled in Chicano Studies at research universities. These students were able to cope better with feelings of isolation, get in touch with their heritage backgrounds, developed meaningful relationships with faculty, and understood the struggles of other ethnic groups. In sum, the Latinx students who took Chicano Studies courses handled better the transition process to higher education. However, for Latinx students who experienced discrimination, experiences with stereotyping, non-welcoming college climates, can lower self-confidence, academic performance, commitment to completion, and sense of belonging. This is yet another reason why FYEs are important for Latinx students. They can help them with the

transition process to higher education and, by increasing sense of belonging, potentially achieve the same results as Chicano Studies courses.

First Year Experience Courses

The research discussed above suggests that Latinx students face significant challenges in the transition to college, including achievement gaps, opportunity gaps, equity gaps related to student services, developmental placement, financial barriers, first-generation status, lack of social capital, racialized experiences, and sense of belonging. Nevertheless, FYEs may be an important point of intervention to the transition to college for Latinx students.

The first student success courses offered to first year-students for academic credit can be traced back to Johns Hopkins University in 1877 (Young & Keup, 2016). A century later, the University of South Carolina in 1972 created the first FYE to support and engage new incoming students (Bers & Younger, 2014). The need for FYEs has to do with providing the tools for new students to navigate the very complex bureaucratic system of higher education. Thus, a successful transition to college is related to learning new study skills, time management strategies, and learning to develop new social relationships (Karp & Bickerstaff et al., 2012; Young & Keup, 2016). As Bers and Younger (2014) argued, many organizations that have published research at the national scale, such as the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition; the Indiana University for Postsecondary Education; the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California; Achieving the Dream, and the Foundation for Excellence provided recommendations as to how to support student success and retention. Nonetheless, after reading many of the reports, it was concluded that only 40% of institutions surveyed had a "stand-alone first year experience program or office" to assist students in their first year, and 60% offered discrete activities without a central office

(Alamuddin & Bender, 2018). This underscores the variation in FYE program offerings across the nation in community colleges.

There is no specific standard definition for FYEs in colleges because of the variation in pedagogical content used to meet the students' needs. In the literature, college courses are also referred to as student success, introduction to college, orientation to college, and freshman experience courses (Karp et al., 2012). Within the same context, these FYEs serve the purpose of introducing students to campus services, assisting with career and transfer, planning, strategizing to improve study skills and personal development. In addition, one of the main goals of FYEs is to measure students' progress with long-term college success. In other words, FYE classes focus on how students apply the skills learned to cope with new academic-or life-challenges and strive to be successful. The knowledge acquired by students must be shifted to short-term and long-term academic goals, such as how to obtain specific student services to be successful; also, students must be exposed to the process of transferring from a two-year college to a four-year university. The process of acquiring this short-term and long-term knowledge and the application process defines FYEs real value to the student (Karp & Bickerstaff et al., 2012).

Different Types of FYEs Programs in Higher Education

FYEs are prevalent in colleges and universities and are considered high impact practices. Culver and Bowman (2016) indicated that 52% of colleges and universities offer and require students to enroll for a first-year academic seminar, and 30% have optional seminars for students to choose. These courses are explicitly designed to promote student achievement and retention by introducing students to college-level work and different pedagogical approaches (writing and reading intensive workshops, collaborative assignments, and service learning) to community college students (Young & Keup, 2016). FYE is a common name to identify different retention

initiatives for first- year incoming students. Bers and Younger (2014) identified six different core components of first year practices:

1. First Year Seminars. The seminar provides a forum, typically in the first term, for new students to examine their entry to college and the implications it has for their identity, their time, and their intellectual growth. These are mainly FYE 101 classes taught by faculty, staff and administrators.

2. Learning Communities. Although there are variations in structure and delivery, learning communities depend on linking two or more courses to emphasize connections among bodies of knowledge and to create a cohort of students with shared experiences.

3. Orientation. Across postsecondary institutions, orientation for new students varies in terms of length, content, and involvement of faculty and staff in academic affairs and student affairs.

4. Early Alert Systems. This function is an automatized referral system for students who are experiencing class difficulties such as never attending class but still enrolled, excessive absences and tardiness, not turning in assignments, low test and quiz scores, and personal concerns disclosed or observed by the faculty member. These students are referred to different departments on campus for assistance.

5. Academic Advising. It is a central component of FYEs at community colleges where students are assisted with their academic planning and questions or referred to other services within the institution.

6. Student Engagement and Student Success. As student FYEs programs have developed, other variations of students' success and retention goals have emerged such as reading

programs, service learning, and mentoring. Service learning had significant impact on students, considering that they are exposed to teamwork and career skills.

For the purpose of this research paper, FYE courses are explored to find out the effectiveness of these classes to retaining, completion, and graduation of Latinx students.

First-Year Experience Courses Effectiveness

It is unclear to what extent FYE courses achieve their intended goals. Permzadian and Crede (2016) stated that finding answers to this question of whether first-year seminars are effective is imperative because the price tag associated with these types of classes run into the hundreds of millions. With this goal in mind, the authors look at the effectiveness of FYE courses with respect to first-year GPA (cumulative) and retention rates (persistence to the second academic year). They found that first-year seminars are more effective if they have the following characteristics: hybrid (combination of online and on campus classes) academic content (instead of extended seminars), and are taught by faculty, administrative staff, or trained instructors. Seminars at two-year colleges are more impactful because of the population they serve (minoritized, first generation, lower ACT scores) compared to four-year colleges. They also found that first-year seminars do impact first-year GPA and retention albeit minimally. Overall, the study positively correlated first-year seminars with improvement of GPA and retention.

Culver and Bowen (2016) also found mixed results on the effectiveness of FYEs related to GPA and retention. The study results indicated that the first-year seminar had a positive correlation to first-year GPA as well as student satisfaction during the first year. The report also indicated that the institutional policy related to the type of seminar offered at a particular institution varies when it comes to student success. Thus, if the institution offers a first-year seminar and participation is optional, the first-year seminar is not significantly related to student-

success outcomes. Culver and Bowen (2016) also found significant correlations of satisfaction after completing the first-year seminar especially for students who had lower ACT scores, continuing-generational students, and Black students.

When institution take the task of designing an FYE, it is important to be aware of the students' risk factors. Brown et al. (2021) observed that before an institution designs an FYE, risk factors related to attrition and retention need to be analyzed. The risk factors are associated with gender, ethnicity, first-generation status, high-school performance, financial aid eligibility, enrolling for less than 14 credits, and living off campus. Out of all the factors previously mentioned, they found that being first-generation student and financial-aid insecurity negatively impacted all the cohorts included in the study. In addition, the students who failed the first-year experience were more likely to drop.

As part of my study, I explore the issues Latinx students encounter in higher education by interviewing students who completed and non-completed a first-year experience course at a community college. The interviews will provide an in-depth understanding of the risk factors and why some decided to stay, while others made the decision of dropping out. Similarly, I investigate the social, cognitive, and institutional factors that impacted their decision for students to continue or drop out of the institution. Swail (2014) addressed some of the strategies for retaining students such as counseling, service mediation, academic support services, study skills training, and time management. Most of these topics are covered while taking a first-year experience, but many students encounter challenges in their personal lives that prevent them to continue with their educational journey.

Latinx Students' Enrollment in Community Colleges and Projection for the Future

As stated previously, the vast majority of Latinx students are enrolling at community colleges. Within this context, it is important to analyze the reasons for this phenomenon and integrate long-term, sustainable solutions to student success and retention. An Excelencia in Education report indicated that the majority of Latinx student attend public institutions, and the following is the breakdown of institutions: 41% enrolled in public-two-year institutions and 28% enrolled in public four-year institutions (Santiago et al., 2019). Another report generated by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (2020), better known as HACU, revealed that there are 3.8 million Latinx students in higher education institutions, and projected that by 2029, the enrollment will increase to 4.2 million (25% of all students). In addition, the report projected that from 2018 to 2028, the Latinx labor force will increase from 17.5% to 20.9%. In 2018, the report underlined that one out of four Latinx students earned an associate degree.

Why Offer FYEs at Hispanic Serving Institutions?

Accordingly, this analysis of Latinx students' experiences with FYE courses may be especially important in the context of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Over 60% of Latinx undergraduate students enroll in 13% of higher education institutions designated as HSIs (Perez, 2020). HSIs is a federal designation outlined by Title V, which has the goal to increase the educational opportunities of Latinx students and increase their degree attainment. The legislation outlines the call to: "expand and enhance the academic offerings, program quality, and institutional stability of college and universities that are educating the majority of Hispanic college students and helping large numbers of Hispanic students and other low-income individuals complete postsecondary degrees" (20 U.S. Code, 1101, n.d). To receive the HSI designation under Title V, college and universities must enroll at least 25% full-time equivalent

(FTE) Latinx students. Another requirement is that 50% of the students enrolled at the institution must be classified as low-income. As described in the Code of Regulations, low-income students are those who are eligible to receive one or more categories of Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, and Federal Work-Study.

With this concept in mind, HSIs need to develop FYEs in line with the goal of improving degree and goal attainment for Latinx and other low-income students. Furthermore, Garcia (2019) suggested it is important for HSIs to enhance the cultural and racial experience of Latinx and minoritized students. It is not enough to simply enroll large percentages of minoritized students without validating their epistemological ways of knowing.

The HSIs' task is enormous considering many of these institutions are underfunded (Garcia, 2019). Other important points to mention are regarding the number of appropriations granted by the Department of Education every year and the lack of funding available for institutions that attained the designation. Other emerging HSIs with at least 20% of Latinx students enrolled might not obtain funding needed to serve the students' long-term goals, which will impact retention, progression, and completion.

FYEs Courses in Community Colleges

There is a lack of research on FYEs, particularly in regard to how they might benefit Latinx students' participation and retention. Some research suggests that navigational skills early in the first year of college do matter for Latinx students. Andrade et al. (2015) evaluated an HSI community college orientation in which the majority of the participants were Latinx students. They were tasked to find out why some students decided to participate (opt-in) and those who decided not to participate (opt-out). For the study, they interviewed 20 students with equal representation of those who opted-in and those opted-out. Their findings suggested that students

who participated in the program gained external benefits such as resume building, making social connections, and learned coping skills of a more rigorous academic environment compared to high school. In addition, student viewed academic counselors as instrumental in designing an academic path, in particularly in assisting students with understanding the process of transferring to a four-year college.

To the contrary, the students who opted-out of the program had some unique recommendations on how to improve the orientation program specifically with outreach strategies. Students pointed out the lack of clarity in the program's services, requirements to participate, and mission. Students also indicated that they had no time to attend scheduled weekly meetings because the meeting times were during their busy schedules with family obligations and work. The lack of information and an endless list of barriers are recurrent trends that many Latinx students face in higher education. Consequently, these are deciding factors for dropping out of higher education (Andrade et al., 2015). The lack of information and clarity of a program's goal and mission is an issue that school administrators need to account for when designing FYEs for Latinx students. Although the Andrade et al. study offers insight into the experience of Latinx students with college transitions programs, such as orientation, it suggests the need for additional research that examines FYEs. There is also a unique opportunity to address Latinx student retention, persistence, and graduation through the improvement of FYE courses.

Research Questions

These are the questions for this phenomenological and case study to explore the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education.

1. What are the academic, social, and institutional issues facing Latinx students in the first year of college, and how do these factors influence their persistence and retention in community colleges?
2. How do FYE courses at a two-year HSI serve Latinx community college students?
3. What are Latinx students' experiences in these FYE courses?
4. What supports do Latinx students in FYE courses believe they need to be successful to complete their educational goals?

Theoretical Frameworks

To understand Latinx students' experiences in FYE courses and explain the barriers and motivational factors Latinx student encounter in them, I apply Swails's Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. Swail's Geometric Model is presented in an equilateral triangle with a student's experiences in the center. The goal of the model is to explain all the factors related to students' persistence. The base of the triangle outlines the institutional factors, the left leg outlines the cognitive factors, and the right leg outlines the social factors (Swail, 2004).

However, based on the findings from the literature reviewed above, some of the factors and variables from Swail's Geometrical Model may impact Latinx students in different ways compared to other ethnic groups. Some of these factors that impact Latinx students are related to their academic preparedness, persistence and achievement, educational legacy, social integration on campus, and the ability of the institution to provide institutional support with FYEs initiatives and students services. Accordingly, in the context of HSIs, where most Latinx students are enrolled, suggests that it is important to complement Swail's (2004) Geometrical Model with

Garcia's et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs. This framework provides a rationale for HSIs to look beyond the enrollment of Latinx students and to serve their needs with a racial/ethnic cultural enhancement perspective. Similarly, Swail's model, referring to curriculum and instruction (institutional factors), suggests that institutions develop a core curriculum, which includes contributions of minority group. Garcia et al. refer to having an inclusive curriculum and makes a call to decolonize the curriculum and instruction. These two models are well suited to make the case that FYEs in HSIs must account for culturally equitable outcomes and increase retention and graduation for Latinx students.

Garcia et al.'s (2019) framework focused on "servingness" of Latinx students and what it should mean for higher education institutions. Catano and Gonzales (2021) suggested "servingness" within HSIs through a multidimensional conceptual model that integrates "indicators for serving, structures for serving, and external influences of serving" (p. 5) They explained that structures of serving should include validating and respecting Latinx students' epistemological ways of knowing. In addition, HSIs need to examine the experiences of minoritized students that are rooted in a system of white supremacy like discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions (Catano & Gonzales, 2021). Given this, FYEs could provide a platform to Latinx students have an equitable and inclusive curriculum within HSIs where students feel safe to discuss their individual experiences in relation to discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions.

Swail's Geometrical Model

Swail (2004) explains that "the Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement provides a user-friendly method for discussion and focus on (a) the cognitive and social attributes that the student brings to campus; and (b) the institutional role in the student

experience" (p. 12). The model explains the factors that lead to student attrition, and these attrition factors are a combination of cognitive, social, and institutional factors. According to Swail (2004), "these three factors must combine to provide a solid foundation for student growth development, and persistence. When stability is lost, students risk reducing their academic and social integration with the institution resulting in their dropping out" (p. 13). It is essential for institutions to collect biographical data (personal information) or student characteristics to better serve them. In other words, it is important to know, and have the data on, who the Latinx students on campus are and what types of experiences they bring with them. FYEs courses can assist institutions in collecting biographical information in a non-invasive way as it relates to first-time students. Overall, FYEs are a safe space for students and instructors to discuss the challenges that Latinx students are facing as first-time students and learn coping mechanism to be successful.

Swail (2014) provided a list of risk factors that interfere with completing college such as having part-time attendance, low GPA, non-traditional student status; coming from minoritized groups (except Asian decent); being first-generation, low-income and independent; having children or being single; attending an HSI, placing in developmental English and Math; working more than 20 hours per week. In addition, students with multiple risk factors have much lower opportunities of being successful, leading to dropping out. The list previously mentioned supports the factors and variables included in Swail's Geometrical Model. Figure 1 provides a visual of the model and a more detailed explanation is provided of each retention factor.

Institutional factors

With regard to institutional variables within the Geometrical Model of Student and Achievement, there are some factors to consider such as financial aid, student services,

recruitment and admissions, academic services, and curriculum and instruction. The institutional side of the triangle refers to the capability of the institution to provide services during the time the student is enrolled including academically and socially (Swail, 2004).

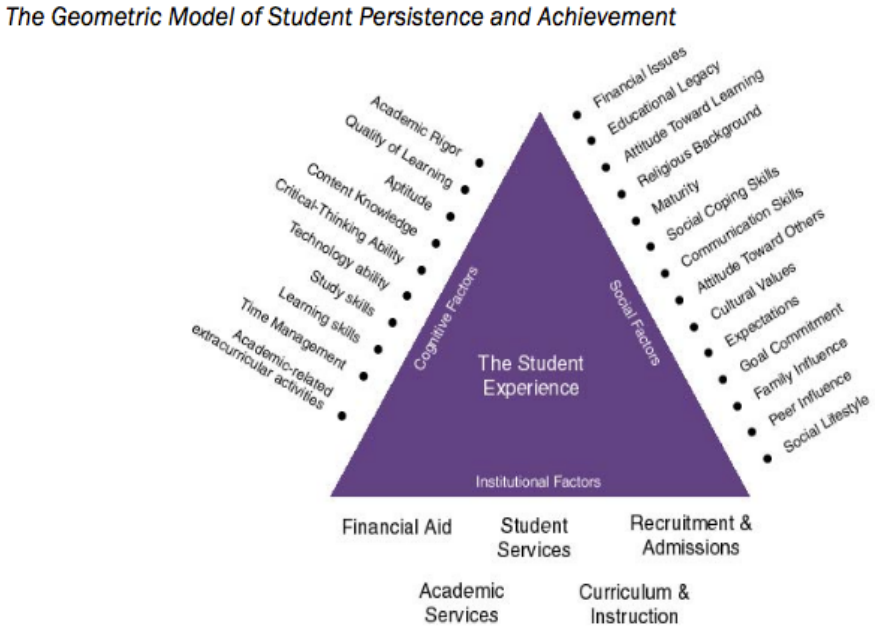
Cognitive factors

Cognitive factors within the Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement are important in retaining students. These include the intelligence, knowledge, and academic ability students have gathered overtime and brings to the institution (Swail, 2004).

Social factors

As part of the social experience within the Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement, social factors relate to the students' integration inside and outside the college campus. These factors include parental and peer support, the development or existence of career goals, educational legacy, and the ability to socially adapt. In addition, the social integration of the student is positively correlated with retention, but many students have a difficult time persisting when they are not fully integrated to the campus social environment (Swail, 2004).

Figure 1: Swail's (2004) The Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement.



The Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement suggests that FYEs should be implemented as campus wide programs to address Latinx student persistence, retention and graduation. Swail (2004) explained the phases of developing and implementing a comprehensive student retention program, which must include commitment from administrators, faculty, and staff. Thus, a comprehensive student retention plan must have: 1) proven research with solid supported indication of student success, 2) student success initiatives must be focused on the uniqueness of each campus with the mentality that one size does not fit all, 3) funding must be institutionalized with policy for the purpose of continuation, 4) successful retention initiatives engage the entire campus (every department) and less successful strategies are compartmentalized, 5) institutional change at the level of staff and faculty could be embraced with resistance, and providing extensive training alleviates confusion, 6) focus must be on any

initiatives as to the positive effects of student persistence and success because all operations should be centered on students, 7) institutional research is important to monitor the data as to whether change has been positive or negative, 8) and retention initiatives must target the most needy student populations. To implement an FYE or seminar course in a community college campus, the proper steps must be taken as detailed by Swail, where the faculty, administrators, and staff are working together to design the program or course with institutionalized policies that support student retention initiatives.

The Geometrical Model's Connection to Institutional Servingness

Swail (2004) emphasized that institutions must be sensitive to students' needs, specifically, to the neediest (minoritized) populations on campus. The author stressed campus climate by aligning a "pluralistic environment for students" and embracing diversity at the level of campus leadership, faculty, staff, student enrollments, curricula, programming, and campus artifacts. Exelencia in Education highlighted that in 2018, 67% of all Latinx undergraduate students enrolled in 247 two-year colleges and 292 HSIs universities (Santiago et al., 2019). FYEs implemented at HSIs need to account for the population they are serving, and the theoretical frameworks must be in congruence to Latinx students' ways of knowing. For this reason, I complemented the Swail model with a more critical framework of institutional servingness focused on Latinx students.

Servingness of HSIs

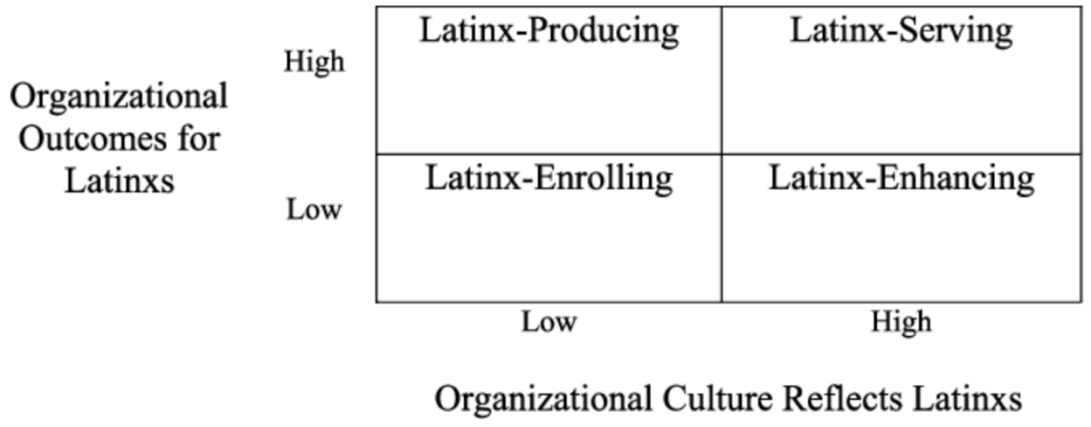
Gina Garcia (2019) proposed a cultural theoretical framework quadrant as a starting point for HSI organizations to measure outcomes for Latinx students. One of the main questions for administrators working at HSIs, and scholars, is what does it mean to serve Latinx students? The author described the cultural theory as a variable of institutional outcomes for HSIs, considering

Latinx students on campus would feel linguistically, culturally, and racially connected to their friends, faculty, and administrators. In this regard, the culture created within the institution would lead to desirable institutional outcomes because the students would gain a sense of belonging, persistence, and graduation. Garcia assesses institutions based on ideal outcomes related to an HSI identity, which illustrates "institutional ways of knowing and aspects of their unique culture." This is the reason why Garcia proposed the typology of Hispanic-Serving Institutions Organizational Identities. Within this quadrant, in the low bottom of organizational outcomes or lower quadrants, Latinx-Enrolling and Latinx-Producing are adopted, and in the upper levels, Latinx-Serving and Latin-Enhancing. As Garcia eloquently illustrated, she argued that HSIs should provide both outcomes (increase graduation rates) and cultural experiences to create an organizational identity. The typology could also be used by policy actors to inform their perceptions of servingness and to address any racial discrepancies in relation to educational outcomes (Catano & Gonzales, 2021).

In addition, Garcia (2019) proposes a different organizational framework for HSIs and challenges these institutions to "decolonize" and to empower the liberation of minoritized students. The idea is grounded in the history of colonization in the United States and the "coloniality of power" that began with the conquest of Latin America by European Powers (Spain, Portugal, and France). The ideology of social subjugation continues to be apparent in education, political, and economic disparities for Latinx students. Part of the challenge for HSIs is to disrupt the historical white-centric values and be open to organizational approaches that are "Raza" (people sharing a common culture) centric. In other words, HSIs need to consider the epistemological ways of knowing of their Latinx students and the values they are bringing to campus. Garcia argued that the organizational framework for decolonizing HSIs is the right path

to effectively fulfill the mission of "serving" Latinx students. Within this approach, the HSIs mission should not only be to graduate Latinx students but to enhance their racial and cultural history to better understand themselves and others.

Figure 2: Garcia (2017) Typology of Hispanic-Serving Institution Organizational Identities.



Latinx-Enrolling

When HSIs construct their organizational identity as Latinx-enrolling, they are only required to have a minimum of 25% of Latinx students to obtain the designation and apply for federal grants. However, these institutions do not provide equitable outcomes (students would not feel linguistically, culturally, and racially connected to their friends, faculty, and administrators) for Latinx students because they do not have organizational culture that enriches their personal development (Garcia, 2019).

Latinx-Producing

These institutions enroll at least 25% of Latinx students, and they produce desirable outcomes, including higher graduation rates of Latinx students. Also, students in Latinx-producing HSIs are trained for future careers and contemplate obtaining higher degrees. On the other hand, members (administrators, faculty, staff, and students) may not recognize that the institution lacks the culture enhancing component, which is important for supporting and developing Latinx students (Garcia, 2019, 2017).

Latinx-Enhancing

These institutions enroll a minimum of 25% of Latinx students, and they endorse a culture that enhances the experience of Latinx students. The institution has embraced a cultural identity and practices the norms and ways of knowing from the students' perspective. Nonetheless, the institution acknowledges the lack of equitable outcomes for Latinx students (Garcia, 2019; Garcia 2017).

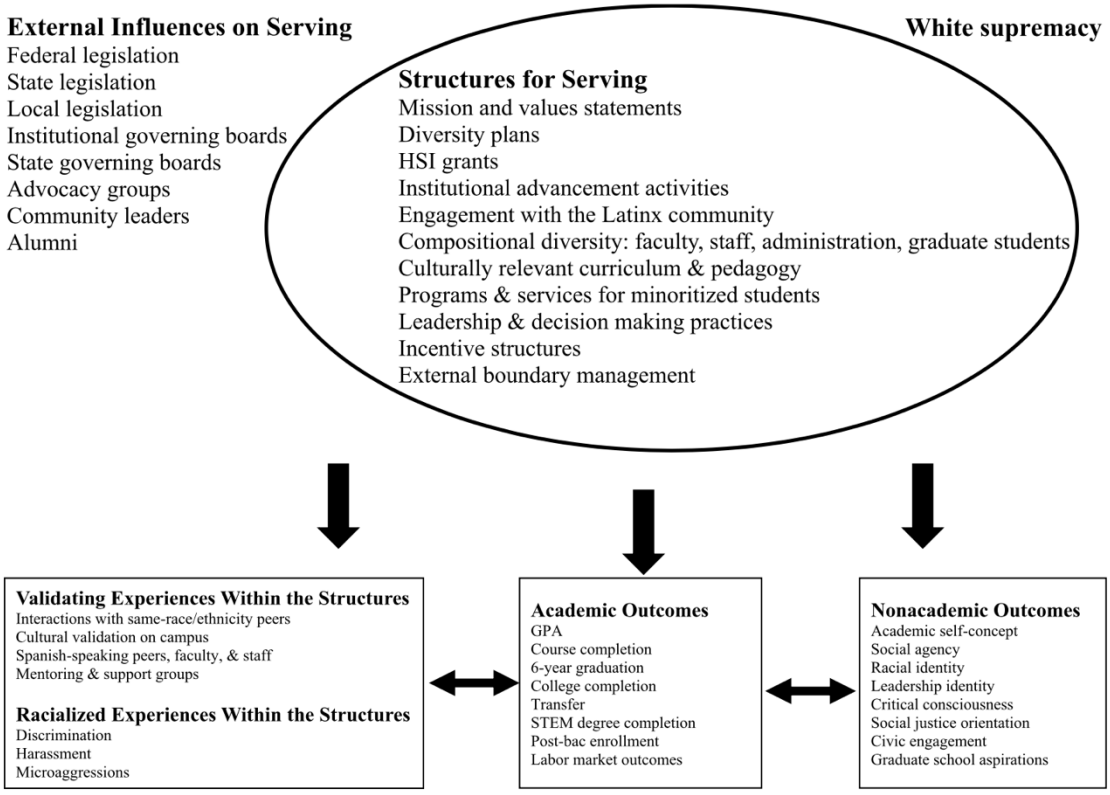
Latinx-Serving

The institution's identity is constructed around the members who understand that 25% of student enrollment is Latinx, and equitable outcomes are a pillar of their success. In addition, the institution provides to, and enriches the cultural and educational experience for their Latinx students (Garcia, 2019, 2017). Although, Latinx-Serving for HSIs is the inspire level within the quadrant, the author recognizes that all HSIs are worthy because many institutions co-exist in a stratified system of higher education. Garcia (2017) is implying that many HSIs did not plan on becoming HSIs; the designation is provided merely on enrollment trends. Consequently, the institutions do not emphasize their efforts in serving Latinx students.

Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs

It is not unusual that theoretical frameworks morph into more complex structures to be inclusive to prevailing educational realities. This was the case of Garcia's (2017) Typology of HSI Organizational Identities. It was the only peer-reviewed theoretical framework in the literature providing an understanding of servingness that accounted both organizational culture and outcomes. Hence, Garcia's (2017) two-dimensional framework on servingness was expanded to a Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs after a systematic review of the literature that included148 publications (Garcia et al., 2019). This is the model (see figure 3) that I am using to expand on the concept of "servingness" of Latinx students at HSIs; however, I believe that an extensive explanation of Garcia's (2017) was needed to provide some background context. Also, it provides more than just a typology of HSIs; it offers a perspective to examine practices, including FYEs, at HSIs.

Figure 3: Garcia et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs.



Garcia et al. (2019) suggested that the Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs is based on the findings of an extensive literature review. During the literature analysis, these themes emerged: outcomes, experience of students on campus and interactions were analyzed, policy and governance, political environments, and structures of service from a white supremacy perspective. In addition, the authors explained that outcomes and experiences only focus on the individual (student, faculty, staff, and administrators). Nonetheless, there are other external forces that shape the capability of an institution to develop structures to meet the needs of Latinx students. Some of these external forces are political,

funding, white supremacy embedded systems, policies of the local, state, and federal level (Garcia et al., 2019).

Indicators of Serving

Garcia et al. (2019) explained that "indicators of servingness" within the framework are divided by individual outcomes and experiences for students and nonstudents. Thus, these indicators of servingness are measurable by surveys, interviews, or focus groups. In addition, the framework is also divided in academic outcomes and nonacademic outcomes. The authors emphasized that common academic outcomes found in the literature included GPA, course completion rates, six-year graduation rates, transfer rates from two-year to four-year colleges, pursuing graduate enrollment, and labor market outcomes. On the other hand, nonacademic factors were less common in the literature review, but it is important to mention the most prevalent such as academic self-efficacy, social agency, racial identity, social justice orientation, and plans to pursue graduate school (please see figure 4 for complete list). It is noteworthy to mention that both outcomes holistically happen as a result when students attend HSIs, however, the experiences can be disrupted by structural elements and external forces. As the framework indicates with double-sided arrows, indicators do interconnect with each other such as outcomes, experiences for students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Garcia et al., 2019).

Garcia et al. (2019) discussed that in order for HSIs to become "transformative spaces of serving," the organizational must consider the experience of all people including faculty, staff, and administrators because they get to influence the experience and outcomes of students. Within the framework, the authors divided these experiences into validating (positive) and racialized (negative). Validating experiences of minoritized students include interactions within the same peer groups, race, faculty, staff, cultural validation, comfort level to speak Spanish on campus,

mentoring, and support. To conceptualize these racialized experiences, the authors emphasized oppressions systems of white supremacy still operates within HSIs. For minoritized communities, they experience racism, discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions. It is important to mention that all these positive and negative experiences are measurable by conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups (Garcia et al., 2019). For the purpose of this study, indicators of servingness will be measured by interviewing students who enrolled to an FYE course.

Structures for Serving

Garcia et al. (2019) explained that organizational structures are important within HSIs to address the needs of Latinx students. In fact, organizational structures also include the decisions administrators make to serve students including mission and value statements aligned to serve students, developing strategic diversity plans for serving, changing hiring practices to attract and employ minoritized faculty and staff, and engaging with the community they are serving. In addition, another way showing commitment to serving Latinx students is by applying and implementing HSI grants, culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculums, supporting programs that are culturally relevant, and respecting Latinx students' ways of knowing. Some of these structures are not necessarily measurable as outcomes and experiences, but they can be observed for reporting purposes using appropriate methods such as case studies, observations, inventories, and document analysis as strategic plans (Garcia, et al., 2019). For this study, document analysis will be included to report servingness structures.

External Influences on Serving

Garcia et al. (2019) indicated that beyond structures, there are external influences that affect the positionality of HSIs to serve Latinx students. The research findings depict external

influences as local, state, federal legislation, state governing boards, advocacy groups, and community agents. Within the literature, part of the history acknowledges that the HSI designation was a grass roots effort. In other words, the HSI designation did not come about because the federal government desired to better serve Latinxs, but instead as a result of long-term political advocacy (Garcia et al., 2019).

White Supremacy

The final element added to the framework is the "system of white supremacy." The main reason for adding white supremacy to the framework has to do with recent research recognizing and calling out systems of oppression. These systems go back to colonial times and still influence HSIs to underserve minoritized students (Garcia et al., 2019). One of the examples provided by Garcia et al. is that recent search shows that applicants for HSI grants design their proposal using race neutral to comply with white supremacy values. The institution where this case study will take place has received an HSI recently, and it would be important to explore their proposal to collaborate what the authors are implying.

Integrating the Models

Swail's Geometrical Model, which centers the student experience along three domains of institutional, cognitive, and social factors offer a guide for exploring Latinx student experiences in FYE courses. Yet, the unique setting for the study an HSI and community college suggest that Garcia's et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs is important for exploring issues specific to the experiences, academic outcomes, nonacademic outcomes, validating experiences, racialized experiences, external influences on serving, structures of serving, and white supremacy systems related to oppression of Latinx students in FYE programs. Garcia et al.'s (2019) framework is complex considering that it includes social

justice curriculum (teach students to become activists, learn about their indigenous culture, and colonized past) cultural programs, services and resources (teach students about systems of oppression and tools to disrupt them, encourage students to become community change agents, enhance understanding of their selves and other minoritized beings), faculty of color and administrators of color (faculty and administrators represent students' enrollment ratios, are aware of issues minoritized communities are facing, complete diversity and inclusion trainings, and become allies to oppressed communities such as LGBT and undocumented students). All of these concepts are important to strive to become an institution that recognizes and validates Latinx students' epistemological ways of knowing and experience. In addition, the framework acknowledges students' backgrounds, and the curriculum should challenge them to question their education instead of accepting indoctrination. Thus, these elements embrace the diversity of the students and strives to have an inclusive curriculum that teach Latinx students about their backgrounds and oppression. With this concept in mind, faculty and administrators understand the struggles of minoritized students and assist them to achieve their academic goals.

What is unique about both frameworks is that servingness depends on many internal and external factors to conceptualize the student experience. Nonetheless, the student is at the center of both frameworks because these internal and external forces do impact them positively or negatively to continue their academic journey. Swail's model highlights the individual factors and experiences. On the other hand, Garcia's et al. framework underlines the organizational experience provided to the student. As a result, the two models complement each other in making a case that FYEs in HSIs are suitable for providing cultural equitable outcomes, and to increase persistence, retention, and graduation for Latinx students. For this study, the examination of FYEs will provide a unique opportunity to learn more about the experiences of

Latinx students that completed or dropped out. As research indicated, FYEs are generally taken during the first year of college and students who fail this course are more likely to drop out of the institution. To the contrary, those students who completed an FYE may have earned higher GPAs, made social connections, and learned coping skills to persist in a more rigorous academic environment.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological and case study explored the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that influenced the retention of Latinx college students in one community college located in the southwest part of the United States, focusing on their experiences in an FYE course. This phenomenological and single case study was a holistic design, and it is bounded by the students who enrolled and completed and non-completed a first-year seminar course during the spring and fall 2022. The FYE completers and non-completers were e-mailed and invited to be interviewed to capture their experiences. It was important to explore the issues Latinx students' perceived when they completed or opted to withdraw. The first-year seminar course at this particular community college is not required to be taken by freshman students (those who have completed 15 credits or less). Rather, it is optional. Academic advisors, counselors, recruiters, or friends recommend the class. On many occasions students who are not doing well academically (GPA below 2.0) are also encouraged to enroll for the first-year seminar class in hopes that it would bring a different personal and academic perspective to the student's academic goals.

Questions

For this research study, the following questions explored the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education.

1. What are the academic, social, and institutional issues facing Latinx students in the first year of college, and how do these factors influence their persistence and retention in community colleges?

2. How do FYE courses at a two-year HSI serve Latinx community college students?
3. What are Latinx students' experiences in these FYE courses?
4. What supports do Latinx students in FYE courses believe they need to be successful to complete their educational goals?

The researcher chose this specific community college because it had 32.5% enrollment of Latinx students during the fall 2018 and 71.4% of students were attending part-time. In addition, the institution is an HSI. Another important statistic is the number of FYEs scheduled during spring and fall 2022. During spring 2022, there were 57 FYEs sections offered and during fall 2022 there are 45 FYEs sections.

Research Design

The different parts of the research design will be explained to provide an in-depth understanding of the issues Latinx students experience in this particular community college FYE course. The phenomenological design was valuable to describe the common themes and lived experiences between several individuals. Qualitative researchers identify a phenomenon (abiding concern) of human experience and then compose a description of the main themes related to all individuals as linked to "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenon in this study was Latinx students who enrolled to a first-year experience course designated to support students in the community college setting.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the data collection procedures typically involve interviewing participants who have experienced the phenomenon the researcher is investigating. In addition, the phenomenological investigation could include data sources related to observations and written documents to interpret the phenomenon experienced by the participants.

As stated previously, the participants of this study were Latinx students who completed the spring and fall 2022 FYE course (non-completers did not respond to e-mails to participate on the study) The students were interviewed to connect different themes related to the issues they experienced concerning institutional, social, and cognitive factors while enrolled in the FYE class.

Setting

The participants of this study were Latinx students who completed the first-year experience class at a community college located in the Southwest part of the United States. There were a few advantages for choosing this research site. First, the institution received the HSI recognition in 2015, which meant that at least 25% of the students were Latinx. In addition, 42% of the students were Pell Grant recipients, which meant many students were socioeconomically disadvantaged and underrepresented. The institution has been divided into a multi-campus model located within three city limits. The FYE course was under the English Department offered at all three campuses, and the majority of the classes were taught by part-time instructors. As stated previously, the FYE course was not mandatory for first-year incoming students and the course offering was limited. In spring and fall 2022, there were 102 sections offered for the entire school, and 777 Latinx students were enrolled for both semesters.

The limitations of choosing this particular institution were related to location and circumstances created by the pandemic. As stated previously, the institution is divided into a multicampus model within three cities. The students who lived in a particular city or neighborhood closer to, or farther from, to the campus could have encountered different barriers to completion. To this point, one limitation of this study was to make general conclusions about Latinx students who lived in different cities and the issues they faced to be successful. Due to the

pandemic and when this research took place, students had limited option of choosing classes on campus, and dual enrollment students (high school and college) did not have access to on campus services. As of fall 2021, the campuses reopened and all essential student services were offered on campus and online such as tutoring, financial aid, counseling, advising, career services, library services, computer labs, and transferring services.

The pandemic created adaptation issues for students to transitioning to an online environment. According to Steward, Goodson, and Miertschin (2021), these groups of students with the most difficulty time to adapt to an online environment were low-income or working class, first-time incoming students compared to junior and seniors, minoritized students, and students with no access to technology or devices. When the pandemic began college campuses were obligated to be closed; as a result, many students experienced frustration, lack of motivation to complete online work, and lack of study space. Consequently, colleges reported a 20% drop in of enrollment during the pandemic (Steward, et al., 2021). All these variables were common for many students, and they should be considered as limitations for the chosen research site.

Regarding the FYE course at this particular institution, there were 102 sections offered during spring and fall 2022. The vast majority of Associate of Arts degrees do not require this FYE course, and it is not counted as an elective. Another important variable to consider was that Pell Grants do not cover classes that are not part of the degree requirements. Thus, many students are discouraged to enroll into the FYE courses because these are not counted for their degree and the student is required to pay using their own funds.

This is a single case study because the research focus only on FYE courses. However, the institution has adopted a multicampus model, and it is composed of three campuses. Thus, the

phenomenon and case study were explored across three different sites because every campus offered FYE courses under the umbrella of one single department. Yin (2018) indicated the options for designing a single-case study: 1) single institution, 2) common case, and 3) holistic design (one single department instead of multiple subunits). “You can then use the single-case to determine whether the propositions are correct or whether some alternatives set of explanation might be more relevant” (Yin, 2018, p. 49). The propositions of this single holistic case study are aligned with Swail’s (2004) Geometrical Model of Student Persistence that describes the cognitive and social factors the students bring with them to the campus. Thus, the institutional role is to enhance the student experience. Garcia’s (2019) Organizational Outcomes quadrant is reflected in regards to the willingness of Hispanic Serving Institutions to provide a cultural experience to their Latinx students. Moreover, the propositions are related to the institution’s inclination to enhance the cultural experience (servingness) of Latinx students. Swail’s (2004) Geometrical Model and Garcia’s (2019) Organizational Outcomes model complement each other because both of them advocate for the institution to enhance the student experience.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 students for this phenomenological case study from an extensive list of those who completed and non-completed the FYE course during spring and fall 2022. Bailey (2018) indicated interview questions in a phenomenological and case research study often begin with “what” and “how” to explore the phenomenon. These types of open-ended questions were useful to obtain comprehensive responses. These were some of the questions that were asked of the participants: 1) What factors contributed for your decision to dropping out of the institution? 2) What factors contributed for your decision in completing the FYE in your first or second semester? 3) How would you describe a Hispanic Serving

Institution? 4) Can you list what student services you received while completing the FYE (e.g., tutoring, library services, advising, counseling, financial aid, career services, etc.)? 5) If you did not receive any student services, would any have made a difference in your decision of not dropping out? 6) What was your overall experience taking the FYE? 7) Do you feel more prepared to be successful in college after taking the FYE, why or why not? 8) What were some of the most important skills you learned while taking the FYE? 10) What is your employment status (part-time or full time)? 11) If any, what life and academic challenges were you facing while enrolled in the FYE? 12) How has the relationships you developed at school or in the community helped you to transition to college? 13) What cultural relevant teachings were part of the FYE that you felt identified with, and how did the course expand your knowledge.

Yin (2018) stated the importance of interviews in case studies because interview transcripts help the researcher explain the "how's and "why's" of key events (completing FYE course and perceived issues). Interviews also provide the opportunity for interviewees to reflect and provide insights about the experience events (Yin, 2018). Lastly, audio recording interviews provides a more accurate rendition of the events compared to taking notes, and it is a more accurate mechanisms of transcribing (Yin, 2018).

Also, I did an analysis of six documents pertinent to the study 1) FYE history, 2) Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Strategic Plan Report, 3) FYE housed in the English Department, 4) Historical overview of the FYE course, and 5) Institutional Strategic Plan. Also, the researcher provides general statistics of number of FYEs sections for spring and fall 2022, and the breakdown of students' enrollment per semester. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the researcher collects the data from individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon by in-depth interviewing participants (students who enrolled and completed the

first-year seminar course during the spring and fall 2022). To this end, I was trying to find out and understand the common experience of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured and recorded. Bailey (2018) indicated that in semi-structured interviews, a guide of specific questions is organized by topic, but questions are not asked in a particular order to maintain fluidity between the interviewee and interviewer, questions are not in any particular order. Subsequently, students' e-mails and phone numbers were obtained from the college's Institutional Research.

Sample Recruitment

The college has three main campuses, but the majority of courses are offered online. I obtained the list from the Registrar's Office with 777 Latinx students (489 females and 288 males) who completed and non-completed in the spring and fall 2022 semesters. All the students were contacted via e-mail (student recruitment e-mail script) inviting them to participate in the study with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The criteria set for qualifying participants was based in the willingness to participate in the study. The student recruitment e-mail explained: 1) my personal information and degree; 2) participants' characteristics (Latinx student and completer or non-completer of the FYE course) and purpose of the study; 3) the time frame of the interview using Microsoft Teams; 4) all student participants selected for an interview received a $50 gift card.

Data Analysis

In this study, I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with Latinx students who showed willingness to participate and had completed the FYE course during spring and fall 2022 semesters. Of this group, 18 individuals were selected to participate in the in-depth interviews, based on the criteria previously mentioned. The interviews were recorded using

Microsoft Teams and later transcribed by the researcher. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained one-on-one interviews could be accomplished by having the interviewee and interviewer in the same room, talking face-to-face using technology, or talking over the phone. As stated previously, the researcher interviewed participants using Microsoft Teams with the intention of identifying the participants' perceived issues while they were completing the course.

To complete the coding task, the researcher used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS or MAXQDA). Bailey (2018) identified the advantages of using CAQDAS as assisting the researcher in finding key words in the transcript, retrieving segments of data, searching for relations among assigned categories, making graphical representations of the transcript to find relationships amid different themes, and working with digital audio. All of the capabilities of using CAQDAS were important for providing validity to the research.

It is important to point out that computer programs cannot do the analysis for the researcher of coding and categorizing. Rather, it was my responsibility to condense the data, identify key phases, construct patterns, developed categories, themes, assertations, and assign a code level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the authors explained, the main purpose of coding is to analyze the data line by line and "thinking about the meaning of each sentence and idea, the researcher engages in active reading strategy" (p. 209). In addition, coding was analyzed through the lens of Swail (2004) Geometrical Model of Student Retention Persistence and Achievement (cognitive factors, institutional factors, and social factors) and Garcia et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs.

Validity and Trustworthiness

I also took the proper steps to ensure this research met high standards of excellence. Bailey (2018) defined validity and trustworthiness by engaging in high standards of analyzing

the data, which accurately enlighten the experiences of the participants in the setting. I do understand that as a researcher I checked biases, but it is important to remind myself that my opinions were part of this research considering my background as an immigrant, English language learner, and tenured faculty. I realized my opinions were included when analyzing the data, and my committee members helped me to recognize that my opinions were not checked out at the door. Instead, they positioned me to embrace them. Triangulation of the data is another way to increase validity and trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used triangulation in the form of creating an adapted Swail (2004) model for each participant to explore elements of cultural domain using the interview transcription. Also, the domain analysis was conducted by creating a table with taxonomies, category subsets, and evidence supported with the transcription of the students' interview data.

Positionality

I believe it is important provide a positionality statement to be fully transparent. I am a Latinx, heterosexual, and baptized Catholic. However, I like to think of myself as spiritual instead of being a religious churchgoer. I am also an immigrant born in El Salvador. Due to El Salvador's civil war from 1980 to 1992, my family and I immigrated to the United States when I was fourteen years old. I grew up in Los Angeles where I went to middle and high school. When I came to the United States, I did not speak English.

After graduating from high school, I attended a community college. For full disclosure, I never took an FYE course in college because it was not offered. After graduating with my master's degree, I did have the opportunity to teach an FYE course for five years at the same community college where this study took place. Thus, I believe I am familiar with the general topics covered on the FYE.

In regard to my positionality, I consider myself a critical scholar knowing that I have much to learn about myself and others' culture. I also understand that being Latinx does not make me an expert on every culture from Latin America. Bourke (2014) explained the research process as "reflexibility" because the researcher is self-reflecting throughout the progression of collecting and analyzing the data. It is a continuous analysis of one's biases toward others and how one might approach the research setting and engaging with the participants to interpret their experiences. Bourke explained that interpretations are divided into two viewpoints: 1) the way the researcher interprets the experiences of the participants and oneself, and 2) the way the participants make meaning of their own experiences. I certainly understand that I share the same if not similar background as the study participants of this study, and I need to be aware of my interpretations of the data to accurately represent the participants' views.

As a researcher, I am aware my biases and opinions considering I work at the research site. In other words, I will be conducting research in my own "backyard," and I am aware of the advantages and disadvantages. I am not worried about any repercussions of reporting unfavorable data or dangerous knowledge (Creswell and Poth, 2018) that might jeopardize my job or integrity as researcher. As I stated previously, I have taught the FYE course in the past, and I am familiar with the course content.

Conclusion

The purpose of conducting qualitative research on the issues pertaining to Latinx students and their perceived need for services was to analyze the challenges they faced and pose workable solutions. In addition, the ultimate goal is to provide a platform for the students and, with their shared experiences, help other Latinx students to succeed. The results of this case study will inform educators, administrators, and support staff of the issues this population of students is

facing and advocate for solutions to the most pressing problems, which are retention, "servingness," and completion. Also, using a servingness lens to analyze Latinx student experiences in FYEs will help to illuminate how these structures can better serve Latinx students. Garcia et al. (2019) might argue that FYEs were not designed with Latinx student in mind, and so in the context of HSIs. FYEs might need to be interrogated to examine how they are serving Latinx students.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This chapter focuses on analyzing a single case study of a First Year Experience (FYE) course by drawing on multiple data sources at a college located in the southwest part of the United States. In addition, the phenomenon is analyzed through the interview transcripts depicting Latinx student experiences among those who enrolled in the FYE during the spring and fall of 2022. Thus, this phenomenological and case study will explore the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that influence the retention of Latinx college students. Separately, this research study has analyzed how the FYE courses and institutions serve a broad scale of Latinx students. All study participants completed the FYE, but it is important to explore the issues Latinx students perceived upon completion of the course. The first-year seminar course at this particular community college is not required to be taken by freshman students (those who have completed 15 credits or less). Rather, it is optional, and they can choose to take the course at any time during their academic development or degree completion. Academic advisors, counselors, recruiters, or friends recommend the class. On many occasions, students who are not doing well academically (GPA below 2.0) are also encouraged to enroll in the first-year seminar class with the hope that it brings a different personal and academic perspective to the student's academic goals.

The single case study findings are organized in the following parts: FYE history, reports, academic department housing the FYE course, culturally relevant curriculum, program and services for minoritized students, and general statistics of Latinx students enrolled in concurrent

semesters (spring and fall 2022). After further describing the program, the researcher will describe relevant themes extracted from the phenomenological study.

Questions

For this research study, the following questions explore the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education.

1. What are the academic, social, and institutional issues facing Latinx students in the first year of college, and how do these factors influence their persistence and retention in community colleges?
2. How do FYE courses at a two-year HSI serve Latinx community college students?
3. What are Latinx students' experiences in these FYE courses?
4. What supports do Latinx students in FYE courses believe they need to be successful to complete their educational goals?

Document Analysis

In this section I provide an analysis of six documents pertinent to the study 1) FYE history, 2) Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Strategic Plan Report, 3) FYE housed in the English Department, 4) Historical overview of the FYE course, 5) Institutional Strategic Plan. I also review institutional data and report statistics of number of FYEs sections for spring and fall 2022, and the breakdown of students' enrollment per semester.

FYE History Reviewed Documents

Garcia et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs highlights the external influences on serving and structures for serving. As part of the case study, the structures for serving will be analyzed by reviewing the following: college website, mission

and value statements, diversity plans, HSI grants, institutional advancement activities, compositional diversity (faculty, staff, administration, and students), Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), culturally relevant curriculum, FYE pedagogy, and programs services for minoritized students.

The mission statement does not mention that the institution is recognized as an HSI or a minority serving institution. The institution has five core values with one related to diversity, which discusses the integration of different backgrounds and perspectives from students, faculty, staff, and community. The impression is to promote creativity, innovation, and growth. These values could be considered as a structure of serving under Garcia's et al Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness since it promotes diversity, considers the backgrounds and perspectives of students, faculty, and community.

The institution's main webpage does not include a section explaining their HSI designation and status obtained in 2015. In other words, there is no heading that a student, faculty member, or someone from the community would recognize that the institution has an HSI designation from a clear view browser perspective. To read about the college's designation, the researcher had to type HSI in the search bar. The Title V HSI project link page is accessed, and the page has information regarding what is an HSI. Also, the page explains the type of HSI grant awarded and how the grant would benefit Latinx, low-income, and other underrepresented student groups. In the same page, a hyperlink takes the navigator to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) 2021 fact sheet on HSIs and Latinx enrollment in higher education.

Diversity and Inclusion Assessment Strategic Plan Report

In 2020, the institution released a strategic plan report on diversity and inclusion assessment. The report outlined the institutional challenges regarding diversity and inclusion. One of the statements that was impactful to read in the report stated the issue of "faculty not connecting to students" and explained that faculty needed to meet students at the students' academic development level. Another finding of the report indicated that white faculty members arbitrarily viewed the hiring of minority colleagues as quota-fulfillment rather than merit-based hires. The report proposed the development of a path that allows white faculty to be part of the solution of embracing minority colleagues by acknowledging that decades of discrimination has led to faculty being predominantly white. According to the report, the breakdown of tenured and tenured track faculty is comprised of 71% White/Caucasian and 6% Hispanic/Latino. On the other hand, the student population is continuously more diverse with minorities becoming the majority compared to white students. The Latinx student enrollment is 34% compared to 28% white. When it comes to Department Chairs, 71% are white, and 6% are Latinx. The aspirational change needed for representation is 27% increase. Overall, the staff composition is 41% white and 25% Latinx. The aspirational change needed for representation is a 9% increase.

The diversity and inclusion assessment report provided a detailed breakdown of the composition of the administrative leadership by race/ethnicity compared to student enrollment. In reference to school deans, 83% are white compared to 28% student enrollment. There are no Latinx deans even though Latinx student enrollment is 34%. As the report indicated, an aspirational goal is needed for representation.

Another important key finding of this report has to do with institutional policies that attack ideas which developed a diverse pool of faculty and employees. The report indicated the

institution does not have clear hiring goals as it relates to Affirmative Action and diversity equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategic objectives. It is difficult to change the composition of the faculty at any higher education institution to be more diverse when policies in place protect the status quo. The recommendations provided by the report on diversity and inclusion assessment might trigger some faculty and administrators to make changes that simultaneously do not "rock the boat." It is possible the report has been discussed openly in President's Forums, Faculty Senate meetings, various diversity committees, and the faculty's union meetings. However, very little can be accomplished if the culture of the institution prevails over substantive changes. It is fair to conclude that good intentions do not necessarily yield results when it is not an institutional priority.

The issue of lack of diversity among the tenured or tenured track faculty is the result of non-existent initiatives and budget set aside to attract a diverse pool of applicants. The diversity report provided recommendations, but no action has been taken to implement those recommendations by human resources. However, when the faculty negotiated the 2022-2025 union's year contract with the administration, job descriptions for various positions such as Chairs, Assistant Chairs, Directors, Faculty Leads were included in the CBA. In the past, those job positions did not have any job descriptions. The union, Faculty Senate, and administrators developed those job descriptions and placed on the union's website. In other words, those job descriptions were codified. Part of the description of each position stipulates a commitment to diversity and inclusion. To that end, chairs are required to demonstrate compliance with diversity and inclusion, but it is difficult to reinforce the agreed language if it is not part of their individual end of year evaluations.

The CBA contract was part of the case document analysis to assess equity, diversity, and inclusion. Collective Bargaining Agreements are not carefully examined by researchers because it is not a document that is publicized in academic research engines. Nonetheless, the union's CBA supersedes institutional policies and the state's higher education systems code when there is a dispute of ambiguity or contradiction over adopted policies and procedures. One of the CBA articles talks about non-discrimination. This article affirms the principles of equal opportunity and freedom from unlawful discrimination. In addition, the article states a non-discrimination clause in the hiring processes for the institution and reassures a dedication to affirmative action. After carefully reviewing the contract, it is difficult for a union to hold an institution accountable for breach of contract when the CBA does not include an article on arbitration.

FYE Course Housed in the English Department

The FYE course at this two-year college is housed in the English Department, which is part of the institution's School of Arts and Letters. The school's webpage indicates that they "want students to understand and value their cultural and intellectual heritages and those of others," which aligns with the structures of serving proposed by Garcia et al (2019). However, the page does not outline outcomes and objectives under the premises of valuing their cultural backgrounds, intellectual heritages, and those of others.

Historical Overview of the FYE Course

Part of a case study is to provide a document review and the history behind the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was able to obtain a copy of the original Academic Standards Committee Course and/ or Program Request Form. The FYE course at this institution is dates back to 1986, when it was reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee. The document review indicates the class was a three-credit, 100-level, non-transferable, and developmental

course. It was classified under a different name and suffix as the current one. The goal of the class was to develop essential study skills to cope with the demands of college-level courses. Reading comprehension and retention were emphasized. In 1986, the name of the community college was different from the current one.

The Academic Standards Committee reviewed the course again in 1990 and in 1992. In 1990, the course name and number changed to a lower division (less than 100-level and became non-transferable). The course description was also updated. Reading comprehension and retention goals were deleted. The Academic Standards Committee Course and/ or Program Request Form indicated the course number was changed to reflect a state-wide numbering system for all developmental-level courses, called common course numbering. In 1992, the course name and number changed one more time to a 100-level in order to match the equivalent course taught at one community college in the state. The course description remained the same, but the course was assigned as a general elective. With the course number change, the two in-state universities agreed to accept the course as a general elective. This agreement is documented in a letter sent by the Office of the Associate Dean of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences division and signed by Registrars of each institution.

There were other changes to the course that are worth mentioning because they help to capture the whole history of the development process for the FYE course. To provide a short timeline from 1995 to 2005, the FYE course description changed in 1998 to include topics such as college orientation, memory, priority management, career development, with outcomes focused on personal, social responsibility. The rationale provided by the Curriculum Committee Course or Program Request Form stated that the previous course title and description did not represent the updated content and orientation of the course. In 2000, the course description was

changed, and more topics were added such as time management-priority setting, money management, and other topics that impacted the students on campus and outside of the institution. The course was placed under the discipline of human relations for certificates and degrees programs. In addition, the course outcomes (18 total) were developed. The main core performance elements were, critical thinking, communication skills, technology content, diversity content, and life experience. It is also important to mention that none of the documents previously reviewed included course outcomes and core performance elements. For this part of the document review, the diversity performance element was unexpected, and the course outcome states, "understand and describe at least three or more effects of an open, diverse society." I have quoted this course outcome because diversity became a core performance element to the current FYE course.

The College Curriculum Committee Course or Program Request approved the following changes from College Success to Academic Life Success, course description, and number change as of 2004 with an implementation date of fall 2005. The rationale for those approved changes focused on the course content and course topics. As a researcher, I found the rationale for the course number change to 101 to be very interesting. The document analyzed (College Curriculum Committee Course or Program Request Form) stated FYE 101 was the "beginning of several classes to be offered" under the current designation. The researcher carefully examined past catalog years as part of the documents analyzed, it was discovered that the institution had created an equivalent FYE 101 course for Spanish speaking students, but the course has not been offered for many years. As stated previously, the last revised FYE version for Spanish speaking students was offered in 2004, and it has remained unchanged to the present FYE. This course is optional for students who are pursuing Associate of Applied Science Degrees, Associate of Arts

under general electives, Associate of Science under general electives, and Associate of Applied Science under human relations.

The overall conclusion of the significance of these documents analyses and the history behind them is that even though the FYE at this institution has evolved overtime, but it has remained relatively unchanged in many ways for 20 years. It can be concluded that the current course outcomes are more representative of the challenges that newly admitted students face in college. Nonetheless, the FYE course at this institution is not mandated for newly admitted students, and it is therefore difficult to quantify the positive impact on students' success towards retention and completion. This is an argument posed by the literature review because institutions cannot credit students' success on retention and completion if an FYE is not mandated.

Institution Strategic Plan 2019 -2024

The institution's strategic plan 2019-2024 does not make any reference to the HSI designation or an identify as a minority serving institution (MSI) even though the HSI designation was received in 2015. Within the document, there is a statement about the state's governing system of higher education, which indicates that one of their strategic goals is to, be consciousness of the achievement gap between different minoritized student populations. To achieve this goal under student success objectives, the institution proposed that an implementation of FYE model would enhance the students' connection, entry, progress, and completion. This experience (FYE) is a model for student services, where the students who participate might develop connections amongst themselves and consequently, also connect with college degree pathways or goal completion.

Institutional Record

Latinx Student Enrollment During Spring and Fall 2022

Some of the enrollment presented below include statistics provided by the Registrar's Office and course offerings modality for spring and fall 2022 semesters. A total of 57 FYE course sections were offered in the spring 2022, 46 sections were web-online, and six in-person sections were on two of the main campuses (the college has three campuses). For fall 2022, there were 46 class sections. There were 24 course sections offered web-online, and six in-person sections were offered on two of the main campuses. For both semesters, the majority of the FYE courses were offered online. There was a total enrollment of 777 students for both semesters (completers and non-completers). Nine students did not declare their sexual orientation (unknown), 288 were male, and 489 were female. Also, there were 33 students that obtained a "W" in their transcripts.

Interview Participants

Table 1 provides the demographic of the 18 participants. Most of the participants are females of Mexican background. Two of the participants are Salvadorian and identified as Puerto Rican. Another important statistic is that 17 of them are first generation, and 14 of them work part-time or full-time jobs. The average age of the participants is 20 years old.

Table 1: Participants and Demographics (N= 18).

Names (Pseudonyms)	Age	Background	Declared Major	First Generation	# of Working Hours	Transfer Plans	HSI Knowledge
Maria	19	Salvadorian	AB Business	Yes	Part-time 35 – 39 hrs.	Yes	Yes
Esmeralda	19	American Mexican	AAS Arts and Designs	Yes	Part-time 7 hrs.	Yes	No
Sofia	19	American Mexican	AA-Elementary Education	Yes	Full time	Undecided	No
Manuel	37	Mexican	AAS Network Security	Yes	Part-time	No	No
Lucia	18	Mexican	AAS Nursing	Yes	Full-time	No	No
Miguel	20	American Puerto Rican & Mexican	AAS Automotive Technician	Yes	Full-time	No	No
Lisa	18	American Salvadorian & Mexican	AB Associate of Business	Yes	Unemployed	Yes	No
Elena	18	American Mexican	AA Criminal Justice	Yes	Part-time 30 – 40 hrs.	Yes	No
Rosa	20	American Mexican	AAS Ultrasound Technician	Yes	Part-time 25 hrs.	No	No
Luna	19	American Mexican	AAS Nursing	Yes	Part-time 25 – 30 hrs.	Undecided	Yes
Teresa	19	American Mexican	AAS Real Estate	Yes	Unemployed	No	No
Javier	26	Mexican	AAS Cyber-Security	Yes	Full time	Yes	Yes
Martha	19	American Mexican	AA Psychology	Yes	No	Yes	No
Emily	20	American Mexican	AAS Construction Management	Yes	Part-time 35 hrs.	Yes	No
Estela	23	Salvadorian	AA Communication	Yes	Full time	Yes	No
Mario	30	American Puerto Rican & Black	AAS Videography	No	Part-time 20 – 30 hrs.	No	Yes
Roberta	21	American Mexican	AAS Veterinary Nursing	yes	Unemployed	No	Yes
Breanna	18	American Mexican	AA Associate of Arts	Yes	Unemployed	Yes	No

Interview Analysis

The researcher used the services of Rev.com (with human transcription) to transcribe each interview recording. Once the transcript was generated, the researcher analyzed each participant's transcript for accuracy. Also, the researcher read each transcript multiple times to organize preliminary hand coding and created an adapted Swail (2004) model for each student to better understand the participant's cognitive, social, and institutional factors. The process of hand coding provided some unique insight of each participant's barriers or life struggles.

The researcher also used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS or MAXQDA). Bailey (2018) identified the advantages of using MAXQDA as assisting the researcher in finding key words in the transcript, retrieving segments of data, searching for relations among assigned categories, making graphical representations of the transcript to find relationships amid different themes, and working with digital audio. All of the capabilities of using MAXQDA was important for providing validity to the research. Saldana (2016) identified a two cycle qualitative analysis process divided into five steps using a Lego brick analogy: 1) the data is cluster in different color Lego bricks, 2) the codes are created by sorting out the color of the Lego bricks (white, blue, green, red etc.), 3) categories are created by different colors and shapes (this completes the first cycle), 4) themes and concepts become the Lego bricks separated into stacks and peaks, 5) one creates assertions and theories by putting together the Lego bricks into a figure representing a house, building, car, etc. Saldana's coding visualization helped me to make sense of the data analysis and forming codes, categories and themes for this research.

It is important to point out that computer programs cannot do the analysis for the researcher of coding and categorizing. Rather, it was the researcher's responsibility to condense

the data, identify key phases, construct patterns, developed categories, themes, assertations, and assign a code level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the authors explained, the main purpose of coding is to analyze the data line by line and "thinking about the meaning of each sentence and idea, the researcher engages in active reading strategy" (p. 209). The researcher analyzed each transcript manually for coding and active reading. In addition, coding was analyzed through the lens of Swail (2004) Geometrical Model of Student Retention Persistence and Achievement (cognitive factors, institutional factors, and social factors) and Garcia et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs.

The major themes of this research study are broken down in four different categories, 1) cognitive factors, 2) social factors, 3) Institutional Factors, and 4) how the FYE courses at this two-year HSI influenced the retention of Latinx students to complete their educational goals. Each theme is supported with sub-themes to provide a deeper understanding of the student experience. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the qualitative phenomenological study explores common themes and lived experiences between several individuals. The goal is to honor the students' lived experiences when they were enrolled in the FYE and the long-term impact it had on their individual educational goals.

Theme One: Cognitive Factors

First Generation College Struggles

The participants interviewed for this study were first generation except for one. The struggles they experienced are interrelated with their perception of belonging to the institution or the skills not yet acquired. The students' mental health struggles also include the perceived expectations (Familismo) of their parents, or extended family members, to become role models for younger siblings. It is difficult to fit into a college environment when participants questioned

their own intelligence, knowledge, and academic ability to become successful. These are the cognitive factors the students are bringing with them to the institution, and it impacts their ability to cope with curricular demands. As many participants expressed, they must juggle life troubles alongside their academic challenges. Again, the ability to cope dictates the student's ability to persist and eventually become successful.

The participants shared their experiences and identified cognitive factors interfering with their sense of belonging and skills they still need to acquire. After the students completed the FYE, they internally visualized their futures with the new learning skills from the FYE course. Unfortunately, the skills learned in class do not necessarily solve the student's ongoing issues because each student must still work on their own identified weaknesses, or individually take the proper steps to receive institutional wrap-around services.

The common struggles of first-generation students are present at all levels of their student development experience. Most of the participants interviewed stated that they experienced struggles with their mental health, family expectations, and academic challenges. Familismo expectations interconnected with the mental health of the student. Lucia is a first-generation student that has experienced conflicts with her mother due to the time she dedicates to school. She indicated the following:

> But my mom, she kind of takes my school as if it's nothing, that its easy and it's not, it takes a lot of time. And so that has taken a toll mentally on me, and I've just been kind of arguing with my mom back and forth.

Lucia is frustrated with her mother because her mother does not understand the demands that come with being a college student. It is difficult for parents to understand the academic demands when they lack that firsthand knowledge.

Similarly, the parents' lack of understanding coupled with the messages students are receiving at home impacts their mental health. Maria provided an example of the mental health struggles faced by Latinx students.

> Because I have noticed that a lot of the first gen or first years also go through this, but especially, if you are from a Hispanic household, you put your school first, and sometimes, it doesn't really help with your mental health, but it is the way that we were raised.

Maria articulated the struggles of first generation and first year students who come from Latinx backgrounds. The parents' expectation is to put school first, but this becomes detrimental to the mental health of the students. Maria's point is that first generation-students are not well positioned to cope with the demands of school and messages received from home.

Expectations from home amount to more pressure to do well academically, and it becomes difficult for students to cope with the demands imposed at home and school. Elena eloquently stated the pressure she was feeling at home.

> It's really a lot pressure about on me because of my parents. They expect me to be a top A (earn "A" grades) student and everything. So that's one of the challenges I have. Yeah, that's one of the challenges I have to live up to my parents.

She was reflecting on her Familismo ingrained in her compared with her understanding of how to maintain a balanced life. These contrasting expectations will continue throughout her college experience because they are part of the household culture of Latinx families. The mental health of Latinx students is not a prioritized factor in family expectations and only the student's academic performances, or grades, are considered in recognizing achievement. Latinx students do not have conversations with their parents about the impacts of mental health in their pursuit of

academic goals. These students are subjected to a vicious power struggle cycle pitting the parent's educational expectations against the resources students need to be successful, and a lack of institutional support of aggressive mental health services only complicates the relationship. Students suffer in silence at home and at their institutions.

Another participant expressed her frustrations on how she made mistakes in college and learned lessons. Breanna spoke about the mistakes she made trying to figure out her way to find answers.

> Colleges doesn't necessarily care about you, but they really…It's very different from high school, they don't offer… They're not worried too much about you, so it's very important that you figure everything out on your own. And I guess I didn't have that guiding hand or anyone to advise me on it, so it was very difficult, and I did make a lot of mistakes on the way, in the way, but I figure them out eventually and I've learned from my mistakes, I guess.

Breanna was comparing her high school and college experience, and she identified how colleges are not invested in assisting students. The students are supposed to figure out the intricacies of how the higher education system works on their own. Breanna did not have anybody to advise her at home or at the institution. She admitted to making many mistakes through her college experience. She also acknowledged that making mistakes was the way she acquired institutional knowledge. It is a common trend among first-generation students to make mistakes due to the lack of awareness of how higher education is designed. Miguel best described mistakes made in college by stating, "especially navigating as a first generation, don't have somebody to tell me what to do and what not to do." This is a common sentiment of first-generation students because

they go through many struggles to find the information needed to be successful in their academic journey.

One obvious disadvantage for first-generation students is their parents' lack of knowledge about the United States system of higher education, in addition to the fact that many parents immigrated from other countries where they completed basic education. Maria stated the following:

> So, when I came into college, that was my mentality, like, oh, I'm struggling. I have to find my way. I need to see, I need to find out myself, who I need to call, where, when, what do I need to do, type of things. My parents, first off, didn't really graduate or had any bachelor's degree from school, and second, they weren't from this country. It wasn't really that big of a help asking them because the only thing that they would say would be, okay, try to talk to a counselor or try to see who you can talk to. It wasn't really, here, I'll help you, or this and that.

Maria was trying to find different avenues to cope with all the disadvantages presented when she began school. She had enough awareness of the higher education system to attempt contact with different student services departments, both in-person and over the phone. Maria had become aware that she was not going to obtain the answers she was looking for at home because her parents did not complete higher education in either their country of origin or had a basic idea about navigating United States higher education system. In addition, her parents moved to the United States as adults from another country and did not speak English. Maria was encouraged by her parents to speak to a counselor or other institutional agents to obtain the necessary information. Maria's struggles had to do with the lack of knowledge on how to navigate an educational system that is foreign to many Latinx parents and students.

Self-Perception

One prevalent mental condition experienced by participants was their self-perception of belonging. This mentality affected the development of the student's learning quality, aptitude, critical thinking ability, and study skills. Lisa shared her academic struggles and how she felt after completing high school and taking time off.

> So I feel like sometimes I'm not smart enough to be in college. I remember being in my first semester and I was recovering from intense burnout from my senior year still, so I was just feeling like I didn't have the energy or intelligence to be in any sort of college and I didn't feel very educated or just capable of anything at that point. I would compare myself to my peers very often and I would just think, oh, they're out here getting so many scholarships and internships and I am just doing what I can, which is just the classes, so sometimes I feel beneath people.

Lisa did not feel intelligent enough to be in college. During her first semester, she struggled to cope with the academic demands, explicitly stating that she was recovering from mental exhaustion due to completing high school. She found herself in a state of mental unrest, feeling unequipped to continue her academic pathway. Lisa compared herself to her classmates and in the process, she felt less educated and capable of achieving success.

Self-perception of not fitting in is also a characteristic for students for whom English is a second language. Limited vocabulary and communication skills are related to feelings of not belonging. Manuel recalled his early experiences in college, and remembering the feelings of isolation he endured due to feeling out of place.

> Well, that was part of my feeling isolated at the beginning, especially somebody like me. I'm old, well, I'm old compared to my classmates. So the loneliness came from that, from

> feeling that I'm her pretending because I just like computers and I shouldn't be here. I didn't finish high school, my English is not up to par. Classes at the beginning were really hard, and I knew that because they were so hard.

Manuel concluded that his age was a factor in feeling isolated. His classmates were younger, and he attended college to expand his knowledge about computers. In reality, he did not feel he belonged to a college environment because he did not graduate from high school and English is his second language. He was having academic struggles from being unprepared for college level classes. It is crucial to understand that sense of belonging is intertwined with cognitive factors, influenced by preconceived biases regarding who should be a college student.

Likewise, Estela has dealt with preconceived or unconscious biases about her self-worth when comparing to other students. She discussed her personal struggles to fit in into the college environment, especially considering her limited vocabulary skills.

> Honestly, I just feel like sometimes I'm not as sophisticated as other people, and that kind of just makes me feel a little off. I just feel like sometimes I have to change the way I talk, or I've got to expand my vocabulary a little bit more, just because there also are a bunch of words in English where I'm not going to fully understand it.

Estela has experienced feelings of not being educated enough when comparing herself to other students. She has contemplated expanding her English vocabulary to better assimilate into the college environment. Estela was aware that her limited English vocabulary put her in at a disadvantage to being college-ready and successful. Estela and Manuel share a common characteristic, English is their second language. This could be the reason why they believe communication and vocabulary skills are barriers to their college success.

Considering that many of the interviewees completed the FYE in a dual enrollment program (high school and college), these students also had self-perceptions issues that manifested with their sense of belonging. Breanna stated the following:

> I think with being a high school student, again, in college, that's already kind of crazy, and so I definitely felt like I didn't belong there. And then having my background, being the first generation, I guess. There's just so many aspects of it.

Breanna was reflecting on her experience of being dual enrolled and how unusual it is for a student to do both programs. She questioned her legitimacy of belonging to a program where she was selected over other students. Brenna was also in disbelief that an opportunity of completing a dual program is well deserved for a first-generation student like herself. The concept of deserving opportunities for first generation students made her doubt about her skills or sense of belonging to be successful.

Deficiency of Skills to be Successful

Skills deficiency with time management, learning skills, study skills, academic-related extracurricular activities were a common pattern with the participants. When it comes to time management some of the participants had a good handle on how to plan their academic responsibilities. On the other hand, other participants were still in the process of finding equilibrium. It is important to mention that the FYE provided tips on time management, study skills, learning skills, critical thinking ability, but the implementation of those strategies is what determines student persistence.

Lisa stated that time management skills was one of her main struggles along with low energy to complete her assignments.

> I think I lack time management skills, and I also think I lack of energy to be in college because I try really hard in school, but sometimes it's very difficult to find the motivation to focus on assignments.

Lisa was not only struggling with time management, but she was also dealing with personal challenges that made it more difficult to concentrate on school. She was very honest about her state of mind, but she was determined to continue in school despite the obvious obstacles.

Correspondingly, Sofia expressed the challenges she was facing with time management. She stated, "I'm still struggling in it. Being honest, it's kind of tricky doing everything all in one day. I think that's it. It's a challenge for me." Sofia was finding the balance on how to plan her schoolwork. She had a misconception that everything needs to be planned for one day. The whole purpose of time management is to arrange tasks in different time periods and to follow a schedule of planned activities.

On the other hand, there are some participants that have learned good planning skills to be organized with their schoolwork and personal lives. Rosa indicated the skills she has implemented to stay on track. She explained that "I've learned how to manage it, and to just stay calm at times and to not really stress about things so I've managed to cope with everything." Rosa's main coping skills were to stay calm and not to stress about the work she needed to complete.

Lucia used other strategies for time management. She explained that, "being efficient with my time. I do the easy assignments quickly. I know I can get them over in a couple of minutes and then leave harder for last and take more time on those." Lucia's strategy for time management was to complete the easy assignments first and take more time for the more difficult ones.

One of the most difficult aspects of time management is to have an equilibrium with schoolwork and personal life. Lisa described that, "but yeah, I feel like I could be more focused. Sometimes I find myself focused on my personal life than of the academic life." Lisa's statement contributes to the difficulty of having a balanced life, and she admitted to being more focused with her personal life compared to her academic life.

Learning Skills

Some participants shared their learning problems that interfered with their student success. Teresa described her learning challenges and how the FYE was helpful to overcome and to assimilate them with the professor's help.

> Some of the most important skills were, I would definitely say it's not just life skills like internal skills, but I would say personal skills. You learned how to, well, me personally, I learned how to be more vocal. Since I have anxiety, my professor was really patient with us, so I learned how to be more vocal, take my time, breathe and try not to freak out. Also, it kind of relieved a little of my stage fright, so it was really helpful.

Teresa managed to control her anxiety, and she learned how to communicate by practicing some important techniques as taking her time to speak and breathe to avoid panicking in front of her classmates.

The FYE class also exposed the participants to learn more skills about how they learn. Emily stated that she learned about learning styles, and she identified with one in particular.

> So during the class, they did go over the learning styles and what to do to help yourself learn in a situation where the class doesn't use your learning style. So again, I am hands-on-type of learner, and most classes aren't that way. And I wish, I really wish that I had

> learned a way or learned how to actually learn in those other positions. So learned how to actually understand when I'm reading or writing.

Emily's statement is powerful because she found a method of how to best learn the information. She was not exposed to these learning methods in the past, and she felt was she not well prepared for different learning scenarios. In addition, she learned how to best learn when professors presented information that did not match her learning style. After completing the FYE, she developed her reading comprehension and writing skills. It is important to mention that some recent studies suggest that learning styles are myths or misconceptions. Nonetheless, the student found it to be valuable information for her learning.

Lucia learned different strategies to be successful in college. She stated, "I liked the different tips and tricks and the different strategies it exposed me to and how I got to pick which one I like and work with that one." Lucia was satisfied with the different study methods she learned while completing the FYE, and she was able to identify one learning method to learn best.

The FYE exposed the participants to study skills and prepared them to be successful in college level courses. Lisa explained what she enjoyed learning, "I really enjoyed learning stuff that went outside of what to do in classes because it's always nice to be told how to study and be told what to expect in college classes." It is important to notice that she enjoyed learning the different study skill approaches. The class helped her to have a clear understanding of what was expected to be successful in college level courses.

Aptitude to Continue

The FYE introduced an array of skills, but it cannot force students to act on any of their perceived deficiencies. Nonetheless, some of the participants were motivated to continue their academic journey after completing their FYE. Rosa stated the following:

> I would say more motivation that the class gave me, for sure, yeah. That's how I would put it. The motivation the class gave me for staying on top of my stuff, it gave me motivation to continue with my years in school.

Rosa was motivated upon completing the class. It provided a different perspective about how to stay organized and most importantly it provided the motivation to persist every semester. Rosa was describing how she was impacted, and she felt prepared for the years ahead. Rosa was motivated to persist. It is significant to point out that most general education courses required for a degree do not necessarily are designed to have an impact as FYEs do.

Elena was a high school student when she took the FYE, and she welcomed the opportunity. She described the course, "it was very motivational, and I really wanted to get those free credits that they were giving to me, because it was an opportunity that I don't think I'd get again." Elena was inspired to persist, and she was determined to complete the "free credits" granted due to being a dual enrollment student. She was aware that tuition free credits are a rare commodity in college. Perhaps, Elena's point talks about why colleges need to provide more tuition free courses where the students will learn the skills to be successful.

Sofia talked about her character and her resilience. The FYE class also provided the opportunity to make connections.

> I just feel like, myself, I'm just not the type of person to just give up. That's why I just kept going. And then it was kind of a motivation as a professor saying, make connections, and then she always had us talking to new people.

Sofia was committed to persist and complete the class. She was focused on staying on track. Another unique side of the class was the ability to network with classmates. The professor encouraged the opportunity to meet other students and to build a support group.

Theme Two: Social Factors

The social factors are related to the connections and support system the students are able to create on campus or outside the institution. Social factors also pertain to financial issues, expectations (Familismo), educational legacy, social coping skills, cultural values, peer influence, and family influence. One of the major struggles of the participants was navigating a system alone without the support of others. Social capital was important to feel connected to the institution. This is the reason why an FYE made a difference for first-generation and first semester students. The students found a support system with the FYE professor, and the students enrolled. It was often communicated during the interviews that many of them did not make those connections early on, and they felt lonely. Taking the FYE online or on campus also provided a different perspective on how the student felt connected or disconnected to the institution especially for first semester incoming students.

The FYE course is not required for first incoming students at this institution. The class is optional for students and Financial Aid does not automatically pay for skill building courses. The FYE is part of the associate of applied science degrees as an option under human relations. On the other hand, a good number of the participants took the FYE during high school as a dual credit, and the participants stated the course was tuition free. Nonetheless, not everyone in high

school had the opportunity to be in a dual enrollment limited entry program. The bottom line is that social factors matter for student persistence.

FYE and Social Integration

When students are not socially integrated to the institution there is a imbalance to persistence and retention. It is critical for institutions to know how well the students are integrated to the campus environment and the connections they are building. The FYE created a space for students to develop their social capital. Sofia shared:

Sofia enrolled in the FYE during her second semester. The FYE did count towards her major in health science, which was a limited entry program. Sofia stated that she earned extra points for taking the class. She communicated her experience when she was enrolled for the FYE on campus, and she shared her experience of being part of a learning community. Most importantly, she was able to develop social connections.

> Every week we would go, she'll have us sit with somebody else, and introduce ourselves to that person, and tell them more about ourselves. It's something that we're looking forward to everyday or every time I would go to the class, making connections with others.

The professor encouraged students to build a social supporting network in class. Sofia was motivated to attend class, and she enjoyed meeting her classmates and "making connections." She was able to take advantage of social activities in the classroom. She appreciated the opportunity to learn from others, stating "If someone needed help with homework, we'll just sit together and ask each other for help, kind of like a study session." Sofia liked the class setting because students helped each other with their assignments. Her reflection illustrates how the professor has the power to make the class meaningful for the students where they can network

and support each other. The truth of the matter is that how FYEs are structured makes a positive impact for students' social integration to the class and campus environment. Another benefit for students is to take the FYE during their first or second semester.

Maria shared her experience and social integration when she took the FYE online when she was enrolled for dual credits. She stated the following:

> I really liked it (FYE class). I was able to, again, find resources. I was able to connect with other first-generation students. I noticed that when we were doing discussions, a lot of them like or had similar interests that I had, so that was really nice to see. But overall, it was really nice.

Maria enjoyed the FYE course work. She took the course online, but she had the opportunity to connect with other first-generation students. With the class discussions, she noticed many of her classmates had similar interests as her. The disadvantage of online FYE courses is the limited interaction between the students. Participants who took the FYE as a dual credit in high school were not given the option of taking the class in person. The students were not able to connect with resources on campus such as student clubs or campus activities.

Students did realize the value of having FYE as a required course for the purpose of social integration. Manuel was a non-traditional student and took the FYE towards the end of his college degree. The FYE was part of the major requirements. He stated the benefits of taking the class during the first semester.

> I think that the course should be required at the beginning, and it should be amongst the very first things. And then.. I mean, if not, at least strongly suggested to everyone if they want to succeed at what they're doing. So it's like a way to train. I mean, it should be made sure that everyone had been told about it.

Manuel was implying the FYE should be required for incoming students. If it is not required, the institution needs to market the FYE to new students, so they are aware of it as a class option. He believed the class trains the students to be successful in their academic endeavors. Part of being successful in college has to do with students' social integration.

Students' Financial Struggles

As part of social factors, the participants shared their experiences with financial struggles. In particular, the struggles are more acute when the students do not have citizenship. Although, financial struggles were prominent among most participants. Thus, most of them were working part-time or full-time jobs to cover tuition expenses.

Maria has an immigration process pending, and it is the main reason why she is not eligible for financial aid assistance. She shared the following:

> Because we are still in an ongoing process, immigration process. I don't have all the financial help that I would like to get from the US government. And as I was doing research, I noticed that a lot if the universities are really expensive. And college university, well, college schools, my bad, they offer more help, especially for immigrants.

Maria understood that not having Financial Aid was a barrier to her academic success. During the interview, she explained a scholarship she was receiving from the state because she graduated from a state high school. Students who meet all the requirements upon graduation are automatically eligible for the state scholarship regardless of immigration status. The scholarship covers about half of the tuition cost. When students transfer to a four-year in state universities, the cost of tuition is much higher, and the scholarship funds are exhausted rapidly. Maria chose a community college for tuition cost purposes. It was a common trend that most of the participants chose a community college due to tuition cost. As explained previously, she is working part-time

to cover aggregated tuition costs. Maria was also aware of the benefits of attending a community college because these colleges offer more assistance to immigrant students. The state where she resides recently passed a law that all immigrant students are considered state residents for tuition purposes if they have graduated from a state high school.

Similarly, Lucia has an immigration case pending, and she is not eligible for Financial Aid assistance. She shared the difficult experience of being a student without citizenship.

> Yeah. I lost hope for a while. I didn't apply to any scholarships besides the DREAM Scholarship (nationwide scholarship for DACA and undocumented students, but colleges must become partners), which I knew that was the only one I knew I could apply for. But I didn't try to look into other scholarships because I was like, what's the point? I don't even have a social, so they're probably not going to let me apply. And I was very dependent on the (state scholarship). That's why I went to (this college). But I came to find out that you only qualify for it if you're enrolled full-time, but I was only able to enroll part-time. When I found out I didn't even qualify for that. It was kind of heartbreaking, but I still went. I still decided to, even if I do one class at a time, I'll pay it out of pocket.

Lucia's financial challenges to pay for school are "heartbreaking." She applied for the Dream Scholarship because it is a scholarship for DACA and undocumented students. For other scholarships, she needed a social security number to apply, but she gave up on that idea. She was hoping to receive the state scholarship, but she needed to be a full-time student. Yet, she could only attend school part-time due to working 36 a week in a graveyard shift. She decided to only take one class per semester and pay out of pocket.

Another important issue to consider is when students are on academic suspension. Typically, students are suspended for one semester, and they have to appeal to return back to the institution. Students on academic suspension are not eligible for financial aid or most scholarships. They must pay out of pocket for tuition expenses, and in most cases they must retake classes to increase their GPA. Emily was on academic suspension when she was interviewed.

> I feel like I'm not getting enough work. My job, for my job to continue going to school because I am part-time, they put me just my minimum hours and I don't get paid the best. Again, it's retail and school is expensive. One class was about $500 for me, and I know it's not San Miguel University, but it's still $500. So that definitely was... Well, it still is kind of something that I'm struggling with, just trying to make ends meet and still trying to find time to study, which I'm okay now with finding time to study, but just balancing that, oh, well, I don't make enough money to even go to school, which I was scared that this semester I wasn't going to be able to school because I didn't have enough money.

Emily was concerned about how many hours she was working, and she was unsure about having enough money to cover her tuition expenses for the current and future semesters. She was working on a retail job with low pay and wages. There was an imbalance of how much she was earning considering tuition cost. She was comparing the tuition cost of a university and a community college. She realized community college tuition was much cheaper, but it was relative to income earnings. Also, she was struggling with balancing her work schedule with study time. Emily's story was a common one among other participants who were struggling financially due to life circumstances.

Family's financial instability becomes personal and adds pressure to academic challenges. In many ways unforeseen life circumstances within the family circle impact the decision of persisting or dropping out. In other words, family's financial instability is collateral damage to colleges' enrollment. It is unheard that colleges spend resources to find out why students decided to leave the institution. These personal student stories might help institutions to have a better perspective on why students do not persist. Teresa shared some intimate financial struggles and how she is impacted.

> Some life and academic challenges that I'm facing would be when it comes to my personal life, would be financially, since my dad isn't working as much because he suffered an injury at work. So it's been sort of hard when it comes to college, with all my rides and... Because I drive sometimes, but gas is also expensive, and the only income right now is my mother, that's it. So my mom brings all the income, she has to feed a family of seven. So it's sort of hard and it's frustrating, because I can't do anything about it. Even though I do want to work, but there's nobody to take care of my little brother.

Teresa was having life and academic challenges. Her father suffered a work injury, and he was laid off. The family of seven was living with only one income. Teresa's mother was the only one working, and there was no extra money for additional expenses such as gas. Teresa had difficulty getting to campus. She wanted to work, but she also needed to provide childcare for younger siblings. Consequently, she was not able to contribute financially to her family due to her home responsibilities.

Cultural Values and Expectations

Caring for younger siblings is part of cultural values and Familismo in the Latinx community. Also, it is not surprising that only female participants were responsible for childcare

and home responsibilities. They also lived in home environments where goal commitment was an expectation even with added responsibilities.

Elena described her job schedule and home assigned responsibilities. Even though, what she was describing were her assigned gender roles expectations.

> Well, at work, obviously, I work a nine, six to three, and then here at home, I have to take care of my sisters, and then I have to clean the house, and help out my parents with that as well.

Gender role expectations interfere with academic success, and it provides a perspective of additional barriers for Latina college students. Elena described her job schedule and home responsibilities such as caring for her sisters, house chores, and being an active family member. This is a topic rarely discussed as a social barrier because institutions do not have rich demographic data about their students.

Another important aspect to consider is that assigned home responsibilities are more than providing childcare to younger siblings. Teresa shared her assigned responsibilities to the family.

> Yeah, so it's me, my parents, and then my four younger brothers. So, I'm the oldest and I am the only girl. And I have a baby brother, which he has a late birthday, he's five, so he stays here at home. When I'm not at school, I take him to my grandma and then once I get out of school, I go pick him up, because I'm the only one that is able to take care of him. Therefore, I can't participate in any other activities such as anything else, any sports or clubs.

Teresa is responsible for childcare and driving her younger brother to another family. When she is done with school, the baby brother is picked up. Teresa is the only one providing childcare, and she is not able to participate in extracurricular opportunities at school due to caring for a

younger sibling. For the most part, higher education institutions do not have express childcare services for students to participate in school activities. Thus, home assigned gender roles are a barrier for students to build their social capital.

Likewise, Elena's home responsibilities are detrimental to building social capital at school. She provided a more detailed list of responsibilities.

> I'm the oldest actually. I help with everything. I'm the only person in my house that drives, so I go to the grocery store, take kids to their appointments, take the little ones to school, and pick him up from school, take them out whenever I can because grandma does not drive, and uncle is schizophrenic, and he can't drive.

Elena is the only one who can drive in her household. She does grocery shopping, and drives her younger siblings to doctor's appointments, school, and any entertainment activities. At the time she was interviewed, she and her siblings were living with her grandmother and her "schizophrenic" uncle on a permanent basis. Her mother and father were not part of the family. Elena responsibilities are classified as someone who is the head of a household. With all assigned responsibilities to the family, it is close to impossible to have a strong support system at school. On top of everything, Elena also has a part-time job working between 30-35 hours per week. Elena fits the characteristics of being at risk of dropping out. This is the reason why institutions need to do a better job in collecting demographic data because they will learn about their students. In addition, institutions will shape their student services to fit the needs of the students.

Babysitting for younger siblings was a topic of discussion for many participants, and it truly speaks about the commitment to the family. Martha is the second oldest among brothers and sisters, and she does not mind taking care of her younger siblings.

> I mean, we have my older sister, but she lives really far and she also has kids that she has to take care of. And my mom feels better if I were to be in charge. I mean, it's not the first time that it had happened. I mean, I've been kind of used to taking care of my siblings by now.

Martha has also earned the trust of her mother to care for her younger siblings, and it is an assigned gender responsibility to her. It is a way to contribute to the well-being of the family.

Educational Legacy and Goal Commitment for Latinx Students

Educational legacy and goal commitment go hand in hand for students and their families. All the participants were committed to graduate or transfer to a four-year college. Nonetheless, they were also conscious of the struggles they were facing to accomplish their academic endeavors. Breanna stated that her immediate family and including extended family were not able to understand the struggles she had faced while pursuing a degree. They can only see the academic results, not the struggles.

> Or at home, where my parents always, they're like, "Oh, you're always studying or you're always doing so good. I know you're so intelligent." And I'm like, "I'm struggling behind the scenes," but they don't see that, I guess. And it's difficult. I guess it's just people's perceptions of me or that I have of them. It's really what just affects that and yeah… Oh, yeah, definitely, especially with my aunts. They're like, "Oh, we're holding on hope. We're hopeful that you're going to get something done. You're going to be the one who saves us," or they use very strong language and putting a lot of expectations on me.

Breanna obtains positive feedback from her parents about her commitment of doing well in school. Her parents see her study, and they believe everything is going well, but she could be struggling, “behind the scenes.’’ This was a powerful statement because Breanna did not want to

share her personal struggles with her family. She has camouflaged this earned perception about her that everything is going well, and she did not want to show any weaknesses. She might be playing the imposter syndrome role with her parents and extended family. One of her aunts made a remark about “holding hope” and she will save the family. Breanna feels the pressure of those high expectations because she is representing the family legacy to complete a degree. Her aunt made the comment in a family gathering where all her male cousins could hear. Breanna also explained that her brother dropped out of college along with his cousins. She is the only one pursuing a degree.

Family legacy and goal commitment are important to feel a sense of pride the students and family members. Luna was motivated to be successful to bring pride to the family.

> So currently I'm the only person that's going to college. So when it comes to school, I'm trying to put my full effort into my assignments and being able to pass my courses to be able to graduate and hopefully get my assignments done, because knowing that I am the only first generation student so far, it's been a little hard to put my all into it. But sometimes I try my best because knowing that I want to make my family proud.

Luna is a first-generation student. The ultimate goal was to graduate, but she was aware of the graduating process, which entailed completing her assignments and obtaining passing grades. She is also conscious that being the first in her family brings pressure and responsibility. Luna wants to bring pride to her family by completing a degree.

Emily is also family oriented and wants to obtain a degree for financial benefits to the family. She stated the following:

> I'm very family oriented and I put my family first. So I try to make my family happy. I want to do something to help them retire and just do better with their life so that they

> don't have to work forever until they pass, unfortunately. That's what I don't want. I just want all of us to be okay. I want us to be financially stable. That's what my goal is.

Emily's main motivation to complete a degree was to help her family retire. She did not want to see her parents struggle and work their entire life. Family legacy is also a goal commitment to complete a degree. As stated previously, what is missing in higher education is to see the student with a holistic perspective to learn more about their cognitive, social, and institutional barriers.

Theme Three: Institutional Factors

The institutional factors are the services provided to the students in an effort to provide stability during their college years. The most common institutional services are related to financial aid, academic services, recruitment and admissions, and curriculum and instruction. The FYE is part of curriculum and instruction. The participants recognized what services were most important to them while completing or after taking the FYE. One main premise generated with this research was that the FYE impacted the lives of Latinx students.

FYE Provided Institutional Knowledge for Latinx Students

The FYE was a course that provided confidence and changed students' mindset to continue their academics. Maria explained how the class provided a different perspective about her skills and the resources available to her.

> I think after I completed it, I felt a little more confident on my skills. Because of that confidence that I had, I decided to keep on going with my education because I felt like I was in a community that would help me through anything that I needed with advising and tutoring. Those two help me the most. So, because of this class I was able to realize that I have the resources. All I need to do is put an effort.

Maria felt confident of the skills learned in class, and it provided the motivation to continue in school. She also felt part of a community, and she was aware of resources available to her such as advising and tutoring. She also reasoned that advising and tutoring were two of the most important student services to her. Hence, the FYE provided awareness of the services available. The class was valuable for Maria, and she took it as a dual credit. As stated previously, the FYE was more impactful when it was taken during the first semester.

Luna had a similar experience about the benefits of taking the FYE during her freshman year in college. She stated the following:

> It's like you get to understand more and it really helps when you're a freshman at college, you get to get your way through campus and it helps you a lot when it comes to being able to know different situations, experiences.

Luna was pleased with the knowledge she acquired about how college works. She learned about services offered on campus. Mainly, she was able to conceptualize different scenarios and the services needed depending on the situation. For many of the participants, the class material and discussions were helpful to identify where services were located on campus or online services. One of the most mentioned services was the online library research services, and the fact students can interact with a Librarian in a virtual setting.

The FYE also provided a different perspective to students who were placed on academic at-risk status due to low GPA. First-generation students are not necessarily aware of the consequences of falling behind in school because in high school students are not placed on academic warning, probation, and suspension. Emily completed high school during the pandemic, and she began college with online classes. Classes online were the only option for

students during the pandemic. Emily was not prepared to embark on an academic journey, which required adaptation skills to be successful.

> I think it definitely would have made the biggest difference. It would've definitely had made me understand that, okay, if I don't study enough, if I don't understand what I'm learning, or if I'm not trying or making time just for school, just setting up time, then I'm going to end up where I am now if I don't push myself to actually do it. So I think it definitely would've made a big difference for me to actually have that set in.

Emily was projecting the value of the FYE to gather information to avoid academic fall backs. She did not measure the consequences because she simply was not aware of them such as maintaining a minimum semester GPA of 2.0 or higher. Emily did not put in the sufficient effort to do well. She concluded a class like the FYE would have given her the proper information to avoid academic suspension. As stated in the past, students placed on academic suspension most likely are not eligible for financial aid and scholarships. More barriers are added to students when they are suspended.

Miguel articulated the FYE content served his needs and provided the information necessary to look for institutional services.

> The class was relatively easy, but the biggest factor that I've seen was that class was basically made for me to succeed in any way, and it was just more for me to take advantage of everything that class was kind of showing me for the future, such as the student services and the tutoring. I had no idea beforehand that was a thing. So now moving forward, there are some classes in the future that I'm kind of preparing to start taking tutoring for, help me out in those classes.

Miguel took the FYE during his first semester. It made a difference to his academic trajectory. He explained the class was made for him to succeed and showed him a path to his academic success. He became aware of student services and tutoring when he was enrolled in the class. He reasoned that he did not know about student services before taking the class, but he felt prepared to look for services such as tutoring if needed in the future.

FYE Connected Student Services

Students who completed the FYE learned about services offered to them on campus. Elena became familiar with services that she could receive based on her needs.

> I think some of the important skills that I learned where just finding where everything is at, just because I am, that was very first year of college, so finding where everything was at and where I can get the help was very helpful.

The FYE was the navigational compass to find the location of the resources available. Elena indicated that finding the resources was the most important skill she learned, and it provided a solid foundation where to look for help. She took the course during her first semester as part of the dual enrollment program.

Likewise, Lisa learned how to navigate the different institutional services because she took the FYE. She also took advantage of the services provided.

> But what I actually learned was how to navigate the resources college give you, for example, because of that class I looked into what financial aid offered me and what [the college] was offering to students of low income in general, and I ended up getting a free laptop out of that because I looked into it and I also learned some other skills or just lessons like how connections are important in college and how your college experience is really where you make it.

The positive impact of the FYE has to do with the short- and long-term knowledge to navigate higher education. It is the combination of social and academic development. Lisa's knowledge of student services assisted her with finding out all the resources available to her. As a low-income student, she qualified for financial aid. In the process of searching for services, she was able to obtain a free laptop. She also learned how to build her social network on campus, and she conceptualized her college in the most profound way. She said, "your college experience is really where you make it."

Library services were utilized or mentioned as an essential service introduced to students via the FYE. For many of the participants the library was a space where they could do their homework and find a sense of peace from their home environments. Moreover, financial aid was another popular service utilized by students. As stated previously, some students were not eligible for Financial Aid due to their immigration or academic status. Other popular services were tutoring and advising.

Emily described the library as a quiet place where she could concentrate and do her assignments. The library become a getaway place to find a sense of relief from her home responsibilities. Emily stated the following:

> It definitely is a better space just because it's more quiet and nobody's kind of destructing me. As you can see, I do have my little brother at home, he's seven and he is also special needs. So he does require a little bit more of attention. And when I'm left alone at home with him and I want to study or I need to do something, it is a bit difficult because again, he does require a little bit more attention. And so when I was going to the library, I had some free time for me to be able to actually do my work. And at home I can't really do that.

Emily was caring for a younger sibling who has special needs, and he requires much of her attention at home. She goes to the library because it is a quieter space. The library also represented a sense of relief from her home environment. To expand this story, when she was interviewed online, she was caring for her brother. It was morning time, and her brother wanted to eat breakfast. Emily began cooking breakfast for him while being interviewed. She had the computer next to her while she answered the researcher's questions. As a researcher, it was a privilege to witness the commitment of caring for a child with special needs. Emily was dedicated and cheerful to provide the best care to her brother. This is the story of many of the students who must care for younger siblings, and they use student services such as the library to decompress from their daily life.

Breanna described the student services she utilized, and the ones she used in a regular basis. She was able to take advantage of them because she was enrolled for on campus classes, and the FYE introduced her to student services.

> I know the library was available. That was the one I used most frequently. Apart from that, I like to use the cupboard (food pantry), which was their program where they had free food, I guess. You can go every week to get some. I'm not sure why. I would meet with my counselor every semester as well. So I met with him or her, I switched, during that semester as well. I think that's all the services that I used.

Breanna used the library regularly, and she utilized the food pantry. She knew how many times a week she could go for food. This was a service the institution created before the pandemic, and it has been widely used by the students. She also scheduled meetings with her counselor to go over her academics, but she switched counselors during the semester. Brianna was a student who was

on track to be successful due to completing a dual program, and she took the FYE early on. When she was interviewed, she had transferred to a four-year college.

Manuel used services such as tutoring, but he had a difficult time finding tutoring for his advanced major required classes. He was also disappointed that information catering his needs was not provided.

> Tutoring was incredibly helpful, even though I sued a lot of tutoring for mathematics and English and history. But I was wasn't able to get tutoring that was helpful for my advance classes like Linux and Cisco classes and cybersecurity compliance. These are still very hard subjects that I continue to bump into that I haven't been able to get tutoring. I mean, because of the way I learn, I prefer to get tutoring face-to-face with other people. So that wasn't available to me. Counseling, I've attended probably three or four times during all of these years, and they have helped me. But honestly, information that is more catered to my needs would've been so much more helpful.

Manuel found tutoring services helpful until he needed tutoring for his specialized courses in technology. The classes are difficult, and no assistance is provided at the institution for these types of courses, and it becomes a barrier for students. Most of the professors do not provide tutoring services during office hours. Another major issue with tutoring is that community colleges employ part-time faculty, and they usually do not have an office space on campus. Manuel preferred tutoring face-to-face, and this could be another disadvantage considering that many institutions are moving to online tutoring. In addition, many institutions have partnered with private online tutoring services such as Smarthinking, Brainfuse Tutoring, Tutur.com, etc. Manuel also has utilized counseling services to make sure he was on track for graduation.

Nonetheless, he was disappointed because information regarding financial assistance was not disseminated to him early on. Student services were not catered to his personal needs.

Theme Four: FYE Content and Structures of Servingness

There are many variables when it comes to how institutions are serving Latinx students, and conclusions could be made if there was a servingness scale. When the Department of Education provides the HSI designation, there is no specific criteria to comply with servingness. However, the literature review provided specific theoretical frameworks to provide guidance to HSIs. Garcia et al. (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs outlines culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. The model also includes programming and services for minoritized students.

FYE Improvement to the Curriculum

The participants had very specific recommendations for improving the FYE to better serve students. Some of the recommendations included mandating students to enroll in the FYE during their first semester, additional financial literacy support, and class specific assignments, and working towards a more inclusive course curriculum. Also, many of the participants agreed that the FYE should be required.

Mario recommended for the FYE to be offered to students in their first semester and to be an optional course if the college does not update the general education curriculum. The FYE was an option for Mario to take under humanities, but he is aware that it is not a required course for many other students. Mario's argument was that he took the FYE late in his program, and it was not as impactful as he wanted to be.

> So, like I said, I would recommend it for the first year, or I mean for the first semester for students, freshman students. As far as it being a requirement, I can't see why it would be

> a requirement. For CSN, it's optional within, I forget which general ed subject, but it is an option, and I just wouldn't recommend, I mean, of course they probably can regulate that. So, I only say as a recommendation it should be taken if you are going to take that class, it should be taken within your first semester.

The discrepancies of who is eligible to enroll for the FYE depends on their declared major. As stated previously, financial aid does not cover classes that are not part of the degree requirements. For financial aid to cover a class such as the FYE, and exemption needs to be approved. Mario was aware that taking the FYE was part of his general education option, and he is suggesting that if the class becomes a requirement it needs to be included as a stand-alone humanity.

Institutions can make bold decisions to reconfigure their general education requirements and include the FYE as a mandatory class. The real issue with making decisions to change the general education curriculum of HSIs lies with the internal and external influences of serving. At the internal level, faculty senates and college Presidents have the power to recommend changes to adding credits or mandating a class as a requirement. At the external level, there are institutional governing boards (Board of Regents) that formally approve curriculum changes. The process to make changes seems to be complicated, but the willingness to serve students should be the engine to pull things forward.

Maria believed the FYE should be required and part of the general education coursework. She shared her experience of meeting classmates that did not know where student services were located on campus.

> I think it should be required for first years only because I know that a lot of the first years that I have met don't know about the resources that we have. Some of them don't even

> know that we have a computer lab or a tutoring lab, so this would help them on giving them more helpful resources. But then again, maybe as a first year you don't want to take too many electives. So, if you make this one of the GEDs per se, then it would help them a lot to be able to at least open up their minds and see that there's helpful resources that they can always access as long as they are enrolled at (institution).

Maria's point was that students do not want to take elective classes in their first semester. She was suggesting that the FYE should be required to assist students navigate the resources available to them such as the computer and tutoring lab. Maria comments suggested students were lost on campus, and they did not have the basic knowledge of knowing where to go for help.

Serving the students is also meeting them where they are on their personal development. Improvements to the curriculum is not just designing a curriculum that meets the perceived needs of the students. It takes willingness to ask them how they could be better served. Institutions have taken the approach of being the experts in providing skills, but they forget that basic life skills are necessary to make good life choices. Javier stated how the FYE curriculum could be improved for the next generation of students.

> I don't know if it's relevant to this, but maybe to do their taxes. Or maybe how to, if you're living on campus how to… or renting and stuff like that, how to give them some resources on, hey, you need money or you need something or you need extra time, or how to renew your lease, I don't know, something like that.

Javier recommended for the course to focus on navigational skills and include other topics such as tax preparation, steps to rent an apartment or renew a lease, where to find financial aid resources in case a student needs money. It was a common practice during and after the COVID-

19 pandemic for institutions to offer student emergency funds to pay for unexpected emergency situations. The purpose of these grants is to assist the students persist with the financial assistance provided. However, the emergency funds are limited and there are detailed application guidelines for eligibility purposes. Javier pointed out that students need to be aware of those unique resources, not just the common student experience services.

A good number of the participants took the FYE as a dual credit. Many of the students who enrolled for FYE online did not set a foot on campus. Luna suggested that as part of the curriculum a scavenger hunt activity is included where students are forced to go to the campus and get acquainted with services.

> I guess recommendations I would give is if only we were given options of that. If we were given... Sometimes if she would give assignments, be like, "Oh, you can do this in person, go to campus and do this." And I feel like just obviously I know some students may not want to do that, but I feel like it could have been an assignment at least to prepare and see at least the college and she can give an assignment, be like, "Oh, go to this course or go to this class or meet this professor or go to this service and understand." So you can understand and get to experience the campus before school start or started

Students who take the FYE online as dual credit are not required to come to the campus. The class is strictly online. Luna's comment was suggesting that students do not benefit from just online discussions or awareness of services. If the students are required to go to the campus for an assignment, they will "experience the campus." The best teaching method might be a hybrid component instead of an online only option. Thus, students are not served if they are kept in their high schools without giving them the opportunity to be equally and included in the college environment and services. It seems dual credit students are marginalized and taken advantage of

if the classes they enrolled are not counted for their degrees. In other words, students are deceived or misadvised to take a "free credit class," that would not count as an elective or meet the degree requirements.

Inclusive Curriculum

An inclusive curriculum must include the voices of those who have been oppressed, marginalized, and colonized. The curriculum of HSIs cannot continue to sideline with the status quo at the expense of ignoring students that they are supposed to be serving. Many institutions act rapidly to obtain the designation when they meet the enrollment threshold and forget that institutional changes must be made to provide a better experience to Latinx students that are soon to be the enrollment majority. At the institution where this research took place, the Latinx student enrollment amounts to 40%. Another important barrier to make significant institutional changes to the curriculum has to do with the composition of faculty by ethnic background. At the institution where this research took place, 71% of the faculty are European Americans. Thus, decolonizing the curriculum is not an easy task for most HSIs, "I remind the readers that HSIs exist within a context that is grounded in whiteness and that they been racialized as inferior within a racially white system" (Garcia, 2019, p. 116). Therefore, HSIs feel obligated to keep the structures of white supremacy for funding purposes at the state and federal level.

It is no surprise that most participants were not introduced to cultural relevant teachings when they took the FYE. Those participants that were introduced to some type of relevant cultural teachings did not remember well what the activities entailed and how it expanded their knowledge of their own culture and others. Rosa stated the following:

> No, let me see, cultural wise. I feel like we did talk about something with everyone individually, but I don't remember it too well. I think she asked all of us individually to

> speak about ourselves, and that did make us learn more about how we all work differently as different cultures, but that's all I can really remember.

Rosa was introduced to class activity that entailed learning more about her classmates, but she was not able to describe what she learned about other cultures. It is safe to say that the professor did not have a well-designed class activity that expanded the knowledge of students about other cultures and their contributions to society. On the other hand, professors need to be trained on how to teach diversity, equity, and inclusion to expand the knowledge of students and make it meaningful to them with class activities or assignments.

Miguel was not introduced to any cultural teachings in class, and he did not see any literature that was directly to his experience. Miguel stated that, “In terms of culture relative (relevant), I didn’t really see any, nor anything that was directly towards me anyway. So, I didn’t really identify with any of it to be fair.” The FYE content did not provide any cultural literature.

The majority of the participants only stated that they did not remember any content related to culture. Javier explained, “I don’t remember anything learning from other people’s culture or anything like that.” Cultural relevant teachings were not part of the class discussions or activities. Likewise, Elena stated the lack of cultural teachings. “From what I can remember, I don’t believe there was any cultural topics like that. I don’t really remember any of that. I just remember it being more of how-to de-stress, and how to time manage, and everything.” Elena learned more about how to control her stress level and time management, but she was not exposed to any cultural teachings.

Latinx Faculty Distribution

Another part of having an inclusive curriculum and instruction is the composition of Latinx teaching faculty. As stated previously, only six percent of the faculty identified as Latinx

per an institutional report. None of the participants took the FYE with a Latinx faculty, and very few have taken classes for their major with any Latinx faculty. Martha described the experience of taking a Math class with a Latina professor.

> I felt actually really comfortable. The teacher was really nice and respectful to all her students. And I guess that class specifically was filled with Hispanic students, so there would be times where she would come up to the students and ask them in Spanish. I think she knew that they understand Spanish more than English, so she would help them in Spanish to better understand what she was saying.

Martha shared the experience when she was taking a math class. She felt very comfortable because the professor was respectful to her and all students. The class had many Spanish speaking students, and the professor assisted them in Spanish for better comprehension. Martha was able to experience the benefits of having a bilingual professor and how students benefited. She also stated, “I feel like it would be best if we had more faculty that were Latinos. Because I mean, almost every class has one student that doesn’t speak English enough to properly understand what the lesion is about.” The lack of Latinx faculty does have a negative impact in the curriculum and instruction and student’s sense of belonging.

Maria knew some faculty that spoke Spanish at the institution. She explained, “I also know a few faculties that speak Spanish, and I’m able to communicate more with them because I just feel like it’s a deeper connection that we share the same language.” Martha conceptualized that having Latinx faculty provides a sense of comfort and deeper connection.

There is much work to be done if HSIs want to change the composition of their faculty. Curriculum and instruction are the pinnacle of serving Latinx students because they all must take courses for their general education and major requirements. Also, students develop a sense of

belonging is developed in the classroom and how students identify their professor and the material they are learning.

Conclusion

A total of 18 participants were interviewed and documents were analyzed to collect the data included in this chapter. The interviews were semi-structured. The role of the FYE was examined at this Hispanic Serving Institution to answer the questions generated for this research. The researcher was able to draw conclusions about the students' cognitive factors, social factors, institutional factors, and HSI servingness. The researcher was able to identify the struggles Latinx students encounter to be successful, and many are stemmed from economic instability to cover tuition cost. In addition, they lack social capital to navigate a very confusing higher education system. Latinx students were not involved in extracurricular activities because most of them were working and had home assigned gender role responsibilities.

The study provided evidence that the FYE does bridge the knowledge gap for Latinx students. The FYE provided the basic skills of college preparedness and navigational skills. Many of them believed the FYE should be a required course for first generation and first semester students. However, when it comes to culturally relevant teachings, the FYE is taught with a deficiency perspective on culturally relevant conscious. Also, very few Latinx faculty were teaching FYE courses. The following chapter provides a discussion of the findings, suggestion for future research, and the implications for community colleges to offer FYEs that include a servingness component.

Chapter 5

Introduction

The purpose of the single phenomenological case study was to examine the importance of an FYE or College 101 seminar and why this topic matters to Latinx students' success. The research took place in a two-year Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) located in the Southwest part of the United States. The overarching question was: *How can First-Year Experiences (FYEs) or college seminars bridge the gap of retention, persistence, servingness, and completion for Latinx students in higher education?*

As stated previously, the research was a single and phenomenological case study of a FYE course by drawing on document analysis and interviews. The phenomenon was analyzed through the interview transcripts of 18 Latinx students in order to explore their cognitive, social, institutional factors, and servingness that influenced the retention.

All of the participants interviewed completed the FYE, and the researcher was not able to interview students who decided to withdraw from the class. For future research, it would be important to explore the in-depth reasons why students decided to withdraw or dropout. The first-year seminar course at this particular community college was not required to be taken by freshman students (those who have completed 15 credits or less). Rather, it was optional, and the students were able take the course at any time during their academic development or degree completion. Academic advisors, counselors, high school teachers, recruiters, or friends recommended the class. Some of the participants learned about the FYE by reading the class description on their academic plans if it was part of their degree options. Therefore, another limitation is that these results reflect only the experiences of students who enrolled in an FYE course during spring and fall 2022.

This chapter is divided into five sections: 1) begins with a summary of the study, which includes a brief review of the guiding methodology, 2) discussion of the findings related to the themes in chapter four, 3) implications for two-year HSIs to offer FYEs that include a servingness component, 4) suggestions for future research 5) lastly, a conclusion of the research.

Summary of the Study

This study aimed to explore the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, and institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education. The research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. What are the academic, social, and institutional issues facing Latinx students in the first year of college, and how do these factors influence their persistence and retention in community colleges?
2. How do FYE courses at a two-year HSI serve Latinx community college students?
3. What are Latinx students' experiences in these FYE courses?
4. What supports do Latinx students in FYE courses believe they need to be successful to complete their educational goals?

To answer the questions, I utilized a phenomenological approach. Additionally, I applied Swail's (2004) Geometrical Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. The model is presented in an equilateral triangle with a student's experience in the center. The aim of the model is to present all the factors that impact the student's persistence. The base of the triangle outlines the institutional factors, the left leg outlines the cognitive factors, and the right leg outlines the social factors.

In the context of HSIs, where most Latinx students are enrolled, it is important to complement Swail's (2004) Geometrical Model with Garcia's et al. (2019) Multidimensional

Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs. This framework provides a rationale for HSIs to look beyond the enrollment of Latinx students and to serve their needs with a racial/ethnic cultural enhancement perspective. Similarly, Swail's model, referring to curriculum and instruction (institutional factors), suggests that institutions develop a core curriculum, which includes contributions of minority groups. Garcia et al. refer to having an inclusive curriculum and make a call to decolonize the curriculum and instruction. These two models are well suited to make the case that FYEs in HSIs must account for culturally equitable outcomes and increase retention and graduation for Latinx students. Consequently, both models were considered when analyzing the data.

Two sources of data were collected. The first set of data were drawn from a document analysis to investigate the history of the FYE and highlight the external influences on serving and structures of servingness within the institution. The college website was explored to find any clues of HSI designation and servingness as it communicates general information to the students and community. The second part of the data came from interviewing 18 students who enrolled for the FYE during spring and fall 2022. To provide a short summary of students' demographics, 15 were females and three male students, 17 were first-generation, 15 were working a part-time or full-time job, nine wanted to transfer to a four-year college and the rest were undecided or were completing a terminal degree at the institution (associate of applied science).

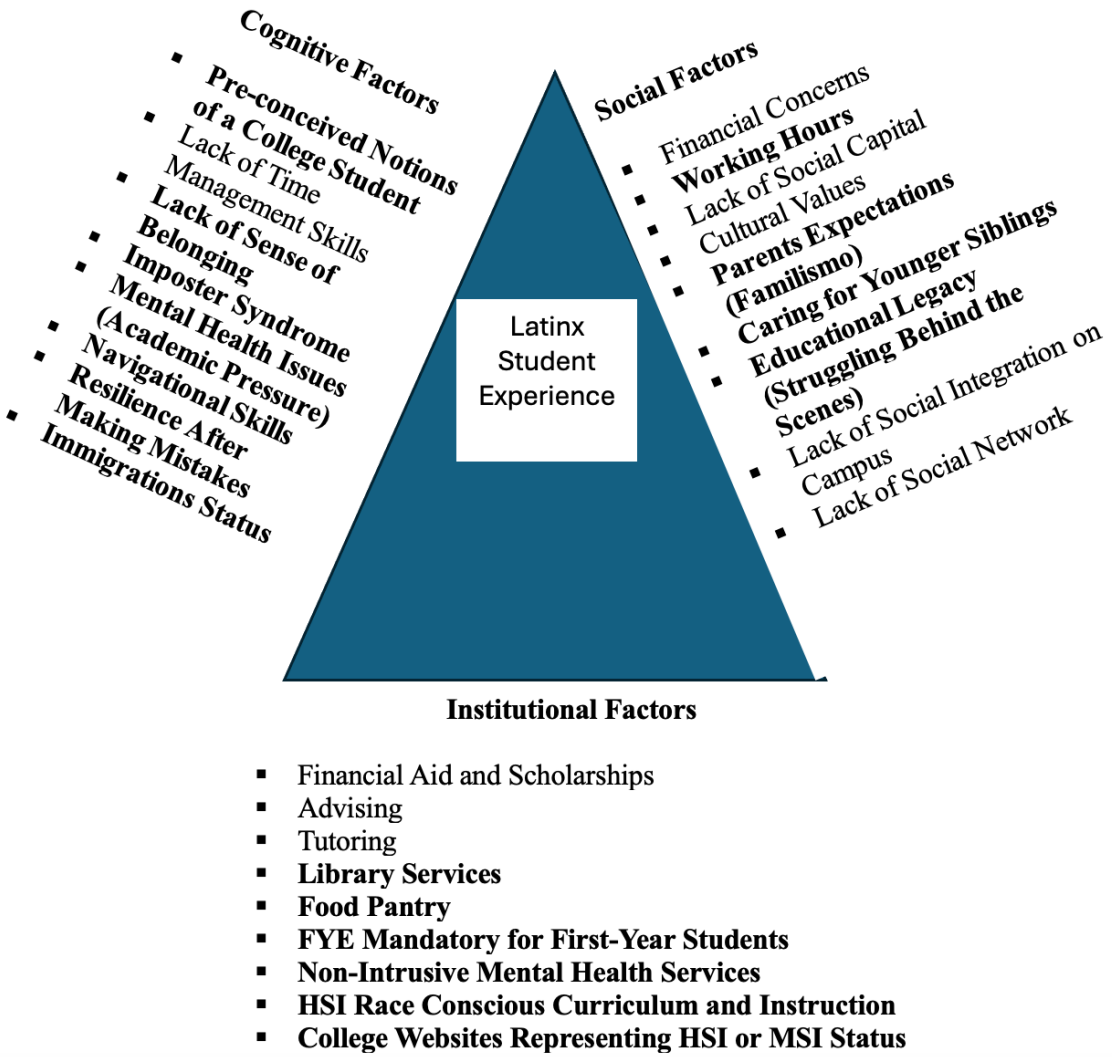
Discussion of Findings

My study took place in a two-year HSI focusing on Latinx student experiences. Generally, the literature has focused on four-year HSIs. My study adds to the work of Servingness of two-year HSIs through the lenses of FYEs. Also, research has shown that navigational skills are important for students of color (Nunez, 2011; Shumaker & Wood, 2016;

& Schneider, 2022). In this regard, my study adds to the significance of two-year HSIs by providing a course that bridges the knowledge and persistence gap for the majority of Latinx students to be successful in higher education. As concluded in the literature review, many Latinx students in higher education are enrolled in community colleges and FYEs provide a potential opportunity to serve these students.

Based on the collected data, I also discovered that Swail's model had limitations in grasping the Latinx student's experiences. Consequently, I incorporated the concept of servingness and introduced additional dimensions for consideration. There were some differences specifically to the factors and variables from Swail's Geometrical Model that impacted Latinx students in different ways. Some of these factors that impacted Latinx participants were different compared to other ethnic groups as proposed by Swail's model. The following factors were the most common from the data under each of the three categories: 1) cognitive factors included preconceived notions of who should be a college student, sense of belonging, imposter syndrome, mental health, navigational skills, resilience after making mistakes, immigration status and mindset, 2) social factors included financial concerns, assigned gender roles and academic struggles, working hours, lack of social capital, cultural values and expectations (Familismo), educational legacy, social network, and 3) institutional factors such as mental health services, institutional research and risk factors, cost of tuition, lack of services depending on immigration status, race-consciousness HSI curriculum and instruction, FYE required, food pantries, financial aid, advising, tutoring, library services, and HSI institutional marketing. Please see the adapted figure below for a list of factors.

Figure 4: Additional Dimensions for Swail's Model.



Note. This adapted model proposes additional dimensions (in bold text) for consideration based on Swail's (2004) model. The dimensions proposed were compiled from the Latinx student's experiences, and they were significant to understand their unique struggles as they navigated higher education.

The participants provided valuable information about their experiences to assert the study findings. Four major themes were created from analyzing the interview transcripts: 1) cognitive factors, 2) social factors, 3) institutional factors, 4) FYE course content and lack of servingness. The findings supported the challenges experienced by Latinx students when trying to fit into a college environment and complying with family expectations (Familismo). Many of them expressed mental health as a major struggle to cope with the demands of school and at home. In general terms, participants expressed their main struggles with navigational skills, time management skills, sense of belonging, social capital, financial struggles, immigration status, balancing school with work, and student services. The findings also support the lack of curriculum and instruction to serve their needs with a racial/ethnic cultural enhancement perspective.

Cognitive Skills

Cognitive factors were interconnected to the fact that participants were first-generation students except for one, and as a result they lacked navigational skills. Part of the main struggle they experienced were interrelated to their lack of sense of belonging and the skills not yet acquired. One of those skills not yet acquired was time management. Participants were having a difficult time with balancing their personal lives, school, and home-assigned gender-role responsibilities. Female participants were given home responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, house chores, and dealing with family expectations. In the process, participants experienced mental health issues due to balancing and juggling their personal lives with their academics. Another factor that added to participants' mental health were the messages received from their parents about school expectations and the parents lack of understanding of school demands. It is vicious cycle of high academic parental pressure and lack of consistent

institutional outreach offering mental health support services. Mental health was discussed in the literature view as a factor not outlined by Swail's model, but it is a factor for Latinx students in their decision to continue or drop out (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). There is a lack of demographic information in higher education about Latinx students that is concerning.

Participants discussed their lack of navigational skills and counteracting with figuring it out themselves. Again, first-generation participants' struggles stem from the lack of guidance at home and school. Latinx students are expected to make mistakes in their quest for institutional knowledge. Lacking navigational skills is a common trend among first-generation students, but they also have the resilience to learn from their mistakes and move on. Making mistakes due to the lack of knowledge was supported by the literature review. In general, first-generation Latinx students enter college without important knowledge on what to expect academically and socially, which is only part of the problem.

Self-perception was influenced by a state of mind of not feeling intelligent enough compared to other classmates, being a non-traditional student, speaking English as a second language, and perceived lack preparation skills to be prepared academically for college level courses. What is important to understand is that sense of belonging was interconnected with cognitive factors in relation to their self-perception of who should be a college student depending on preconceived notions.

The FYE bridged the gap of learning skills for participants and provided a sense of comfort. Students learned to control their communication anxiety. They also learned different learning styles, and most of them identified with one. Participants were also exposed to different study skills, and they felt prepared and motivated to continue their academic journey after completing the FYE. The FYE also provided opportunities to build participant's social support

network, which helped them create study groups to work on class assignments. The benefits of FYEs were considerably discussed in the literature review. In chapter four, participants expressed the benefits of taking an FYE to counteract their initial lack of knowledge, lack of sense of belonging, and lack of navigational skills associated with first-generation and first year students.

Social Factors

The most common social factors participants struggled with were financial concerns, family expectations (Familismo), educational legacy, social coping skills, cultural values, and family influence. One of the major challenges participants experienced was navigating a system alone without the support of family and institutional agents. However, the participants were able to develop social connections and a support system when they were enrolled in the FYE. The FYE did make a difference to the connections Latinx students developed when they enrolled during their first or second semester. Andrade et al. (2015) proposed that there is a value of timing to develop social connections and navigational skills for Latinx students. As a social factor deficiency, the researcher analyzed that if the participants did not make connections early on, they felt lonely. Students did realize the value of having the FYE as a required course for the purpose of social integration. The literature review corroborated how students' lack of social capital impacted their persistence. Tovar (2015) defines social capital "social networks and interpersonal relationships" students develop to feel supported throughout their academic journey.

Another important factor was the financial struggles participants experienced, and the struggles were more predominant when students did not have a permanent immigration status. Latinx students that do not have a permanent immigration status are most of the time excluded

from financial aid and scholarships. The struggle was to find the resources to pay for their classes when they were not supported financially by their parents or by the institution. In addition, students who are placed on academic suspension are not eligible for financial aid or scholarships. The majority of the participants had part-time or full-time jobs to cover tuition and life expenses, and they chose a community college due to affordability. The literature review supported the struggles students must endure to be successful as they juggle a job with school and contribute to the family financially (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Also, Swail (2014) emphatically stated that finances related to the cost of tuition was one of the main drivers of students' attrition.

Cultural values such as parents' expectations were additional pressures that participants had to cope with. These additional pressures impacted their emotional well-being, family dynamics, and opportunity to develop social connections on campus. As stated previously with cognitive factors, female participants specified that they provided childcare to younger siblings and had home assigned responsibilities. In the literature review, family expectations were defined as "Familismo" when the family comes first when support is needed (Turcios-Coto & Milan, 2013)

The consequences of these expectations were related to not being able to participate in social events on campus to develop their social capital. Nonetheless, all the participants were committed to graduating or transferring to four-year colleges. Family members were not able to understand the struggles participants were facing to be successful in college. Family and academic pressures were topics not discussed with family members, and one of the participants said it best, "struggling behind the scenes."

Institutional Factors

Participants were more acquainted with some specific institutional services than others. The FYE provided awareness and connected participants to services available online or on campus and participants were able to conceptualize different scenarios and the services needed depending on the situation. The class material and discussions were helpful to identify where the services were located. Participants discussed the services they used or became aware of such as advising, tutoring, financial aid, food pantry, and library services. It is important to mention that participants viewed the library not only as a physical space to study or do their homework, but also as a quiet space that provided a sense of peace away from their home environment. Tutoring was one of those services widely used for most of the popular classes in general education and science. However, tutoring was limited or non-existent for major specialized requirements.

Participants indicated that the FYE was the navigational compass to find the location of the resources available. However, dual enrollment program students (high school and college) did not have the option to enroll for the FYE on campus, and this was a disadvantage for them when they came to campus. The students had the knowledge of services available, but they did not have a clear understanding of their physical location.

The literature review set the stage that Latinx students face significant challenges in the transition to college, including achievement gaps, opportunity gaps, equity gaps related to student services, developmental placement, financial barriers, first-generation status, lack of social capital, racialized experiences, and sense of belonging. Nevertheless, FYEs may be an important point of intervention to the transition to college. The findings do support the benefits of having an FYE for new incoming Latinx students. They were exposed to services that assisted them in their academic journey.

FYE Course Content and Lack of Servingness

The course content of an FYE could be political topic issue at any HSI institution and external influences could block servingness. Participants stated that the FYE did not provide a racial/ethnic cultural enhancement perspective due to the lack of culturally relevant conscious teachings. As indicated in the document analysis, 71% of the faculty are White and 6% are Latinx at the institution where this research took place. Thus, the problem lies with curriculum and instruction because it is difficult to make significant changes to it when the faculty do not look or represent the student's viewpoints or needs. Part of the viewpoint of the participants was to offer a mandatory FYE during the first semester and be counted for their degree requirements. HSIs can make bold decisions to reconfigure their general education requirements and include the FYE as a mandatory class.

Participants suggested that the course does need to include navigational skills and add other non-traditional topics such as financial literacy, tax preparation, steps to rent an apartment or renew a lease, where to find emergency funding for unexpected emergencies, food pantries, and information about scholarships. Participants stated the need to be aware of non-traditional resources as part of the curriculum. The list of improvements to the FYE was expanded in chapter four. Serving the students is also meeting them where they are on their personal development. Improvements to the curriculum is not just designing a curriculum that meets the perceived needs of the students from the institution perspective. It takes willingness to ask them how they could be better served.

Another important finding was that most of the participants did not know about the institution's HSI status. This is not surprising considering the lack of information on the institution's website, and it is not a topic of discussion included in the curriculum. The

participants that expressed knowledge of the institution's HSI status had a general overview of what it meant.

Implications for Two-Year HSIs

This study addressed the retention issues associated with cognitive, social, institutional factors that Latinx students face in higher education. Also, the concept of servingness was introduced to have a better understanding of the Latinx student's experiences. The existent implications for two-year HSIs are associated with how these institutions implement an FYE with a curriculum and instruction that serve the needs of Latinx students. There is a negotiation process that HSIs must have at their internal level and with external forces of serving as stated by Garcia et al. (2019). Emphatically, the services provided must also match the students' needs. Thus, HSIs must create practical solutions about assisting Latinx students with their FYE curriculum and instruction. Participants indicated they want to learn financial literacy such as how to file taxes, leasing and renewing an apartment lease, buying or renting, and where to find funding for unexpected life emergencies. Also, the institutions should consider having parent night orientations to educate the parents about school demands. These orientations should include conflict resolutions and a general idea about student services within the institution and in the community. Perhaps, FYE assignments should highlight the role of the family (Familismo) for Latinx students and how to deal with home gendered responsibilities.

FYEs curriculum must be redesigned with a different perspective on how time management is viewed for Latinx students who work and care for family members. In other words, the common definition of time management is usually analyzed in a traditional setting where the students do not have many responsibilities besides school demands, and they waste time in non-productive activities. Another implication is creating different versions of FYEs for

minoritized students. The benefits of offering different versions of FYEs should generate a sense of community and social capital. Another implication is to educate Latinx students about how to navigate their imposter syndrome at school and home. Non-intrusive mental health services can alleviate mental health struggles to cope with school demands and home environments.

Institutions also need to collect demographic data to have conclusive information about their students and how they can assist them in their academic journey. Swail's model suggests that if there is an imbalance of cognitive, social, and institutional factors, the student is more geared to leave the institution. More conclusive research on this imbalance is necessary to conclude when Latinx students tend to drop out due to their cognitive, social, and institutional factors. HSIs administrators must be held accountable for the inconsistencies of MSIs mission and vision to serve the students, but the reasons why they do not take bold decisions to change the system must also be investigated. What is the apprehension or fear behind not changing the system within their institutions?

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was bounded by Latinx students who enrolled for an FYE at a two-year HSI college, and 18 students were interviewed to capture their experiences. As a researcher, I was pleased with the data gathered and the findings. However, more qualitative research is desirable in HSIs to have more concrete data on how these institutions support and understand their Latinx students in order to help them persist to completion. It is also important to conduct more research on how curriculum and instruction is created with a deficit perspective for Latinx and other ethnic groups. In regard to Swail's (2004) model, more research is needed to create an argument that not all the cognitive, social, and institutional factors outlined apply to minoritized students. In addition, how the factors outlined intercept each other to create the student

experience. In the case of HSIs, the term minority students is not applicable because they are the majority not the minority. With this concept in mind, research focus must shift to a non-comparative white standard.

Research is the backbone to validate that a colonized curriculum is detrimental to how Latinx student's view themselves in higher education especially for first generation students. Many of the participants acknowledged that they had felt the imposter syndrome when they were in college. In this context, more research is appropriate to find out the psychological background behind their feelings of not belonging.

The researcher was not able to interview students that dropped out of the FYE, and their perspective is important to understand the reasons why they decided not to complete the class or leave the institution. The institution where this research took place enrolls more than 28,000 students every semester, and the FYE is not required. Future research could focus on HSIs where an FYE is required and how it impacts student success.

Most of the research on FYEs has been conducted in four-year colleges and the literature review was specific on the limitations at two-year colleges. If two-year HSIs are added to the criteria of limited research, it is difficult to compare or contrast the data. Another important implication was the cost of tuition and the ability to use financial aid to pay for an FYE if it is not part of the general education requirements.

Conclusion

The purpose of the single phenomenological case study was to examine the significance of an FYE or College 101 seminar and its relevance to the success of Latinx students. The research took place in a two-year HSI located in the Southwest part of the United States. The overarching question was: *How can First-Year Experiences or college seminars bridge the gap*

in retention, persistence, servingness and completion for Latinx students in higher education? As a researcher, one aspires that a research project provides inspiration and offers insight to others, and to instill the courage needed to challenge the status quo within HSIs. It is irrational to strive for student success without understanding the student body and who is the institution enrolling. This research has provided evidence that FYEs do bridge the gap of knowledge and persistence among Latinx students, but the establishment of an FYE must be collaborative involving faculty, administrators and most crucially, student voices. Also, there is a pressing need to decolonize curriculum and instruction, ensuring the inclusion of voices that have historically been marginalized or overlooked in the past.

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