TOWARD A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF HISPANIC UNDERGRADUATE
RETENTION AT A PRIVATE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY USING NARRATIVE INQUIRY
AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

A Dissertation

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

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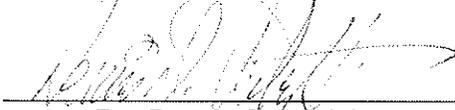
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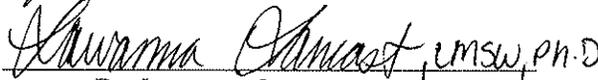
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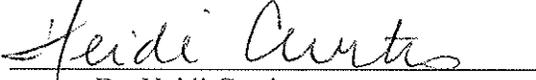
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I have been blessed with an incredible life and have experienced some remarkable events. Several years ago while standing at the base of the Hindu Kish Mountain range in Afghanistan, some 6,000 miles away from home, I was quickly reminded of the fact that despite our circumstances, or desires, each of us has an important role to play in how we make this world a better place for generations yet to come. The journey toward a PhD was personal for me because it was more about showing others who are searching for the path the importance of embracing your fears, having faith in God, and living the life each of us was intended to live. The path leading to this PhD was very much shared by many who willingly gave of their time to provide the encouragement, motivation, and ambition to help keep me going when the going got tough. Any success which I have achieved in this effort was a shared success made possible by the relationships of supporting family, friends, coaches, and mentors. Although it is impossible to know the amount of impact and influence we might have on another person's life because of some random act of kindness or a more personal relationship, I know that I could not have completed this journey without the support of my loving wife Lori, my daughter Sierra, my son Dakota, Dr. Dennis Cartwright, Dr. Lori Werth, and Dr. Heidi Curtis. Thank you for walking the path with me and being there when I needed you most. I am forever grateful.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my loving mother, Virginia Sanchez, 1945-1987, who displayed exceptional personal courage, perseverance, and grace in her brief life. An 8th grade dropout, and a single parent, she worked two jobs to raise a family and provide for me. Although she never made a lot of money, she was a successful single parent and mother in that she taught me the importance of family and the value of hard work. She often would say to me, "Miejo…. Puedes hacerlo que quieras y ser lo que quieras ser si estás dispuesto a intentar" [My Son, you can achieve anything you want to, or be anybody you want to be in this world, if you are willing to try]. The significance of moments like that are lost when you hear them as a young boy. Now that I am older, and have children of my own, I fully understand what she was trying to tell me. Although her forty-two years on this earth were way too short, her memory remains the inspiration behind my desire to live a life of selfless service to others. May this work serve as a testimony to a mother who taught her young son; yes-anything is possible for those willing to try. I love you, Mom.

ABSTRACT

Student retention is considered a complex human behavior. Adding to the complex nature of student retention is the ever changing landscape of higher education due in large part to the growth of Hispanic undergraduate student enrollment on college campuses. While notable gains have been made increasing the number of Hispanic students graduating from high school and going on to college, little progress has been made in increasing the college graduation rate of this group. Narrative inquiry and autoethnography methods were used in this study to explore the family background and lived experiences of the researcher along with those of a sample population of 19 current and former Hispanic undergraduate students of a private Christian university. Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) served as a theoretical framework for this study because it was well suited for exploring student persistence as longitudinal process impacted by a multitude of institutional factors, external influences, family background characteristics, and student attributes.

Primary data was collected using demographic questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling. Several commons themes emerged from data analysis and interpretation which shed light on the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention at private Christian university. The emerging themes from this study were comprised of: family, family support, motivation, religion, transition, institutional support, and supportive relationships. These themes point toward a connection between a student's family background, individual skills and abilities, and pre-college academic readiness to the development of initial academic goals and commitments to earn a college degree. This study provided evidence that the cultural beliefs, values, and language reflected in the emerging themes converge with the cultural elements of the university in a way indicating connections between students and institutions were important

determinates of student success. The findings revealed that a university's ability to effectively engage and retain Hispanic students may be a function of a broad and supportive network of persons dedicated to the success of minority students throughout the university. This study provided evidence that supportive relations provided by agents of the institution and sources external to the university played a major role in a participant's educational journey.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction of a qualitative inquiry exploring Hispanic undergraduate student retention at a private Christian university. In this chapter, I provide the reader with (a) an introduction to the research topic, (b) a statement of the problem, (c) an overview of the research questions, (d) a description of terms, (e) a description of the study, and (f) an overview of the research methods used for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and description.

I have always had a strong desire to contribute to the success of students aspiring to earn a college degree. My interest in exploring the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention came from of my own experiences as a Hispanic student at two universities, one public and one private. Shortly after I retired from the U.S. Army in 2012, I had the privilege and honor of serving as a mentor to nine high school seniors at a three day conference composed of activities, workshops, and leadership development seminars for Hispanic students. My role as a mentor was to serve as a resource and guide to conference attendees seeking leadership development and educational/career opportunities. I was asked often during the event to share my family background, experiences, and motivation for going to college, including my reasons for serving as an officer in the U.S. Army. My role as a mentor was to share my experiences and insights with nine young Hispanic men and women who were about to begin their senior year in high school. Interacting and sharing my experiences with each of these young people, I sensed their excitement about the future and their concerns about the challenges which lay ahead of them. Listening to each of their stories I realized that many of them faced the very same challenges I encountered almost three decades ago: a lack of family support, financial hardships, and very

few positive role models. Yet, I was very impressed by their confidence and motivation to pursue advanced placement courses and dual credit opportunities in their final year of high school. In comparison, I spent my senior year in high school trying to play catch up by applying to universities, taking college placement exams, and filling out financial aid forms long after others were already receiving acceptance letters from institutions eagerly awaiting their arrival in the coming months. I wondered if the educational system had made improvements for students like these since I had been in high school.

During the final day of the conference, each of the young men in my small group committed to the goal of attending and graduating from college. In less than a year, these young men and women would provide evidence of the significant progress made in increasing the number of Hispanics graduating from high school and going onto college. I left the conference feeling inspired from my interactions with these high schools seniors; then came Marco's (pseudonym) email:

> I want to thank you for all the time you spent on me, for sharing your story so bravely. It was an honor. I need to be honest with you. I feel dead inside. I have cried 27 times since I got to HYS [Hispanic Youth Symposium] in public, in the restroom, on the way home, and now locked in my room. I don't feel good enough, I don't have confidence in myself, because even though I didn't come from nothing, I at the moment believe I'm nothing. You know I hide it with smiles and laughs but behind doors I am so lost. I feel so much pain and it's becoming very hard to handle, because I just hate it so much. You guys were so amazing. I am so proud of each and every one of you because you have made such a difference in so many lives, and it's selfish for me dropping this all on you but I need to tell my mentor what I truly feel. I am so sorry.

Marco's email was weighing heavily on my mind as I began my doctoral studies and a new position at Triad University (pseudonym). Many times in my life I had similar feelings to those described by Marco. I knew what it felt like to lack confidence and pretend like everything was okay on the outside while it felt like the complete opposite on the inside. The same day I received Marco's email, I also became aware of a young Hispanic female undergraduate student at Triad University who reportedly was living out of her car located in one of the campus parking lots. Sylvia (pseudonym) had no relatives she could live with, and as she described it, "no one to turn to for help." Sylvia shared with me her experiences of studying in the university library until it closed and then going to her car to sleep for the night. When morning came she would go the university gym to take a shower and then to the cafeteria, where she would wait until no one was watching the front desk so she could sneak inside to get some food to eat before class. Despite these challenges, this young Hispanic female student was maintaining above a 3.5 grade point average.

I thought of Marco and Sylvia and wondered about the larger picture of Hispanic undergraduate student retention. Marco had already applied and been accepted to a university. Sylvia was in her junior year at Triad University. Through the process of this study I discovered between the academic years of 2005 and 2015 Triad University experienced a 400% increase in Hispanic undergraduate. The significant growth in enrollment at Triad University was consistent with what other colleges and universities were experiencing across the nation. When asked about the reasons for this significant growth, however, representatives of the university were neither aware of the increase, nor could they identify potential contributing factors. By exploring the family backgrounds and experiences shaping the initial academic goals and commitments of

Hispanic undergraduate students, this study provided some insight to the student retention puzzle.

This study was a journey into my past and present through the lens of autoethnography, research literature, student retention theory, and a sample population of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students who attended a private Christian university. This study represented what Tinto (1993) described as rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. I believed Triad University, like most universities, would benefit from the knowledge gained from this study. Everyone has a story to tell that can be told and retold in a multitude of different ways. In conducting this study, I wanted to contribute to existing theory and research by using personal experience as part of the data to help answer the research questions guiding inquiry. In this manner, the findings of this study may become a catalyst for additional research exploring Hispanic undergraduate retention. At a minimum, the findings of this study increased the discourse about Hispanic undergraduate student retention, and provided a voice to a population often underrepresented or marginalized in scholarly research.

Statement of the Problem

Student retention in higher education is one of the greatest challenges facing colleges and universities today. It is a persistent and complex issue with a significant impact on almost every aspect of daily life. Educators, policymakers, and researchers often approach the challenges of student retention like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. One piece of the retention puzzle is described as the individual aspects of the student, their academic skill sets, socioeconomic background, and cultural heritage (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The university campus environment provides other important pieces of the retention puzzle. Examples of these are the formal and informal social and

academic climate of the institution, including the level of institutional support and commitment to retention programs, policies, and strategies (Miller & Garcia, 2004; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2008; Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). Rendón (2002) argues many of the previous studies examining student retention occurred when the composition of college student populations was much less ethnically diverse than it is today. Against the backdrop of a changing and more diverse student population in higher education, colleges and universities are facing challenges and opportunities in getting the pieces of the retention puzzle to fit together (Braxton, Hirshcy, & McClendon, 2011).

In 2012, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in college increased from 11% to 17%, representing an increase of 447,000 students across the United States (Pew Research Center, 2014). In comparison, the percent of Caucasian/non-Hispanic students declined from 67% to 58%. Despite gains in enrollment, Hispanics continue to be underrepresented on college campuses when compared to their percentage of the overall population of the nation, with little progress being made in increasing the graduation rate of those aspiring to earn a college degree (Milen, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Rios & Leegwater, 2008). Today, many researchers, policy makers, and educators contend several knowledge gaps exist in our understanding of the factors impacting Hispanic student persistence and academic achievement in higher education (Miller & Garcia, 2004; Oseguera et al., 2008; Sólorzano et al., 2005). Oseguera et al., (2008) asserted too many Hispanic students have found themselves ill-equipped to meet the challenges of separating from family, fully integrating into the academic and social environments of college, and persisting to earn a degree. Despite 40 years of student retention research, few studies have addressed the issue from the Hispanic students' perspective. In this study Hispanic students were given a voice and were directly asked about factors which influenced retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to seek understanding of the background, experiences, and interactions of a sample population of current and former full-time undergraduate Hispanic students at a private Christian university, and to examine how these experiences and perceptions impacted student retention and departure decisions.

Research Questions

This study explored and analyzed a broad range of social, cultural, academic, and institutional factors influencing the experiences and impacting the persistence decisions of Hispanic students at a private, Christian university.

The following questions shaped this study:

1. What background characteristics such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

2. What personal experiences and institutional support factors were important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?

3. What were the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, including their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

Description of Terms

Creswell (2012) emphasizes the importance of describing and labeling terms and descriptions in research. The terms and descriptions provided below were employed throughout the dissertation, and are defined here for clarification and standardization of use.

Academic integration. Refers to meeting explicit standards of the

University, and the individual's identification with the beliefs, values, and norms inherent in the academic system (Tinto, 1993; Hadlock, 2012).

Autoethnography. Autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative allowing researchers to understand themselves, but also to understand others from the same cultural backgrounds (Chang, 2008).

Campus climate. The current perceptions, attitudes and expectations that define the educational institution and its members (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

Campus culture. Deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior, as well as the shared values, assumptions, and beliefs that members have about their institution (Berger & Milem, 1999; Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

College or university. An accredited institution of higher learning that grants the bachelor's degree in liberal arts, science, and business (Tinto, 1993).

Culture. Observable customs, traditions and practices; a group's heritage and history; characteristic ways that people solve environmental problems; a common set of explicit or implicit values that guide behavior; arbitrary meanings assigned to symbols, always changing (Chestnut, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the term culture was used to describe the shared values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors of a group.

Cultural capital. The rules and values an individual learns as a child in the family of origin (Bourdieu, 1986)

Cultural identity. A conceptual framework used to describe and understand cultural development. It is also used to describe an individual's personal attitudes, beliefs and behaviors associated with one's own culture (Hernandez, 2005).

Diversity. The bringing together of persons of different backgrounds, personal

characteristics, or perspectives to create a community in which all ideas are respected and explored and all students benefit from the experience. It refers to differences in student talents and interests and to differences in region, class, culture, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and disability (Hernandez, 2005).

Educational pipeline. A system of interrelated institutions where students move from one level to the next. The journey is varied and shaped by school structures, policies, and culture (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

First-generation college student. A student for whom neither parent nor guardian obtained a 4 year bachelor's degree (Davis, 2010).

First-time, full-time student. Traditional, non-adult student attending college for the first time, straight out of high school, and enrolled in at least 12 credit hours (Tinto, 1993).

Graduation rate. Graduation rates are computed as the number of first-time, full-time freshman who complete a degree, either an associates' or bachelors', within 150% of program time (six years for a bachelor's degree and three years for an associate's degree) (Santiago, 2010).

Hispanic American. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) identified six major race categories in the 2010 Census Bureau Report. Hispanic American is one of the 12 sub-categories. It includes those persons identifying themselves as Latino, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Spanish, or Hispanic. Hispanic Students represent the following Hispanic origins: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and other Latino origins (De Santos & Guamea, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the term Hispanic and Latino are interchangeable.

Minority student. A person or student who is a member of one of the four historically underrepresented ethnic groups in higher education in the United States: African American, Asian American, Hispanic or Latino/a, and Native American (Nora & Crisp, 2009).

Marginalization. Refers to experiencing repression or stigmatization or being placed in a position of marginal importance, influence, or power (Hernandez, 2005).

Persistence. A decision made by a student to remain enrolled in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A student's ability to remain enrolled in college and continues studies toward completion of a college degree. For the purpose of this study, the term persistence is used to describe undergraduate students who remained enrolled beyond their initial date of matriculation.

Reflexivity. An explicit form of self-consciousness regarding the values, positions, social, or political views of the researcher, and how these could potentially influence the research design or any phase of the inquiry process Creswell (2013).

Retention. Retention in higher education is often times measured from the continued enrollment of a student from one year to the next, with specific emphasis placed on the time period from the first year to the second year of enrollment. A measurement of retention is often measured in the fall semesters of the first and second year of a student's enrollment (Swail, Cabera, Lee, & Williams, 2005).

Social capital. The connections in and between a person's social networks (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social integration. Pertains to the extent of congruency between the student and the social system of the university; this congruency happens at the university level and at the level of a subculture of the university (Hadlock, 2012; Tinto, 1993).

Stereotype. A negative or limiting preconceived-belief about a specific group

that is applied to all members of that group (Robinson & Bowman, 1997).

Significance of the Study

Limited empirical research is available regarding the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic students enrolled in private Christian universities in the United States. Linares and Munoz (2011) submit a majority of studies on the topic of Hispanic student retention have been focused on four-year public universities and community colleges, with few select studies examining private institutions, and even fewer studies conducted at private Christian universities (Gasman, Kim, Nguyen, 2011; Guenter -Schlesinger, & Ojikutu, 2009; Williams & Kirk, 2008). Addressing the issue of Hispanic student retention for private Christian colleges and universities presents a unique opportunity for researchers to apply student retention theory to population groups where very few in-depth studies have been conducted (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Menon & Harter, 2012; Milen et al., 2005).

Because of the limited empirical research is available regarding the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic students enrolled in private Christian universities, this study provides the type of data necessary for decision makers, practitioners, and policy makers to assess higher education variables impacting Hispanic student persistence. Organizations that understand the need to grow the enrollment of Hispanic students in higher education and achieve a greater degree of diversity on college campuses may be interested in the outcomes of this study. Identifying variables that increase Hispanic student success in higher education will lead to increased opportunities now and in the future for this segment of the population.

Overview of Research Methods

In this research study I utilized a qualitative approach incorporating narrative inquiry with analytical autoethnography to seek understanding of background, experiences, interactions,

beliefs, and ideas of a sample population of current and former Hispanic students of a private Christian university, in combination with those of the researcher. Individual interviews and focus group sessions served as the source of primary data for this research. A constructivist-interpretive paradigm, together with a theoretical framework composed of Tinto's Theory of Student Interaction, provided an analytical lens to produce findings informing a self-descriptive narrative telling the story of Hispanic undergraduate student retention and departure at a private Christian university. Analytical autoethnography provided a method well suited for combining theory with the human experience (Wall, 2006). A descriptive self-narrative was used to report the results of the research findings in a manner which invited readers to become co-participants, to feel as if they were actually experiencing the story emotionally, intellectually, and morally (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). A qualitative approach facilitated the researchers desire to give a voice to a minority group often marginalized, or not represented at all, in topics of importance and significance such as student persistence in higher education (Creswell, 2012; Ladsons-Billings, 2005; Price, 2010).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature and multiple perspectives and theoretical approaches to student retention and Hispanic undergraduate persistence. The review of the literature is comprised of select U.S. census data, cultural, psychological, and sociological perspectives guiding research and practice of student retention in higher education. In this chapter, I provide the reader with evidence from the literature that Hispanic population growth in the U.S. along with student success in navigating the K-12 educational pipeline will result in increased enrollment of Hispanic undergraduate students on college campuses now and in the foreseeable future. The literature review points toward a claim made by previous researchers that diversity matters and increases in Hispanic undergraduate enrollment will present both challenges and opportunities, particularly in the area of campus diversity and the level of investments made by institutions to create and sustain inclusive learning environments.

The literature review communicates the complexity of the topic of undergraduate student retention by describing it as a complex human behavior which occurs over time and is impacted by student background characteristics, socioeconomic status, cultural variables, environmental factors, and levels of institutional support. The review of the literature revealed that the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention is particularly complex given the fact that Hispanics as a group are comprised of many different subcultures which are very diverse. This chapter provides an overview of the cultural implications described in the literature on Hispanic undergraduate retention. A discussion of ethnic identity, social identity, and validation theory highlights multiple psychological and sociological perspectives on Hispanic undergraduate retention (Bean

& Kuh, 1984; Bok, 2003; Braxton et al., 2011; Kuh, 2007). Researchers have applied theories such as Social Identity Theory, Ethnic Identity, and models of student retention and departure in attempts to gain a better understanding of how ethnic minority students may shape self-perceptions and develop personal assessments of their own self-worth and value (Braxton et al., 2011, Castillo et al., 2006; Chen & DesJardin, 2010; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). The research suggested that these self-perceptions and personal assessments ultimately lead to individual decisions to stay in college and persist to graduation (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Solberg & Viliarreal, 2007).

In this chapter, a description of Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) as a theoretical framework is offered along with a review of other dominant theoretical perspectives such as Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory used in the study of student retention. Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) served as the theoretical framework guiding inquiry and analysis because it was well suited for exploring student persistence as a longitudinal process impacted by a multitude of institutional factors, external influences, family background characteristics, and student attributes. This chapter concludes with a summary and acknowledgement that many knowledge gaps exits in the collective understanding of the experiences and factors impacting Hispanic undergraduate persistence to graduation. While researchers and policy makers continue to work toward solution sets for adequately addressing these challenges, one factor in particular is sure to impact student retention research and practice -the rapid growth of the Hispanic population.

The Implications of Hispanic Population Growth and Hispanic Student Success in

Navigating the Educational Pipeline

The Hispanic population is the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United

States, increasing from 35.3 million people to approximately 50.5 million in just 10 years (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2012). The demographic figures for the Hispanic population growth in the

United States are staggering and at some point, the term "minority" will no longer make sense

(Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2005). U.S. Census Bureau (2012) figures tell the

story. In 1990, non-Hispanics made up almost 75% of the population. In 2010, this same group

dropped to 64% of the population, and is expected to decrease to 61% by 2017. According to

population projections by the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), if current population trends continue

as they have for the past 20 years, by 2035, non-Hispanic whites will be outnumbered by

minorities.

Hispanic population growth in the U.S. occurred during a time period characterized by

limited progress made by Hispanic students aspiring to earn a college degree. The education

pipeline was a model used by researchers to analyze transitions in a student's participation and

progress from kindergarten all the way to the point of earning a terminal degree (Ewell, Jones, &

Keely, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Researchers have looked at every level of the educational pipeline in

efforts to identify and validate what is known about the educational experiences of the

disproportionately few minority students who were successful in completing a post-secondary

degree (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004; Yosso & Solórzano,

2006). Available literature identifies numerous educational conditions and related outcomes that

existed as Hispanic students navigated the undergraduate pipeline, as well as the reasons why

these conditions continue to exist (Ewell, Jones, & Keely, 2003; Swail et al., 2005; Yosso,

& Solórzano, 2006). According to one research study, unequal K-12 school conditions, failure of the community college transfer function, limited baccalaureate opportunities, inability to fund higher education, and educational isolation and alienation, were the most significant factors in determining success or failure in Hispanic students navigating the educational pipeline (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lopez, 2013; Silva, 2007). According to a study conducted by Swail et al. (2005), there is a direct correlation between the limited number of Hispanic students successfully navigating the educational pipeline, the number of potential students to recruit, and the number of qualified Hispanic students accepted and matriculating into higher education. In attempts to fully illustrate the minority educational pipeline, researchers have concluded that out of every 100 ethnically underrepresented elementary school students, only 52 graduate from high school (Rivas, Pérez, Álvarez, & Solórzano, 2007; Silva, 2007). Out of these 52 high school graduates, only 31 end up enrolling in college. Approximately 20 enroll in community college, 10 enroll in 4-year universities, and an average of 10 students will complete a Bachelor's degree. Approximately four students will move through the educational pipeline to earn a graduate or professional degree. Out of the original 100 ethnically underrepresented elementary students who entered the educational pipeline, less than half a percent will graduate with a terminal degree (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Silva, 2007; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

A review of the literature provided evidence of some gains in the number of Hispanic students graduating high school and pursuing a college degree; however, according to some researchers these gains are not enough to positively impact the percent of Hispanic student retention given that the gains are not equal to the increased population of those groups (Fry & Lopez, 2011; Silva, 2007; Swail et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993). The Pew Research Center (2014) provided a much different perspective by claiming the enrollment rate of Hispanic high school

graduates surpassed that of Caucasian/non-Hispanic high school graduates in 2012. In 2012, the

number of Hispanic students enrolled in college increased by 447,000 representing an increase

from 11% to 17%. In comparison, the percent of Caucasian/non-Hispanic college students

declined from 67 to 58 % (Pew Research Center, 2014). The Hispanic population growth is

having tremendous impacts on higher education, providing challenges and opportunities for

colleges and universities in developing and implementing effective and efficient retention

strategies to grow enrollment and retain unrepresented population groups (Cabrera & Nora,

1996; Carter, 2006; Hurtado, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Williams & Kirk, 2008). Nora

and Crisp (2009) argued the Hispanic population growth and student success will continue to

impact higher educational attainment goals while also bringing numerous challenges and

opportunities because this population has been long underserved by the existing education

community. Carnevale & Rose (2011) examined Hispanic population growth in the United States

and the associated increased cost with meeting the specific needs of underserved or

unrepresented student populations and found that many institutions of higher learning simply do

not have the financial capability to make significant investments in creating and sustaining

diverse learning environments (Horn & Ethington, 2002; Rivas et al., 2007). While Hispanic

undergraduate enrollment growth provides challenges, it does also provide opportunity,

particularly in building and sustaining inclusive learning environments which embrace diverse

student population groups.

Diversity Matters

Researchers suggested many university-wide positive benefits and rewards result from

campus diversity such as personal growth, increased knowledge gained from challenging

stereotypes, the development of critical thinking skills, and helping students learn to

communicate effectively with people of different backgrounds (Beil, Reisen, Zea, & Caplan, 1999; Christie, & Dinham, 1991; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Swail et al., 2005). Student retention and persistence is directly linked to campus diversity and the level of commitment institutions make to diverse learning environments (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail et al., 2005). In examining Hispanic student integration, some researchers claimed ethnic or racial minority students learned more in colleges and universities committed to building diverse campus climates and learning environments, where faculty and administrators were supportive and welcoming (Berger & Milem, 1999; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 20078; Milen et al., 2005). In learning environments where faculty structure classes fully integrating the views and perspectives of ethnic or racial minority students, all students are more likely to participate in the types of learning which involves the fusion and integration of others' ideas with their own (DeSousa & Kuh 1996; Horn & Ethington 2002; Pascarella et al., 1983). Another perceived benefit of campus diversity is the potential of faculty of color to serve as mentors to ethnic or racial minority students, ultimately facilitating student integration into the campus environment (Flowers, 2003; Guskin, 1994; Thomas, Willis, & Davis, 2007). A review of the literature pointed toward numerous cultural implications on Hispanic undergraduate retention. The topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention is particularly complex given the fact that Hispanics as a group are comprised of many different subcultures which are very diverse. While diversity does matter in higher education, several researchers claimed culture also plays an important role in student retention, particularly how different subcultures converge within the space of a campus community and larger university culture.

Cultural perspectives on Hispanic Undergraduate Retention

Any effort toward increasing the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Hispanic students in higher education will first require an understanding of Hispanic culture, behaviors, and values. There are numerous challenges in developing an understanding of the Hispanic culture in the United States given the intra-group diversity and multiple subgroups that exist (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000). Hernandez (2005) cautions researchers, educators, and practitioners from assuming that data from a single sample taken from a Hispanic population can be equally applied to all Hispanic subgroups.

Within the Hispanic culture there is a mixture of beliefs; however, several dominant characteristics exist such as the importance of family, gender roles, community, religion, and education (Greenwood, 2012; Solberg & Vilarreal, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2005). In examining Hispanic student retention and departure decisions within the context of Hispanic culture, Hernandez (2005) determined, compared to other ethnic groups, Hispanics were more traditional on the subject of immediate and extended families. Hernandez argued these strong family bonds and feelings of loyalty to the family unit were extremely important. Halgunseth, Ispa and Rudy (2006) used the term "familsmo" in describing the importance in which the Hispanic culture placed on family. In a research study focusing on the parental control in Hispanic families, Halgunseth et al (2006) asserted members of Hispanic families had strong family ties and relied on each other for support and care, and further argued the family unit was of the highest importance in the Hispanic culture. In a similar study conducted by Hurtado (1994), the researcher concluded family bonds were one of the major influences in a decision to enroll in college. Hernandez (2005) argued these family bonds can also influence a Hispanic student's decision to live on campus or stay at home and commute to college.

Gutierrez, Yeakley, and Ortega (2000) examined the Hispanic culture in efforts to gain a greater understanding of the cultural factors impacting Hispanic student departure and retention decisions. In highlighted research findings, Gutierrez et al. argued factors associated with Hispanic student cultural integration, retention and graduation was complex. One example of this complexity was gender role expectations faced by male and female members such as Hispanic males serving as the income provider while the female stays at home to take care of the household and family. Given the cultural norms and expectation for the male member of the family to work full-time, Gutierrez et al. suggested the female must serve as the main link to extended family, children, and parents. Hernandez (2005) argued these gender role expectations often resulted in challenges for both male and female Hispanics aspiring to go to college. Those making the decision to attend college often experienced mixed feelings or guilt because of their decision to leave the family (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Tinto, 1993; Torres, 2003).

In a study of college environments, diversity, and student learning, Hurtado (2003) determined that one of the defining characteristics of the Hispanic culture is a sense of community composed of extended relatives and peers. Hurtado (2003) argued the Hispanic culture values a commitment to community, with trust among group members, and collective focus on the welfare of the group versus the individual. Gutierrez et al (2000) referred to this concept as "simpatia", meaning the promotion of relationships and the avoidance of conflict.

Religion was another defining characteristic of the Hispanic culture which sometimes had a significant impact on the lives of Hispanic students (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvin, 2007; Linares & Munoz, 2011; Milen et al., 2005). Hernandez (2005) asserted religion was a highly personal choice, and it could also be considered a key component of cultural identity given the religious values, teachings, and observances which shaped beliefs and perceptions about a culture.

The Hispanic culture places tremendous value on education. Halgunseth et al. (2006) used the term, "educación", and further suggested this concept included life skills as well as academic achievement. In the Hispanic culture, according to Halgunseth et al. (2006), the concept of "educación" also comprised individual development and living a life of character and integrity. Success or failure in a child's educational development was considered by the Hispanic culture as a reflection on the parent's role in helping their child achieve their potential (Halgunseth et al., 2006). While it is important for educators and policy makers to understand the Hispanic culture with regard to the factors impacting academic achievement, it is also important to have an appreciation for the numerous cultural stereotypes and biases within schools and communities which present barriers to Hispanic student success.

In a research study that examined at risk Hispanic student in K-12 public schools, Martinez (2003) determined many school teachers and staff held the inaccurate belief Hispanic parents placed a low value on their child's education or were indifferent to their academic progress. This perception, according to Martinez (2003) had the potential to influence how educators view students, and more importantly their near term abilities, or long term ambitions to attend college. Stern (2008) provided evidence from a research study which examined why Hispanic students fail to attend college, despite the fact that parents of Hispanic students placed a tremendous value on their child's education. The challenges, Stern argued, were that many Hispanic parents did not graduate from high school, or attend college, and were not able to provide the academic support or assistance at home because they did not have the knowledge or experience to guide and direct their child's studies. While this challenge is not unique to Hispanic population groups, many other challenges presented obstacles and barriers which were unique to Hispanic students and their families.

Available literature was filled with examples of the obstacles and barriers minority students faced in all stages of education (Carter, 2006; Ewell et al., 2003; Gasman et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Williams & Kirk, 2008). Factors that were most predictive of educational success among ethnic or racial minority students varied across stages of the educational pipeline. A review of available data suggested four critical junctures presented barriers to minority members aspiring to earn a college degree: academic preparation for college, graduation from high school, enrollment in college, and persistence in college (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). The racial and ethnic group differences at each of these four junctures impacted minority members' ability to overcome challenges and achieve academic success (Swail et al., 2005). Nora (2001) focused on the variables impacting Hispanic student persistence and college degree aspirations and found that Hispanic students may have lacked family support. Some Hispanic students might have been first generation college students and lacked role models. Other Hispanic students might not have understood educational policies which may have assisted them in their efforts to earn a degree. Some might have been unaware of their own educational potential or may have struggled with ethnic or social identity (Lopez, 2013; Silva, 2007; Santiago, Andrade, & Brown, 2004).

According to Cole (2008), faculty-student relationships were critical to fostering student development and learning, but relationships with faculty may have presented challenges for ethnic or racial minority students. In research conducted by Lundberg (2010), all students preferred to communicate information to faculty members of their own race or ethnicity. With regard to topics of racial, academic, or sensitive issues, this preference to communicate with faculty members of their own race or ethnicity was strongest for African-American and Hispanic students (Flowers, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Other research suggested ethnic or racial

minority students found it difficult to approach faculty of a different race because they feared

those faculty had negative perceptions of their racial group (Guskin, 1994; Lundberg, 2010).

Research has focused on the impact of student interactions with faculty as a strong predictor of

learning (Braxton et al., 2011; Kuh et al., 2006). In studies conducted by Flowers (2003) it was

found when faculty encouraged students to become more involved in the educational aspects of

campus life, they taught students to become critical thinkers and to communicate expectations

about their ability to succeed. The critical takeaway was faculty interaction with students,

especially when the interaction was academic in nature, had a positive impact on student success

for everyone; student satisfaction with faculty relationships, however, appears to vary by race

similarity (Kuh, 2007).

Research and available literature emphasized the importance of mentoring despite a

perceived reluctance of ethnic or racial minority students to interact with faculty from different

ethnic groups or backgrounds than their own (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005;

Tinto, 1993). According to Merisotis and McCarthy (2005), faculty-student interaction was a

strong predictor of student learning for all students, including minorities, and the frequency and

quality of student interactions with faculty had a positive effect on grade point average.

Hernandez (2000) established a positive correlation between retention and quality student-faculty

interaction. Research focusing on Hispanic student population groups in college indicated a

trusting relationship with a faculty or staff member had a positive effect on student persistence

and social adjustment (Dale, 1995; Kezar, 2003).

Oboler (1998) concluded the confluence of limited English proficiency, low educational

attainment, and limited economic resources hinder many ethnic or racial minority parents from

engaging their children in early literacy activities that have been shown to be important for later

academic success. Other research found many ethnic or racial minority students preparing to enter high school are uncertain about what programs or courses to take and are less likely to have taken courses, such as algebra, that would prepare them for advanced high school course sequences (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

Hurtado (2002) concluded that a resulting lack of social integration, or sense of belonging, can impact a student's transition to college and resulting ability to persist. Campus climate is worthy of attention because campus climate affects all enrolled students on a college campus. Two studies found that although non-minority students may be less aware of acts of hostility toward ethnic or racial minority students, non-minority students were still affected by a negative campus climate (Braxton et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993; Wilds, 2000) In fact, non-minority students' persistence was impacted both directly and indirectly by discrimination against minorities and perceptions of a hostile campus climate (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Another obstacle, according to Tinto (1993), is the lack of cultural role models. The majority of universities faculty is white and for the most part, "do not serve as cultural role models for Mexican-American doctoral students" (Tinto, 1993, p. 53). Research conducted with ethnic or racial minority doctoral students revealed more obstacles for those students, compare to the number of obstacles found with the general population of doctoral students. The researchers conducting ethnic or racial minority research found barriers such as racism, absence of pre-college career counseling, identity formation, and socialization factors (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Ortiz, 2004).

Ethnic Identity Theory

Ethnic identity theory is defined as a complex psychological construct influencing perception, cognition, and shaping of an individual's psychological attachment to a specific

ethnic group (Castillo et al., 2006). Researchers have applied Ethnic Identity Theory (EIT) as a lens for examining issues of minority student retention in higher education by considering the factors of social identities, gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class (Ortiz, 2004; Phinney, 1989; Phinney et al., 1997). To adequately support both the needs of minority students and faculty of color, research suggested it is important to understand how ethnic identity plays a role in assisting universities in setting the conditions for students to integrate and assimilate into the college campus (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). Ethnic Identity Theory is part of a person's identity combined with the culture's feelings about values, symbols, and known histories that identify them as a group (Torres, 2003). Nora (2001) determined several components, such as self-identification and ethnic role behavior, impacted the feelings and values people have about their own ethnic group membership. The researchers suggested these feelings and values were critical in the development, understanding, and acceptance of one's own group in the face of perceived lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism (Bernal & Knight 1990; Mbuva, 2011).

In a qualitative research study examining a correlation between ethnic identity and acculturation, Torres (2003) used grounded theory methodology to study Hispanic college student development and how the environment in which a student was reared had a great impact on the student's ethnic self-view and how he or she related to the dominant culture. Torres (2003) claimed during the first two years of college, Hispanic students ethnic identity was shaped by the environment where they grew up, changes in relationships, generational status, self-perception, and status in society. Torres argued that Hispanic cultural influences in student's life greatly affected ethnic identity and the farther away a student was removed from the first generation, the more assimilated they were into the dominant culture of the university. Torres

suggested that while Hispanic students integrated into the campus community they would experience cultural dissonance and changes in relationships, each shaping their ethnic identity. Torres determined that when a student felt like he or she belonged to a subordinated group but could not assimilate a parity relationship with the dominant group, conflicts with ethnic identity and individual self-worth would follow. Other EIT research validated this can cause an individual to think of themselves as subordinate and only worthy of respect in relation to the dominant culture (Menon & Harter, 2012). Although research using EIT has been primarily focused on students in a learning environment, there may be value in applying EIT within a workplace environment in order to gain a better understanding of ethnic or racial minority faculty ethnic self-view and how he or she relates to the dominant culture (Ortiz, 2009; Phinney, 1989; Phinney et al., 1997).

Social Identity Theory

The application of Social Identity Theory (SIT) may provide insight into how gaining a better understanding of an ethnic minority student member's self-efficacy is affected by their social and cultural capital. Kuh (2007) determined that a major key to success for ethnic minority students is engagement, and that engagement in a new academic setting could possibly increase self-esteem and self-efficacy because students are starting to learn how to adapt to a new place of interaction. Perhaps one of the most important offerings of SIT is how the theory helps provide a bridge between the individual and the social environment (Crow & Allan, 1994; Farr, 1991; Jenkins, 2004). The theory does have its limitations. Phillips, Gallagher, and Carroll (2009) discovered that SIT did not fully account for other important variables such as the importance of history and culture, and that the theory can cause researchers to make claims about bias that are not supported by data.

Validation Theory

Validation Theory provided a way for researchers to examine the value of involvement in the college experience, placing greater responsibility on the institution for validating ethnic minority students and inviting their involvement in such opportunities as participating in student groups and associations (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimain, & Miller, 2007; Rendón, 1994, 2002). According to Rendón's (2002) Validation Theory, ethnic minority student members who are validated begin to believe they have the potential to be successful, that feel they belong at their institutions, and that they are valued as individuals. All of which are factors impacting ethnic minority student motivation and retention (Hurtado et al., 2007; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Rendón, 1994, 2002). Validation Theory provided researchers and practitioners a model for understanding the importance of increasing ethnic minority student retention in higher education by explaining how external validation can help move students toward acknowledgement of their own internal motivation, capability, and potential for success (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rendón, 1994, 2002).

Validation Theory emerged as a means to better understand the success of ethnic minority students, improve their assimilation, understand student development needs, and other strategies for success (Linares & Munoz, 2011). Linares and Munoz (2011) provided several practical applications of validation theory such as inviting ethnic minority faculty or community members with diverse backgrounds into classrooms to share their experience and perceptions, and how they overcame obstacles and challenges. In research examining student/faculty relationships and freshman year educational outcomes, Terenzini, Rendón, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, and Gregg (1994) determined the practical application of the validation process provided an important opportunity for students to share their own unique experiences with

people representing diverse backgrounds. Linares and Munoz (2011) argued that the practical

application of validation theory may help students validate self-worth and build self-confidence.

In research examining minority student retention in higher education, Swail et al. (2005)

applied Validation Theory as a framework for discussing the important role educators play in

helping students see themselves in the context of subject matter being discussed in class, as well

as the value of encouraging students to share their unique backgrounds and experiences with

peers. Additionally, this process also validates the notion that what ethnic minority students

know and bring to the classroom is valuable (Brown, 1994, Boud, 2000; Linares & Munoz,

2011; Ternzini et al., 1994). Rendón (1994) emphasized the practical application of validation

theory in faculty/student interactions, and proposed interpersonal validation happens when

faculty or others take action to help develop ethnic minority students' personal development and

social adjustment. Bean and Kuh (1984) stressed the importance of validation in faculty/student

interactions as a valuable process where faculty members and staff helped ethnic minority

students build supporting relationships, validated each other through work groups, group

projects, and membership in academic and social organizations and networks.

Validating ethnic minority student members, given their unique distinctive

circumstances, cultural background, or experience, was a vital step in setting the conditions for

them to be successful (Linares & Munoz, 2011). Research also suggested that the support

provided by peers and family was an important component in the external validation process

(Cole, 2008; Hurtado et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008). Faculty played an important role in being a

motivating influence for students in developing confidence in their academic abilities, especially

for first generation minority students who may not have received family or peer support

(Lundberg, 2010).

Some researchers argued mentoring relationships between minority faculty and minority students formed a sense of validation as they interacted with professionals from similar cultural, socioeconomic, ethic, and racial backgrounds (Evanoski, 1988; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). These mentoring relationships and interactions were critically important, especially for those who did not have peers from which to seek guidance in terms of personal, social, or academic challenges. These interactions with ethnic or racial minority faculty potentially helped set the conditions for validating a student's self-worth or self-confidence when others were not available to assist in overcoming challenges (Allen & Duch 1998; Duch, Gron, & Allen 2001).

Other researchers argued validation from ethnic or racial minority faculty with similar backgrounds, experiences, and culture, permitted minority students to feel like they had the capability and potential to accomplish goals that were never demonstrated by peers or family members (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Swail et al., 2005; Torres, 2003). Hamrick & Stage (2004) claimed validation is critical for developing self-esteem and self-confidence for ethnic or racial minority students who come from very difficult and challenging backgrounds and as a result question their value or potential. In addition, Tinto (1993) claimed that students were more likely to be involved in college, work to accomplish greater goals, and serve as mentors to other students from similar backgrounds, when they became motivated and believe in their potential and academic capability. In examining the factors which impact student integration, retention, and achievement, Validation Theory had its strengths and limitations. Critical Race Theory provided researchers, educators, and policy makers with another lens to apply in seeking a deeper understanding of multiple causes and effects related to student integration, retention, and achievement.

Critical Race Theory

Just what is Critical Race Theory and what is it doing in a nice place like education? This is not a question, but rather the title of a book by Gloria Ladsen-Billings about the inequities in education. In 1994, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first used as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Since then, scholars have used CRT as a framework to further analyze and critique educational research and practice (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Within the field of higher education, CRT is becoming an increasingly important tool to broaden and deepen the analysis of the structural, social/psychological, and racial disparities in higher education such as a lack of mentorship from same-race role models for students of color, their perception of a non-welcoming campus climate, or perceptions of bias and discrimination (Delgado, 1989; Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Price, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso 2001).

Available literature suggested CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities to objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Lopez, 2013). This theoretical framework revealed how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality acted as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society (Calmore, 1992; Delgado, 1989). The application of a CRT framework in the field of higher education required that the experiential knowledge of people of color be acknowledged, centered, and viewed as a resource stemming directly from their lived experiences (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989, 2009; Olivas, 1990).

Lopez (2013) used CRT as a lens for studying and understanding Hispanic student retention in California Community Colleges and the disproportionate numbers of Hispanics fulfilling executive administrative roles in higher education. Lopez (2013) claimed that race was

a characteristic which impacted all facets of society to include higher education. Lopez emphasized the importance of CRT in research by claiming it not only focused on the factors of race, gender, and ethnicity, but helped the reader view participants' experiences within the context of culture as well. Lopez (2013), McQuillan (1998), and Olivas (1997) all argued that CRT offered a way for researchers to critically analyze and interpret the experiences of Hispanics students within the context of language, culture, family, and education. The outcomes of the Lopez study shed light on how CRT might influence Hispanic student persistence decisions by providing insight into their experiences, backgrounds, aspirations, social, and academic challenges within the community college environment. Lopez concluded that family traditions, culture, and experiences served as the foundation for success of Hispanic students in college. While the theoretical application of CRT may have helped to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of racial minority students, and the perceived racial barriers in higher education, it did not take into consideration many of the other variables which impact minority student persistence in in higher education (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Examining racial inequality through exploring educational policies and practices of an institution can help explain a relationship between minority student integration and achievement in college.

Latina/o Critical Theory

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) evolved as an extension of CRT, because of a need to examine issues beyond the white/not white, binary race classifications (Anguiano & Castaneda, 2014). LatCrit theory developed out of a social justice project, and provided the researcher a lens through which to focus on experiences and realities unique to Latinos, such as language and immigration (Villalpando, 2004). According to Anguiano and Casteneda (2014), by focusing on

a single minority group, LatCrit enabled researchers to examine "unique intragroup and intergroup issues of the Latino/a population" (p.112). Vallalpando (2004) argued LatCrit theory presented a framework for examining the unique ways Latina/os have experienced racism and oppression as an everyday occurrence.

Although Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory are well-defined in the literature and have been used numerous times as frameworks for research, neither of these theories was selected as a theoretical framework for this study because of the focus on racialization in these two theories. This study focused on identifying factors which impacted Hispanic undergraduate student retention and departure from a Christian university, and the researcher did not want racism to be the central lens of focus.

A Theoretical Framework: Tinto's (1993) model of student interaction and departure

Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1993) is considered one of the dominant sociological theories and perspectives on the topic of student retention in higher education (Braxton et al., 2011, Kuh et al. 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A review of the literature provided evidence that many researchers believed Tinto's Theory of Student Departure served as the cornerstone for much of the contemporary research on the subject of student retention. (Harvey-Smith, 1993; Hernandez, 2005; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rendon, 2002) A review of the literature revealed that many researchers believed Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) was instrumental in helping researchers understand the convergence between a student's home culture and an institutions culture within the context of a student's sense of belonging and persistence to graduation (Camacho, 2015; Hadlock, 2012; Huratdo et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rendon, 2002).

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study because of the focus on individual attributes, academic integration, and social integration within the context of the university system. This theory allowed the researcher to explore participants' pre-college background factors, initial academic goals and commitments in combination with on-campus experiences and interactions within the university system, and the potential impact on student retention or departure. According to Tinto (1993), students came to higher education with individual attributes, skill sets, and expectations which impacted their success in integrating into formal and informal academic and social settings within the overall campus environment, which ultimately lead to persistence or departure decisions. Tinto described student persistence as a parallel process of interactions between a student and the university in academic and social settings. Tinto suggested that each student possessed individual characteristics such as cultural heritage, socioeconomic background, academic preparation (or academic experiences), and that the student persistence or departure was dependent on the quality of the interactions. It is important to note that Tinto communicated his theory on student departure did not pertain to students who had been removed from the university, only those who had voluntarily departed (Tinto, 1993).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) emphasized the social and academic integration components of Tinto's (1993) theory by suggesting that academic integration consisted of the student's ability to meet the standards set by the institution as well as embracing the belief and value system of the university. Social integration, described by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), was the process of the student having a connection or commitment to the social system of the institution. Tinto argued that this social integration happened with the institution as a whole, and included many formal and informal groups which comprised the social networks of a university.

In emphasizing the importance of the social integration component of Tinto's (1993) theory, Solberg, and Viliarreal (2007) determined in previous research on the topic of student persistence that students who were involved in activities on campus reported more positive experiences and a greater social integration. Tinto suggested that academic and social integration within the campus environment impacts a student's commitment to the university and to their goal of earning a college degree (Tinto, 1993). Supporting this concept, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), determined in their research on student retention the more significant the level of integration, the greater the student commitment, and the higher the likelihood a student persisted to graduation.

Conclusion

The literature review provided an overview of impacts and barriers for Hispanic students in the educational pipeline, as well as the theoretical foundations, applications, and extensions of several theories used by researchers to gain a better understanding of Hispanic student persistence. The available literature on the topic of student retention reinforced the idea that the underrepresentation and low retention of Hispanic students on college campuses continues to be one of the major challenges facing higher education (Milen et al., 2005; Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Thomas, et al., 2007). Despite increased efforts to understand the factors and variables impacting Hispanic student retention, there has been very little change in the numbers of Hispanics graduating from college (Scheider & Yin, 2011). Many knowledge gaps still exist in our understanding of the factors that impact Hispanic student persistence. Too many Hispanic students find themselves ill-equipped to meet the challenges of separating from family, fully integrating into the academic and social environments of college, and persisting to earn a degree (Carter, 2006; Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). Increased knowledge in these areas may be of value

to policymakers and practitioners interested in ways to develop strategies and models for

retaining ethnic minority groups and improving ethnic minority student persistence.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter is organized into the following sections: introduction, philosophical assumptions, purpose of the research, research questions, research design and rationale, pilot study, individual and group interview protocol development, selection of research setting, recruitment of participants, data collection, researcher bias, and trustworthiness of the data, data analysis, and summary. A review of the literature presented in the previous chapter provided a critical summary of select research studies, relevant literature, and theories examining undergraduate student retention in higher education.

The literature provided evidence of numerous influences impacting Hispanic undergraduate student retention, such as family background, parents' level of education, family support, pre-college academic readiness, and financial barriers. Previous studies found these influences impacted the experiences of students in the formal and informal academic and social systems within a university environment (Tinto, 1993). The review of the literature provided strong empirical support for Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure, suggesting positive student interactions in the formal and social and academic systems were tied to student persistence. Numerous studies supporting Tinto's model of student departure emerged from both qualitative and quantitative research at public institutions with very few qualitative studies focused on private Christian universities. Limited qualitative research using Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure as a theoretical framework to explore undergraduate Hispanic student retention was available. The purpose of this study was to explore undergraduate Hispanic student retention at a private, Christian university in a manner which valued individual

experience and participants' views of reality by collecting data using their own words. My intent was to conduct a qualitative research study providing vivid descriptions of experiences, emphasizing participant's voice, values, beliefs, and language.

Utilizing narrative research design and autoethnography, this study explored, analyzed, and described the experiences and interactions of a sample population of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students aspiring to earn a baccalaureate degree at a private, Christian university. The data were collected from multiple sources using a demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, focus groups, researcher journal, observations, and institutional documents. The participant pool was composed of seven men and 12 women, representing a diverse traditional and nontraditional undergraduate student population at a private, Christian university located in the Northwestern United States. Participants included freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, individuals who graduated with a degree from Triad University, and individuals who left the university without obtaining a degree.

Several qualitative researchers have combined autoethnographic methods with narrative inquiry to guide empirical study (Esienbach, 2015; Hardin, 2012; & Melnyk, 2012), yet a review of the literature did not identify previous autoethnographic narrative inquiries focused on the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention at private Christian universities. The rationale for combining narrative inquiry with autoethnography methods was based on my desire to study the lived experience and interactions of participants within a natural setting of a university campus, framed within the context of theory, culture, and undergraduate retention. Ellis et al. (2011) captured the essence of narrative inquiry and autoethnography by stating, "As humans, our lives are shaped by the stories woven through our experiences; we make sense of our world and our lives through our stories" (p. 4). The application of narrative inquiry and autoethnography

provided a method well suited for presenting – as a story – the study of experience, in what

Clandinin and Conelly (2000) described as a process of looking "inward and outward, backward

and forward, into the past, present, and future of experience" (p. 50). Autoethnography provided

a way for me to include my own lived experiences into the data collection, analysis, and

descriptive narrative. Creswell (2013) stated, "Data collected in a narrative study should be

analyzed for the stories they have to tell, according to a chronology of unfolding events, turning

points, and epiphanies" (p. 189). This narrative inquiry and autoethnographic study fused

together my personal stories and experiences of aspiring to earn a college degree with those of

other participants, forming a rich data base for analysis and interpretation. The following

research questions, within the frame of Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure guided the

study:

     1.   What background characteristics, such as the financial status of students and their

families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents

impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

     2.   What personal experiences and institutional support factors were important to

Hispanic students during their time at the university?

     3.   What were the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who

did not complete their studies, including their perceptions of the quality and quantity of

institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

Research Design

The research design for this study was composed of narrative inquiry and

autoethnography and was based upon the works of several prominent qualitative researchers such

as Creswell (2013), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Chang (2008), and Ellis (2004). The

narrative research design process recommended by Creswell (2013) was combined with the six

steps described by Chang (2008) for conducting autoethnography.   The research design process

for this study is outlined in Figure 1, Sanchez Research Design.

Figure 1 *Sanchez Research Design*

Philosophical Assumptions: Constructive-Interpretive

Theoretical Framework: Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993)

- Natural setting: Single Site/Private Christian University
- Purposeful sampling: Current and former Hispanic undergraduates
- Seve a dual role as both researcher and participant

Participant and Site Selection

Instruments Protocols Pilot Test

- Demographic questionnaire
- Participant consent form
- Semi-structured interview questions
- Focus group questions

Interpret and Describe Findings

Data Collection and Analysis

- Analytical-Interpretive: Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993)
- Constructive intrepretation: Personal experiences/Self-Analytical/Search for meaning/cultural emphasis
- Descriptive narrative

- Individual interviews
- Focus Groups
- Researcher journal
- Observations/field notes
- Institutional reports and documents

Qualitative Data Analysis:

Combination of inductive/deductive approach

Open coding-identify categories-emerging theme (Interview/focus group data)

Event-structure analysis: Key events isolated (pre-college/transition to college/post-transition)

Narrative Analysis: Chronology/Identify characters- themes-plot

Autoethnographic: Search for cultural themes (values, beliefs, language)

Narrative inquiry. I selected a narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach to inquiry for this study because it is well suited for exploring and seeking understanding of people's lives and the meaning individuals or groups affix to a human problem or social issue (Creswell, 2013). Creswell defined narrative inquiry as a literary form of qualitative research which is well suited for studies where participants willingly tell their stories and share their experiences in detail. Stories reported in narrative inquiry provided a micro analytical view and insight into personal experiences and interactions in a natural setting. Marshall and Rossman (2011) emphasized qualitative research was an "interactive process," a methodology which values a participant's view of reality. Autoethnography is a considered a form of autobiographical narrative inquiry that seeks to examine the personal experience of the researcher and participants within a larger cultural or social context.

Autoethnography. Similar to other types of qualitative research, autoethnography is a qualitative form of inquiry promoting analytical, objective, subjective, and theoretical approaches to research while adhering to the traditional processes and standards of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Jensen, 2013). I was intrigued by autoethnography as a method for analyzing personal experiences through a cultural lens, facilitating a researcher's ability to set a scene, tell a story, and connect experience to theory in a broader context. In this research study, autoethnography provided a process for what Taber (2010) described as "pushing methodological boundaries in order to address research questions that cannot be explored by traditional methods" (p.6).

Designing and conducting research that combined narrative inquiry with autoethnography was a labor intensive and complex task. In addition to drawing upon the works of prominent qualitative researchers, I also reached out to many others through email and phone calls, such as

Watson (2014), Brandes (2013), Camacho (2015), Schackmuth (2012), and Marrero (2013) who were all very generous with their time in answering numerous questions and approving my requests to use or modify instruments and protocols they developed and used in their studies.

Philosophical assumptions. Creswell (2013) cautioned researchers to study their own world views and theoretical perspective and how these might impact a research problem or design. The challenge often facing researchers, Creswell (2013) argued, was twofold: acknowledge personal beliefs and assumptions, and actively incorporate them into the study. In this manner, a researcher adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study by not only disclosing bias, judgments, and assumptions, but also the strategies they used to mitigate any undue influence throughout the research process. Guba (1990) and Denzin and Lincoln (2013) further emphasized this point by stating researchers bring certain perspectives and beliefs that guide their actions throughout the entire inquiry process, but they can sometimes overlook or fail to acknowledge how these shape a research problem and the central questions guiding a study.

Creswell (2013) described epistemology as a philosophical assumption regarding the question of how knowledge is acquired, arguing individuals acquire knowledge as a result of the meanings derived from their experiences and interactions with others. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) stated epistemology was the manner of studying a phenomenon as it appears in our experience both from a first person point of view and from those of other research participants. Within qualitative research, the epistemology assumption is composed of the notion the researcher interacts with participants to observe, explore, analyze, and derive meaning leading to greater insight and understanding of a phenomenon under study. I was drawn to the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention because of my own experiences aspiring to earn a college degree and the unresolved feelings and questions that remained.

One of my research goals was to conduct a study which valued human experience and individuals' view of reality. I was attracted to narrative inquiry because of its emphasis on human experiences, interactions, beliefs, and ideas in the form of personal accounts and stories. I wanted to not only explore the family backgrounds, experiences, interactions, and influences shared by participants, but I wanted to further bring meaning by describing how these have been challenging, important, and transformative in a way that offered insight to student retention at a private, Christian university. I did not attend a private, Christian university as an undergraduate student and was very much interested in knowing how my experiences at a state university might somehow be connected to others and how the knowledge gained might shape my understanding of self, higher education, and the educational journey of others. More important to me was how the knowledge gained from this study might help inform the direction of future studies on the topic of student retention.

In this research study, I adhered to an epistemological position which valued proximity and closeness to research participants by prolonged engagement and immersion in the research setting. Guba and Lincoln (1998) argued qualitative research necessitated minimizing the distance, or objective separateness between participants and the researcher. The philosophical assumptions of ontology and axiology address the characteristics of reality and the nature of ethical behavior in research. My philosophical views regarding ontology in this research design embraced the idea multiple realities exist. In this research study, I adhered to an ontological position which valued a participant's view of reality. I collected data from multiple participants and sources which included interviews, focus groups, observations, and researcher's reflexive journal to produce multiple themes composed of the actual words and phrases reflecting participants multiple views of reality.

Axiology is the philosophical assumption concerned with the role of values and the nature of ethical behavior in research. In further describing the nature of ethical behavior in research, Creswell (2013) claimed all ethical tensions are part of everyday life and the practice of research. All researchers have a duty and responsibility to disclose biases and assumptions which might influence the credibility and reliability of a study as well as risk the unethical treatment of others. I embedded reflexivity in my research design as an ethical and accountable process to achieve a critical self-awareness of the dual role as researcher and how actions and behaviors might influence others and impact the findings from this study.

Reflexivity. Creswell (2013) described reflexivity as an explicit form of self-consciousness regarding the values, positions, social, or political views of the researcher, and how these could potentially influence the research design or any phase of the inquiry process. Bishop and Shepherd (2011) claimed reflexivity in some forms of qualitative research can be confusing, particularly in studies, such as narrative inquiry, where the researcher seeks to maximize his/her role compared to other types of studies where a researcher looks for ways of minimizing his/her role, or relationship, with participants. To mitigate any temptation of maximizing my dual role as observer-participant, or becoming self-absorbed with only my personal experiences in the research, I adhered to several steps recommended by Anderson (2006) for conducting autoethnography: serve as a complete member in the social world being studied, engage in reflexivity to analyze data on self, be visibly active and present in the text, include others in similar situations in data collection, and remain committed to theoretical analysis.

In this research study, I served as a complete member in the social world being studied by virtue of my position as Hispanic, a full-time doctoral student, and a staff member of the

university. This did not come without challenges. As Marilyn Strathern (1987) discussed in her overview of autoethnography, complete member researchers must manage multiple identities. Unlike other participants in the research setting, my complete membership status meant I was constantly balancing the functions of observing, documenting, recording, reflecting, and analyzing with daily reflexivity. In an overview of the use of reflexivity in qualitative research, Charlotte Davies (2008) highlighted the deeper level of awareness self-conscious introspection provided researchers seeking a better understanding of the reciprocal influence between themselves, the setting, and the participants. Atkinson, Coffey, and Delmont (2003) provided a similar analysis of reflexivity by stating:

Autoethnographers as authors frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self. Their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making. They themselves form part of the representational processes in which they are engaging and are part of the story they are telling. (p. 62)

Analytical autoethnography posits researchers must be visibly and active in the text, but not in isolation; they should include other participants in the research. Incorporating a purposeful sample of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students who attended the university in the research was a way I ensured I included others in similar situations during data collection. Chang (2008) and Anderson (2006) claimed that autoethnographic researchers should be committed to theoretical analysis. Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure provided the theoretical framework and analytical lens demonstrating my commitment to theoretical analysis throughout the research process.

Research Setting. I requested and received approval from a private, Christian university located in the Northwestern United States to serve as the single research site and setting for this

study (Appendix A). For the purposes of this study, I assigned a fictional name for the institution, Triad University. Triad University was founded in 1913 and was classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a private, non-profit, teaching university. Triad University is composed of two colleges, the College of Adult and Graduate Studies, and the College of Arts and Science. Triad University offers 42 undergraduate majors, eight Master's degrees, and two Doctorate degrees. Triad University attracts students representing many different denominations and faiths from across the United States and countries throughout the world

The university is located in a mid-size city with a population of approximately 87,000 inhabitants. Its 90 acre campus is located in a residential neighborhood approximately two miles from downtown. The demographic composition and full-time undergraduate enrollment for Academic Year 2014-2015 was 1,167 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The gender distribution for the undergraduate population was 43 % male and 57 % female. In 2014, the university reported a student population which included White-non Hispanic, full-time undergraduate enrollment of 78%, with Hispanics accounting for 8 % of the overall undergraduate population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The university reported a first year to second year retention rate of 75% and an overall six-year graduation rate of 55 %. The national overall college graduation rate for Hispanics in United States and Triad University in 2014 were both identical at 64% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Selection of Research Participants. I utilized several strategies in identifying individuals who were accessible and willing to share information regarding family background, experiences, and educational journey toward earning a college degree. I used a purposeful sampling strategy to intentionally select participants who self-identified as Hispanic and were current or former full-time students of the university. In qualitative research studies there are no

set guidelines for determining the sample size of a participation population (Patton, 2015). In narrative inquiry, Creswell (2012) recommended a single individual who is the subject of the research serve as the sole participant in the study. In autoethnography, the researcher serves as the primary subject of inquiry and source of data, but often times not in isolation; other participants may be included in the study.

In order to ensure multiple perspectives were included in the research study, I initially sought an equal number of participants who were current students of the university representing freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and those who graduated. I did not exclude non-traditional students or transfer students from the prospective participant pool. In order to make the selection process more manageable, I submitted a request to the university registrar asking for a list of only current and former Hispanic undergraduate students from academic years 2008 to 2015. The registrar provided me with a list of potential participants meeting the criteria I established. I subsequently divided the names into several categories: current students (freshman, sophomore, juniors, and seniors), those who graduated, and those who departed the university without earning a degree. I sent both an email and letter of invitation to participate in the study to 20 current and former students and received responses back from 19 individuals agreeing to participate in the study (Appendix B). I provided each person who agreed to participate in the study with a participant consent form (Appendix C). During the process of scheduling individual interviews with each participant, I answered questions about the consent form and asked each person to sign the document and return it to me prior to the individual interview. In an effort to reduce perceived risks by participants in this research, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data (See Appendix D) and, the right to not participate in the research or to withdraw from the project at any time. All participants were assigned a pseudonym. Participants

who were current students of the university at the time of this study were assured their decision

to participate in the research, or not, would have no impact on their standing at the institution.

Participant Description.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Born in USA	Home Language	College Status	Working During College*
Jose	19	M	No	Spanish	Freshman	0
Margarite	19	F	Yes	English	Freshman	0
Lionel	20	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Sophomore	15
Jessica	20	F	Yes	Spanish/English	Sophomore/ Athlete	0
Natalia	19	F	Yes	Spanish/English	Sophomore	0
Alicia	21	F	Yes	Spanish/English	Junior/Transfer	15>
Junior	20	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Junior/Transfer	15>
Rose	21	F	Yes	Spanish/English	Junior/Transfer	0
Karla	21	F	No	Spanish	Junior/Transfer	25>
Rachel	28	F	Yes	English	Junior	25>
Raquel	23	F	Yes	English	Senior/Transfer/Athlete	0
Romona	51	F	Yes	English	Senior	30>
Juan	21	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Senior	25>
Emily	21	F	No	Spanish/English	Senior	20>
Otalia	23	F	Yes	Spanish/English	Graduated	25>
Red	24	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Graduated/Athlete	0
Pamela	27	F	Yes	English	Graduated	0
Julio	25	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Left the University	20>
Patricio	20	M	Yes	Spanish/English	Left the University	0

Note. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=19)   *Work hour per week

The participants in this study included 19 current and former undergraduate full-time

Hispanic students of Triad University during the period of 2008 to 2016. Seven of the

participants were male and 12 of the participants were female, ranging in ages from 19 to 51

years old. Three of the participants were born outside of the US. The sample population was

composed of two freshman, three sophomores, five juniors, four seniors, three students who

graduated, and two students who departed the university before earning a degree. Six of the

participants were transfer students from other colleges or universities. Three of the participants were student athletes and members of the university's athletic programs during their time in college.

Instrument and Protocol Development. The primary means for collecting data were a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Literature on Hispanic undergraduate student retention informed the development of the demographic questionnaire and interview guide. The demographic questionnaire and interview questions used in this study were created by modifying instruments from Watson (2014) and Marrero (2013). Permission was obtained from Watson (2014) (Appendix E) and Marrero (2013) (Appendix F), to use and modify their instruments. Both of these researchers conducted previous research studies on students' retention in higher education. The format of the semi-structured and focus group interviews facilitated my ability to create a structured yet relaxed setting for obtaining the narrative responses of participants' family backgrounds, experiences, and interactions on campus. The demographic questionnaire helped obtain biographical, educational, and financial data from participants in efforts to achieve accuracy and trustworthiness of information.

Pilot Test. Creswell (2013) recommended researchers consider the use of a pilot test to refine data collection plans, develop, and refine research questions, frame questions, detect observer bias, and collect background information. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix G) and the focus group (Appendix H) guide was piloted with one Hispanic graduate student who was enrolled at Triad University at the time of this study. The pilot test was conducted in order to validate the amount of anticipated time required to conduct the individual interview and focus group, in addition to verifying clarity in understanding the research questions (Creswell, 2013). The pilot test was conducted at Triad University using the same

meeting room scheduled to use for data collection. The pilot test was audio recorded to test that part of the research protocol, but the audio file from the pilot test was not transcribed. At the conclusion of the pilot test, the demographic questionnaire and entire interview guide was reviewed with the pilot test participant, and minor adjustments were made to the wording of several interview and focus group questions based on received feedback. The overall results of the pilot test indicated the interview protocols and instruments were well designed and easily understood by the participant. The conference room which served as the location for the individual interview was more than adequate, affording both privacy and no distractions. The new demographic questionnaire and adjusted instrument for the semi-structured interview resulted in data representing the life narrative and lived experiences, interactions, beliefs, and ideas of the participants. In preparation for data collection, a participant contact summary sheet was constructed to facilitate submission of items, track interactions, and record notes about any questions requiring clarification during the interviews.

Data Collection

Approval from the Human Research Review Committee was granted from Triad University (Appendix I). Data collection was composed of a demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, a researcher journal, a review of institutional reports, and documents. In qualitative research, data is collected from multiple sources in order to establish a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) claimed semi-structured interviews provided a method well suited for conducting in-depth narrative inquiry of participants. Once each of the participants in the study had completed and returned the signed consent forms, I provided them with a copy of the demographic questionnaire (Appendix J). Each participant was instructed to

complete the demographic questionnaire and return it to me before the semi-structured interview. I took a phenomenological approach to the semi-structured interviews by seeking to create meaning from the family background, experiences, and beliefs shared by participants. Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009) claimed the phenomenological approach is well suited for researchers seeking to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and perceive their circumstances within the context of their own lives through their own terminology. For the purposes of this study, questions were constructed to obtain data on participants' experiences, family background, and external pressures impacting their educational journey. Guided questions were used, in combination with open-ended questions and prompts, encouraging participants to describe their experiences and share their stories freely on the topic under investigation. Questions one through five were composed of open-guided and open-ended questions designed to obtain descriptive data on experiences and to focus on a participant's family background. Phenomenological questions should be reflective and exploratory in nature (Smith et al., 2009). Questions six through thirteen were designed to be reflective in nature and explore participants' experiences and interactions within the informal and formal academic and social systems of the university. The questions were as follows:

    1. Tell me about where you were born and raised.

    (If applicable)-When did you first come to the United States?

    2. Please describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up.

    3. Tell me about your parent's level of education.

    4. Talk to me about what support and encouragement you received from others in making your decision to go to college.

    5. What else would you like to tell me about your background?

6. What personal experiences have you had here at the universities which have had the biggest impact on you?

7. What kind of academic experiences have you had here at the universities which have had the biggest impact on you?

8. Which college support factors have been the most helpful to you during your time here at the university?

9. Why did you choose to attend this institution?

10. How significant was the faith-based nature of this institution in your decision to enroll here?

11. What things can the university do to make your experience here better?

12. Would you share a story with me about a challenging time or situation for you during your time here at the university?

13. This will be my final question. What else would you like to tell me that I did not ask today?

At the beginning of each of the semi-structured interviews, I asked each person to complete a consent form and then select a pseudonym for the purposes of protecting their identity. I assured each participant that I would protect all of the information by treating it in a confidential manner. Each interview was conducted on the campus of Triad University in a meeting room located within the library and lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. The interviews were audio recorded using a computer application program called Audacity. The recordings were later transcribed, labeled, and cataloged for analysis.

Focus groups. The use of focus groups in qualitative research is a method well suited for gaining insight on a topic which might not be obtained solely through semi-structured interviews

(Krueger & Casey, 2009). This method of data collection was instrumental in confirming emerging themes from initial data analysis of the semi-structured interviews. All of the research participants in the sample population were invited to attend structured focus group sessions held at Triad University; however, only 10 participants agreed to participate. In order to keep the size of the focus sessions manageable, I grouped together participants according to class standing at Triad University.

Focus Group Number 1 was composed of two sophomores, two juniors, and one senior from the sample population. Focus Group Number 2 was composed of one sophomore, two juniors, one senior, and one student who had graduated. Neither of the two freshmen participants in the individual interviews was able to participate in a focus group because of scheduling difficulties. The focus group sessions served as a form of member checking and provided the opportunity to elicit feedback regarding interview transcripts, to clarify questions, and involve participants in a group discussion on student retention at Triad University. Focus group participants were provided with a copy of emerging themes from initial analysis of the individual interview transcripts as a form of member checking and validation of the data. I served as the facilitator of the focus groups and led participants through a series of questions to guide focus group discussion. The first sets of questions were composed of the following:

1. Are these categories and themes representative of your persistence experiences?

2. How do these categories come together to explain student retention?

3. In what ways, if any, do these categories influence each other?

4. Are some categories more important than others?

5. Is anything missing?

Although neither freshman participant was able to attend a formal focus group, member checking through feedback regarding interview transcripts and emerging themes was able to be obtained through phone calls and email.

Kruger and Casey (2009) claimed focus groups can be used to lay the ground work for subsequent research by providing insights into factors and conditions that might inform the scope and direction of study. The next set of questions sought to elicit participant insights regarding recommendations for Triad University to help posture Hispanic undergraduate students for success in achieving their academic goals. The second set of questions was composed of the following:

6. What barriers and challenges must Hispanics undergraduate students overcome to be successful at Triad University?

7. What recommendations do you have for the university to help Hispanic undergraduate students overcome barriers?

8. What can the university to do make the collegiate experience for Hispanic undergraduate students better?

The focus group questions helped to add to the trustworthiness of the data collected as well as to provide input for future studies focusing on ways in which Triad University can help posture Hispanic undergraduate students for success in achieving their academic goals.

Analytical Methods

There are several analytical approaches researchers use to analyze data collected within a narrative inquiry and autoethnographic study. Clandinin (2013) claimed that narrative analysis begins with an understanding of the term narrative. In narrative research, participants share their experiences in a manner that positions events and characters in time and space in order to make

meaning of the lived experiences within the context of the phenomena under investigation. Narrative analysis involved reading and re-reading participants interview transcripts and organized data into chorological order and searching the text for characters and plot. Similar to other methods of qualitative analysis, narrative analysis required reading interview transcripts, making notes in the margins, sorting the data into categories, discovering patterns, and emerging themes. For the purposes of this study, I combined narrative analysis with Creswell's (2013) steps for analyzing and interpreting participant's data by: organizing the data, transcribing the data, exploring and coding the data.

Creswell (2013) emphasized the process of coding as an essential part of analysis. All interview data was incorporated into the coding process. All data analysis was conducted manually using a coding scheme incorporating both inductive and deductive orientations, InVivo coding (participants own words or phrases), and predetermined categories to help organize the data while searching for patterns of similarity, differences, frequency, causation, and correspondence. I used a table to organize text data into the following: focus group, interview, secondary data, field notes, and reflective information. Transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed to produce words, labels, or direct phrases to categorize the text and organize the data into codes and topical groupings or clusters. A constant comparative analysis was performed by reading through each interview transcript for a comparison of themes to produce a composite description communicating the essence of participants' experiences. At the completion of constant comparative analysis, thematic units were created. The themes were presented to participants during focus group sessions for discussion, triangulating data, and member checking.

At the direction of my dissertation committee, I performed the coding process; separate, but in tandem with a person not attached to this study. This was done in order to mitigate the chance of bias or undue influence in the analysis process. In order to ensure consistency of how text data was segmented, labeled, and classified, we each adhered to the following process: initially read and then re-read the interview transcripts, make notes in the margins as necessary, divide text data into segments, use participants exact words and phrases (InVivo coding), and collapse codes into themes. The coding of qualitative data, as Creswell (2013) claimed is a judgment call, impacted by the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and theoretical framework guiding inquiry. Creswell further argued that for these reasons, other researchers might analyze identical text data using identical processes and methods; yet achieve different results, or interpretations of the data. The results of the co-coding process used in this study revealed agreement between myself and the individual conducting analysis with slight variations among the frequency of codes identified and the InVivo (participants' exact words and phrases) codes used to segment data. While the use of another person (external to this study) in the coding process was helpful in the data analysis process, given this type of qualitative study, the use of a co-coder cannot mitigate researcher bias alone. Further in this chapter, I provided the reader with a more detailed discussion of my researcher assumptions and biases in efforts to communicate transparency and the care I took in conducting research in an ethical and responsible manner.

In narrative inquiry and autoethnography, text is analyzed within a social, cultural, and historical (or chronological context). Chang (2008) stated that autoethnographers are expected to, "review, fracture, categorize, rearrange, probe, select, deselect, and sometimes simply gaze as the data in order comprehend how ideas, behaviors, and experiences interrelate and what they mean to in relation to others" (p.127). Analysis of autoethnographic data was conducted by

reviewing my autobiographical timeline, personal memos, self-observations, artifacts from my life, self-reflections, and reflective journal and coding the text while looking for cultural themes in order to transform the data into culturally meaningful explanations of self and my relation to others. I organized my autoethnographic timeline, personal memos, observations, and journal into chronological order by year and month. This approach was based on the research of Miles and Huberman (1994) who recommended arranging events and experiences in by chronological time periods, sorting them into several categories" (p.111).

I reviewed the entire internal data set (researcher data) searching for recurring topics, themes, and patterns. Chang (2008) described the search for topics in analysis of autoethnographic data as the process of "identifying specific subjects pertaining to people, places, ideas, or activities. McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy (2005) argued that looking for cultural themes in analysis of autoethnographic data was an important step in the research process. McCurdy et al. offered a definition of a cultural theme as a, "position or postulate, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tactically approved or openly promoted in society" (p.78). In my analysis of autoethnographic data, I sought to identify similarities and differences between my family background, pre-college attributes, and on campus experiences and interactions with participants in this study. This approach was consistent with the recommendations made by Chang (2008) to analyze autoethnographic data by considering relationship between self and others.

Chang argued that analysis of inclusion and omission of data was an important step in the data analysis process. Data analysis often times focuses on what is included in a data set. Chang stated that the absence of data in a data set can shed light on the research process and provide valuable insight just as much as what is included in the data. Data omission, Chang argued can

occur for multiple reasons such as the fact that some elements are absent (did not occur) in one's life. Chang observed that omission of data could also be the result of unintentional or intentional exclusion in the recording of an event or experience. Omission of data, Chang emphasized, can sometimes reveal a researchers dislike, unfamiliarity, dissociation, or ignorance of a specific phenomenon in life. During the data analysis process, I attempted to identify intentional and unintentional inclusions and omissions. One of my primary goals in the data analysis was to remain committed to theoretical analysis. I framed my analysis by using Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) as an analytical lens in efforts to explore my own family background characteristics, pre-college attributes, on campus experiences/interactions, and external pressures within the context of my educational journey and persistence to graduation.

Chang (2008) claimed that data analysis and interpretation were critical to autoethnography because they facilitated the transformation of fragments of autoethnographic data into culturally meaningful descriptions of findings. Chang (2008) differentiated data analysis from interpretation by stating that, "data interpretation focused on finding cultural meanings beyond the data, or making sense of the data" (p.127). I engaged in a combination of analytical-interpretative, constructive-interpretative style of autoethnographic writing by interweaving stories from past, connecting them to the present using a descriptive narrative to communicate the meaning of lived experience, interactions, understanding of self, and relationship to others within a shared group. This narrative is presented in Chapter 4.

Researcher Assumptions and Bias

Serving in a dual role as a researcher and participant, I was not an impartial observer in this study. I brought several assumptions and biases into the inquiry process. Therefore, it was critical that I disclosed as much information as possible about my assumptions, personal values,

and preferences while assessing in what ways these could impact participants or influence research outcomes. Guba and Lincoln (1998) argued an awareness and acknowledgment of the researcher's personal values and assumptions greatly added to the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. At the time of this study, the researcher, a Hispanic and first generation college graduate, was employed as the Director of Veterans Services, the Directors of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and was a doctoral student at Triad University. My wife was also employed by the university as a professor and at the time of this study, my daughter was a sophomore at the university.

Exploring the background and experiences of participants within their natural environment on the campus of the research setting facilitated my ability to achieve a greater understanding of the formal and informal academic and social systems of the university. Creswell (2013) claimed qualitative researchers face numerous complex issues throughout the research process and provided several recommendations to follow: protect the anonymity of the participants, treat the participants with dignity and respect, avoid any deception about the nature of the study by clearly articulating the purpose, obtain written permission from the participants, present the facts when reporting the research findings, and consider seriously whether or not to share personal information. During the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, my primary role was to guide participants by following an interview guide and protocol designed to elicit a response describing experiences, stories, and beliefs. I fully acknowledged that, though there have been similarities between my lived experiences and those of the participants, the situational and personal circumstances of the researcher and participants were different.

Trustworthiness of the Data

The researcher ensured the trustworthiness and reliability of the data in this study by incorporating triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Creswell (2012) describes triangulation as the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, multiple forms of data (interviews and field notes), or other methods of data collection used in identifying themes and descriptions. The researcher used the technique of member checking with participants in this study in order to determine the accuracy of themes, findings, and interpretations. Member checking was also facilitated through the use of a letter sent to each participant in efforts to ensure that I accurately depicted data shared in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Appendix K). For the purposes of this study, triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple sources of data from multiple participants, such as through individual interviews, focus groups, and a demographic questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher's use of field notes and a reflective journal were critical in capturing the accuracy of the data collected.

Bracketing

Bracketing is achieved by understanding the researcher's narrative in relationship to the research topic. I provided my own narrative representation followed by the narratives of select participants. These particular participants' stories were chosen for their unique experiences which represent the themes shared across the larger sample of this study. Following each of the individual narratives, I offer my reflections and reflexive insights through an interactive and supportive voice. The supportive voice integrates my observations into the narrative in an effort to create a respectful distance from the participants' voices and to be clear on whose story is

whose. The interactive voice is intended to communicate the dialogue between the researcher and the participants for the reader.

Ethical Considerations

Weis and Fine (2000) highlighted the importance of ethical research by emphasizing the degree of care which must be taken to identify and mitigate any potential issues (actual or perceived) where power between the researchers and the participant can be abused. The researcher took a very deliberate and methodical approach to ensure that all participants understood the purpose and procedures of the study, the potential benefits, and that their privacy would be respected at all times. The importance of voluntary participation was emphasized throughout this study by ensuring each participant understood participation in this study was voluntary, and by obtaining individual consent from each party. Safeguards were established for every phase of this study to ensure the protection of participants from any potential of physical or mental harm.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study given the size and scope of the research. The research design, location, sample size, and management of data in autoethnography and qualitative study all present limitations in achieving the overall objective to explore experiences and factors impacting Hispanic student persistence and retention. The administration and collection of qualitative data from open-ended questions, interviews, and focus groups provided an abundance of opportunities, yet was difficult to manage. The accuracy of responses may be limited by the length of time the participants were currently enrolled, if they had graduated, or if they had departed from college without completing a degree.

Delimitations

I did not attend a private, Christian university for my undergraduate degree, but instead attended a public university. The scope of this research was delimited to a sample population of current and former Hispanic students who attended a private, Christian university in the Northwestern United States. The outcomes of this study reflect the experiences of Hispanic students within a host of academic and social settings in a specific campus environment. The research findings are not necessarily representative of the larger Hispanic population in higher education currently residing in the United States.

Summary

This chapter described the rationale and qualitative research design and analytical autoethnographic methodology used for this study to explore the family background, personal experiences, and external forces that shaped student retention and departure decisions of a purposeful sample of Hispanic undergraduate students who attended a private, four-year Christian university. I provided a description of my role as the researcher, the selection of co-participants, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The semi-structured interviews and focus groups used in this study were more than just methods to collect data. These processes demonstrated the complexity of qualitative research in numerous ways. As a researcher practitioner, I had the responsibility for not only being fully transparent by disclosing biases or judgments by not bringing any personal agenda into the research process. I made every effort to be mindful of the power imbalances between myself and participants. The participants in this study were eager to share their experiences and tell their stories. On numerous occasions, after the interviews were completed, participants asked me share my story with them. Several participants approached me in the university cafeteria and asked to sit with me and began

inquiring about my lived experiences. These interactions caused me to believe that our shared experiences and interactions resonated with one another in a way which caused us to see, or perhaps value the complexity of our similarities and differences.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents a report of the results and research findings from this qualitative autoethnographic exploration of Hispanic undergraduate student retention and departure at a private, Christian university. The chapter is divided into five sections: participants' demographic data, participant profiles, researcher self-narrative, research findings in accordance with research questions aligned with emerging themes, and summary. Narrative inquiry and autoethnographic methodology guided data collection and analysis, while Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure provided a framework for exploring participants' pre-college attributes, academic goals, commitments, and college experiences impacting retention decisions. Primary data was collected from multiple sources and included demographic questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, and a reflective journal. Ex post facto data were composed of institutional documents and reports and was analyzed for emerging themes. Through exploring participant's family background characteristics, experiences, and college support factors, several themes emerged that shed light on impacts to retention of a sample population of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students of a private, Christian university

Analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews and focus groups revealed the following themes across the sample population: family, family support, motivation, religion, transition, institutional support, and supportive relationships. Analysis of the ex post facto data highlighted institutional efforts to enhance and sustain diversity on campus. A review of institutional documents, such as annual reports to the institution's board of trustees,

demonstrated a commitment to diversity initiatives, but showed little progress was made in increasing the number of fully qualified faculty and staff of color.

In this study, the findings from an analysis of the primary data collected indicated the importance participants placed on family. Across all participants, family was viewed as a source of motivation and support important to achieving academic goals. Participants further described motivation for a better life, religion, supportive relationships, institutional support, and external demands as meaningful experiences in their educational journeys. Participants described experiences of a challenging transition to the university and adjusting to the academic, social, and religious expectations of the institution as memorable moments during their time in college.

Narrative inquirers writing an autoethnography vary in the degree to which they include themselves as a central character of a story. These research findings provide a highly personalized narrative binding together multiple experiences, situations, and identities into a description of the educational journey of the researcher and a sample population of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students of a private, Christian university. Another key characteristic of narrative inquiry and autoethnography is bracketing personal experiences to mitigate bias, preconceptions, or assumptions that might cloud the research process. Bracketing is achieved by understanding the researcher's narrative in relation to research topic of the study. I provided my own narrative representation followed by the narratives of select participants. These participants' stories were chosen for their unique experiences that represent the themes shared across the larger sample of this study. Following each of the individual narratives, I offer my reflections and reflexive insights through an interactive and supportive voice. The supportive voice integrates my observations into the narrative in efforts to create a respectful distance from the participants' voices and to be clear on whose story is whose. The interactive voice is

intended to communicate for the reader the dialogue between the participant and me, as the researcher.

My intent was to present a narrative in a manner which speaks to the heart of participants' experiences and insights by using direct quotes and actual phrases from the interview transcripts as well as comments made during the focus groups. The descriptive narrative of the findings sought to provide meaning of student retention by describing the educational journey as viewed from participants' lived experiences. Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure provided a framework for viewing student retention as phenomena occurring over time, beginning with the pre-entry attributes of a student, leading to initial academic goals and commitments, and followed by the interactions, experiences, and external commitments impacting a student's ability to achieve their academic goals. Within the context of Tinto's (1993) model, a student's pre-entry attributes are composed of family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling, and external commitments. Each of these elements, Tinto (1993) claimed, shaped a student's initial academic goals and institutional commitments.

Understanding a participant's experiences and academic skills before entering college was important for several reasons. The pre-entry attributes of participants speak to each student's initial expectations, attitudes, and beliefs they form about institutions and their own individual role of being a student. University choice plays an important role in any student's initial academic goals and commitments to an institution. Exploring the pre-entry attributes of participants help to shed light on the reasons participants selected Triad University as their school of choice, as well as presented an understanding of how significant the faith-based nature of the intuition was in their enrollment decision.

Findings in Accordance with Research Questions and Emerging Themes

The research findings are presented using a descriptive self-narrative, integrating self-reflection and theoretical analysis of my own experiences and those of co-participants with regard to the research questions and emerging themes. I used multiple methods of qualitative data analysis and interpretation strategies recommended by Chang (2008), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Hatch (2002) to gain a deeper understanding of the text by identifying patterns and common themes across all participants in this study. Each of the emerging themes were reviewed by participants (member checking) and cross referenced with the research questions guiding this study. The final report of findings consisted of my personal narrative, interweaving the stories of selected participants in this study in the form of vignettes, to address the following research questions and emerging themes:

Table 2

Research Questions and Emerging Themes

Research Questions	Emerging Themes
1. What background characteristics such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?	Family Background Motivation Religion
2. What personal experiences and institutional support factors are important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?	Transition to college Institutional support Religion Family support Supportive relationships
3. What are the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, to include their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support facts available during their time at the university?	Family Background Motivation Institutional Support External Pressure

Narrative inquiry is more than just the uncritical gathering of stories or simple re-telling of a story shared by others. I constructed the narrative by piecing together, through a deliberate process of analysis, the fragments of my lived experiences and those shared by other participants in order to communicate the educational journey of a very diverse group of current and former undergraduate students of a private, Christian university. A detailed discussion of the findings begins with my own personal narrative. My personal narrative presents a history of my

educational journey to include the many challenges/obstacles I faced and the multiple sources of support provided to me. My narrative also represents my reflections and multiple views of reality regarding my experiences impacting my persistence toward earning a college degree. My personal narrative is followed by the personal accounts of select participants in this study. Unfortunately, including each participant's complete story in the descriptive narrative was not feasible. The participants selected for the inclusion in the descriptive narrative of the finding were chosen for their unique experiences which represent the themes shared across the larger sample of this study. The participants also represent a fairly even distribution of freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, college graduates, and those who departed the university before achieving their academic goals. In order to provide the reader with a greater understanding of participant backgrounds, a profile of each individual highlighted in the narrative of research findings is offered.

Profile of participants highlighted in the Findings

  Jose- is a single, 19-year old male studying engineering. He was born in outside the United States. His mother earned a Bachelor's degree in general management and his father earned a Master's degree in Business Administration. Jose described his family's socioeconomic status, while growing up in his country of origin, as middle class, living comfortably until his parents were divorced and mother was fired from her job as a manager at a shoe lace factory. After the divorce of his parents, Joe lived with his brother and sister until his mother remarried and moved the family to the United States when he was 12 years old. At the time of this study, Jose was enrolled as a traditional student, a first time college freshman majoring in engineering. Jose's long term career goals and aspirations are to return to his country of origin to work for an engineering firm after graduation from college.

Margarite-is a single, 19 year-old female studying psychology. Margarite's background is racially and ethnically diverse, self-identifying as a Hispanic, African-American, and Cherokee Indian. Margarite's father has a master's degree in Chemistry and her mother has a bachelor's of Arts degree in psychology. Margarite is the first among her siblings to attend college. Margarite's career goals and aspirations after graduating from college were to pursue a master's degree in psychology, counseling, or social work.

Lionel- is a single 20 year-old male studying economics. His parents were born in Michoacán, Mexico and came to the United States shortly after they were married in 1994. His parents did not complete high school; however, his mother later earned a General Equivalency Degree from the College of Southern Idaho when she was in her mid-thirties. Lionel described his family's socioeconomic status while growing up as very poor, often struggling to pay the bills and put food on the table. The entire family worked in the fields during his childhood and adolescence until his parents saved enough money to open a video store. Today, his family operates a chain of video stores catering to the Hispanic market throughout Southeastern and Southwestern Idaho. Lionel is the first among his family to attend college. At the time of this study, Lionel was enrolled as a traditional student, with junior class status, majoring in financial economics and is scheduled to graduate from the university with a bachelor's of science degree in May, 2017. Lionel's long term career goals and aspirations are to work in the finance field while devoting time and effort to his community through volunteer opportunities as a mentor for at-risk youth.

Jessica-is a single, 20 year-old female transfer student and varsity athlete studying nursing. English was the primary language spoken at home. Both of her parents graduated from high school with her mother going on to graduate from college and become a registered nurse.

Jessica's parents divorced while she was very young. For a short time, she lived with her grandparents while her mother was working at the county jail in order to make enough money to provide for the family. Jessica is an accomplished varsity athlete for the university. At the time of this study, she was a traditional student enrolled at the university with sophomore class standing and majoring in nursing. Her goals and career aspirations are to graduate from the university with a bachelor's of science degree in nursing and work in the healthcare profession.

Alicia-is a single, 21 year-old female transfer student studying political science. Her mother and father were both born in Jalisco, Mexico and came to the United States in the early 1990's as migrant farmworkers. Alicia's father passed away when she was only five years old, leaving her mother to raise the family as a single parent. Her mother never progressed beyond a ninth grade education and encountered numerous challenges in providing for the family. As a result, Alicia went to live with her grandparents while her brothers and sisters remained with her mother. Alicia was the first in her family to attend college. Her aspirations were to graduate from the university with a Bachelors of Arts in political science with a minor in criminal justice and to pursue a career in municipal, state, or federal government.

Rachel-is a 28 year-old, single female student studying business administration. Rachel was the first of her siblings to attend college, and enrolled at the university as a first time freshman in 2006. However, in 2008 Rachel departed the University after failing to meet the academic standards of the nursing program. Rachel later returned to the university as a full-time student in the fall of 2015. Rachel's father was physically disabled due to chronic illness which hindered his ability to work full-time. Although her father never completed high school, he did earn his GED in his late thirties. He was later diagnosed with cancer when Rachel was eleven years old, passing away a short time later and leaving her mother as the sole provider for the

family. Rachel's mother graduated from high school and went on to college to earn an associate's degree in nursing. Rachel's aspirations are to graduate from the university with a bachelor's of science degree in business administration in May, 2017, and to pursue a career in the banking industry.

Juan-is a single, 21-year old male studying accounting. Juan was born in Nampa, Idaho, and is the oldest child in a family of five composed of a younger brother, sister, a mother, and father. Both of his parents were born in Mexico and came to the United States in the early 1990's. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home with English as the second language. His parents never progressed beyond the sixth grade, both working in a local restaurant to earn income needed for raising a family. Today, his parents are partial owners of a very successful local Mexican restaurant. Juan is the first of his siblings to attend college. At the time of this study, he was a traditional student enrolled at the university as a senior majoring in accounting and scheduled to graduate with a bachelor's of science degree in May, 2016.

Emily-is a single, 21 year-old female studying math. She was born in Mexico as the middle child in a family of four composed of an older sister, younger brother, and single parent (mother). She never knew her father. Emily's mother became pregnant (with Emily) at the age of sixteen and never progressed beyond high school. Looking for an opportunity for a better life, Emily came to the United States with her family when she was nine years old and lived in the Los Angeles area until their move to Idaho later the next year. Emily is the first in her family to go to college. Her career goals and aspirations after graduation are to pursue a career with a computer software engineering company.

Julio-is a married, 25 year-old male who attended the university from 2009 to 2010, and studied political science. He was born in California, the middle child of a family of seven,

consisting of three brothers, two sisters, a mother, and a father. Both of his parents were born in Mexico and came to the United States in 1987. His parents never progressed beyond the sixth grade. Julio was the first member of his family to attend college. Since departing the university, Julio has attended a local community college in California. Julio's aspirations are to return to the university in the fall of 2016 to resume studies with the near term goal of earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration.

Patricio-is a single, 20 year-old male who was enrolled at the university during the 2014 to 2015 academic school year. He was born in California and is the eldest child in a family of five, composed of one brother, two sisters, a mother, and a father. Both of his parents were born in Mexico and came to the United States in the early 1990's. His parents never progressed beyond the tenth grade. Patricio was the first member of his family to attend college. Patricio departed the university after the spring 2015 semester due to poor academic performance.

Red-is a 24 year-old, graduate of Triad University where he earned a Bachelor's of Business Administration in 2013. He was a varsity athlete while attending Triad University. He was born in the state of Washington and is the oldest of five children in his family. English is his second language. He is a practicing Catholic and attends church regularly with his family. Red was the first in his family to graduate from high school and earn a college degree. His father was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and his mother was born in California. He is part owner of his family's restaurant and works full-time helping to run the business.

Otalia-is a 23 year-old, graduate of Triad University where she earned a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in International Studies. She is the oldest of three children in her family. She was the first in her family to graduate from high school and college. She is fluent in both Spanish and

English. Otalia was married during her senior year in college and worked in the family's restaurant while enrolled in college full-time.

The Researcher's Educational Journey "True Grit"

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claimed that personal narratives provided a way for researchers to describe individual stories and explain the meaning of personal experiences. Chang (2008) emphasized the value of self-narratives in autoethnography research as a style of writing useful for promoting understanding of the researcher's experiences and position in relation to others within the context of culture. Chang (2008) further emphasized that autoethnography writing was to be "ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (P.48). My personal narrative is ethnographic in its orientation, reporting on individual experiences, values, beliefs, and languages from my past and present within multiple settings and contexts to describe the background factors, interactions, and external pressures impacting my persistence to graduation. My personal narrative is based on analysis and interpretation of data of my autoethnographic data, field notes, reflections, and reflexive revelations. Data analysis and interpretation strategies were comprised of: searching for recurring topics and patterns, analyzing relationships between self and others, comparing my experience with others participants, and framing analysis by integrating Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure into the research design/methodology. My personal narrative is presented using a combination of analytical-interpretive and confessional-emotive styles of writing, connecting my lived experiences with the broader topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention, while appealing to the reader in a meaningful way.

Each of us has a story to tell. My story begins with my great grandfather, Concepción Espinoza, who was murdered by the Rurales, the rural Mexican militia who dominated the

political and geographic landscape of Mexico from 1861-1914. My great grandmother, Leonor, was left to fend for herself and the surviving members of her family. In the turbulence of the times, neighbors and enemies of my great grandfather made off with the family's cattle and other farm livestock. Eventually my great grandmother was forced to abandon the ranch and migrate north from the Burgos area of Mexico to the larger city, Reynosa, situated on the U.S-Mexico border. My grandparents crossed the border from Mexico into the United States in the early 1950's, and settled in Pharr, Texas, an area commonly referred to by the locals as "the valley." My mom and dad met each other while working in the cotton fields of Texas. They were married in the summer of 1961.

My earliest memories of my family come from the time we spent in Ohio, Texas, and Washington during the late 1960's and early 1970s, traveling with other braceros [contract field workers] working in the farm fields. In Ohio, our family was cheated by a farmer who refused to pay us for the work we completed. With no money, my family found refuge in low income housing for migrant workers in what was commonly referred to as labor camps. Eventually, my family settled in Idaho. Soon after arriving, however, my parents divorced, leaving my mother, Virginia, an 8th grade dropout, to raise a family of four children by herself.

My story of aspiring to earn a college degree began long before I ever arrived at a university campus. The story emerged while growing up in poverty in a predominately white community in rural Northwestern United States as a young Hispanic kid in the 1970's. The essence of my life at the time was captured in a Central Broadcasting Station (CBS) documentary produced a decade earlier by Murrow and Friendly titled, "The Harvest of Shame." The documentary described the plight of a Hispanic mother and single parent of five children. The average dinner each day for the entire family comprised only a pot of beans, or corn. She

could not afford to purchase milk more than once a week for her children. In the documentary, Murrow and Friendly (1960) vividly described how the mother could not afford to pay for day care, which at the time only cost 85 cents per day, and so her 9-year-old son cared for his three infant sisters while the mother was at work. The scenes described by Murrow and Friendly (1960) in the "Harvest of Shame" were played out again and again in my life growing up as a young boy.

Given the circumstances in which she found herself, my mother was a dynamic woman. There was no childcare for migrant workers, so my mother would take me and my brother and sisters to work the farm fields with her each day. Older children watched the younger kids to keep them from falling into the irrigation ditches. Infants were shielded from the beating sun by blankets thrown over the back windows of the cars. My mother taught each of us an incredible work ethic and the importance of family.

I spent most of my childhood in rural Idaho in a small town community. The summer of 1972 marked the beginning of a period of self-discovery for me, coming to grips with my ethnic identity, and forming an understanding of living in a world within a pre-dominantly non-Hispanic community. Walking into a 1st grade classroom surrounded by non-Hispanic students for the first time was very intimidating for me. I felt out of place. At times I felt like I was a failure, inadequate, or unaccepted. My developing language proficiency may have played a large part in how I felt, but that did not occur to me at the time. I felt like my teachers did not have an idea of what my life was like. Worst of all, I did not feel like there was anyone I could ever share my feelings with, or who could understand my aspirations or my struggles. Often my mother was not present when I got home from school. The autonomy and anonymity which comes with being a "latch key kid" left the burden of responsibly for watching over my brother and sisters to me.

This responsibility included helping them with homework and school projects--a task I was not even remotely prepared to adequately accomplish. Even if my mother had been fortunate enough to be home with us after school, she would not have been able to help with school assigned homework and projects because of her limited education. Although my feelings of isolation and alienation in elementary and middle school gradually declined because of my developing English fluency and ability to make friends, I continued doubting my own academic abilities due to knowledge gaps in math and science. During my high school years, these knowledge gaps continued to grow, but I was fortunate to attend a school where academic tutoring was provided to students who needed help with homework. I also found solace in athletics, primarily individual sports such as track, wrestling, and martial arts.

Sports provided me with a social support network and the acceptance of peers. My brother and sisters never felt like they had the benefit of a social support network or access to quality academic assistance outside the classroom. They did not participate in athletics. The school they attended did not provide an after school tutoring program. Many of their friends had already dropped out of school. Given these and many other challenges, my brother and one sister dropped out of school before earning a high school diploma. Many of my peers also dropped out of school before successfully completing high school. Those of us who remained in school encouraged each other to not drop out. It was during my junior year in high school when I began dating a remarkable young lady, Kathy (pseudonym), who eventually became my wife, and at the time of this study is my bride of almost 27 years.

Supportive relationships matter and are important in a person's life. Kathy's influence played a major role in my life and decision to want to go to college. She was the honor student, drum major, and teen model voted "best dressed" in high school. I was the young Hispanic guy

who grew up on the "north side of the tracks." In the town where I grew up, the railroad tracks separated the north part of town from the south side of the city. Similar to today, the lower socioeconomic and Hispanic population resided on the north side of the tracks. I grew up on 1st Street North, an area of town often times referred to by local citizens as "Little Mexico." The middle to upper class and White-non Hispanic population lived primarily on the south side of town. Kathy's parents were both college professors at Triad University and immediately expressed concern their daughter was dating me. "Why don't you like Bob?" Kathy would ask her parents. Each time her parents responded with, "It's not that we don't like Bob…it's that both of his parents are divorced…he comes from a different background."

I remember my first visit to Kathy's house. I was wearing the only clean clothes I had, a pair of blue jeans and a yellow tee shirt that said "Don't Say Beer Say Bull," a reference to Schlitz malt liquor. Her father answered the door and did not invite me in. Instead he let Kathy know that a "Japanese boy" was there to see her. Today I have a much better understanding of how experiences and interactions shape our understanding of others and how we perceive the world. Kathy's parents had very limited experience and interactions with Hispanics. Although I grew up in a prominently Hispanic neighborhood, the schools I attended were composed of a predominately White-non Hispanic population across students, teachers, and coaches. I did not take the description of me as a "Japanese boy" by Kathy's father in a personal way; rather it seemed consistent with what I had encountered numerous other times in my life. Over the course of time, Kathy's friendship and encouragement helped me to better see the world from another person's point of view.

I hoped to attend Triad University mostly because I wanted to share in the college experience with Kathy, but there were other reasons as well. Attending the local church with

Kathy, I began to form a personal relationship with God. I felt attending the university might

help me further grow in my faith. I also believed the quality of the education of a private

university would be better than a public education. I assumed if it costs more to attend a private

university, the quality of the education must be worth more. Despite my desire to attend Triad

University, many factors presented challenges too great to overcome. Specific factors relating to

my family background such as a lack of parental support, parents educational level, and

inadequate pre-college academic readiness resulted in barriers too significant for me to

surmount. Certain social and environmental factors of the institution, such as limited financial

aid and availability of grants, proved equally challenging. Given my limited understanding of the

intercultural/interracial environment of Triad University, I also wondered how well I would fit in

or how welcomed I would feel at a predominantly White, private university. I lacked the

procedural knowledge of how to successfully navigate the college admissions and financial aid

process. The high school counselor at the time actually said to me, "I could sing a song with your

report card..D..D..D..D." My meeting with him lasted only a few minutes. Kathy, as a high

school student, was the one who guided me through the college admission process and taught me

how to apply for financial aid. She helped me study for the college entrance exam and gave me a

campus tour of Triad University. In fact, Kathy was sitting right next to me the day a financial

aid counselor from Triad University and I were trying to figure out how to find several thousand

more dollars to pay tuition. That moment taught me that attending college takes more than a

desire and the willingness to try.

　　　I attended a public, four-year university as a commuter student. I did not live on campus

because I could not afford to pay the cost of room and board. Even if I did have the money to

live on campus, I knew that I would feel torn about leaving home and the responsibility of taking

care of my brother and sisters. I was riddled with guilt when the importance of taking care of family was eclipsed by the task of trying to improve myself by going to college. Living off campus, I felt isolated from the social community and campus residential life. I also lacked the academic skill sets required for a seamless transition from high school to college. My pre-existing knowledge gaps in science and math from high school continued to widen in college. During my freshman year, I failed three out of the five classes I enrolled in (Math for Business, Biology, and Accounting) and was at risk of flunking out of college. At times I found myself doubting if college was the right choice for me. Things were not working out, and there was no one I could go to for help or advice. My turning point occurred in the least likely of places, spring break 1985. I remember many college students viewed spring break as the opportunity to "hit the road," venturing off to destinations such as Fort Lauderdale, Daytona, or Mexico. I was fortunate to notice a banner in our university student union building advertising a spring break getaway with the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), a week long white water rafting trip in Idaho…free of charge. Nothing is free, of course. This event had "Army recruiting" written all over it. Going on the trip turned out to be one of the best decisions I ever made.

It was during this trip that I met a very unique person who provided me with much needed direction and guidance, Army Special Forces Master Sergeant Stephen Estep. Master Sergeant Stephen Estep was a combat veteran from Vietnam, but had also served as a military advisor in both El Salvador and Nicaragua during a seven year period in the 1980s. He spoke fluent Spanish, understood the Hispanic culture, and had a passion for helping others achieve their potential. He encouraged me to work hard over the summer by retaking the classes I failed during my freshman year, and he spent countless hours tutoring and mentoring me. He helped

me apply for on-campus jobs and introduced me to other ROTC cadets/students on campus. The organizational structure of the ROTC program was and still is today made up of active duty officers, sergeants, and cadets, all of whom provided me with the academic and social support I needed to be successful. The leadership and specialized skill training I received from the military science cadre was unmatched by any other class or academic program I participated in during my time in college; the new direction I was moving in, however, and the momentum I was gaining would soon come to a very abrupt halt.

My mother was diagnosed with cancer when I was a sophomore in college, and she died later that same year. After my mother passed away, I left college to take care of my brother and sisters. It was an easy decision for me at the time given the gravity of the situation at hand. The only jobs I could find at the time were as a cook at a McDonald's restaurant, teaching martial arts part-time, and working in the fields during the summer. These experiences were valuable in so many ways and I wouldn't trade any of them, yet I was not satisfied where I was in life and the direction I was going. One of the most difficult choices I ever made in my life was to leave my brother and sisters the next year in order to finish my degree. The guilt I still feel, even after almost 30 years, is overwhelming sometimes. One sister dropped out of high school shortly after I went back to college. She became a 10th grade dropout and a mother at age 15. My other sister and half-sister both left home and never came back. My younger brother eventually earned a GED, however, after years of alcohol and drug abuse, his battle against those demons still continues to today. I fully understand how people, who grew up in the exact same environment/family and under the same conditions, can walk different paths in life. It's been very difficult for me to accept that I could not have done more to help my brother and sisters, while trying to improve myself at the same time.

My mother never got to see me graduate from college, marry Kathy, meet her grandchildren, or see her granddaughter complete high school and go on to attend a private, Christian university on an Army ROTC scholarship. Even though my mother departed this world long ago, I am convinced her spirit lived on. When I close my eyes, even for just a moment, I can still feel the cold air cutting through my coat while walking the railroad tracks with my mother searching for coal. I can feel the hot sun beating down on my back as my mother and I worked the beet fields from dawn to dusk. Now that I am much older and a parent working to provide for my own family, I sometimes hear the whisper of my mother's voice, "Miejo…. Puedes hacerlo que quieras y ser lo que quieras ser si estás dispuesto a intentar" [My son, you can achieve anything you want to, or be anybody you want to be in this world, if you are willing to try]. Each of us has experienced hardships, happiness, success, and defeat to varying degrees, and while my experiences may not be considered unique by others, they are how I have shaped my understanding of myself and the world in which we live.

My personal narrative represented a highly personalized account of my family background and individual experiences impacting my persistence in earning a college degree, yet provided only a segment of the larger story of Hispanic undergraduate retention. The voices of other participants provide a deeper look and broader understanding of the background characteristics and other factors (social/academic/environmental) impacting Hispanic undergraduate retention at a private Christian university. As Chang (2008) reminded us, "searching for connectivity between self and others is fundamental to autoethnographic interpretation" (p.134). Through careful analysis of a multitude of data sets in this study, reflection, reflexivity, I compared my experiences to other participants within the broader topic of persistence and retention by coding and organizing data, searching for recurring topics,

themes, and patterns. In my autoethnographic analysis, I discovered many similarities and several differences between myself and other participants in this study.

Similar to other participants in this study, the idea of family is of the upmost importance to me. This revelation is consistent with the findings of Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Nuñez (2009) who claimed, "Maintaining family relationships are essential aspects of student success in college" (p.339). Other similarities were comprised of religious faith, belief in God, language proficiency (English/Spanish), low levels of family financial income, and limited parent's level of education. Just like me, many of the participants faced numerous barriers and challenges; however support from family, friends, and others were critical to their ability to overcome obstacles impacting their persistence in college. Previous research pointed toward an assumption that Hispanic undergraduate students were concerned with financial issues and perceive the need to work part time during college (Nuñez, 2009). Many participants in this study worked 20 or more hours per week in jobs off of campus during their time in college. In my case, similar to other participants, this need to work served as what Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) termed as "environmental pull factors" detracting students away from certain aspects of the campus experience. Each of these similarities seemed to align with what was already known about the challenges and barriers faced by Hispanic undergraduate students while showcasing the resiliency (never quit attitude) participants displayed in the face of adversity.

Chang (2008) claimed, "While repetition and recurrence give much information about our lives, not all aspects of life follow patterns or routines; exceptional events and encounters often change a course of life and major impacts on life." (p.133) My decision to depart college before achieving my academic goals due to the unexpected death of my mother certainly provided evidence of the impacts of exceptional and life changing events. I made the decision to

return to college and resume my studies one year after I departed. It was a difficult decision, one which may have appeared to many in my family as counter to our value of "family is everything."

In autoethnography, Chang (2008) reminds us that data analysis and interpretation are a primarily a function of what is included in a data set; however at that same time cautioned researchers to not forget what is omitted in the data, "sheds valuable light on the data" (p.133). Missing from the data is narrative of my brother and sisters. It's been over 30 years since we (my brother and sisters) were all together in the same room at once. Chang (2008) argued that omission in data revealed a researchers ignorance, devaluation, disassociation, or unfamiliarity of a certain phenomenon. Also missing from the data were the experiences of faculty, staff, and other agents of the institution. I love my family and I certainly value the faculty and staff of the institution. My decision to omit the previously mentioned groups of people was solely a decision to focus on current and former Hispanic undergraduate students. The integration of faculty and staff perspectives is discussed in Chapter V in recommendations for future research. In the remainder of this chapter, I presented the narrative of other participants in this study by aligning their stories with the research questions and emerging themes. I made every attempt to honor their voice and view of reality by using their exact words, phrases, and quotes.

Research Questions and Themes

Research Question#1 What background characteristics, such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents, impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

Themes: Family Background, Motivation, and Religion

Family background

Family background emerged as a common theme across all participants. The research

literature provides evidence that the environment in which Hispanic students were raised

influenced the issues they faced during the transition to college. Background characteristics of a

student such as educational level of parents, socioeconomic status, expectations of parents,

academic abilities, and social attainments are often analyzed in retention studies (Braxton et al.,

2011; Tinto, 1993). Research Question #1 of this study focused on understanding a participant's

family background as told through their life stories collected through semi-structured interviews

and focus groups. Interview questions elicited participants' experiences and stories relating to

parents level of education, family support, educational goals, pre-college academic readiness,

and the role religion played in university choice. A demographic questionnaire elicited data

regarding native language, age, place of birth, family structure, employment, financial status,

religion, and reasons for going to college. The following family background factors and

characteristics were analyzed: parent's level of education, country of origin, beliefs, values,

language, family support, student's pre-college academic readiness, and income level.

Three of the 19 participants in this study were born outside of the United States, and the

remaining 16 participants were born in the United States. Twelve of the 19 participants in this

study were first generation college students. Five of the participants had parents who did not

progress beyond the 6th grade. Seven of the participants had parents who attended college but

never graduated. Only two participants had parents who were college graduates. Fourteen of the

19 participants described their family income level as falling within the lower socioeconomic

category. The remaining five participants stated their family income level fell within the middle

class socioeconomic tier. The cumulative high school GPA of the participants in this study was 3.41.

The research literature provided evidence of lower college enrollment rates for students whose parents did not complete high school or go to college. During the semi-structured interviews, ten of the 19 participants revealed their parents had never attended high school. Consistent with experiences described by these ten participants during semi-structured interviews, individuals participating in focus group sessions (to include those whose parents did not graduate high school) revealed their parents valued education and were supportive of their decision to go to college. Tinto (1993) identified financial resources as one of the characteristics of a student's pre-entry attributes. Fourteen of the 19 participants described their family's financial status in the lower socioeconomic range. The financial status of students and their families were described by participants as difficult and challenging. Participants described experiences working in the fields and orchards with their parents for long hours, acknowledging that education and a college degree were pathways to greater opportunity and a better life. Participant's described the financial challenges as a motivator to achieve their academic goals in honor of the sacrifice their parents had made, working two jobs or long hours in order pay for the kids to go to college. Tinto (1993) claimed that a student entered college with varying degrees of academic readiness, a fact that has a direct impact on academic performance in college. Participants described varying degrees of academic readiness for college and their expectations of the academic rigor. Ten of the 19 participants shared experiences of preparing for college by enrolling in dual credit or concurrent credit classes while in high school.

Participants provided multiple reasons why they chose to come to Triad University, such as proximity to home, academic programs, athletic scholarships, religion, and family/friends who

previously attended. Seven of the 19 participants stated that Triad University was not their first choice. Ten of the 19 participants revealed that religion and the faith-based nature of the university was the primary reason for attending Triad University. One body of research on minority student retention in higher education emphasized the strong ties Hispanics have to family (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). Participants communicated experiences within the family unit which they described as powerful influencers toward individual motivation in developing academic goals and aspirations to earn a college degree. Participants described their value of family, utilizing words and phrases such as "family is everything" and "family forever." Other participants, such as Emily and Romona, described a completely different experience of family, sharing stories of a lack of support or encouragement to pursue college. Several participants shared experiences of extended family support as important in determining initial academic goals and commitments.

Direct Quotes from Participants

Otalia (**Graduate**)

> Family's everything. To my mom and dad, family's always been really important, but in her eyes, her kids have always been first, you know, because, I mean, even with my dad…. his family was always first, like, it did, but it was, you know, his dad and mom first, and his sisters, and he's, that's his life, his family, you know. And then for my mom, it's her kids, and then comes everybody else.

Juan (**Senior**)

> Okay, well my mom actually came from Mexico and she arrived in California with one of my uncles. And she lived with them, she took care of their kids for quite a while and then a few years after when she found out I was on the way, she decided to come over to

Nampa and here she lived with my aunt and other cousins and pretty much all lived in the

same house and we cared for each other and we helped each other out and, yea, it was

pretty tight-knit little family.

Lupe (Freshman)

My mom and her side of the family, they all had the restaurants, so, like, my cousins and

I grew up in the exact same situation; our parents were always working. I remember

when we were little, like, once or twice a week, my mom and my aunt would always,

like, get all us kids together. And, like, up to date, like, I always see my cousins, like,

every day, or talk to them every day, so we grew up, like, really, really close and I felt

like family was just something, like, it was super constant, like we always had something

to rely on and family was, like, it's always been number one to me. And I feel like my

mom and my dad, like, enforce this by getting us all together and keeping us together,

whether whatever the situation was.

Rachel (**Junior**)

My family was always really close. We've always really connected with one another.

Well, not always, but older brothers, there's about, I think there's a fifteen year age gap

difference between my oldest brother and my youngest sister. So us girls were kind of the

second family I guess you could say. So there was kind of, I mean we always, we've

always known our brothers as our brothers, it was just he was in high school, we were in

elementary school and even my sister-in-law, I've known her ever since I can remember

her, she's just always been part of the family. And then having our grandma around with

us, she was elderly, she needed help. So, you know, we, my sister and I, she would

always call us her little nurses and we'd help her with her shoes, help her get ready, help

her make dinner, help her do everything. She was, growing up she was like my mom, just because she was always there. I remember her always wanting to make tortillas, always making caldito and, you know, different things. And then my dad was home too, so he would walk us to school, pick us up from school, take us grocery shopping, different things like that.

Natalia (Sophomore)

I'd say we are a very loving family and family is valued a lot. Family's always first above everything and for us it was always like, my sister did something that, you know, she disobeyed my parents, they would be upset with her and they would tell her, like, "this is not right because so and so, but we still love you because you're our daughter." So family is always, and it's, 'til this day it's very important.

Patricio (Left the University)

Family is everything for me. You know, I'm really close to my parents; I'm really close to my brothers. My brothers and I did everything together while we were growing up. As a matter of fact we still do everything together even though I have my own family now. I'm really attached to them and I think that created a sense of that, you know, growing up they were always there for me, they were really supportive

Ramona (Senior)

There was a lot of drinking in my family, my dad drank quite a bit and of course as the years progressed, you know, that increased as well. But I can say, you know, my parents, I mean, I wouldn't say that we were, we weren't really middle class, but we weren't, like, poor either, I mean they both worked, they worked really hard, you know, we always had a roof over our heads and food on the table and things like that. But, you know, it was

just still really hard with having that, you know, that alcoholism in my family; my dad's side, actually my mom's side too, but not her personally, but I have numerous aunts and uncles on both sides, and grandparents that alcoholism is very prevalent.

Emily (**Senior, emigrant**)

My dad's never been a part of our life, so there are four of us and I have a sister and a brother, a younger brother and an older sister so I am the middle child. And my mom has been a single parent for a long time so it's just been really hard because I think from the fact that we grew up in a very different place than a normal family does, we've been very dysfunctional and we've been very far apart from one another, so it's really hard to really understand how to be a family, how to be a close family and so we both kind of decided to do our own little worlds and how to better ourselves in our own way. TU became my island that I went to and I kind of went away from all the things I've been through up until that point and, you know, transitioning into that was probably one of the best experiences of my life because I realized a different aspect of being a human being, the part of being a part of something, you know, and feeling like you belong in that home, like, you're a burden on someone or your, you know, excluded or, you know, because with my, you know, my life growing up, I really felt like I was a big burden on my mom because of her experiences and the way that she expressed things about her life and so that was a huge part and just, you know, thinking, "*I'm actually doing this, I'm actually going to class, and I'm getting closer to where I want to be,*" and that's exciting, like, it's not really about, like, well, I have to do all these different things and I still have a long way to, it's more like, I'm already in the process of that, you know, and it was just a big moment for me to be able to come in with that.

Reflection and reflexivity.

In efforts to better understand my own attitudes, beliefs, and values of family, it was valuable for me to view family from the perspective of other participants in this study. At the beginning of this research study, other than a shared ethnic affiliation, I had no idea what other similarities I might have with participants with regard to family background, pre-college attributes, and experiences. The shared experiences of participants resonated with me in very emotional ways, often times proving difficult for me to control my own emotions, especially during the semi-structured interviews. I am quickly reminded of an interview session with a former student, Otalia (graduated). During the interview session, Otalia broke down in tears several times as she talked about her family and the important role they played in her life and persistence to graduation. Attempting to connect my lived experiences, and those shared by participants, with theory and practice, I found myself re-looking the important impacts which parental levels of education, family financial income, religion, language spoken at home, and pre-college academic readiness played in student success. Equally important, I found myself many times questioning ways in which I, as an educator, could better leverage the knowledge and insight gained. I discuss many of these thoughts in greater detail in Chapter V, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Motivation

The research literature and models of student retention achievement often defined motivation as a student's desire to achieve success, determination to overcome obstacles, complete tasks undertaken, and the self-determination to strive for success and excellence. Tinto (1993) provided evidence that students enter higher education with a multitude of pre-college attributes, background characteristics, and social and personal dispositions that impact a

student's motivation to persist. The research literature further emphasized a student's achievement motivation was socioculturally rooted and connected to the cultural environment in which a person develops during the formative years of their life (Liem, Martin, Porter, & Colmar, 2012). Each of these views represents a holistic approach to understanding student success as it relates to the academic, social, emotional, and spiritual development of an individual. Participants in this study described many sources of motivation such as family support, parental expectations, a desire to make their family proud, self-determination, and a desire to be the first in their family to graduate college. Among these many sources of motivation, participants described family as the central influence impacting their desire to achieve academic goals. Participants described their experiences of how the institution plays a critical role in developing and sustaining a student's level of motivation. Tinto (1993) provided evidence that external pressures faced during their time in college impacted student retention. Participants described several external pressures such as employment demands and family commitments which impacted their educational journey.

Emily (Senior, emigrant)

> There was no motivation to do anything except work and so, that's kind of what it looked like for us. When we came to the US, it was the first time that my family and I actually lived together, just us, not with a group of people, not with anybody else around, and so learning traditions and learning how to do things together was very, very challenging and, because my mom was always so busy as a parent trying to provide for us. There was really nothing much done within the home as far as activities or celebrations or anything like that; mainly because my mom didn't know how to do those things. So Christmas was never a priority or, you know, it was just kind of another day for us and I just kind of

learned to not really understand holidays really because there was no time, there was no money.

It was always very hard for us to survive really because my mom always had to try to find something and we, for my siblings and I, the only source was my mom and for my mom, it was herself, and because of the lack of opportunity or inability to speak English, that really impeded her to find something that would provide for us and so for a long time, for the first year in the US, my aunt did help us out a lot with giving us a place to live and my mom trying to find something. But my mom just couldn't and so when we moved to Idaho, she did end up finding someone that would give her a job and pay her under the table because we were undocumented at that time. So it was always really hard and for me as a kid. I watched that and I kind of understood the fact that I was going to have to rely on myself financially because my mom could barely, you know, keep food on the table. And so I decided to do what I could, you know, tutor or do small jobs to provide for myself, so I actually started doing that in the seventh grade and I started buying my own shampoo, my own soap, and my own food and I kind of started from there, from that day to start taking care of myself because my mom had a really hard time being involved in my life in a lot of different aspects, like with my academic life or my school life or extra activities. I think she just expected me to do everything by myself because she knew I could.

Lionel (Sophomore)

I always loved listening to my grandma tell stories about my mom and dad from back then, back in California, working in the fields. If, in my opinion, it's inspiring to me just simply because of the struggles that they had to go through to reach where they're at

now. So, I mean, the fact that both my mom and my dad, even before they met, they were working two jobs, I believe it was from six a.m. until twelve p.m., six hours sleep most of the time, and they would eat in between, obviously, of when they had opportunities throughout their jobs. So in my opinion, I kind of see that as motivating factor for me to pursue a higher education to kind of look for opportunities to advance myself in that way.

Junior (Junior)

Both of my parents worked in the orchards, at an early age they got us working in there too, I want to say around maybe twelve or thirteen we would go in early mornings, you know, help them as much as we could, and they'd always tell us, you know, this is how far we can go, this is as far as, you know, like, our education got us, you know. We don't want you to live the same life that we're living right now, you know, we want you to really focus on your studies and to make the most of what you can with your life so you won't end up, you know, in the orchards like us. I will never forget those days out working with them, you know, always, we'd work until late afternoon on the hot days and by the end of the day we were just all tired and they would always just tell me, you know, you gotta focus on school, you gotta do good in school, get good grades so that you can go on to learn more to get, you know, a better life for yourself, better jobs.

Red (Graduate)

I came to the university because I didn't want to go into the family business and so after graduation I went to work for an investment company. Guess what? Now I am working in the family business. You know why? Because I discovered that working with my dad and brothers every day and building something to pass to my own family one day is what makes me happy. If I could give my advice to anyone just starting out here at the

university or trying to figure out what they should do with the rest of their life, I would

tell them to figure out what makes you happy and ways to share that happiness with

others. I would tell them that it doesn't matter where you come from, it doesn't matter

how much money you have, it doesn't matter, you know, who judges you because of your

background or because of who you are or if you have a funny accent or whatever it may

be, but it's up to you, you know, it's you as a person. If you're the first person in your

family that is going to college or if you're the oldest sibling that you have a responsibility

to, you know, work and be the best person you can be. Whether that be going to college

or whether that be doing anything else, you know, you, I believe that you have to be

tough and you have to, you have to work hard in everything that you do, nothing is easy.

And there are some people that come from really difficult places but you have to, you

have to want to be better, you have to want to pursue that education, it doesn't matter the

language barrier, I mean, Father did it with no language [English] at all. If you have the

desire and the will and the mental toughness and you want it bad enough, anything is

possible. So, growing up, there's a couple things that I can think of that my dad more

than anything, kind of told me, repeatedly, I always would kind of get upset with him

because I wanted to go out with friends or I wanted to go to things and then I had to help

out the family business or I had to do yard work or things like that. And then I remember

thinking, and getting so upset, and he would always say to me, "Red, there's", he would

always say, "There's time for everything, you know. There's time for fun, there's time

for play, there's time for family, there's time for work, there's time for everything and

right now you got to work". But that stuck with me and, you know, I remember coming

to college, and those late nights, those times where it was just kind of like, man I, school

was hard, this is difficult, you know, I just want to go to sleep, I don't want to write this paper, I don't want to study for this test. Whatever it was, you know, and I remember thinking, you know, you have to, you got to do it because, I mean, yea. If my dad would have quit or if he wouldn't have pursued what he was going after, you know, after it got difficult, like, where would you be now? Or, if anyone, if anyone had to stop when things got hard, then nothing would have gotten accomplished. And I remember thinking to myself, like, I have to keep going because I, you know, people, my brothers looking up to me, my, you know, my dad is helping me through college, I can't, I have to do this, not for myself but for them. You know, and I remember thinking, you know, when I wanted to, my later years of school, when I wanted to go goof off or go hang out with friends and everything, and well, this isn't free, this is, you know. So it's not just you sacrificing this time, it's family members that are sacrificing, you know, money; it's others that are believing in you to keep going and that was the driving force for me, you know, family was a very big push. And still to this day, I want to make, you know, my family proud. I want to be, I want to do more, I want to accomplish all these things because I want them to see, I want them to be proud and I want them to look at me and be like, wow, you know, he did a great job. And so those are some of the things, I remember I walked across that stage, you know, seeing the tears in Mom's eyes, which was very, kind of hit me. But, you know, it was just, it was very important for me to keep going because of the fact that my family, you know, they supported me in every step, so. You know and still to this day I push and I persevere and I want to do more, I want to keep going. So those are some of the things, you know, and I believe that my father still does those goals in me,

those, just the hardworking, you know, mentality, you know, to when things get hard, you just got to keep going.

Juan (Senior)

I want to graduate and get a job with a company or an organization where I can help make a difference for others like setting an example and being a role model for everybody else. For, like, other Hispanic kids, in my family especially, just letting them know that everything's possible; anything's possible as long as you put your mind to it and you, you know, stick it out strong and, you know, don't turn away, don't give up.

Jose (Freshman, emigrant)

I wanted to go to college because I'm not much of a, like, a technical kind of guy, like hands-on-type of person, like, welding and stuff like that. I'm more of, like, a reason type of person and a college degree is really, like, especially from the United States, is worth so much in [country of origin], which, I'm, like, hoping to go back to because that's where my family and where my friends are. So I'm guessing, I guess if I would be fine, have a college degree from the United States, I am not tied down to just being in the States, I can move wherever I want and pray I would get a good job.

Reflection and reflexivity.

My motivation for pursuing a college education, later a graduate degree, and now a doctorate was the result of my mother, and then my wife. Both of these amazing women never wavered from providing love and support in their deeds and words. My wife has been by my side for over 30 years and continues to make incredible sacrifices in helping me achieve my academic goals. I am forever grateful not only for her sacrifices, but for her legacy and the incredible work ethic she has instilled in our family. I have not done enough to help those in need. Emily made

me think about Abraham Maslow for the longest time. How many other young men and women are eagerly searching for a safe and secure environment? Connecting Emily's experience to Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993), it was immediately apparent to me how her challenging family background and lack of parental support differed from many of the other participants; however still played an important role.

Religion

The literature and research provided evidence that the Hispanic population differs from other groups not only in terms of language, immigration status, race, and place of origin, but in religion as well. The Hispanic culture is heavily influenced by religion, Catholicism in particular. Participants described experiences of Catholic values and beliefs and their experiences in understanding the values and beliefs espoused by a private, Christian university. Ten of the 19 participants revealed that religion and the faith-based nature of the university was the primary reason for attending Triad University, even though it is not a Catholic institution. Participants described a general belief in God and their experiences of religious practices and faith as sources of motivation during their educational journey.

Lupe (Freshman)

> I come from a Catholic background, like, we were always raised Catholic. There are
>
> differences between the two, the Nazarene and the Catholics. I wasn't really sure what to
>
> expect when I first came here, like was I going to be expected to now become a
>
> Nazarene? Cornerstone we learned about how college matters to God and stuff, and I
>
> never imagined connecting the two together as I do now. Because, you know, just
>
> growing up in public schools, I was always separated, religious but your academic life,
>
> and it was interesting to know that those two can be integrated. And, I don't know, it was
>
> interesting, just stood out.

Lionel (Sophomore)

I've always been very religious but I wouldn't say, twenty-four/seven thinking about it, living it day by day kind of thing. I was more, you know, three to four days whenever I could. But coming to university, taking courses based on religion, I was able to go ahead and kind of comprehend and relate my religion to my life. So an example of when I noticed that I've advanced in that way that I've actually become closer to God. God is helping me along this whole path.

Rachel (Junior)

Religion and faith, they are not really significant to me. I'm not an active church goer or, you know, I don't even really know where my status is with religion right now. But I don't know. The religion part, I don't mind it, I like learning about it too and I respect everyone else that believes.

Emily (Senior, emigrant)

I was praying about, you know, where I needed to go to college before I went to the university and then, you know, I think that admissions counselor, her calls and everything was really an answer to prayer in a lot of that. And then, you know, I think it was my freshman year of college when I realized what it felt like to know that you're in God's will, where you're exactly where He wants you to be, and being able to talk about that with my peers, being able to talk about that with my RA and my friends was huge because normally at a place where it's not centered around faith, I couldn't, I guess I could speak about it but I would be in a place where it's not very, like, accepted or maybe it's not normal, you know, and being able to, you know, come to a place where that, that is what we do and that's where I realize that it's very encouraging and, you know,

knowing that that was God's will for me and really being sure about it and being able to show that was huge, you know.

Otalia (Graduate)

I would see like other students and they were really into, like, this Christian life and that, I mean, I grew up Catholic, so for me...had a different connection with God that wasn't what they were, it wasn't like different…maybe sometimes I just thought they would be too into it and pretend to be into it or, I don't know, I just, it was hard for me to understand them because I had never grown up in a Christian community. I had, you know, my parents all grew up in the same church I did and we wouldn't really go to church often. And I just have a hard time believing that they were that into it all the time. I thought I had a relationship with God, but it wasn't, it was more of a disconnect than a relationship that I had with God and I didn't realize it until I started attending chapel here and I would get really overwhelmed with emotion, even my freshman year just sitting there. I didn't know what was going on with me because I was just listening and I would have to leave because I'd get so emotional, but it's funny because I don't think I would have had that experience or realized something was wrong unless I came here.

Researcher reflection and reflexivity.

Religion played a very important role in my life ever since I was a young boy. I attribute that to my Grandmother Victoria. She presented me with my first bible when I was just seven years old. I have fond memories of her taking me to the Spanish Assembly of God church every Sunday morning. The church services were conducted entirely in Spanish and never lasted less than two hours, the first hour always dedicated to singing and praise. I am quickly reminded of the time when my grandmother made me sing in church, a solo in front of the entire

congregation. I was so embarrassed that I held my spiral notebook containing the words to the song I sang right up in front of my face so no one could see me. I maintained a close relationship with the Lord all throughout my life. My faith in God was one of the important factors attracting me to Triad University over 30 years ago and more recently as a new staff member. During data collection and analysis, I found it interesting that less than half of the overall student population has a religious affiliation with the denomination association with Triad University. This was consistent with what I discovered with participants in the sample population of this study. At the beginning of this study I assumed the role of religion would play a major role in university choice and persistence to graduation; however I was surprised to discover that a majority of participants did not feel like it was a significant factor. While many participants did not state that religion played an important role in coming to Triad University, I was encouraged by how the faith based nature of the university helped many of them to grow in their faith during their time in college. I know that I have certainly grown in my faith during my time on staff at Triad University.

Research Question #2 What were the personal experiences and institutional support factors important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?

Themes: Transition, Institutional Support, Family Support, Supportive Relationships

Transition

Participants described experiences of challenging transitions to college. Student retention theory provides evidence claiming the easier the transition to college is for students, the less likely they are to experience difficulty in adjusting to the campus environment. Family separation, time management, and adjusting to the academic rigors of college were the primary

challenges during the transition to college encountered across all participants. Finding ways to ease the separation from family, while maintaining close family relationships, was considered important to Hispanic students during their transition to college. Institutional programs designed to integrate students into the residential dorms, social organizations, and campus communities were described as valuable opportunities for participants during their adjustment to the university. Students described experiences of new student orientation, freshman retreat, residential life, family support, and other supportive relationships as important aspects of their transition.

Natalia (Sophomore)

> It was a hard transition for me because I was used to, like, my mom and dad being like, we want you home at ten-thirty, you know, and I had liberty, but to some extent and here it was like, curfew was at twelve, so even the hours changed. My friends changed; in high school, I had a lot more Hispanic friends, you know, my group of friends was mainly Hispanic and coming to college, there was only, like, one or two Hispanic girls that I ever even saw and I never even talked to them, so my friends are transforming from Hispanic friends to American friends, that was a different thing too. In high school, I felt like my Hispanic friends understood me a lot more and there were more, like... let's say if they were talking to somebody and they used a word or they pronounced it wrong, if I did that, they were more compassionate towards me because they, that would happen to them. But I feel like here sometimes, like, yes, they're compassionate towards that stuff but since they don't, they're not from that background and they don't have those struggles, it's hard for them or for us to connect sometimes because of that. But I've found that friends,

Hispanic and American, are, you know, the same; they're loving, they're caring and that, you know, ethnicity has nothing to do with that.

So in high school, it was like, you can get stuff done during class while teacher's still going, or the morning of at breakfast, like, you can finish your math assignment the morning before breakfast because it was, you know, not long and it was easy. But college it got a lot harder because I had to spend, like if it was a reading an article that they gave me in my Cornerstone class, like, I had to read it and reread it to understand what it meant and then I had to answer whatever, you know, question was and then like, writing papers as it's so hard me because I've never been good at, like, putting my words on paper, writing in general. And now, here, I've had to do, like, millions of papers it feels like, and that was really hard, like, I have to spend so much more time now, you know, doing outlines, like in high school, I didn't have to do outlines, it wasn't important; and now if I don't do an outline, it's like, wait, you know, I can't fill up ten pages. So I now in college I realize that you really, I really have had to spend so much more time on homework, it's so much more time outside class time, versus in class where it was, you know, high school was all pretty much in class, outside of class you didn't have to worry, but now I feel like it's almost the opposite.

Alicia (Junior)

The transition to college was probably the most difficult thing I've ever dealt with because the hardest thing that I felt was being cut off from basically everything that I had established. So like I said, in elementary school and middle school I was kind of in the in between because I didn't really have, like, friends. And then I transferred high schools, I actually went from Homeland High School to Peaceland High School (pseudonyms). So I

had two years to basically establish myself and I did and it was in this kind of

Latino/Hispanic community, FH, you know, FHLA [Future Hispanic Leaders of

America]. And then just when I got used to having that and feeling, you know, great, they

sent me, like, I basically sentenced myself to do time in a new, in this new place and I felt

completely stripped of everything again. So it felt like going back to elementary/middle

school time where I didn't honestly know where I fit in. And that happens in general to

college students and then there was also, that there was just more responsibilities, not just

in terms of, you know, your regular stuff, like, homework and that stuff. But I mean, I

had to keep track of how much money I was making because I had to keep track of how I

was going to pay my tuition. And that was something that, you know, my mom wasn't

doing and my grandma wasn't doing; that was, that was all on my own. And then I had,

you know, I had to do those own worries and then also, like, balancing my family with

my, you know, with college which is never something I really had to worry about in high

school

Jose (Freshman, emigrant)

It was definitely hard because my mom, as I said, raised me by herself, mainly. I mean, I

did have my dad, but it was mainly my mom. And I lived with my mom in Alaska and

my sister was there with me, and I guess, like, my sister was with me all my life, she's

like the one that's always been there with me for, like, the rough stuff so leaving her was

definitely hard. Leaving my mom was definitely hard, like I say, because we were so

family oriented. When I first got here, I was kind of bummed because I didn't have a

roommate. I wasn't really bummed, it was like, it's good and it's bads of having a

roommate. The good is because I didn't have to, like, take care of, I mean, I guess I do

have to take care of my room but not as much as if I had a roommate. And I get two

closets which is always a plus. The academics are definitely tougher than high school, but

if I can say, high school in the States is definitely easier than high school back in [country

of origin]. Back in [country of origin] we had thirteen/twelve subjects a year and then

over here we just had six a year. And then, like, towards my senior year, you could have

free periods. Yea, so I definitely have to say that I got a little bit spoiled in high school so

I have to pick up my game again, like, start highlighting stuff in my books, reading more.

Junior (Junior)

It's different. You know, there are always people around you; you're living with other

people that you don't know, and it's hard to get used to at first. It's hard to integrate

yourself with everybody else, especially being a transfer student this far into the year and

not knowing anybody, it's been difficult, but at the same time it's been really enjoyable.

Like the first day when I moved in, we had our RA in there with a whole bunch of other

people and I brought my car fully loaded and he's all like, "Just open up the trunk, we'll

move it in," next thing I know ten people, or a dozen people are, you know, coming into

my car, moving everything out of my car into my dorm and I just thought that was really

cool, the sense of community and family we have here. Meeting my roommates and, you

know, building that relationship with them. It really helps me to be more at peace and not

be so anxious because I'm a really anxious person when it comes to being around people.

Emily (Senior, emigrant)

Walking into the dorms the very first time I felt right away like I was part of a family,

especially with my RA, she was very welcoming and she was very, very nice to me and

then the fact that you're putting, like, the group of girls that have similar values with you,

you become a family really, really fast and I just remember realizing how much I needed that and how much I didn't realize I need that, I needed that and to be a part of that environment and the main thing that sticks out to me was Triad University became my home.

Reflection and reflexivity

My transition to college was perhaps different from the experiences shared by some of the participants in this study, but also similar with regard to the tensions and discomfort students described in adjusting to a new environment. The transition to college was difficult for me for many reasons. My mother never progressed beyond an eighth grade education so I was the first in my family to go to college. Many of the participants in this study were also the first in their families to go to college as well and shared a belief they were academically unprepared for the rigors of the university. Like many of the participants in this study, I underestimated the difficulty in making the academic transition from high school to college. I certainly anticipated the fact the academic rigor would likely be more intense in college; however during my first weeks at the university, I was inadequately prepared for the time required to satisfactorily complete reading assignments and other course work. While my mother supported my desire to go to college, I lacked any guidance from her regarding university choice or direction in completing the application, admissions, and financial aid process.

I lived at home and navigated dual environments (home/college) during my educational journey. I never attended a new student orientation program or participated in campus tour and so I had to discover on my own the resources available to me on campus while at the same time searching for supportive network of faculty, staff, and peers. I worked off campus during my freshman year in college. My part-time job and status as a commuter student made it difficult for

me to participate in on-campus social activities. I was able to maintain relationships with friends from high school who didn't go to college, however; I lacked a supportive social network on campus during my first year at the university. I always believed that if a student could successfully navigate, or complete the first semester of college, then their chances of persisting to graduation increases exponentially Although I made a deliberate effort to seek out a supportive network on campus during my transition to college during my undergraduate years, I can no longer assume students today will feel comfortable in doing the same thing.

Institutional Support

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure emphasized the important role that organizational and academic factors played in promoting a student's academic success. Given the complexity of student retention and limited assets and resources, it is challenging for any institution to provide a comprehensive and holistic enrollment management program which meets the unique needs of every identifiable group in achieving their academic goals. During semi-structured interviews and focus groups, participants described positive faculty interactions (in and outside of the classroom), supportive staff, academic advising, academic skills center, and campus resources (new library building and learning management system-CANVAS) as important to their academic success. Participants also shared experiences of inclusive learning environments where they felt valued and encouraged to share experiences with others. Participants in this study were also asked during individual interviews and focus groups to share the ways in which the university could make the college experience better. Participants shared many ways in which the institution could improve support to Hispanic undergraduate students. Participants stated the necessity of more needs-based scholarships for Hispanic students. This recommendation was followed by a desire for mentorship programs on campus for Hispanic

undergraduate students. Participants believed the university should do more with regard to community outreach, stating many Hispanics and their families do not know very much about the university. Participants described how many of their parents were not fluent in English, and they believed Spanish speaking recruiters from the university would be important in communicating with parents about admissions and financial aid processes, or academic programs offered by the institution. Participants stated a need for admissions/financial aid materials to also be available in Spanish. Participants described a lack of diversity programs on campus as evidence of the limited quality and quantity of support to all minority students. Participants believed more cultural awareness events on campus were needed.

Non-traditional students in the sample population of this study believed many factors of institutional support were very good; however more needed to be done by the university to enhance their persistence to graduation. Non-traditional students believe the transfer procedure at the university was good, especially the admissions and financial aid process. Participants felt new student orientation for transfer students was informative. Participants believed there was a limited awareness among the non-traditional student population of the many events, activities, services, and programs available on campus. Participants felt that the university website and learning management system (CANVAS) displayed information focused almost exclusively on the traditional student population. Participants described the need for more events and activities focused on connecting non-traditional student population with each other and the campus community.

Several participants described a lack of diversity programs on campus as evidence of the limited quality and quantity of support available to meet the specific needs of minority students.

They desired more culture awareness programs and events on campus. Other participants described the need for more scholarships and financial aid for Hispanics students.

Red (Graduate)

My soccer scholarship was a big part of me coming to [Triad], I knew I wanted to play soccer, that was, you know, but I had received a very good scholarship here at [Triad] to play. It was good enough where we, you know, we found that we could cover the rest of it so, that was very important. You know, I was lucky enough that I graduated without any, I guess, debt with soccer and other things. So that was very, very lucky.

Jessica (Sophomore)

Softball, getting a scholarship, that helped a lot. My parents make enough so where I don't get any financial aid, so I'm relying on loans. I take out, like, a little extra money for, like, myself also so I don't have to keep asking my parents for money. So I don't ask my parents for money often, but, like, when we talk, they're like, they're like, "Do you need anything….are you okay*?* I'd say the most important support I get is the scholarship and student loans.

Otalia (Graduate)

Honestly, my best and most memorable experiences were with my professors. I had people I talked to and I had, I made, like, one really good friend out of this whole situation, she comes over often. But my professors seem to always really care and at a time where I felt like [Triad] as an institution I didn't fit into it, I knew that in my classroom I was doing pretty good and I knew that they cared about me and I knew that they knew me by name. Like, stuff like that where you think that they don't look at you because the room's so big or they don't look at you because you're not always raising your

hand or whatever. That was my, my best experiences were in the classroom with my professors.

Emily (Senior, emigrant)

It is nice to have a counseling service on campus because they provide for them and they are free so why not utilize the service. Tutoring is a great resource because you're meeting with students that know the material that can explain the content in a different way. Academic advisors can be a useful resource depending on who you speak to. In the Bella Voce Choir, the all-women's choir here at [Triad], as well as the AMA which is the American Marketing Association in the school of Business, to back your degree up. Chapel was really influential for me and helped me maintain a positive outlook. Community is always almost a positive influence. There's Time Out, there's these free classes, There's Coffee Beans, go and be friends and go and cherish this time that you are here.

Jose (Freshman, emigrant)

The smallness of the student body allows teachers to be more personal which allows the students to succeed. How the faculty always checks in with their students to make sure they understand the content. Also motivating in the way they want their students to succeed. The attention that I would receive from faculty in regards to education, build community with the people around me.

Rachel (Junior)

Professors were readily available, willing to help, and wanted to see me succeed. The classroom size was also helpful because it helped me feel like I had more time with my professors and classmates. Study sessions also helped in improving study skills.

Professors here have taken an interest in the students. They take the time out of their day to help students succeed. My advisor has been a huge help by sending out a list of different tutors that could help business statistics class. The financial aid office and the business office were very helpful when I first started school. It was nice to connect with someone there, ask them questions when possible, and even go to the office itself.

Karla (Junior, emigrant)

The fact that the professors are easy to contact, and are there for the students' well-being. They are invested in your learning and are understanding. My advisor, the library and all the things they offer online are helpful in my academic experience. Having the access to the resources that the library provides have been helpful in completing assignments. Also, being able to access the resources online has been very helpful.

Reflection and reflexivity.

I would describe myself as very outgoing. It has always been easy for me to make friends. I didn't feel like I needed a lot of institutional support with regard to meeting other students on campus. My challenge often times was I just didn't have the time to meet other people since I worked part-time, lived off campus, and was struggling to keep up academically. I feel like I missed out on the college experience because I never lived in the dorms. Over time, I did make many friends on campus and got to check out social activities and dorm life .My interactions and experiences inside and outside the classroom with faculty and staff at the university I attended were much different than the ones described by the participants in this study. The quality of these interactions were heavily influenced by the large student population, in excess of 15,000, going to school full time on campus. This was evident in student to teacher ratios which in some cases were 300:1. The large student population impacted the quality and

quantity of support provided by the university. Students had to compete for limited resources such as student parking spaces on campus. As a commuter student, student parking was a critical factor for me each day. Often, the only student parking spaces I could find were approximately a 20 minute walk to class. The computer lab at the university was a first come-first serve. Students were limited to only one hour at a time on a computer work station. The campus tutoring center was disappointing, had inadequate hours of operation, and a limited number of tutors were available.

Family Support.

The previous literature and research provided evidence that family support played an important role in a Hispanic undergraduate's adjustment to college and subsequent academic success (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Participants described family support as a primary source of motivation and a powerful influence to their aspirations in achieving academic goals. Six of the nineteen participants came from single parent families where single mothers served as head of the household. Seven of the participants in this study came from households where grandparents resided in the family unit. Fourteen of the nineteen participants in this study described limited family financial support was provided to them during their time in college and relied on student loans and part-time employment to fund their education. Two participants in this study had their education fully funded by their family. Two participants received fully funded athletic scholarships to pay for college tuition and other expenses (room/board). Descriptions such as "family is everything" and "nothing is more important than family" were used by participants communicating the importance of family to their success in college. Participants described family values with the terms respect, integrity, loyalty, and hard work.

Otalia (Graduated)

I always wanted to go to college, it was just that there wasn't really…my mom would freak out if I went to hair school, not that that's bad because I love hair and I love makeup and that would be great, but she, her exact words were, "You, you know, you need to go to school." So that was fine for me because college, I've, you know, that sounds like fun, so I had made a couple other decisions before coming here, wanted to, but my parents didn't well, my mom didn't want me to leave, so she kind of forced me come here to the university because she didn't want me to go to the state college and live there, she didn't want me to go other state university either, she wanted me to stay at home and go here. And then she, you know, heard it was a really good school and so she's like, "if I can, you know, get you through this school, this is where I want you to go. And if I'm going to be helping you pay, then I should get to choose where you get to go." So, can't argue with that, so came here and everyone was really supportive except for my aunt that actually opened up the restaurants. She was, she didn't understand why girls go to college, that you didn't need to go to college or something like that which I thought was dumb because, I mean, I wasn't going to open up a restaurant, so I didn't, you know. And I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I figured this would be a good time to kind of figure it out and my parents were really supportive. My aunt on the other hand, she was just kind of waiting, what is she going to do, you know, is it that hard or whatever, and then my brother came here and my cousin's here now and now my brother.

Juan (Senior)

Most of my family, I guess, that didn't even graduate high school, even my cousins that were born and raised here, I don't think…not one of them graduate from college, I mean some got their GED, but…I mean from high school. Some got their GED, but most of

them didn't even do that, just dropped out and ended up having kids at the age of seventeen, eighteen, sixteen, and yea, I just wanted to make a difference. I think the only reason why I made those decisions or this decision to come here is because of the influence my mom had on me and her support

Red (Graduate)

Well, you know, my dad, I wouldn't say he was against it, but at the same time, he believed very strongly that I could go straight into the family business without going to college and, you know, make, be well-off, I guess, and helping him with the business. So he wasn't against it, like I said, but he kind of saw, he kind of tried to talk me into helping him with the business. But my mother was very supportive of me, they both wanted me to, I guess, pursue a higher education.

Jose (Freshman, emigrant)

They, well, my parents always wanted me to go to college in the United States, they always pushed forward for me to be the best that I could. And then, they gave me little incentives and when I did, when I had a good grade report, they have me little extra money to eat at the cafeteria and stuff like that. But yea, they were always pushing me to do better, like, I got B's, they said, like, "you can do better than this…you're better than that…I want you to get A's because" they're like, "you weren't born to be average."

Jessica (Sophomore)

My parents both think education is a very big deal. My mom, yea, she, my grandma is also a nurse and I feel like she put it in my mom's mind to, like, further her education and my mom, like, worked hard to become a nurse while she had me. Like, while I was

growing up, like, obviously nursing's not easy and she did it with a baby. And I think

that's what, like, inspired me to, like, want to be a nurse.

Rachel (Junior)

So I have huge support system, which has been really nice because it's been, there's been

days where it's really trying. My mom has been a huge encouragement and she always

reminds me that, "you know, I have, I was working full-time, I was a full-time student, I

had your sister, I had you at home, and if I can do all of that, I know that you can do that

with your status." My friends have been a huge support as well, my girlfriend has, there's

just a lot of people that are willing to help me in any way to see me succeed.

Emily (Senior, emigrant)

I don't think I needed a lot of support to go to school, I think to continue to be in school is

the major thing that I would have needed support in. And the main thing, my mom, my

siblings, they weren't against me going to college, they were sort of, not...a little but more

towards the envious side because my siblings did not work hard in high school like I did.

I was a four-point-two student, I did really well on my ACT and I committed my life to

my journey to go to college and so I remember when I graduated high school, my mom

was definitely proud, she was, I think, but because of the hard work I've done, she'd be

proud of that and she knew that I was going to do something better with my life and she

was okay with it and she was like "Yea, go ahead, I'm proud of you," but not really

anything more than that. She didn't really care about the fact that I went off to college or

about what I was going to major in or what I was going to do; just the fact that I was

doing something different was enough.

Reflection and reflexivity.

Some of the participants in this study reported feeling isolated from immediate family, especially those who were attending Triad University as an out of state student. Others shared their decisions for attending Triad University was because of the proximity to home and family. My decision to attend a public 4 year university was largely driven by proximity and the desire to live at home. I really did have a strong desire to live in the dorms; however, I felt I needed to remain living at home with my family. Defining persistence within the context of family was interesting because family can be a primary source of motivation to remain in college or depart the university without earning a degree as this study revealed. In this study, the participants who left the university before achieving their academic goals, myself included, did so out of a committed to care for a family member. Several of the participants in this study shared experiences of juggling family responsibilities with work and college. My entire academic journey to date, from earning Bachelors to a Doctorate, was while juggling family responsibilities with work and college. I was not married during my undergraduate years in college; however, I did have commitments to care for my mother and siblings. At the time of this study, I was a full-time PhD student and member of the staff at Triad University. My wife was serving as an associate professor at Triad University and my daughter was a sophomore on campus as well. I feel like I see them more around campus than I do at home sometimes.

Supportive relationships.

Participants described several forms of supportive relationships that were sources of motivation for them to achieve their academic goals and strengthen commitments to the institution. Family support, mentors, peers, faculty, and staff contributed provided encouragement and support. Several participants described experiences of supportive

relationships ranging from study sessions with fellow athletes, roommates, and friends from outside the university. Non-traditional students in the sample described feelings of isolation or awkward moments interacting with younger traditional students.

Jessica (Sophomore, athlete)

> I feel like my teammates are my family, you're a team and we, like, do stuff together, like, whether it's just, like, are you going to the library after practice to do homework or do you want to, like, come to my dorm and watch a movie. I like how they have, like, a lot of activities to do, like, whereas my last school I feel like we didn't have, like, just, like, activities, like, trying to get the whole school involved like this school does.

Otalia (Graduate)

> I really didn't have a social experience here. I don't even know if I ever did, to be honest. I didn't live on campus so I didn't really know anybody and the kids already, you could tell that they knew each other and I was really thrown off because I didn't understand how they already knew each other so well. And it got to the point where I wouldn't even try because I was like, well everyone's already friends, this is awkward, how am I going to just introduce myself? And I'm an extrovert, like, I'm not very shy, but it was just really awkward for me to, like approach people that I didn't know at all and that already had, like, their groups. So, I mean, obviously I would talk to, you know, people next to me or whatever but it wasn't a friendship and I'd leave class and I'd go home or I'd go to my friend's house that I went to high school with or I would do anything to not be here, you know, because I didn't have anybody to hang out with.

Reflections and reflexivity.

Several of the participants in this study did not live on campus during their time in college due to a variety of reasons. As a former commuter student, it was easy for me to relate to the experiences shared by Otalia (graduate) and other participants in this study who lived off campus. Although several of the friends I went to high school with attended the same public university I hardly ever saw them on a campus of twenty-five thousand students. The public university I attended did not have many formal programs or activities which would have helped me to connect to the larger campus community. Just like the participants in this study, I had to seek out supportive faculty and staff as well as engage with others inside/outside the classroom. The results of my efforts were very different than the participants in this study. Participants in this study described finding supportive faculty, staff, small class sizes, and inclusive learning environments. During my freshman year I often found myself sitting in huge lecture halls along with three hundred other students. Often my academic advisor was too busy to make time for me or overwhelmed with the responsibility of assisting other students. It is important for institutions to ensure faculty and staff possess interpersonal communication skills and cultural sensitivity necessary for the effective and efficient interactions with diverse student populations.

At times, I felt lost. Many days the only encouragement I received were from my mother or girlfriend. I am quickly reminded of the experiences shared by Jessica (sophomore/transfer/athlete) and the Cornerstone class she completed at Triad University. "I felt like I learned a lot about the university culture…how to set up your values for what you think is important. I felt like this school cared about students more than the previous college I attended."

Eventually, I developed a support system comprised of faculty mentors, a few staff (financial aid office primarily), Army ROTC, my family, and off campus religious activities

(church/bible study). It was not easy. Often, it was only through sheer determination and will to persist that I kept going.

Research Question #3: What were the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, including their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

Themes: Family Background, Motivation, Institutional Support, External Pressure.

Bean and Eaton (2001) defined a student who departs a university before achieving their academic goals as "a student who enters a college or a university with the intention of graduating, and due to the personal or institutions shortcomings, leaves school for an extended period of time, does not return to the original, or any other school" (p. 2). Identifying the reasons why a student departs the university is an important piece of the retention puzzle. Three of the participants in this study departed the university before achieving their academic goals. One of the participants, Rachel, returned to the university after a seven year absence to complete her degree. Participants revealed family medical issues, family separation, and financial challenges were among the external factors impacting their academic goals during their time enrolled as a full-time student at the university. Participants described similar family background experiences, sources of motivation, and aspirations for earning a college degree at the university. Participants communicated varying degrees of religious faith. Participants stated that family support played a major role in their educational journey. Each participant described difficulties in making the transition from high school to college. Perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support available to them during their time in college varied among participants. Participants described experiences of caring professors, supportive staff, and plentiful student activities as meaningful in their academic journey. One participant noted limited financial aid, a lack of

diversity programs on campus, and uncaring advisors as experiences impacting their perception of the quality of college support factors available during their time in college. Rather than present my findings to Research Question#3 by focusing on each emerging theme individually, I offer a more holistic descriptive narrative of three participants in this study who departed the university before earning a degree.

Rachel (Junior, left university, then returned)

> I was in the nursing program because I just felt like nursing was the way to go. My mom was a nurse. And my grandma, we were her little nurses, and just when anyone was sick in the family that's what we did, we just helped them. And also when I was in high school, I got my CNA, my certified nursing assistant. So I just figured it was the right track to go into nursing. I remember, I think it was maybe a month or two before I started school, but I got a letter in the mail that this is going to be your roommate, here's her e-mail, here's her info, you guys should get to know each other, come up with, like, if you guys are going to do a microwave, just different things like that since we'd be living together. And I thought, my thought was just, *"oh my gosh, this is really happening, you know, I'm really going to school."*

> The transition to college was really hard for me. I lived on campus here for two years and it's kind of funny that I only move five minutes away from my mom's house. And it was really hard for me to do, I went home every night for dinner, I was always on the phone with them, you would have thought I moved across the world with how sad I was about it. In transitioning here to the University, it was really difficult because I was very shy, I just felt so, I don't know, just, it was a lot. The most important to me is the fact that the professors have taken an interest in their students. Professors were readily

available. They took time out of their day when they're already working a large amount of hours a week. They were very willing to help me; they wanted to see me succeed. And I loved how small the classroom size was. And I think it helped me have more time with the professors and even my classmates and, you know, we would do study sessions, we would do different things and it really helped me with studying.

I remember the ice cream social, I remember going to that. And that's actually where I met one of my best friends at. We really connected just right off the bat and then I met a few more of her friends and we formed a friendship and it was really nice, it was really nice to do that. And I remember going to the root beer fest, root beer float fest or whatever, and I met, I saw her again there and this was like day, I don't know, we'd only been here a weekend or so, and so since that time, we just really hit it off, we were like two peas in a pod and really became great friends.

I loved the nursing program, you know, I love caring for people, I love helping them, it's just, it's so rewarding in different ways. But I just didn't feel like nursing was the right thing for me and here at the University. I failed my last nursing class; it just wasn't what I wanted it to be. And at that point I was just like, I have no idea what I want to do now, I don't want to get a liberal arts degree, I don't know what I want to do now. I spoke with my advisor and she recommend I transfer to the nursing program at the community college. Hard to imagine huh...here I was a junior with a 3.0 GPA at the time and because I failed my patho class I could no longer be in the nursing program. So I left the university to work full-time.

Looking back on that now I could have just transferred all of the course work I had completed at the university [during my three years at Triad] into another major, but I

had no idea at the time that I could do that. I still have no idea why my advisor didn't tell [me] that. And I don't think a lot of people know a lot about the liberal arts degree or, you know, just different degrees there are and different professions there are and what you can get in to. I think that maybe that would have helped me, knowing that there are different things to do besides the popular, you know, professions. I came back to the university to complete degree after seven years and I am glad that I did. My motivation has always been to graduate from college.

Julio (Left the university)

When I was in first grade, I sent a letter to the president of the United States and got a letter back. That had a tremendous impact on me, inspiring me to think about what I really wanted to do when I was all grown up. No kidding…all through first grade I had dreams of being President of the United States and writing letters back to all of the school kids. Of course that didn't happen, but it's never too late right? You probably won't believe this but I had no idea where the university was located, I mean, I guess I could name the state, but I had never been outside California, wait, I guess Mexico counts right? I took a tour of the university because with some of my friends in the youth group at church. I really liked the feel of the campus, but to be honest, it was the only university I had ever visited. I really thought everyone was so friendly. I filled out an application right there and finished the rest as soon as I got home. I thought my parents would freak when I told them the cost. My parents have always been so supportive. Neither my mom nor dad ever made it to high school. I didn't think there was ever anyway I could afford to go since it's so very expensive but I got grants and loans. I was only there a year and a half. First semester was awesome. I really like the freshman orientation and all the stuff

they had going on like time out. I met a ton of new people in the dorm but it was really difficult adjusting to the homework and reading. Man it's not like high school where you can just do it all the night before. My first year I didn't do so well in a couple of classes and then it got a little worse after that…I don't really want to go into all of that right now ok...but it had mostly to do with my dad getting sick. It just was getting to be too hard back home…my mom really needed me to come back home and help her take care of dad and everything else…I really liked the university and hated to leave. I felt like I was getting closer to God and getting things figured out, but to me, nothing is more important than family, family comes first. I have been taking classes at the community college since I left…almost enough for a degree. I am planning to finish it up (college degree) while I am in the Army. I leave for basic training later this summer.

Patricio (Left the university)

Looking back at everything now I realize that I just wasn't ready for college. My first semester, I think I did okay. I know I could have done a lot better in some of my classes. I think I underestimated how hard it was going to be and probably wasn't trying as hard as I could at first. Totally my fault; maybe [I] was having a little bit too much fun, I don't know. I would do the reading and the homework. I was taking engineering, chemistry, algebra all at the same time in my first semester. Maybe that was a mistake, I don't know. I wasn't expecting it to be easy...but, it was like, a serious eye opener for me. I tried a tutor a few times. I really liked my first tutor. She was really good and could explain things in a way I could understand, but my second one was no help at all. I don't know...maybe it was we just couldn't communicate very well with each other...I would say "I am not getting it" and he would just keep going. I came home over the Christmas

break feeling a little bit defeated and then was notified I was on academic warning; it just

stressed me out. The second semester I tried changing my study habits, meeting with

study groups...probably something I should have done a lot earlier. Study groups, they are

like these little tribes, especially in engineering; you got to earn your way in. No one

wants someone that is failing the class in their study group. That's the way I felt anyway.

I think I failed three of my classes and almost a fourth one if I am remembering correctly.

My advice to the new students, don't pile too much on the plate at once during the first

semester and don't wait until it's too late to ask for help.

Reflections and reflexivity.

Similar to Patricio and Julio, I too departed the university attended without achieving my

educational goals so that I could take care of my family. In my case it was my brother and sisters

after my mother passed away with cancer. Like Patricio and Julio, I committed to going back to

the university from which I had departed as soon as the conditions permitted. For me, I was able

to return less than a year from when I had left. It has been several years now since Julio departed

Triad University. Rachel came back to school after a seven year absence. Did we defy the odds,

or were we just lucky? How could we use our experiences to help others? In my efforts to

connect my departure decision to that of Patricio, Rachel, and Julio I applied Tinto's (1993)

Theory of Student Departure as an analytical lens in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of

the factors impacting the decision to leave the university before earning a college degree. I also

turned to the research findings of Marti (2008), who claimed Hispanic undergraduate students

depart the university before achieving their academic goals for a variety of reasons: inability to

pay tuition, challenges with the institution, or family obligations. At the time Rachel departed the

university, she had just completed almost 3 full years of college. Her reasons for departing the

university was directly related her inability to meet one of the requirements for continuing in the nursing (she did not earn a letter grade of "C" in a required class). Her nursing advisor recommended that she transfer to a community college. In Rachel's mind, she did not fail; however she believed that the institution perceived her as a failure.

Tinto (1993) cautioned educators against defining departure in ways which contradicted a student's understanding of the reasons why they dropped out of college. The literature and previous research provided evidence that a student's participation in higher education is voluntary and based on multitude of factors (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Huratado, 2002; Kuh, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini; 2005, & Tinto, 1993). Many institutions and retention models describe the concept of persistence as the continued enrollment over time. Fortunately, Rachel came back to school after a seven year absence. She acknowledged the value of a college education and the positive benefits of earning a degree. I made the decision to come back to college because I recognized that earning a degree was a pathway toward greater opportunity and quality of life. Julio has been taking classes at a local community college and after earning an Associate's degree hopes to transfer to a 4 year public university in California. The examples of Julio and Rachel demonstrated that defining persistence is not a simple task partly because each of these students did not permanently give up their studies. Persistence in their case varied depending on the context and circumstances of their departure and return to college.

Summary

In this chapter, the educational journeys of 19 current and former Hispanic, undergraduate students at a private, Christian university were organized and described using the participants' own voices. The participants in this study represented a diverse sample varying in age, gender, language, socioeconomic level, and family structure. This chapter gave voice to a

population group often identified in the research literature as marginalized or underrepresented in the discourse of student retention in higher education. The data collected from this study through individual interviews, focus groups, and researcher reflections and reflexivity revealed how participants at a private, Christian university described their educational journey. Each of the narratives, including my own, provided detailed personal accounts of lived experiences, interactions, and events. While each narrative was unique, together they provided a portrait of a larger story of persistence and retention of 19 participants at a private, Christian university. Each of their voices not only provided a deeper insight and closer look into their lives and experiences, but also broader understanding of patterns and emerging themes across all participants in this study.

The participants in this study described the importance of family, motivation to persist, institutional support, supportive relationships, and external pressures as elements impacting success in achieving their academic goals in college. These themes point toward a connection between a student's family background, individual skills and abilities, and pre-college academic readiness to the development of initial academic goals and commitment to earn a college degree. The theme of family background described the value and impact family support had on motivation to accomplish the academic goal of earning a college degree. Family background was described by participants as a motivating factor in in their educational journey. Motivation was a theme describing the determination and will to act despite hardships and burdens. The transition to college was a theme describing the challenges and struggles participants experienced in formal and informal academic and social systems of the university. Institutional support and supportive relationships were also key themes emerging from the participant's experiences, interactions, and beliefs. Participants described positive faculty interactions (in class and outside of the

classroom), supportive staff, academic advising, an academic skills center, and campus resources as important to their academic success. Participants also shared experiences of inclusive learning environments where they felt valued and encouraged to share experiences with others. External pressures were an emerging theme across all participants. Participants described experiences of external pressures such as, family commitments, employment demands, financial challenges, and family medical issues as challenging pull factors impacting persistence to graduation.

Chapter V

Discussion

In the previous chapter I discussed the underlying themes from this study using descriptive autoethnography and narrative inquiry to tell the story of Hispanic undergraduate retention at a private, Christian university. This chapter focuses on the interpretations and concepts associated with the research findings of this study as they relate to the literature and theoretical framework. A summary of the research results is presented, followed by a discussion of the limitations, conclusions, recommendations for future research, implications for professional practice, and final thoughts.

Policy makers, researchers, educators, employers, students, and families represent a multitude of stake holder groups in the US which have a long standing interest in the study of student retention. The literature provided evidence that student retention in general is considered a complex human behavior. Adding to the complex nature of student retention is the ever changing landscape of higher education, due in large part to the growth of minority student enrollment on college campuses. The Hispanic population in the United States is the fastest growing minority group and will comprise an increasing percentage of the U.S. population in the foreseeable future. While notable gains have been made in increasing the number of Hispanic students graduating from high school and going on to higher education, little progress has been made in increasing the college graduation rate of this group (Pew Research Center, 2015). In order for the United States to achieve its college degree attainment goals, more progress is required in increasing the college graduation rates for all student populations, particularly Hispanics (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Multiple studies have determined diversity matters in college, emphasizing the importance for institutions to acknowledge the fact all students do not experience higher education in the same way. The literature provided evidence that students enter college with diverse family backgrounds, individual attributes, and varying levels of pre-college academic readiness impacting their persistence and institution retention efforts. Universities seeking to increase undergraduate Hispanic retention are faced with the tasks of preparing Hispanic students for the acquisition and application of knowledge while being mindful of the cultural experiences and values they bring to the learning environment and campus community. In order for institutions to fully commit to the implementation of policies and programs to increase Hispanic undergraduate retention, it was imperative to better understand what Hispanic students considered to be meaningful experiences and contributing factors that have impacted their persistence in college.

The purpose of this study was to explore the background factors, characteristics, and lived experiences of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students of a private, Christian university while integrating Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure as a theoretical framework to answer the following research questions:

1. What background characteristics such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

2. What personal experiences and institutional support factors were important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?

3. What were the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, including their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

Summary of Results

This study explored the experiences of a sample composed of 19 current and former students of a private, Christian university. Participants in this study were recruited through a purposeful sampling strategy. This process facilitated the identification of students who self-identified as Hispanic and were willing to discuss their experiences, interactions, and factors impacting achievement of their academic goals. A purposeful sampling strategy also allowed me to include multiple perspectives from freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, as well as graduates and former students who left the university without completing a degree. The participants in this study were 19 current and former undergraduate, full-time Hispanic students of Triad University during the period of 2008 to 2016. Seven of the participants were male and 12 of the participants were female, ranging in ages from 19 to 51 years old. Two of the female participants, and one male participant were born outside the US. The sample population comprised two freshman, three sophomores, five juniors, four seniors, three students who graduated, and two students who departed the university before earning a degree. Six of the participants were transfer students from other colleges and universities. Three of the participants were student athletes and members of the university varsity athletic programs during their time in college.

Data collection was composed of a demographic survey, semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions, and researcher journal. Participants each shared their stories, experiences, and factors they believed impacted their ability to achieve success in college. Data analysis

consisted of open and thematic coding, integrating both inductive and deductive approaches to reduce the data sets into categories and themes relating to student retention. The emerging themes from this study were family background, family support, supportive relationships, motivation, religion, aspirations, transition, institutional support, and external pressures.

The participants in this study described the importance of family, motivation to persist, institutional support, supportive relationships, and external pressures as elements impacting success in achieving their academic goals in college. These themes point toward a connection between a student's family background, individual skills and abilities, and pre-college academic readiness as they relate to the development of initial academic goals and commitments to earn a college degree. The themes describe interactions which took place among students in the sample population, peers, family members, faculty, and staff at the institutional level during their time in college as important in their retention and success in college. Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure provided a theoretical framework for exploring Hispanic undergraduate retention from the perspective of student experiences, student's pre-entry attributes, goals/commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and external pressures they may have faced during their time in college. Narrative inquirers writing autoethnographically vary in the degree to which they include themselves as a central character of a story. These research findings provided a highly personalized narrative, blending together multiple experiences, situations, and identities into a description of the educational journey of the researcher and a sample population of current and former Hispanic undergraduate students of a private, Christian university.

Family Background.

The research literature provided evidence that the environment in which Hispanic students were raised influenced the issues they might face during their time in college. The

following family background factors and characteristics were analyzed: parent's level of education, country of origin, beliefs, values, language, family support, student's pre-college academic readiness, and income level. Participants communicated experiences within the family unit which they described as powerful influencers in their educational journey. Three of the 19 participants were born outside of the United States. The remaining 16 participants were born in the United States. Twelve of the 19 participants in this study were first generation college students. Five of the participants had parents who did not progress beyond the 6th grade. Seven of the participants had parents who attended college but never graduated. Only two participants had parents who were college graduates. Fourteen of the 19 participants described their family income level as falling within the lower socioeconomic category. The remaining five participants stated their family income level fell within the middle class socioeconomic tier. The cumulative high school GPA of the participants in this study was 3.41.

Motivation.

 Previous research literature claimed a student's motivation was shaped by many factors such as ethnicity, family, religion, access to college, educational aspirations, individual attributes, institutional support, supportive relationships, and individual achievement (Liem et al., 2012; Lopez, 2007). In this study, participants described sources of motivation consistent with previous research conducted. Among the many sources of motivation described by participants, family and internal desire were described as the primary sources impacting students' motivation to persist in college.

In previous research focused on Hispanic college student success, Lopez (2007) found that motivation was a critical factor in student persistence. All 19 participants in this study valued their education and were motivated by the belief that a college degree was a pathway

toward greater opportunity. Participants were motivated by their academic skills and abilities, as evidenced by an average 3.4 cumulative high schools GPA, and they believed they had what it took to successfully tackle the academic rigors of college. Seventeen of the 19 participants in this study were motivated by a desire to earn a college degree as a way to honor the hard work and sacrifices made by their parents. Twelve of the participants in this study believed the motivation to be the first in their family to go to college directly contributed to their persistence. Thirteen of the participants were motivated by a desire to serve as a role model for others. Seventeen of the 19 participants described their sources of motivation were family, a belief in God, and a never quit attitude.

Religion.

Hernandez (2005) argued religion is a highly personal choice, it can also be considered as a key component of cultural identity given the religious values, teachings, and observances that shape beliefs and perceptions about a culture. This study explored how significant a role the faith-based nature of the institution played in a participant's decision to pursue a degree at Triad University. In this study, participants described religion and faith as having varying degrees of impact to their decision to attend Triad and achieve their academic goals. Ten of the 19 participants described religion as a primary factor in their decision to attend the university. Seventeen of the 19 participants believed that they grew in their faith during their time in college. Five of the 19 participants shared experiences of Bible study and believed time spent with others in prayer and scripture help them grow stronger in their faith.

Seven of the 19 participants shared how much chapel services have helped them reconnect with God and grow in their faith. Three of the participants described how much they enjoyed the way chapel services sometimes focused on larger social issues.

Transition.

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure provided a framework for exploring a relationship between a student's family background, individual attributes, pre-college academic readiness, external influences, and institutional factors impacting a student's transition to college. All 19 participants described the transition to college, whether from high school or transferring from another institution, as challenging in numerous ways. Adjusting to the academic rigors of the university, time management, separation from family, faith, accountability, and residential life were shared by participants as factors impacting the transition to college. Traditional students in this study expected the college to be more demanding than high school; many, however, underestimated the amount of time that would be required to complete assigned reading and homework. This study revealed that not all non-traditional students experienced the transition to college in the same way.

Institutional Support.

The university environment is composed of a campus support network of academic programs, student support services, and facilities to support students in their educational journey. In this study, participants were asked to describe college support factors have been the most helpful to them during their time here at the university and what things the university could do to make their experience at Triad University better. Sixteen of the 19 participants believed chapel services, the new university library, new student orientation, and experiences in the classroom were the most helpful to them during their time in college.

All 19 participants described friendly and supportive faculty and staff as important to their academic success. Five of the participants were transfer students who described feeling isolated or disconnected from the campus community, or having challenges breaking into

existing friendship circles. Three participants lived off of campus and described feeling like they missed opportunities in integrating into the social environment of the university. One participant shared mixed feelings about the quality of tutoring he received from the study skills center. One participant shared disappointment with the poor academic advising which led them to depart the university prior to achieving their academic goals.

Participants shared many ways in which the institution could improve support to Hispanic undergraduate students. Participants stated the necessity of more needs-based scholarships for Hispanic students. This recommendation was followed by a desire for mentorship programs on campus for Hispanic undergraduate students. Participants believed the university should do more with regard to community outreach, stating many Hispanics and their families do not know very much about the university. Participants described how many of their parents were not fluent in English, and they believed Spanish speaking recruiters from the university would be important in communicating with parents about admissions and financial aid processes, or academic programs offered by the institution. Participants stated a need for admissions/financial aid materials to also be available in Spanish. Participants described a lack of diversity programs on campus as evidence of the limited quality and quantity of support to all minority students. Participants believed more cultural awareness events on campus were needed.

Non-traditional students in the sample population of this study believed many factors of institutional support were very good; however more needed to be done by the university to enhance their persistence to graduation. Non-traditional students believe the transfer procedure at the university was good, especially the admissions and financial aid process. Participants felt new student orientation for transfer students was informative. Participants believed there was a limited awareness among the non-traditional student population of the many events, activities,

services, and programs available on campus. Participants felt that the university website and learning management system (CANVAS) displayed information focused almost exclusively on the traditional student population. Participants described the need for more events and activities focused on connecting non-traditional student population with each other and the campus community.

Family Support.

The literature and previous research provided evidence that family support is a primary factor in a student's emotional and academic adjustment to the university and achieving their academic goals. Hispanic students are underrepresented on college campuses; therefore, support from family was described as extremely important in a participant's educational journey across all members of the sample in this study. Family support comes in many forms. All 19 participants described emotional, financial, and religious support from family as important factors in their achieving their academic goals. This study revealed that participants considered family, both immediate and extended (aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins), as the most important factor in their persistence. Non-traditional students descried family support as critical in their ability to balance a multitude of demands while focusing on academics.

Supportive Relationships.

Torres (2003) provided evidence that supportive relationships such as positive interactions with faculty, staff, family, and peers played an important role in a student's educational journey. All 19 participants described experiences of being separated from family, leaving friends they had in high school, forming new social relationships, and the positive influence of faculty and staff as important factors in their educational journey, although, not always easy. One participant described challenges he encountered seeking supportive

relationships though study groups. Three of the participants (Jessica, Red, and Raquel) in this study were student athletes and shared numerous experiences of the supportive relationships shared with coaches and team mates. Alicia (junior/transfer) shared experiences of supportive relationships with professors and peers. Jessica (sophomore/transfer/athlete) provided multiple perspectives from a transfer and student athlete point of view about the university culture at Triad compared to other schools she had attended.

External Pressures.

For the purposes of this study, external pressures were identified as factors impacting student persistence that were beyond a universities ability to control. All 19 participants in this study described a variety of external factors such as employment demands, financial challenges, proximity, family commitments, and medical issues as significant pressures impacting persistence. Twelve of the participants worked off campus at various periods during his/her time in college and shared experiences of challenges, opportunities, and impacts to persistence. Two of the participants, Patricio (freshman) and Julio (sophomore) in this study who departed the university before earning a degree shared experiences of external influences (family medical issues) leading to their decision to withdraw from college.

Summary

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research findings of this study. First, the topic of student retention is a complex longitudinal process impacted by a multitude of institutional factors, external influences, family background characteristics, and student attributes. The experiences described by participants have revealed multifaceted and complex barriers, obstacles, challenges, and successes regarding their educational journey. Consistent with previous research, this study revealed eight themes impacting student persistence: family

background, motivation, religion, transition, institutional support, family support, supportive

relationships, and external influences. This study provided evidence that the cultural beliefs,

values, and experiences converge with the cultural elements of the university in a way indicating

connections between students and institution as important determinates of student success. The

ability of the university to effectively engage with and retain Hispanic students may be a

function of a broad and supportive network of persons dedicated to the success of minority

students throughout the university. This study provided evidence that supportive relationships

with both agents of the institution and sources external to the university played a major role in a

participant's educational journey.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study provided a basis for multiple follow up studies to further examine Hispanic

undergraduate retention at this university and other institutions. The intent of each of the

recommended studies below is to inform university administrators of effective strategies

promoting both academic and social engagement that will ultimately lead to persistence to

graduation of Hispanic undergraduate students. Based on my experiences conducting this study

and knowledge gained from the research process, the following recommendations are provided

for future studies on the topic of Hispanic undergraduate retention:

1. Conduct a comparative analysis of 1st year to 2nd year retention programs of public and

private universities in order to determine if there is a difference in the institutional support,

environmental, academic, and social factors impacting retention rates for Hispanic undergraduate

students. The study should include an institutional demographic overview and programmatic

variable analysis of first year retention programs, such as residential life (how room mates are

assigned), new student orientation, early warning/academic alert processes, intervention

strategies, and exit interview systems. The research outcomes may provide insight into which first year programs are effective in the retention of Hispanic undergraduate students and the reasons why. The research findings may help to inform university administrators of the effectiveness of other student retention programs and ways to refine services essential in strengthening the persistence of Hispanic undergraduate students.

2. Conduct an explanatory study to identify variables predictive of degree completion among Hispanic undergraduates at Triad University. It would be important to create a research design using quantitative methods to collect historical data sets (pre-college) and first semester data to identify significant variables which are predictive of undergraduate Hispanic student graduation.

3. Conduct a qualitative descriptive study exploring Hispanic, undergraduate non-traditional students' persistence to college graduation at Triad University. Non-traditional students in this study described feeling isolated or disconnected from the university.

4. Conduct an exploratory study to examine whether Hispanic undergraduate first time freshman transition experiences at private and public universities can be linked to student persistence.

Implications for Professional Practice

The literature and previous research provided evidence that specific factors affecting student persistence and retention vary among private and public institutions, and according to the family background, ethnicity, age, and gender of a student. The results of this study provided insight into many background variables, including a multitude of organizational, academic, social, and environmental factors which were important in the persistence and retention of a diverse sample of traditional and non-traditional Hispanic students. While these findings cannot

be generalized to larger student populations at Triad University or similar groups at other college campuses, they do have many implications for policy, programs, and professional practice.

This study found that many participants came from low income families and were among the first in their family to go to college. Previous research suggested that students whose parents never attended college had little guidance in navigating the admissions and financial aid process. Many of the participant's parents did not speak fluent English. In the Hispanic culture, college choice is often a family decision. Institutions need to find ways to provide information and assistance to parents and families with limited English fluency regarding an array of services and support programs provided by the university, including how to complete the college application and financial aid process. Previous research suggested that finding ways to pay for college was a primary concern for Hispanic families. Institutions should find ways for offering Spanish speaking families opportunities to attend college informational sessions such as FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) workshops.

Participants in this study shared experiences of uncertainty about how they might be accepted by others at a predominately white, Christian university. The literature and research pointed out that Hispanic faculty often serve as "cultural brokers" and aid in a Hispanic student's transition and integration into the social and academic systems of the campus environment. Participants in this study noted an underrepresentation of Spanish-speaking, Hispanic faculty and staff on campus. The institution should consider hiring qualified Hispanic faculty and staff and developing culturally proficient faculty as a way of playing a great role in promoting student success.

Participants in this study represented traditional and non-traditional Hispanic undergraduate students, each with different family backgrounds, religious beliefs, levels of pre-

college academic readiness, and socioeconomic status. This study revealed that participants did not experience college in the same way. Traditional students described family separation, difficulty in making new friends, and challenges adjusting to the social and academic environment of the university. Participants described many programs and services that were important in strengthening their motivation and commitment, such as new student orientation, freshman retreat, peer-mentors, and a first semester Cornerstone course. Other services, such as the counseling center, tutoring, career center, access to computers, Wi-Fi, printers, and the Learning Management System (CANVAS), were also viewed by participants as important factors impacting their persistence and retention. Chapel services and Bible study were described by many participants as critical to their motivation and commitment to persist. These programs and services should be continued and expanded in order to provide continuity to the policies that result in student retention.

Non-traditional students in the sample population lived off campus and described feeling isolated or disconnected from the university. Many non-traditional students did not know about existing services or available support. Similar to the peer-mentor group program for traditional students, the university should consider creating peer-groups and mentors for the non-traditional population. These peer groups can assist non-traditional students by providing an on-going support system for creating awareness of available campus resources and activities. Many participants worked off campus during their time in college. The institution should consider ways in which students might obtain on-campus work study as an alternative to part-time employment off campus.

The research findings provide evidence of the need for a more comprehensive, multi-layered, and inclusive retention program to meet the needs of both traditional and non-traditional

Hispanic students. Many departments on a college campus provide different services of support to students, such as financial aid, counseling, tutoring, the registrar, and student services. The findings from this research study could assist these departments, along with many others on campus, in assessing the quality and quantity of retention programs already in place.

Participants communicated a need for the institution to host more cultural celebrations and lecture series focused on topics such as immigration and other diversity issues. The university should establish a multicultural office for the purposes of creating and sustaining a program providing for cultural awareness events and activities such as cultural heritage celebrations. The office could serve as a focal point for coordinating events such as workshops, seminars, and lecture series focused on diversity issues or multicultural themes.

Students who departed the university before achieving their academic goals described themselves as unprepared for the academic rigor of the university. Each of these students was among their first in their families to go to college and worked off campus during their time at the university. University faculty and staff identified their academic struggles at the mid-term point and at the end of the first semester of their freshman years. Despite intervention strategies to mitigate these academic difficulties, both of the students departed the university before earning their degree. Knowing why these students departed is important because the knowledge gained can help in assessing the effectiveness of early identification and intervention efforts. It is important for the university to conduct detailed exit interviews with each student who departs the university.

Several participants in the sample were student athletes. Each of these students described a system of supportive networks and programs which were important to their motivation and commitment in earning a college degree. Participants shared experiences of studying, working

out, eating meals, and attending social functions almost exclusively with other student athletes.

This supportive network was critical to the early identification of any challenges they

encountered and the timely intervention of appropriate strategies to mitigate risk to motivation

and commitment in earning a college degree. While participants described outstanding support

services and programs, they also felt like they did not extend their circle of friends beyond their

peer group of fellow athletes, or teammates, and perhaps missed opportunities to get to know

others on campus. The institution should continue to sustain the practices and programs currently

in place to promote success among student athletes while examining ways in which this

population group can more fully integrate into the campus community.

Final Thoughts

Prior to this research study, little was known about the nature of the Hispanic

undergraduate persistence and retention experience at Triad University. Consistent with Tinto's

Theory of Student Departure (1993), this study demonstrated how student retention can be

viewed as a complex human behavior occurring overtime and impacted by a multitude of factors.

The results of this study shed light on participant's perception of the importance of family as a

primary source of motivation to persist. The results of this study support Tinto's claim that there

is a connection between a student's family background, individual skills and abilities, and pre-

college academic readiness as they relate to the development of initial academic goals and

commitments to earn a college degree. Tinto (1993) argued that both the student and the

institution played an important role in the retention process. This study revealed the importance

of institutional support, supportive relationships, and external pressures as elements impacting

success in participants achieving their academic goals in college. One of my primary goals in this

research study was to give a "voice" to participants in a manner which valued their experience

and view of reality so that others might gain insight and understanding of the student retention from the perspective of those who experienced and lived it This study was only the "tip of the iceberg" for me as an educator and research practitioner. Embracing the complex challenges of Hispanic undergraduate retention at a private, Christian university was the first step in helping create and sustain environments where students don't just survive the college experience, but thrive in the process achieving their academic goals. Many of the participants in this study are continuing to write the pages of the narrative of their educational journey each day as they continue the march toward earning a college degree. Others are focused on different horizons. Regardless of the path we each walk, we are all somehow shaped or transformed from our experiences. Prior to this research study, little was known about the nature of the Hispanic undergraduate persistence and retention experience at Triad University.

Triad University is a community which subscribes to the value of transformation. I am not the same person I was two years ago when I first began this research journey. In some ways my self-view and where I reside in relationship to others in this world is much the same, yet in other ways it's very different. The concept of culture is a difficult construct to grasp. The diverse nature of the sample from this study comprised students representing various cultures and subcultures. The age difference among the participants spanned almost 30 years, across multiple generations. Self-reflection and self-examination were difficult at times as I constantly "zoomed inside and then out."

Revisiting challenging moments and events from my past and then connecting each of them to the present was very difficult for me. I am much more comfortable today than I was a couple of years ago with the complexity and messiness associated with understanding the forces that shape our character and sense of self. I feel much better prepared to participate in the

conversation and discourse of nationality, religion, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and geography. Studying the literature and maintaining a commitment to theoretical analysis greatly changed how I view the process of student retention. I have a much better understanding of why little progress has been made in increasing Hispanic college graduation rates not just at this private, Christian university, but at institutions all across the country. There is much work to be done.

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Appendix A

Research Site Approval Request Form

February 10, 2015

Robert Sanchez

7855 South Powerline Rd

Nampa, Idaho 83686

Mr. Sanchez,

Pending approval by the Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) you have my approval to conduct the research study entitled: A Phenomenological Study of Hispanic Student Retention and Departure at A Private Christian University as described. HRRC review is an important process at ███ and my approval in this letter does not in any way bypass their formal review.

Striving to serve,

(ORIGINIAL SIGNED)

Burton J. Webb, PhD

Vice President for Academic Affairs

███████████████

Appendix B

Participant Invite Letter and Email

Date _____

Dear _____,

My name is Robert Sanchez. I am a Hispanic doctoral student at ███████████████████ specializing in Educational Leadership, and I am also a staff member here at ██████. I am currently doing a research study on Hispanic undergraduate students. The purpose of the study is to capture the lived experiences of Hispanic undergraduate students at ██████ in order to gain a deeper understanding of what factors impact individual persistence and departure decisions. I will be interviewing students individually and as part of a focus group to hear what their thoughts are on the subject. The interview is expected to last approximately 30 minutes. It will take place here on the ██████ campus, and I will audio tape the session. All the contents of the tape will be kept confidential, and the real names of the students will not be used.

You have received this invitation to become an interview participant because you fit the criteria I am looking for. I am looking for Hispanic students who are currently enrolled, have graduated, or departed the university without graduating.

If you are willing to participate in the interview, please contact me by October 12, 2015 at robertsanchez@███.edu or 467-8503. Or, you can complete the information below and return this form to: Robert Sanchez, Box D-████ Campus Mail.

 By participating and sharing your ideas, you would be making a valuable contribution to the study. You would also be helping me to achieve my goal of encouraging student success at ██████.

Thank you so much for your time.

With warm regards,

Robert Sanchez

Participant Response

I accept the offer to be interviewed. I look forward to sharing my thoughts with you. Thank you!

_____   _____   _____

Signature   Telephone #   Email Address

Email Invitation to Participate in an Important Research Study

My name is Bob Sanchez, and I am a Hispanic doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership here at ███████████████████████. This is an invitation to participate in an educational research study I am conducting this fall semester here on the campus of ███████████ ████████.

I am interested in capturing the educational and life experiences of students who come from Hispanic American backgrounds. I am specifically interested in gaining a deep understanding of the background and experiences of Hispanic American undergraduate students here at the university, and how these experiences impact individual persistence and departure decisions.

I am seeking participants who are:

-full-time or former ██████ students
-at least 18 years of age
-self-identify as Hispanic

Why Participate?
• Your views are unique and worthy of being told!
• Sharing your views about your academic and social integration experiences during your time in college will help educate others about how students make decisions about college and navigate college life.
• Your story could help generate change in the university that makes the college experience better for other students like you.

What will happen in the study?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in individual and group interviews at a location of your choice here on the campus of ██████████████████████.

If you are interested in participating in this study please reply "Yes" to this email by October 12th and I will contact you.

Thank you!

Bob Sanchez, M.B.A
Doctoral Candidate, ████████████████████████
Email: robertsanchez@████.edu
Phone: 467-8503 or 202-386-0738

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

The Researcher

My name is Robert Sanchez and I am a doctoral student at ████████████

███████ (████), Nampa, Idaho. I am conducting a qualitative methods research study on the

variables and factors impacting ethnic minority student persistence, engagement, and academic

achievement.

The Research Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions and experiences, of undergraduate

Hispanic students related to persistence and departure at a private Christian university. The focus

is on Hispanic undergraduate students who enrolled at █████████████████████ (████)

during the academic years of 2010 to 2015. From the inquiry process the strategies and methods

the participants utilized to overcome challenges and persist toward earning a college degree will

determined. This study will use a qualitative approach to collect and analyze the beliefs,

opinions, and attitudes associated with the experiences of Hispanic students and Hispanic

graduates. The qualitative methods will facilitate the researcher's desire to give a voice to a

minority group often marginalized or not represented in topics of importance and significance

such as student persistence in higher education.

By studying the perspectives and experiences communicated by each participant as

he/she tells their story of their college experience, the researcher will identify not only the

common challenges and obstacles they faced, but how they overcame these obstacles and

challenges. Equally important, will be the strategies or methods Hispanic students used to

interact with the informal and formal aspects of the academic and social environment of the

college campus and how the quality of the interactions impacted persistence decisions. The identification of concerns, issues, and experiences of Hispanic students helps to inform policy makers, educators, and college administrators on ways to shape the campus environment so that students of color not just survive the college experience, but thrive in the process of walking the path toward earing a college degree. The research findings will provide valuable information for those who are charged with developing and implementing retention programs, practices, and policies that set the conditions of success for the retention and persistence for every student, to include students of color. These are the research questions guiding this study:

1. What background characteristics such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

2. What personal experiences and institutional support factors are important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?

3. What were the external factors and personal experiences of the Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, to include their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

The Methods to Meet the Purpose

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

• Interviews

• Surveys

• Focus Groups

Participant's Understanding

• I understand this study will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

researcher's degree of Doctor of Philosophy at ████ .

• I understand that my participation is voluntary.

• I understand that I will not be identified by name in this study.

• I understand that the interview session will be audio recorded

 • I understand that all records will be kept confidential, in the secure possession of the

researcher.

• I understand that all data collected will be limited to the use of this study.

• I understand that if I am a teacher, this data will not be used to evaluate my performance in any

way.

• I understand that I may withdraw from the study, at any time, without consequences. In

the event I withdraw from the study, all information I provided will be destroyed and omitted

from the final paper.

By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above

information. *I give my consent to participate in this study:*

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**

_____

THE ██████████████████████████ **HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.**

Appendix D

Confidentiality Agreement

Title of Research Project: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF HISPANIC AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE PERSISTENCE AND DEPARTURE AT A PRIVATE FAITH-BASED INSTITUTION

Local Principal Investigator:

As an assistant to the research team I understand that I may have access to confidential information about study sites and participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.

- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

- I understand that all information about study sites or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information, unless specifically authorized to do so by approved protocol or by the local principal investigator acting in response to applicable law or court order, or public health or clinical need.

- I understand that I am not to read information about study sites or participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.

- I agree to notify the local principal investigator immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

_____ _____ _____
Signature   Date   Printed name

_____ _____ _____
Signature of local principal investigator   Date   Printed name

Appendix E

Permission from Dr. Ann Watson

8/11/15

———————

You are absolutely welcome to use the interview protocol. My best wishes to you on your research!

A

Ann M. Watson, Ph.D

Director of Student Success Center

Director of Disability Services

Integrating Faith in Learning, Leading & Serving

Charleston Southern University

9200 University Boulevard

Post Office Box 118087-8087

Charleston, SC 29423

843.863.7159

843.863.8030 fax

From: Robert Sanchez [mailto:robertsanchez@nnu.edu]
Sent: Monday, August 10, 2015 4:55 PM
To: Watson, Annie <awatson@csuniv.edu>
Subject: permission to use interview questions

Dr. Watson, Good Afternoon. I am a PhD student at ███████████████████ and am seeking your permission to use your interview protocol and questionnaire from your research, Perceptions of Academic and Social Integration of First Generation College Students at Less selective private faith based university" for inclusion in my research study, " An autoethnography and qualitative examination of Hispanic student persistence and departure".

Appreciate your help and assistance.

Respectfully, Bob

Appendix F

Permissions from Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero

On Mon, Feb 1, 2016 at 6:53 AM, Arbelo Marrero, Floralba <farbelomarrero@liberty.edu>
wrote:

Good morning Robert,

It is great to know my research lives on and yes you have permission to use my interview
protocol for your own research purposes. If there is anything else that you may need, please do
not hesitate to contact me. By the way the study below was published in the Journal of Hispanic
Higher Education, here is the link, this might help as well.

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Academic Persistence of Undergraduate Hispanic
Nontraditional Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions
Arbelo-Marrero, Floralba; Milacci, Fred
Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, v15 n1 p22-40 Jan 2016

 http://eric.ed.gov/?q=source%3a%22Journal+of+Hispanic+Higher+Education%22&id=EJ1083478

Glad to be of help!

ERIC - A Phenomenological Investigation of
the Academic ...

eric.ed.gov

A Phenomenological Investigation of the
Academic Persistence of Undergraduate

Best Regards,

Floralba Arbelo Marrero, Ed.D.

From: Robert Sanchez <robertsanchez@nnu.edu>
Sent: Sunday, January 31, 2016 8:12 PM
To: Arbelo Marrero, Floralba
Subject: Permission to use interview and focus group protocol

Dr. Marrero, Good Evening, I am requesting permission to utilize your individual and group interview protocol from your dissertation titled," EXPLORING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE FOR UNDERGRADUATE HISPANIC NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS AT HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTHEAST". I am conducting similar research of Hispanic American undergraduate students here at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

I will gladly provide you with a copy of my dissertation once approved. Thank you for your support and consideration.

Very Respectfully, Bobby

Bob Sanchez
Director of Veterans Services and Multicultural Affairs
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

(Office) 208-467-8503
(Cell) 202-386-0738

Appendix G

Interview Protocol

Greeting and Introduction

• Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study, I appreciate your time.

• *Review the purpose of the study:* I am interested in learning more about the experiences of Hispanic undergraduate college students who are currently enrolled or who have attend a private faith based university .

• *Review of procedures:* I will ask you several open-ended questions related to your experiences here and ask you to answer as fully as you can. I will digitally record the interview and also make my own notes. If you wish to state something that you do not want recorded, simply tell me and I will turn off the recorder for that particular segment of our discussion. I will later transcribe the interview and send you a copy for you to review for accuracy. All personally identifiable information will be safeguarded and altered to protect your identity and privacy. In order to protect your privacy and your personal identity, for the purposes of this study-I would like you to choose a pseudonym. Please take a moment to do this now.

• Do you have any questions before we begin? May I clarify anything for you?

• Review with student Informed Consent document and obtain signatures; study participant is invited to select pseudonym.

Individual Interview Questions (Current Students)

Thank you again for your participation in this study. The first set of questions I am going to ask have to do with your background.

1. Tell me about where you were born and raised.
    (If applicable)-When did you first come to the United States?

2. Please describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up.

3. Tell me about your parent's level of education.

4. Talk to me about what support and encouragement you received from others in making your decision to go to college.

5. What else would you like to tell me about your background?

Thank you, the next questions I am going to ask you have to do with your experiences here at the university

6. What personal experiences have you had here at the universities which have had the biggest impact on you?

7. What kind of academic experiences have you had here at the universities which have had the biggest impact on you?

8. Which college support factors have been the most helpful to you during your time here at the university?

9. Why did you choose to attend *this* institution?

10. How significant was the faith-based nature of this institution in your decision to enroll here?

11. What things can the university do to make your experience here better?

12. Would you share a story with me about a challenging time or situation for you during your time here at the university?

13. This will be my final question. What else would you like to tell me about that I did not ask today?

Thank you again for your participation in this study. This concludes our time together today.

Individual Interview Questions (Former Students-Did Not Persist)

Thank you again for your participation in this study. The first set of questions I am going to ask have to do with your background.

1. Tell me about where you were born and raised.
      (If applicable)-When did you first come to the United States?

2. Please describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up.

3. Tell me about your parent's level of education.

4. Talk to me about what support and encouragement you received from others in making your decision to go to college.

5. What else would you like to tell me about your background?

Thank you, the next questions I am going to ask you have to do with your experiences here at the university

6. What personal experiences did you have at the university which had had the biggest impact on you?

7. What kind of academic experiences did you have at the university which had the biggest impact on you?

8. Which college support factors were the most helpful to you during your time at the university?

9. Why did you choose to attend *this* institution?

10. How significant was the faith-based nature of this institution in your decision to enroll here?

11. What things could the university have done to make your experience better?

12. Would you share a story with me about a challenging time or situation for you during your time at the university?

13. This will be my final question. What else would you like to tell me about that I did not ask today?

Thank you again for your participation in this study. This concludes our time together today.

Individual Interview Questions (Former Students-Those who graduated)

Thank you again for your participation in this study. The first set of questions I am going to ask have to do with your background.

1. Tell me about where you were born and raised.
     (If applicable)-When did you first come to the United States?

2. Please describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up.

3. Tell me about your parent's level of education.

4. Talk to me about what support and encouragement you received from others in making your decision to go to college.

5. What else would you like to tell me about your background?

Thank you, the next questions I am going to ask you have to do with your experiences here at the university

6. What personal experiences did you have at the university which had had the biggest impact on you?

7. What kind of academic experiences did you have at the university which had the biggest impact on you?

8. Which college support factors were the most helpful to you during your time at the university?

9. Why did you choose to attend *this* institution?

10. How significant was the faith-based nature of this institution in your decision to enroll here?

11. What things could the university have done to make your experience better?

12. Would you share a story with me about a challenging time or situation for you during your time at the university?

13. This will be my final question. What else would you like to tell me about that I did not ask today?

Thank you again for your participation in this study. This concludes our time together today.

Appendix H

Focus Group Guide

Focus group instructions:

My name is Robert Sanchez and I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. I am currently in the dissertation stage of my program and this focus group discussion is a part of my dissertation work. All reports based on this research and written by the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of individuals in the groups. Only group data will be reported and no participant names will be used.

This focus group session is expected to take approximately an hour to an hour and a half. The focus of the discussion is on Hispanic American student persistence and departure in higher education.

There is no right or wrong answer to these questions and you are free to share your experiences and opinions honestly and openly. Sometimes your perspective might be different from another participant and sometimes you might share the perspective of others. Either way, please let me know your perspective.

Because peoples' perspectives differ, it is important that we respect each other's perspectives. Please state your perspective without making negative comments or put downs towards others.

You do not have to speak in a particular order. When you have something to say, please say it. Please don't speak while someone else is talking. I know it is tempting to jump in; I have trouble with that myself, but, please try to refrain from doing so.

The focus group discussion will be audio taped so, to ensure accurate reporting, please speak one at a time.

To assist with the transcription it is helpful to identify participant comments. Please state your first name prior to your comment. For example, if I asked, what are your plans after completing community college? Ex. "Derek -- I plan to transfer to a four year school"

Please place your tent card in front of you with their pseudonym name of choice as indicated on the demographic data form. Once the tape recorder is turned on, each participant should introduce him/herself by their pseudonym name with the first discussion question following introductions. Are there any questions? Let's begin.

Focus Group Questions

I have provided each of you with an overview of the common themes and messages which emerged from the individual interviews. Please take a few moments to review each of these.

1. Are these categories and themes representative of your persistence experiences?

2. How do these categories come together to explain student retention?

3. In what ways, if any, do these categories influence each other?

4. Are some categories more important than others?

5. Is anything missing?

6. What barriers and challenges must Hispanics undergraduate students overcome to be

successful at Triad University/

7. What recommendations do you have for the university to help Hispanic undergraduate

students overcome barriers?

8. What can the university to do make the collegiate experience for Hispanic

undergraduate students better?

As we come to a close, I want to remind you the audiotape of our session will be transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in this transcript so that all participants will remain anonymous, and then the tape will be destroyed.

Please do not discuss the comments made here today, and respect the right of each participant to remain anonymous.

Thank you for your participation in this study. This concludes our time here together today.

Appendix I

Human Research Review Committee Approval

March 12, 2015

Dear Robert, The HRRC has reviewed your protocol: Protocol #332015 - A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF HISPANIC STUDENT RETENTION AND DEPARTURE AT A PRIVATE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL METHODOLOGY.

You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

(ORIGINAL SIGNED) Barbara Lester ███████████████████████ HRRC Member ███████████████
███████████

Appendix J

Demographic Questionnaire

<u>Family Background</u>

Participant's Name:_____

Participant's Code/Alias/Pseudonym: _____

Age (in years) : _____ Date of Birth (optional): Month ___ Day___ Year_____

Place of Birth (optional): _____

Native Language (check one): English (1) _____ Spanish (2)_____ Other (3):_____

Marital Status (check one):

Single, Never Married (1): _____ Divorced/Separated (2): _____ Married (3): _____

Other (4): _____ Prefer not to answer (5): _____

Do you have any dependent minor children? YES (1) NO (2)

If YES, how many persons are dependent on your income resources? _____

Parents level of education:_____

Are you the first in your family to go to college? _____

Family financial status: Please circle one

Less than $40,000 Annual Income

Greater than $40,000 Annual Income but Less than $50,000

Greater than $50,000 Annual Income

Describe your family Socioeconomic Status (High/med/Low)

<u>EMPLOYMENT</u>

Are you employed? YES (1) NO (2)

If employed, which best describes your employment situation? (Check one)

Full time (40 hours or more per week): _____ (1)

Part Time (25 hours–39 hours per week): _____ (2)

Part Time (Less than 25 hours per week): _____(3)

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Have you applied for state or financial aid? YES/NO

If you applied, do you receive financial aid? (If you did not receive financial aid/grant)

Do you plan on borrowing money to pay your college costs? YES/NO

Source of borrowed money will be (circle all that apply)

Parents/Family (1) Banks/Credit Unions (2) Combination of Sources (3)

EDUCATION/COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

High School GPA:

Prior College Experience(s) Circle those that apply to your situation.

Did you graduate from high school with a state-recognized diploma?

Did you earn college credits prior to enrolling in college? YES/NO

Did you attend a previous institution of higher education before enrolling in this institution?

How man credit hours (not classes) are you undertaking in the current semester/term?

What years did you attend the university?

Did you graduate with a college degree?

> If yes-What degree were you awarded upon graduation?

> If no-Are you still attending college? Reasons for departure?

What is your educational/career goal(s)?

What is your academic major?

Did you live on campus?

Did you live off campus?

Appendix K

Participant Member Checking

Hello

I hope that this email finds you well. Thank you for your participation in the study entitled HISPANIC UNDERGRADUATE RETENTION AT A PRIVATE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY USING NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

I wanted to let you know some of the themes that resulted from the interviews in this particular study (see below). Please let me know if these accurately depicted our conversation.
If you have any suggestions, modifications, or questions, please let me know by
Monday, March 4, 2016

The purpose of this exploratory study was to seek understanding of the background, experiences, interactions of a sample population of current and former full-time undergraduate Hispanic students at a private Christian university, and examine how these experiences and perceptions impacted student retention and departure decisions.

The guiding research questions in this study were

1.   What background characteristics such as the financial status of students and their families, family support, ethnic identity, and level of education achieved by the students' parents impacted Hispanic student retention and persistence?

2.   What personal experiences and institutional support factors are important to Hispanic students during their time at the university?

3.   What were the external factors and personal experiences of Hispanic students who did not complete their studies, to include their perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support factors available during their time at the university?

There were many themes that emerged from the interviews that you participated in.

After reading, re-reading and coding the transcripts, the results showed that student retention is impacted by several factors.

Eight common themes across all participants emerged from this study: Family Background, Motivation, Religion, Transition, Institutional Support, Family Support, Supportive Relationships, and External Pressures.

The research provided evidence that the environment in which students were raised influenced the issues they might face during the transition to college. Background characteristics of a student such as: educational level of parents, socioeconomic status, expectations of parents, academic abilities, and social attainments were analyzed in this study

Participants shared experiences and stories relating to parents level of education, family support, educational goals, pre-college academic readiness, and the role religion played in university choice.

Participants communicated experiences within the family unit which they described as powerful influencers toward individual motivation in developing academic goals and aspirations to earn a college degree. Participants described their value of family, utilizing words and phrases such as "family is everything" and "family forever". Other participants described a completely different experience of family, sharing stories of a lack of support or encouragement to pursue college.

Participants further described motivation for a better life, religion, supportive relationships, institutional support, and external demands as meaningful experiences in their educational journey. Participants described experiences of a challenging transition to the university, adjusting to the academic, social, and faith based nature of the institution as memorable moments during their time in college.

Other participants shared experiences and described difficulties in making the transition from high school to college, or transfer to the university-noting academic rigor, time managements, and religious differences as initial primary concerns. Perceptions of the quality and quantity of institutional support available to them during their time in college varied among participants. Participants described experiences of caring professors, supportive staff, and plentiful student activities as meaningful in their academic journey.

Other participants described peer relations and other supporting relationships as key factors in their academic journey.

Several participants noted limited financial aid, a lack of diversity programs or cultural awareness.

Participants described several external pressures such as employment demands and family commitments which impacted their educational journey. Other external pressures described by participants revealed family medical issues, family separation, and financial challenge as factors impacting their academic goals during their time enrolled as a fulltime student at the university.

If these ideas do not reflect your experience or you would like to comment further, please respond to this email or contact me at the number below. Thanks again for participating in my dissertation study. It would not have been possible without you.

Robert Sanchez

Doctoral Student

██████████████████████

robertsanchez@███.edu

 (208) 467-8503