

STRANGERS IN THE ACADEMY:

Retention of Latino Non-Traditional Students and College Culture

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This work is a study of how Latino non-traditional students interpret and give meaning to their withdrawal experiences from a higher education institution. To examine this phenomenon, I used a qualitative method, which included the following elements:

1. A focus on a unique institution of higher education, which was founded with the purpose of serving Latino non-traditional students. This offered an environment that is, ostensibly, culturally friendly to Latinos.
2. An analysis of a survey conducted by this institution's institutional research office, which provided background data and descriptive opinions of the level of satisfaction of the students with their educational experiences.
3. An analysis of 31 interviews conducted with former students. Ten of these graduated and 21 did not. This process gave voice to the former students of the institution.
4. A Cultural Studies approach to the analysis, with additional theoretical grounding from Gramscian and Bourdieuan concepts, which permit an examination of experiences in terms of how they relate to power and wider political, social and cultural processes.

This study finds that Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences as working in culturally contested spaces. Students give meaning to their experiences in complex and fluid ways, which, in many cases, lead to decisions to withdraw. This reinforces and reproduces social systems that limit access to higher education to non-traditional populations.

i. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The ability of institutions to retain students through a degree is a topic that has long attracted scholarly interest. This is because retention to a degree is a task that clearly benefits all the parties involved. First of all, it benefits the students, who by completing a college degree, fulfill their dreams of higher education and will, hopefully, benefit from the rewards associated with higher education, such as a better quality of life, personally fulfilling employment opportunities and higher salaries. Second, institutions benefit by having students complete a degree because they fulfill their educational missions and they benefit from the revenues generated by students who stay through complete programs. Finally, society at large benefits from retention because it enjoys a more educated population that leads to a more advanced society, and rewards its investments in higher education.

Given the importance of retention, or persistence to a degree, in higher education, it is not surprising that many studies on the issue have appeared over time. As early as 1962, Summerskill studied what affects attrition (Summerskill 1962) and referred to many other institution-based studies. In 1978, Pantages and Creedon published a literature review of studies in retention (Pantages and Creedon 1978). However, other authors, in particular Vincent Tinto in the late 1970s and early 1980s, noted the atheoretical nature of these studies, which often described but did not explain the attrition process at their institutions. (Tinto, 1987; 1993) Numerous scholars, including Tinto, have subsequently developed and tested explanatory models using sophisticated

quantitative techniques. Some studies have focused on student characteristics prior to coming to college and its effect on degree attainment, other studies have focused on different type of institutions, and yet others have explored how the experiences students have in the various environments within institutions affect the ability of students to complete a degree.

Yet, as the studies on retention have become more advanced, the population attending colleges and universities has also become more diverse. Whereas earlier, in the twentieth century, most students were white and between 18 and 22 years old, it is now normal to see minorities and adult students attending college. (Fry 2011) Further, the number and relative percentage of women attending college has also increased (NCES Fast Facts 2012). This adds a level of complexity to retention studies as a diversified student body comes with more complex sets of goals, expectations, and constraints to the college experience. It is not possible to assume that the reasons, the background education, the financial wherewithal, the knowledge about the functioning of an institution, which brought young middle class people into a university to pursue degrees are the same as those for a thirty year old Latina immigrant who is the first member of her family to enter an institution of higher education. And if these reasons are different, then it is also true that the reasons why they may complete or not complete a degree are different too.

B. Statement of Problem

A traditionally underrepresented group that, in an environment of increased access, has increased its presence in institutions of higher education is the Latino non-traditional student. This is a complex population that has entered postsecondary institutions throughout the nation. While it may seem a relatively straightforward task to define this population, it is not. There are two elements to this definition: Latino and non-traditional. For the purposes of this study, defining non-traditional uses clear criteria. Non-traditional refers to students who are older than the average collegiate student (that is older than 22) while attending college and come from cultural, social and educational environments that did not include higher education as a choice in their formation. In all cases they are the first generation in their families attending college. Latino however, is a more complex category and it involves issues of identity and identity politics. How individuals refer to themselves is a dynamic continuum. Someone can be Mexican, Latino, Latin American, Spanish or something else depending on the context and the purpose of the identity. Still, in order to define a unit of study, Latino refers to people who describe themselves as being Latino whether they were born in the United States or migrated to this country. They do so in a particular context, that is in an institution of higher education. Latinos refers to individuals who call themselves Latinos in the academy while they complete an admissions application. This does not preclude that they use that name in other contexts.

Latinos are the fastest growing minority population in the United States and their

presence in institutions of higher education is increasing. The 2010 census shows that there are 50 million people of Latino descent. This is the largest minority group in the nation. Yet, many of these students are not completing their programs of study. Only 16% of Latinos have attained a Bachelor's degree as opposed to 37% in white populations, despite trends that show that Latino participation in higher education is increasing and approaching the numbers of other ethnic groups. (Fry 2011) Latino non-traditional Latino students graduate at even lower rates.

The lower graduation rates of Latino students, and non-traditional students in particular, require explanation. If Latino students are participating in higher numbers in colleges and universities, why are they not graduating? There are some attempts at explanations; Latino students come from K-12 systems that underprepared them for collegiate work, or the finances associated with college attendance are overwhelming for Latino families from low-income backgrounds who cannot afford college, or students have to work many hours every week, impacting their ability to study. Also, Latino students find campus environments, climate, dominated by a white culture, unwelcoming, which leads them to become isolated and thus withdraw. (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado et al, 1996, Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005; Gonzalez, 2000) These are powerful factors that do not allow Latinos to graduate. And these explanations also lend themselves to very specific policy decisions. It is necessary to improve K-12 systems, provide academic support services for underprepared students, increase financial aid packages to truly cover educational costs, and create programs within institutions that

address climate issues by making culturally sensitive environments where Latino culture and experiences are valued and privileged.

The results of investigations mentioned above that address Latino issues in higher education are valuable in making the collegiate experience more equitable. However, they do not address one additional element that contributes to lower graduation rates. This is higher education itself is a cultural phenomenon that exists within certain parameters of experiences. As the population attending colleges and universities has become more diverse, it begins to serve students that are unfamiliar with the culture of higher education. This culture, while originating in a white, straight male dominated environment, includes members of other groups that have either bought into the system or learned to navigate it. It is, in a sense independent of ethnic cultures, it is not white, Black or Latino, it is the culture of higher education with its own rules, norms and practices.¹ This is true for many groups but it is even more salient with Latino non-traditional students. This difference in culture makes it difficult to graduate because the way Latino non-traditional students interpret and give meaning to their experiences in higher education leads to decisions that do not include graduation.

Latino non-traditional students come from cultural environments that did not include higher education as a part of the landscape. In order to address how decision regarding completion and non-completion are made, it is necessary to understand how they give meaning to their experiences in an institution of higher education. The way they

¹ Culture, in this sense (and which will be described later) is not a set of static traditions coming from the ancient past and mediating present practices. It is rather a set of transactions leading to interpretation of experiences in a dynamic context.

relate to their instructors, to their peers, to the administrative offices of a college, all play a role on how they define their place in the institution.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore what leads Latino non-traditional students to choose higher education as an option in their lives and, for many, what leads to their withdrawal prior to degree attainment. The research question is:

How do Latino non-traditional students make sense of their withdrawal experience from a two-year Latino serving institution in the Midwest?

The focus is a two-year institution of higher education that primarily serves Latino non-traditional students in the Midwest. Through a mission dedicated to serving Latinos, this college purposely recruits non-traditional students. Latinos are 92% of the student population, over 80% are first generation students, and the median age is 30. (Latino College Factsheet, 2012) The college offers numerous academic and non-academic support services and financial aid packages that cover the entire tuition, fees, books and supplies to the vast majority of students without having to resort to student loans.

To protect the anonymity of the students, faculty and staff of the institution I will call the institution Latino College (LC) throughout the study. This institution makes for a compelling research site because it is possible to argue that the traditional factors that lead minority students to feel isolated and unwelcome do not exist here. In this institution, almost all students are non-traditional adults and the entire institution is geared toward their service. If they choose to withdraw from their studies it is not

because they are in an unfriendly environment or that the institution has a negative climate for Latinos.

The study includes a brief analysis of a student satisfaction survey and interviews conducted with graduates and non-graduates from the college. As such, it is a qualitative study since the survey offers mostly descriptive data, while the interviews do offer deep insights into how this population gives meaning to their experiences.

The survey analyzed in this study is a satisfaction survey developed by the institution as part of its assessment efforts. The students completed the survey in the spring of 1998, while they were attending the institution. The Registrar's office provided additional background data collected as part of the admission process to the institution and information regarding the eventual completion or non-completion of a degree by 2001.

In addition to the survey interviews were conducted with 31 former students of Latino College. Ten graduated and the rest did not. Following a qualitative approach, the former students give meaning to their experiences in college. The interviews took place in 2009 and 2010.

Although the data from 1998 is somewhat dated, the issues that this dissertation addresses are not. The experience that students had in 1998 are not significantly different to the experiences students have today, the reality is that retention and graduation rates have not improved in this period so the insights these students have are not different. The increased diversity of students attending postsecondary institutions continues to grow and

is even more prevalent now in non-selective institutions with the growth of the for profit sector in higher education.

Using the sample of students from the 1998 satisfaction survey offers another interesting analytic lens. The students interviewed were commenting on experiences that occurred in the past; sometimes eight, sometimes ten years before. The time between the moment in which the students completed the survey and the interviews took place represents a temporal space that is a useful analytical tool, as the former students look in retrospect to their experiences in college.

The choice of using a qualitative methodology is deliberative and attempts to address an issue, which is latent in this research question. The subject population is one that has had very limited knowledge about higher education prior to attending Latino college. Yet, as a discursive piece, this dissertation belongs in the world of higher education. Using interviews together with descriptive data from a survey is an attempt to look at how constructs about retention from previous studies are interpreted by this population and to give a voice to the students regarding their experiences. In this way, this study aims to explain how higher education and the withdrawal experience for non-traditional Latino students fits within a larger economic and socio-cultural environment in the United States that creates pressure to seek “college,” its experiences, its credentialing system and its rewards, as a necessary step for social advancement. In other words, this study takes a cultural approach to understanding how Latino non-traditional students experience higher education. It argues that they have to interpret their

experiences based on their own frames of reference, which often did not include higher education as a life path. To improve retention, higher education institutions must address their own cultural biases and develop new ways of understanding education, progress to a degree and educational outcomes.

C. Significance of Study

This study contributes to the field of higher education research in various ways. First, an understanding of how this population experiences and gives meaning to higher education offers policy possibilities that will enhance their retention and completion rates. But these policy options also raise other very significant issues. The participation of Latino non-traditional students in higher education forms part of the history and development of higher education. When universities were first established in the middle ages in Europe, only elites attended. In fact, universities, it can be argued, were the way in which society certified certain forms of learning and knowledge for the elites and discarded others. In the twentieth century participation in higher education expanded to additional groups, most significantly to middle class environments leading to the creation of professional classes in many countries, including the United States. Now, with the further expansion of higher education, non-traditional students have a stronger participation. As they come, universities are challenged with how this population interacts with higher education. As such this study offers insights in to how in the twenty first century universities define their purposes and their value. This study comments on issues of access, finance, academic rigor, race, class, and culture within colleges and

universities.

In summary, this dissertation addresses gaps in our knowledge of degree completion by adding information on an understudied population, deepens our empirical foundations, re-theorizes the phenomenon of college attendance and non-attendance as a cultural issue within the academy, and offers policy implications for a diversified higher education environment.

D. Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation proceeds as follows: Chapter two reviews the existing literature on retention. It pays particular attention to retention models and studies that have focused on the Latino population. This chapter also presents theory about culture that informs the analysis of how Latino non-traditional students experience the college. It is the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter three explains the methods used to answer the research question. It offers a description of the institution, the population of this study and the techniques used in the analytical processes. Chapter four presents the results of the study. It shows the relations existing, albeit limited, between the survey results and the interviews. Chapter five examines how Latino non-traditional students' ability to enroll and complete a degree relates to how the former students give meaning to their experiences. Based on the analysis in chapter five, chapter six concludes the study by offering policy suggestions that can enhance the participation and completion of Latino non-traditional adult students in higher education.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Introduction

Retention is a well-established field in higher education. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of studies exist trying to explain the factors that lead some students to withdraw from their studies before the completion of a degree or certificate. It is also an active field in higher education research as many articles continue to appear in a variety of publications. Particularly, offices of institutional research in colleges and universities continue to analyze survey results that may give insights into the completion issues existing in their particular institutions. However, most retention studies have focused on the process as an isolated phenomenon taking place within higher education as a closed system. They have given insufficient attention to retention as part of larger political processes that impact educational equity, culture as a way of interpreting experiences, and to the related process of giving meaning to experiences. These limitations are particularly significant when analyzing Latino non-traditional students who come to the academic experience with significantly different sets of cultural activities. This chapter evaluates the academic approaches to retention studies but in an effort to better contextualize Latino non-traditional student participation in higher education, this chapter develops a conceptual framework that includes political processes, cultural interactions and developing meaning, in order to understand how Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education. This is accomplished by evaluating existing literature on retention and Latino retention and then borrowing from other

literatures in critical pedagogy and cultural studies to develop a frame.

It has been noted that most early studies on retention were atheoretical and anecdotal in nature.(Tinto, 198) Academic researchers have addressed the atheoretical nature of earlier studies or institutionally specific studies, particularly since Vincent Tinto's seminal study brought rigor to the study of retention. (Tinto 1987, 1993) An academic approach has also been brought to the analysis of Latino student retention and non-traditional students. However, while our knowledge has increased, Latinos continue to have the lowest degree attainment level. (Fry, 2011) Within this population a growing number are non-traditional students and we are not closer to understanding why they do not complete the degree programs they have begun.

Latino non-traditional students relate in different ways to the academic experience when compared to other more traditional populations. Their reasons for attending, their understanding of the purposes of higher education, their interpretations of relations with faculty and other higher education officials are different. This means that in order to understand the issues we need to focus on how this population frames and understands its relation with higher education in the United States. A focus on these relations will advance our understanding of what one author has called the retention puzzle. (Braxton 1997)

Tinto's longitudinal model is undoubtedly a watershed in retention studies. To this day, work on retention builds on concepts first presented by Tinto. Particularly, constructs such as academic integration and social integration still play a role in research.

However, there are limitations in our ability to explain the issue of Latino non-traditional student retention. Despite the best efforts of many researchers, Tinto's model lacks robust empirical support. Also, Tinto's model has conceptual limitations as it applies to minority and non-traditional populations. The model assumes a student population that is between 18 and 22 years old and has the academic and socioeconomic background that should lead to success in higher education. This reality, however, applies to fewer students every day as larger numbers of non-traditional students enroll in colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The limitations in Tinto's model have also concerned authors not focused on Latino non-traditional students and have generated alternative theoretical approaches to the study of retention. However, Latino non-traditional students are different. They have a world view that did not include higher education on its path. It is necessary to see what forces have led them to include higher education as an option. For this purpose, it is necessary to see the higher education experience as part of a larger social and cultural process that creates this condition of the college non-completer.

While current approaches to the study of retention have not focused on the cultural interaction between higher education and particular populations, such as Latino non-traditional students, it is possible to explore this framework from the scholarly work conducted in other fields. In a complex social environment, where Latinos, and Latino non-traditional students are confronted with issues of belonging to marginalized, racially discriminated, linguistically limited, economically disadvantaged groups, the Cultural

Studies framework lends itself as a path to analyze how Latino non-traditional students experience and interpret their presence in higher education.

The literature that specifically focuses on the issue of retention with Latino populations has followed a path that is similar to the growth of retention theory more generally. Early studies attempted to validate Tinto's model for the Latino population or for segments of this population. But as scholars pointed out the limitations of the model for minority populations, new exploratory studies with alternative theoretical approaches have appeared.

B. Vincent Tinto's interactionist model

As mentioned earlier, by far the most influential figure in the study of retention in colleges and universities is Vincent Tinto.² By noting, in the 1970s and 1980s, that most work on retention was atheoretical, Tinto developed a model that aimed at explaining the attrition process. It is impossible to underestimate the influence this model has had on the field of retention.

Tinto presents his model in Leaving College (1987, 1993). This book has become the watershed in persistence studies. All researchers working on the topic since the publication of Tinto's book make mention of the model and how their studies relate to it.

After an introduction and a descriptive chapter on persistence and attrition in a variety of institutional settings, in Leaving College Tinto begins a chapter where he

² This section refers to Vincent Tinto's interactionist model developed in Leaving College (1987, 1993). Dr. Tinto himself has continued his work on retention and focused on non-traditional students too. These latter works will be mentioned later in the chapter.

discusses, by way of reviewing the literature on persistence, the causes for departure from an institution. These causes lay the foundation for his theory because the model needs to explain these reasons. He divides them into individual reasons, interactional reasons, and integrational reasons. While there are some other external reasons for withdrawing from an institution, such as financial, these fall outside the scope of Tinto's model because his focus is on the effects the institution has on students.

The first reasons for institutional departure fall in the category of individual reasons. Here, Tinto writes that previous research has shown that students' departure is closely related to intentions and commitments. The more closely a degree corresponds with the student's intentions for higher education, the higher the likelihood to complete that degree. The reverse is also true. It is natural that intentions may change over time, so they cannot be measured at the time of beginning studies only, nevertheless these intentions play an important role in deciding whether to complete a program or not. Commitments, on the other hand, refer to the commitments students have to their goals and institutions. Similar to intentions, if a student is highly committed to an occupational goal that depends on a degree, he or she is more likely to complete that degree than someone whose goal is unclear. Commitment to an institution is also significant because if a student has a weak commitment, it is likely that he or she will depart it for another one.

Unlike individual reasons for leaving, interactional reasons refer to experiences students have during the first few months of enrolling in college. Students need to adjust

to the new environment, where there are new social and academic roles to play. In addition, students have to face, most for the first time, with separation from home. These factors exert pressure that may lead to withdrawal. Academic workload is another interactional reason, if the pace of course work is overwhelming, the student will withdraw.

Tinto relates the third group of reasons for departure to integration to the college community. These are more long-term reasons. The first one is incongruence or a mismatch between the needs, interests, and preferences of an individual student and the institution after interacting with members of the faculty, other students and members of the college. There is also isolation, when insufficient contact with other members of the college community leads a student to withdraw from the institution.

But these reasons only form a typology of departure. Although research supports them, they are not an explanatory model. They show the reasons why students leave college but they do not explain the process that leads to this departure. While important, they are of limited use to policy makers in colleges and universities because they do not show where to adjust the college structure to improve the experience of the students.

To develop a conceptual framework, Tinto begins by borrowing from theories in Anthropology and Sociology, namely the study of rites of passage by Arnold Van Gennep and the study of suicide by Emile Durkheim. Van Gennep analyzed how individuals in societies move through stages that allow them membership in different groups. For example, the passing from the stage of childhood to adulthood is a process

marked by rituals. To pass through these stages individual have to go through certain rites, ceremonies and rituals that mark the point when an individual moves from membership in one group to membership in another group.

Durkheim, on the other hand, was interested in explaining why there are different suicide rates in different societies. He analyzed the circumstances under which people commit suicide and through this, he developed a typology of four kinds of suicide. These are: altruistic (when it is morally desirable to end one's life), anomic (when suicide is caused by a breakdown of social and intellectual bonds), fatalistic (when there is an excess of norms), and egotistical. Although all are to a degree analogous to college departure, it is only the latter that most clearly resembles it. This form of suicide stems from a lack of membership in a community, a lack of integration that leads to isolation and finally suicide.

Tinto does not mean to use these theories literally. College is not a rite in the sense of a structured ceremony (although rituals are an important element in the educational process of some types of institution) and most students, who depart college without a degree, do not commit suicide. He intends to use these theories as analogies of decision-making processes involved in these social theories with student departure. Regarding rites of passage, Tinto argues that not unlike the societies studied by Van Gennep, students must first disassociate from their past communities, parents, town, and high school; then they will move to a transition stage where students have not completely left their old communities, but are beginning to learn to participate in the new

community; and finally, become incorporated in the new community of the college.

Durkheim then, is necessary because of the interactional roots of departure. The college experience, not unlike the egotistical suicide may be one where, if there is an absence of social and intellectual integration into the college community, will lead to the student to depart from the institution.

The key to Tinto's model is that it is longitudinal. This way he is able to link the reasons for departure uncovered by research. His model argues that individual reasons, such as intentions and commitments, are affected by interactional and integrationist reasons and therefore lead to withdrawal. Aside from marking the essential background factors, such as family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling, the model begins by focusing on the students' intentions and commitments. These factors will be affected by the interactional processes in the academic and social settings of the institution. These experiences lead to different levels of integration or isolation, both intellectual and social. The students' goals and commitments will be affected by these experiences and lead either to persist or to withdraw. The model is also sensitive to different types of experiences within college communities and full integration is not necessary for persistence. Tinto believes there are different levels of integration and that persistence or withdrawal depends on the complex interaction of all the factors in the model.

The constructs of academic integration and social integration are at the center of Tinto's interactionist model of student retention. (Tinto, pp. 106-107) Academic

integration refers to the academic activities that occur at an institution that lead a student to feel that he or she belongs in that environment. The student feels integrated. These activities involve relationships with faculty in and outside the classroom, activities in laboratories, libraries and so on. Social integration, on the other hand, refers to the social systems that are necessary in daily life for the general well-being of an individual that lead the individual to feel as if they belong in the social environment of the institution. The student feels socially integrated. In colleges, Tinto argues, activities related to social integration occur outside the classroom, in dormitories or social venues, and often run counter the needs of academic integration. Nevertheless they play an important role in the decision making process of whether to stay or withdraw from an institution.

Academic and social integration are essential to Tinto's model because activities related to the education of the student, the academic systems, and activities related to the social well-being of the student, the social systems will lead (or not) to academic and social integration, which in turn will affect the intentions, goals and commitments of a student to persist to a degree. The relative strength of academic and social integration will impact whether a student withdraws from a program or not.

C. Tinto's influence in Retention studies

The level of complexity of Tinto's model, as compared to previously published works on retention, have turned his model into what one author has called near paradigmatic status. (Braxton, 2000) Literally hundreds of studies, both published and

unpublished, on issues related retention appeared after the publication of Leaving College. These studies try to test the model, some of its constructs, or offer refinements and enhancements to the model. Studies on how the model helps explain attrition of special groups of students such as adults, minority, or two-year students have also appeared. In what can only be a representative sample, it is possible to note that Munro (1981) attempts to validate the model using a national sample. Pascarella and Terenzini looked at the interaction effects beyond the classroom in the model, and Pascarella (1984) tested the precollege constructs of the model. In another study, Pascarella (1986) also tested the explanatory power of the model with two-year students. These studies, in general terms, find the model useful but often raise questions regarding how to operationalize academic and social integration. Different studies use different items to define these constructs leading to varied results and with very limited possibilities for comparisons. However, their conclusions fall short of declaring that these constructs do not help understand degree attainment. They often state that additional research will reveal the validity of the constructs.

D. Alternative models and studies

It is significant to note that Tinto is not the only model developed that tries to explain college student attrition. An alternative to Tinto's model is Bean's model of student departure. (1980) Bean challenges Tinto's notion that withdrawing from college is similar to suicide, as analyzed by Durkheim. Bean proposes instead, that withdrawing

from college is more analogous to leaving a job and therefore develops a model that borrows from employee turnover studies. Similar to Tinto, Bean's model is longitudinal. It contains background variables, organizational determinants that contribute to the intervening variable of satisfaction, and finally has dropout as the dependent variable. Through his own research (1980, 1982a, 1982b) Bean finds support for his model with traditional students.

Cabrera et al provided interesting contributions to the discussion on retention models. (1992, 1993) In these articles, the authors attempt to see the extent to which the two models converge. Their results suggest that Tinto's model is more robust because their research validates more of his hypotheses. Most interestingly, though, is that they find many similarities between the two models. They both have precollege characteristics, intervening variables during the collegiate experience that lead to satisfaction and commitment to the institution, and the goal of obtaining a degree and finally the dependent variable of dropping out. They note that satisfaction and commitment to the institution can be equated with academic and social integration. Cabrera et al argue that both models are correct in assessing that withdrawal from college comes as a result of a series of interactions in the collegiate experience that lead to the ultimate decision of dropping out.

What is a clear weakness in these models, in terms of explaining retention and attrition in non-traditional students, is that both Tinto and Bean overtly focus their theories on the educational needs, goals and aspirations of traditional aged students.

Realizing this weakness and noticing the growing importance of non-traditional students, Bean made another contribution, together with Metzner (1985). They developed a model specifically designed for non-traditional students. For this model, Bean defines non-traditional students as older than 24 and students for whom social integration does not play an important role. Social integration is an important construct for Tinto's model, and Bean acknowledges its importance for traditional students, but in this model, Bean and Metzner argue that adult students who seek an education are less interested in the social aspects of the collegiate experience because they have already developed social ties outside of the academy. At the same time, Bean and Metzner hypothesize that external environmental variables will play a large role in the students decision to withdraw because adult students have commitments outside of their studies, such as jobs and family responsibilities. Family needs, changes in employment schedule, and financial difficulties can make college attendance difficult. Thus the major contribution of this model is to bring in external variables to the study of retention. Metzner and Bean, in a follow up article, (1987) estimate the model they developed. The results show that the model was validated with the data. It explained 29% of the variance.

Naretto (1995) continued this line of inquiry by studying adult students (persisters and nonpersisters) across several institutions. She used both Tinto and Bean and Metzner's models in the design of her study. Her results provide support for Bean and Metzner's model because external variables played an important role in the students' decision to withdraw.

Bean and Metzner, and Naretto, contribute to our understanding of degree attainment in adult populations with the addition of external influences. Nevertheless, they only begin to scratch the surface of our understanding of the differences that exist between traditional and non-traditional students. Their model does not explain how non-traditional students differ in preparation, expectations, goal formation and a variety of other factors that affect how they experience college.

E. Empirical critiques of Tinto's model

The enormous influence of Tinto's model on retention studies has led to an ever increasing number of published articles that attempt to test Tinto's model or parts of it. Interestingly, though is that most studies do not fully validate the model but actually find problems with it. Problems that are usually left for future research to continue investigating. This fact is something Braxton noted and therefore decided to embark on a project that would analyze the degree to which research finds empirical support for Tinto's model. The result of this project is the most comprehensive analysis of the empirical validity of the model across institutional types. (Braxton, 1999)

Given the complexity of the interactionist model, Braxton broke the model into thirteen testable propositions. This way he could determine the degree to which each proposition found empirical support in the literature. Braxton argued that if the propositions fail to garner empirical support, then this weakens the model's usefulness. While all the propositions are important, the degree to which propositions eight and nine

garner support is crucial because these are the propositions that refer to academic and social integration, the two key constructs of the model. Proposition eight states that “The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college,” and proposition nine states “The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.”

The results of the study are that only five of the thirteen propositions had strong empirical support in the literature in residential colleges. More interestingly, only two propositions had empirical support in commuter schools, namely, that “entry characteristics affect the level of initial institutional commitment,” and that “initial institutional commitment affects subsequent institutional commitment.” Even more striking is that only one proposition had support in two-year institutions, namely that “entry characteristics directly affect the likelihood of students’ graduation from college.” These results put into serious question the applicability of Tinto’s model to non-traditional students and Braxton concludes that the model is problematic in commuter and two year institutions.

The problem is larger than that and the results of Braxton’s analysis are indicative of a deeper problem. According to Braxton, Tinto’s model only furthers our understanding of commuter and two year students by stating that students, who have received academic, social and psychological preparation for college, as evidenced by the entry characteristics, are more likely to graduate than students who are not prepared.

However, colleges and universities (particularly community colleges and small private institutions) are having larger numbers of students that do not come prepared for the challenges they will face in College. Nevertheless, these students find themselves choosing to pursue academic programs. It is an important educational and policy issue to better understand what leads these people to participate in the academy and what leads them to fail once they are in despite institutional efforts to retain them.

F. Conceptual critiques of Tinto's model and possibilities for new frames

What Braxton's research shows is that there are serious limitations in Tinto's model's attempt to explain retention for populations that attend commuter and two-year schools. These populations tend to be non-traditional. An alternative approach is to show that Tinto's model cannot explain these phenomena because of conceptual limitations. The most important conceptual critique of Tinto came from W. G. Tierney (1992). Tierney argues that Tinto misuses the rites of passage theory because this theory was intended for people undergoing rites of passage within a particular culture. But attending college and earning a degree, according to Tierney, is a rite of passage for middle and upper class white culture and therefore it is not applicable to minority students. We can extend this to mean that this rite of passage is not applicable to adult students who are attending college for different reasons than traditional students. Tierney also states that Tinto overemphasizes integration in the process of persistence. With adult students in particular, integration is not a concern. Adults do not want to disassociate from their

societies and enter a new one. They want to continue being active members of their communities and attend college a few times a week. While Tierney's article addresses Tinto's model specifically, it is important to note that the criticisms he makes, could equally apply to Bean's model. It could also apply to Bean and Metzner's model for adult students because even though this model is sensitive to some of the differences adult students have, such as the weight of external variables and the lack of importance of social integration, these differences might not apply in the same way to non-traditional Latino students. The intentions attending college and the academic and psychological constructs that affect retention for majority adult students might not affect minority non-traditional students.

G. Beyond the Interactionist Model

The limited empirical support to Tinto and the conceptual criticisms to his model have led the community of scholars interested in retention, to revisit the topic of persistence from its most basic foundations. Instead of continuing to produce empirical studies about retention that do not further our understanding of the subject, researchers are beginning to suggest entirely new lines of thinking about attrition in higher education. Following on his 1999 study that showed the lack for empirical support that Tinto's model had, Braxton collects, in a published volume, the thoughts of major figures in higher education research (Braxton, 2000) with the purpose of reinvigorating research on the crucial issue of persistence. The contributors to this volume offer possibilities for new

research from attempting to improve on Tinto's model, to completely abandoning it for new theories and conceptual frameworks. It is important to note though, that none of the authors offer actual studies. They offer new ways to explore the issue of retention in order to inspire new studies that will have an impact on our understanding of the issue.

Braxton and Lien set the tone of the volume. Based on Braxton's previous work, they evaluate all the empirical studies that have academic integration as a central construct. They focus on how these studies have either provided support or have not shown support regarding the influence academic integration has on subsequent institutional commitment and therefore the departure decision. Their conclusions are, first, there is great variability in the way in which academic integration has been used and defined. It simply means different things to different scholars, leading to very different items used to measure it. A corollary to this point is that only in multi-institutional studies, the authors find support for the construct. Their final point is that it is necessary to revise how academic integration is used as a construct.

Among the new approaches offered in this volume is St. John, Cabrera, Nora and Asker. They argue that scholars have insufficiently studied the obvious effect that finances can have on the possibility of individuals completing their academic studies. Although Cabrera attempted to open this line of inquiry earlier (1990), little is known, they argue, about how tuition costs and financial aid subsidies influence the decision to persist or withdraw from institutions of higher education. Even less is known about how finances interact with other factors that affect persistence. These authors reach this

conclusion by exploring how research on economic factors and retention has evolved over time. They explain how early studies used price response theories, where students persist through graduation when they analyze that the social and economic benefits of attending college outweigh any of the costs and benefits of alternative activities, such as working full-time. Some offered an analysis of how financial aid affected retention, but these too were limited because they emphasized actual financial aid offered and received by students, as opposed to the perception of the availability and receipt of aid. They did not look at how financial aid interacts with other non-financial factors.

Newer economic models, known as integrative are beginning to see how financial variables and other non-financial variables affect retention. One of these, according to St. John et al is the “ability to pay” model, where students satisfied with their ability to pay for college are expected to have higher aspirations and higher chances to persist. Another approach is the choice-persistence nexus model, which, through a three-stage process, defines students’ ability to pay for college (including aid) according to institutional fit. This line of thinking expects that the institutional fit of a particular student is good, the better the student’s own perceived ability to pay for this institution’s education and therefore the higher the possibility to persist. The authors feel this latter approach will be particularly fruitful and recommend that researchers pursue this line of inquiry in the future.

Vincent Tinto himself offers criticisms to his model in Braxton’s volume by stating that insufficient attention has been paid to the classroom experience. Tinto

stresses the point that what happens in the classroom is the most powerful experience in college for most students, and consequently, has the greatest potential of affecting their decision to persist or withdraw from an academic program. Tinto laments that many classrooms are still places where learning happens in very passive and isolated ways. Students listen to lectures individually, take notes and later perform in examinations. This, he speculates, is probably negative to retention since there is significant evidence showing that learning takes place better in active environments. The relevance of focusing on the classroom experience for retention theory is that Tinto now argues that academic integration and social integration are artificially separated concepts that mask a more complex reality. By centering persistence studies on the classroom experience, it will be possible to see how these two factors interrelate.

John Bean, the scholar that authored the most complete alternative model to Tinto's interactionist model, also contributes to the effort of reinvigorating retention studies. In collaboration with Shevawn Bogdan Eaton, Bean states that one of the weaknesses of prior retention studies is their focus on sociological rather psychological conceptual frameworks. This is a shortcoming because the decision to withdraw from an institution is an individual reason that requires to be understood as such. Bean and Eaton then discuss four psychological models that they believe may have an impact on retention. First they look at attitude behavior theory, which centers on how an individual evaluates an object, in this case an institution of higher learning. Second is coping behavior theory, which focuses on the collection of behaviors that an individual uses in

order to adapt to a particular circumstance, in this case collegiate life. Third is self-efficacy theory, where an individual's own perception of his or her ability to carry out the necessary actions to reach a certain outcome is measured. In this case the outcome is a college degree. Finally Bean and Eaton present attribution theory, where locus control is the center of the study. This refers to an individual's ability to present internal or external causal perspectives for past outcomes and experiences. External locus refers to individuals who focus on fate or bad luck, while internal locus refers to individuals blaming themselves for their failures. This model can be applied to retention by looking at how students interpret academic performance in college.

Using these psychological models, Bean and Eaton propose a new model for retention that focuses on entry characteristics, environmental interactions, psychological processes, psychological outcomes, intermediate outcomes (where academic and social integration take place) intention (to persist or not) and actual behavior (persisting or not). Using this model, Bean and Eaton believe that further insights can be developed in the study of retention.

On a similar vein, Baird also offers a psychological approach. But instead on centering it on students' psychological factors, Baird focuses on college climate. This is promising because it seems intuitively reasonable that an institution's climate can affect retention. The climate of a college can be closely related to the student's ability for social integration. Baird agrees with other authors that have had difficulties with operationalizing the concept of social integration. There are so many elements that can

form part of this construct that it is almost impossible to compare studies. Yet, Baird believes there is an additional problem with social integration in so far that it is an “intrapysical” process of constructing a college climate in one’s mind and therefore it should be studied as a psychological phenomenon. Baird explains climate as the anthropomorphic characteristics we give an organization. When qualities such as warm or cold are ascribed to an institution we are giving human qualities that attempt to describe our relationship with that institution. Thus Baird’s contribution is to suggest that Tinto’s constructs require to be re-conceptualized into psychological constructs that pay close attention to the issue of climate. This has the added benefit, according to Baird, that climate is a more malleable concept than college culture and that special programs can be used to affect the climate and make it friendlier to particular groups. Thus the policy implications are significant.

Yet a different angle to the study of retention is Berta Vigil Laden’s contribution related to institutional theory. Among the concepts offered by institutional theory is the idea that certain kinds of activities in an organization become part of the norm in that organization, in other words they become institutionalized. Vigil Laden provocatively suggests that this aspect of institutional theory could be applied to higher education, where attending college has become an institutionalized feature of American society. Yet, graduating from college has not become institutionalized. With this in mind, Vigil Laden develops two research related research questions: one is retention in school an inadequately institutionalized feature of higher education, and two, is student departure

an institutionalized feature of higher education. These questions, Vigil Laden opens for the possibility of future research.

Kuh and Love continue with ways of finding alternative conceptual frameworks to Tinto's interactionist model. Kuh and Love propose to look at retention through a cultural lens. They argue that colleges and universities develop their own cultural systems and that students entering college require negotiating unfamiliar environments and this could negatively impact a student's ability to persist in an institution. This leads Kuh and Love to make a long series of propositions for further study focusing on culture.

Also employing cultural concepts is Berger who argues that the discussion on retention would benefit from the inclusion of Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and reproduction. Bourdieu, a French social theorist, attempted to provide a more sophisticated understanding of how class is defined and reproduced in society than that provided by traditional Marxist interpretations. He believed that looking at material production as the only criterion for class definition was shortsighted and advanced the notion of alternative elements. He did this by expanding the concept of capital beyond its traditional economic realm and adding cultural components, which he labeled cultural capital. Cultural capital includes informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, linguistic skills, educational credentials and lifestyle preferences. People with access to the most capital, then, form the upper class and thus use their resources to maintain or expand their capital.

Berger believes Bourdieu's contributions to social theory apply to the study of

retention in that elite institutions of higher education, or institutions with stronger social charters are able to retain students at higher rates than other institutions because they attract students' whose "habitus," the cultural class space they occupy, includes graduation from college and because the power these institutions have to allocate graduates to higher status roles provides a compelling reason for students to persist. This view offers a sophisticated lens from which to observe the process of retention.

Tierney, who provided insightful criticisms to Tinto in 1992, also offers alternative approaches to Tinto's interactionist model. He agrees with the cultural framework but adds the dimension of power to the cultural lens. He believes that this is important because it most closely relates to possible intervention practices that will increase retention. Tierney's argument is within the realm of the cultural approach because he begins his discussion by describing, much like anthropologists and other scholars dedicated to issues of culture, how we are involved in the process of creating meaning throughout our lives and education is no exception. The framework for what we desire from education and what we mean by dropout has been developed by way of our culture. We have created a system of winners and losers and the value of a collegiate degree is embedded with these concepts. Tierney then believes that this leads us to three different alternatives as to approaches to improve retention rates. First is the structuralist approach, which states that the system is predetermined and that nothing short of a complete revolution can have any impact. This denies agency to individuals and therefore it is not favored by Tierney. Second is the functionalist approach, which devises ways to

mend the perceived problem, this is consistent with Tinto's model and all its subsequent applications, extensions and corollaries. This however, does not address the fundamental structural issues that do exist in the conceptualization of higher education with winners and losers. A third approach, favored by Tierney, is to accept the consequences of dropping out but trying to alleviate the painful consequences to the people who leave the system. Power relations that exist in society often get transformed in educational settings as failures for those who are at the margins. Rather than insisting on individuals adjusting to the system, we need to devise ways in which an individual's identity is affirmed and honored and incorporated into the organization's culture.

Finally, Rendon, Jalomo and Nora specifically address how Tinto applies to minorities and how new directions in research should apply to minority students. They emphasize, like Tierney did before them, that Tinto's model is assimilationist. Its focus on academic and social integration as key constructs for retention places the burden for retention on the students assimilating into the majority culture of the institution. This may be inappropriate for minority students who are not seeking to disassociate from their cultures. They believe that to better understand the subtle processes that affect retention of minority students, it is necessary to bring new frameworks such as social psychology, social engagement theory, cultural and other previously mentioned approaches.

The articles collected by Braxton, in this volume, challenged thinking on retention. The lack of empirical support for Tinto's interactionist model, as well as other models, has led specialists in the field to propose a variety of new approaches to look at

why so many students who enter institutions of higher learning, do not complete their programs. The proposed avenues for new research range from the institutional theory approach to cultural and anthropological approaches, and it seems that the possibilities for framing the problem are endless. However, the pertinent question in this study is which approach will most enrich our understanding of the experience that non-traditional Latino students have in colleges and universities. As Rendon et al mention, in their contribution to Braxton's volume, "...great care must be paid to avoid assimilationist models..." since minority students do not necessarily wish to disassociate themselves from their own culture. Nevertheless, in addition to not wanting to disassociate from their culture, it is important to note that Latino non-traditional students enter new cultural landscapes when they enroll in college; landscapes that include application processes, relations with faculty, study time, and many other elements in American higher education. In this sense, Kuh and Love's cultural approach has the potential to offer more nuanced understandings of the experiences faced by non-traditional Latino students. Entering college means having to learn, manage and master a variety of new rules, regulations and social behaviors that form part of academic culture. Yet, it is important to go even further and note that higher education itself is part of a larger cultural system that ascribes certain values to the role of higher education in society. This resonates well with Berger's approach, using Bourdieu. He suggests that obtaining a college degree belongs to the cultural capital that certain elite groups wish to achieve and that the value of that capital varies among different institutions based on their reputations. Yet the issue goes

beyond showing how cultural capital may help explain differing retention rates in elite and non-elite institutions. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can also bring to the forefront the tension existing in some higher education environments, where open door admission policies have given access to many people to enter the academic landscape, but once in it, they do not possess the cultural capital to be successful in that environment. Or in Bourdieu's language, open door access has allowed people to enter a particular habitus, but once in it, they cannot survive. Higher education has subtle and probably non-conscious ways of excluding people who do not belong, once the door is opened.

In this cultural context, Tierney's approach that includes the role of power in the construction of meaning and understanding about the world around us, and how this can have an impact on the ability of minority students to achieve the goal of graduation is particularly useful and offers fruitful ways to conceptualize the problem of attrition in higher education for Latino students. This approach will be further analyzed and fine-tuned below to form the basis of the conceptual framework for this study.

Even Tierney's criticisms back in 1992 are particularly insightful because they show that we do not know enough about how non-traditional students of Latino (or any minority for that matter) construct their views of higher education. In what ways do they value higher education, and how their socioeconomic backgrounds and culture interact with the policies that encourage participation in higher education?

H. Practical Applications

The latest attempts to tie theory with practice and policy in the area of student

retention come in the form of promoting student engagement and learning communities in institutions. George Kuh and his team of researchers and scholars at Indiana University are pursuing studies with varying approaches to the concept of student engagement and John Braxton and his team of researchers scholars are focusing on learning communities.

Kuh et al use the concept of engagement in their publications (2005). They comment that after reviewing the literature, the best predictors for success in college are preparation and engagement. How the students come to the institution is fundamental, but what students do, counts more than who they are or where they go to college. Since institutions cannot change the way the students prepared for college they can only control the level of engagement in the institution. Engagement has two components: first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies, and secondly, the ways in which institutions allocate resources and organize learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such services.

Kuh et al continue to look at various institutions that are attempting to achieve this but the question still remains. As large numbers of non-traditional students go into college, what is it that will make them engaged? Also, we should better understand the tension surrounding the ways colleges expect Latino non-traditional students to internalize ways of relating to the world that are different from how they related to the world prior to the collegiate experience.

As a result of Braxton's intensive analysis of the state of research in the area of student retention, he has moved now to look at suggestions that take into account all the

advances and the limitations that theory and empirical research have uncovered. This has led to the development of a series of recommendations that vary across institutional types. They find that successful institutions on the issue of retention are institutions that can manage challenges at various levels. First are economic, meaning that they manage to be affordable, have organizational qualities that show a commitment to the welfare of students. Furthermore, Braxton et al develop a recommendation related to minority students, which is that it is important for minorities to have sufficient members and the space within institutions to develop subgroups that will provide the necessary psychological and sociological nourishment to be successful. This is consistent with the concept of creating learning communities within institutions.

The concept of learning communities is one that other authors and organizations aiding colleges and universities with issues have also begun to promote (www.completecollege.com). Additionally, they discuss co-requisite remedial education, structured schedules and remedial education.

In addition to Braxton et al, Tinto and Egstrom (2008) mention the impact of learning communities on students that come from low-income backgrounds. The students were academically underprepared and required remedial education. The results showed that learning communities had a positive impact on retention.

I. Latino Student Retention

While the literature focusing on the experiences of Latino students in college and the retention process is not as voluminous as that focusing on traditional student populations, a number of studies have attempted to contribute to our understanding of how Latino students participate in higher education and the difficulties they encounter in that environment. These studies have followed the path laid by the authors who developed and discussed the different theoretical approaches to persistence. Early studies, and some recent ones, focused on Tinto's interactionist model. In different ways, these studies ask the level to which Tinto's longitudinal model in general, and academic and social integration, in particular apply to Latino students. Not unlike the results found with traditional populations, scholars looking at Latino students had difficulties validating the model, its propositions and its constructs.

In addition, to finding limited support to the model, research on Latino retention has been influenced by criticisms as to the applicability of the model, and social integration in particular, to minority populations. Thus researchers have pursued new ways and new frames to study Latino student retention. Bourdieu's concept of social capital has been particularly influential.

These studies have provided a more nuanced view of the complexities involved for Latinos entering the higher education market. The advent of new theoretical approaches show the complexities involved when populations traditionally underrepresented in colleges and universities begin to pursue academic degrees.

However, we still need deeper knowledge of how the perception and exchange of social capital takes place with Latino students. Furthermore, we still know little of how non-traditional Latino students negotiate the higher education environment.

A good example of research studies influenced by Tinto's model is Nora's (1987) study of Chicano students attending a community college located in the southwest. In his attempt to validate the constructs for academic and social integration, Nora found only two indicators of academic integration. These were (a) perceptions of academic experiences students had based on interaction with faculty, counselors and administrators, and (b) career preparation, as perceived by the students. But these constructs only moderately impacted retention, and Nora found no evidence of social integration having an effect on retention. This led him to conclude that further research was needed to identify the factors and the underlying structural patterns affecting Latino retention.

Nora himself assumed the task for further research in 1990 when he explored the effects of finances on retention. Again, looking at data from Chicano students in a community college in the southwest, Nora hypothesized and analyzed a model that showed that financial issues had a higher impact on retention than high school grades. This is probably true, students that cannot find the adequate funding for college will probably drop out and this will apply to all majority and minority groups. However, this does not provide us with knowledge about why when controlling for finances, still Latino students are retained at lower rates than majority students.

Another type of study following in Tinto's footsteps is Kraemer (1997). By looking at Latino persisters in a two-year college in the Midwest, Kraemer tried to operationalize the concepts of academic and social integration for Latino students. She identified three factors contributed to the two constructs, namely formal faculty-students contact, informal faculty-student contact, and study behavior. Since this study only focused on graduates, she concluded that these factors positively contribute to retention. However, a major weakness in this study is that by focusing on the graduates only, we do not know the degree to which the reasons for their persistence are due to the fact that these students already possess the things that will make them successful and that those things would apply to all groups. In other words there is nothing special about the Latino experience in these students.

The resilience of Tinto's model is attested when as recently as 2003 Salinas and Llanes framed an analysis of first year student retention at a Texas public university with the interactionist model. They found that they could not validate academic and social integration with any of their items and that a reduction in the number of registered credit hours was the only predictor of future withdrawal.

A more interesting study influenced by Tinto, but which in turn became very influential is Attinasi (1989). In a qualitative study of Mexican-American college students, Attinasi explored the withdrawal behavior of students by following a life history mode. In what he considered an exploratory study, Attinasi concluded that social integration was extremely important in Latino student retention, but not in the

Durkheimian sense as Tinto posited. Tinto looked at how students without social integration became isolated and therefore led to withdrawal from an academic institution. Attinasi, on the other hand, argued that for Latino students, social integration referred to the ability of students to connect in order to negotiate with peers the new physical, social and academic geographies to which they were being exposed for the first time.

However that may be, Attinasi's study major contribution has been the way in which it began to uncover the possibilities where Tinto's model was not sufficiently sensitive to different cultures and the experiences of minority students in college. This is similar to Tierney's (1992) point that Tinto's model called for integration into an alien culture. Minority students should not seek social integration into a majority culture system and therefore the model should not be used to try to uncover retention or to base policy changes.

Sandra Hurtado's work shows evidence of the transition from studies trying to see how Tinto applies to those looking for alternative approaches to Tinto's model. In collaboration with Carter and Spuler (1996), Hurtado explored issues surrounding college climate and its effect on retention of Latino students. Using a national data set, these authors found that students who perceived a hostile climate had difficulties adjusting academically and socially. These held true across college types. In 1997, Hurtado and Carter continued their line of inquiry by looking at how Latinos developed a sense of "belonging" at an institution. Again, using a national data set that included Latino students of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Latino groups, they hypothesized a causal

model that included background characteristics, college selectivity, ease in transition during first year and perception of hostility during second year, they found that membership in community organizations was most significantly associated with a sense of belonging. They concluded that developing a sense of membership (social integration) does not only include certain behaviors but also how students link with one another and develop a sense of belonging to a particular institution.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) continue to explore the issue of campus climate and Latino students. In this study they note that actual experiences in campus play a more important role in predicting a perception of a hostile environment than background. A limitation is that while understanding that perceptions are very important, these studies do not explore how being Latino clashes with the colleges they are attending and how some students therefore feel like they do not belong.

Gonzalez (2000) actually tries to look at how Latino students and the college structures interact. Acknowledging the limitations existing in Tinto's model as it relates to minority students, Gonzalez developed a grounded theory approach to studying the experiences of Latinos in a predominantly white university. Consistent with the writings of Strauss and Glazer, Gonzalez proposed to see how Chicanos experienced the white university environment in order to build a theory from the ground up. Gonzalez followed two Chicano students in a white university and through their experiences developed the concepts of marginalization and alienation that Latino students experience as they negotiate their social, physical and epistemological worlds. This approach signifies an

important advancement in our understanding of retention for a minority group because we begin to see the actual experiences and how these may lead some students to drop. However, what we do not learn from Gonzalez is the idea of whether it is the white majority culture within the university that leads to marginalization and alienation for Latino students, or is it the university culture itself, as a part of a larger social structure that leads to this. This is so because the site of his study was an institution where Latinos were in the minority.

A related development has been the influence of Bourdieu's social capital theory. Sanders and Serna (2004) analyzed the impact one particular intervention program that tried to help first generation students enroll in college. The program served as a proxy for social capital with first generation students. Using longitudinal data from this program they observed that first generation students followed three strategies in order to negotiate their new surroundings. The first strategy was one of reconfiguring their social networks. These students developed new contacts that could help them maneuver the university. The second group maintained old networks and consistently came back to program staff for help. The third group did not develop new social networks and did not maintain old ones and finally withdrew from college. While the idea of students moving from different social networks in order to adapt to the collegiate environment is an interesting one, this study does not provide sufficient detail as to how students move from one group to the other. What are the factors that affect this movement? This is what Gonzalez et al explore in their study (2003).

In this study Gonzalez et al, interviewed Latino students who had the opportunity to attend selective institutions and students who began their studies in a California community college. They were all coming from working class environments and attended low to middle socio-economic level high schools. Through the interviews they found that high schools were places of neglect and abuse that led to create barriers to college attendance and thus decreased participation.

Contreras (2005) also uses social capital theory to frame her study of SAT takers. Looking at the self-reported descriptive information she saw that Latino SAT test takers are more first generation, do not take as many advance placement courses and have lower GPA's than their white counterparts therefore they come from environments with lower social capital to succeed in college.

In sum, the lack of empirical support for Tinto's model as well as the conceptual criticisms of the model, have moved scholars to look at alternative ways to frame analyses of persistence for Latino students. These analyses have started to show the complexities involved in the decision making process of students who traditionally did not participate in higher education. These studies however, are still in the early stages and new contributions can be made. We still know little about whether Latino students experience difficulties because they attend primarily white institutions, or there are aspects of the collegiate experience itself, that leads certain Latinos to withdraw. We also know little about how non-traditional Latino students approach these experiences. We do

not know enough about how the collegiate experience fits within a larger social structure that is redefining what it is to be educated.

J. Retention and issues of racial inequities in the United States

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, scholarly attention to the issue of retention has been technical and often assumes the university as a closed system that is, to a degree, isolated from external social processes. Kuh et al (2010) states it as ‘...while schools often replicate existing social and economic inequality present in larger society and culture, they can circumvent inequality if students and faculty work in concert toward academic success.’ This is a rather optimistic view. Socio-economic and cultural forces that shape inequities in society are vast and permeate every aspect of society including education. The Latino community is no exception.

Since the Latino population, and the Latino non-traditional population is a subset of the former, is a minority population in the United States’ socio-economic context, it is impossible to separate Latino participation in higher education from larger issues of social and educational equity in the United States. For many years scholars and social commentators more generally, have noted the gap in achievement levels of minority students when compared to majority students. This happens in all levels of education and includes the problem of low completion rates. Instead of focusing on what happens at particular institutions, many authors have attempted to explain what social forces have created a society where minority students do not have the same level of educational

achievements as majority students. A very informed example that explains the different approaches to explaining educational differences in terms of race is Mario Barrera's article, "A Theory of Racial Inequality." (Barrera, 1997) In this article, Barrera summarizes and evaluates various theories explaining the racial inequities that exist in the educational system before developing his own. He begins the article by dividing theories of racial inequality into three categories, these are: deficiency theories, bias theories and structural discrimination theories.

Deficiency theories, according to Barrera, are further subdivided into biological deficiency, social structure deficiency, and cultural deficiency. Biological deficiency is the theory that states, simply, that peoples of minority background are biologically inferior to white people. Naturally then, they perform poorly in schools and drop out at higher rates. This theory is no longer taken seriously by many in academic environments, even though many people in the general public subscribe to it.

Social structure deficiency is a theory that is most often applied to the African American population. This theory stems from Daniel Patrick Moynihan's study in the 1960s, in which he argued that the disintegration of the black family, where large numbers of children grow in dysfunctional families, led to social problems and low academic achievement. Unlike biological deficiency, this theory puts the burden on the social structures of the minority group.

In the deficiency category, the most common, and the one that many people directly or indirectly subscribe to, is the theory of cultural deficiency. People from varied

political viewpoints find merit to cultural deficiency arguments. In essence, this theory purports that minorities have cultural traits that are not conducive to success in education. Latinos for example, cultural deficiency proponents have argued, are more present rather than future oriented, do not value language, and are fatalistic and dependent. These characteristics are a cultural disadvantage for success in education where it is important to be future oriented, give value to written language, believe in free will, and be independent and competitive. Latinos then perform poorly in educational institutions and drop out in higher numbers.

Cultural deficiency theories still play a significant role in academic circles and the general public. While many do not subscribe to cultural deficiency theories openly, hidden arguments that support this theory are common. However, there are many problems with these theories, particularly whether they are actually empirically accurate, but also that they do not question the privileged status that the dominant culture has in society. The way deficiency theories postulate the problem is that other cultures need to assimilate into the dominant culture in order for members of minority communities to be successful. Most importantly, though, is the rather static view of culture that deficiency theories take. To argue that Latinos are dependent and not future oriented is as fatalistic as the trait being ascribed to them. Culture is a dynamic process of giving meaning to experiences. In the Latino context it is extremely shortsighted to generalize on characteristics that may have been true to a limited number of people at particular times. Jose Joaquin Brunner (1995) for example, is particularly convincing when he argues that

Latin America shows a strong cultural heterogeneity. But by heterogeneity, Brunner is not thinking of varied cultures from indigenous to Creole, or rural to urban, low social class to upper social class, but rather he sees a system of differentiated participation in the international market of messages that penetrates local frameworks from all angles leading to unexpected results. Garcia Canclini argues similarly in Hybrid Cultures, (1990) particularly as it relates to the development of complex cultural systems in the border regions between the United States and Mexico.

Continuing with Barrera's development of theory, after discussing deficiency theories, he moves to the second category of theories of racial inequities in education, according to him, namely, Bias theories. There are a variety of these but essentially, they argue that racial ideologies lead to discrimination that then lead to low achievement. Since it is very well established that the dominant groups have racial ideologies that work against minorities, then minorities are discriminated against and thus have fewer resources, which leads to poor performance and increased incidences of attrition in the school system.

Bias theories usually are difficult to support in their entirety. While it is possible to find numerous examples of racist ideologies that lead to discrimination in educational resources and therefore to low performance by minorities in educational institutions, it is also possible to cite numerous counter examples of programs specifically designed for minorities to overcome the historical causes that have kept them in oppressed positions. In other words, bias theories tend to present a very schematic and simplistic view of

society that does not help explain the more subtle ways in which education is not accessed equally by all segments of the population.

The third group of theories is the set of theories on structural discrimination. These theories look at how the entire society is structured in ways that lead to discriminatory patterns. Barrera himself contributes to this discussion by developing a theory of internal colonialism. Borrowing concepts from colonial liberation discourses, Barrera argues that the colonial relationship that has historically existed between colonizers and colonized, namely that of a structured relationship of domination and subordination where the dominant and subordinate groups are defined along ethnic and racial lines, is applied to a condition within one country, namely the United States. This theory states that the dominant group has interests, which lead to the establishment of a system of structural discrimination, which in turn will lead to racial and ethnic inequities in all lines of life including education. This model, anchored with Marxist concepts of class structure, is favored by Barrera because it can accommodate some of the elements of other models such as deficiency issues or ideology issues. He believes that it has the strongest explanatory power for understanding the reasons behind racial inequities in society generally and education in particular.

Internal colonialism offers a strong way in which to frame issues of racial inequities and inequalities in society and education more specifically. Yet, it also has the shortcoming of painting a broad picture and the more detailed moments of processes are lost. To truly affect policy, we need to see how the actors themselves interact with the

forces that lead to subordination.

The advent of Critical Race Theory has bolstered theories of racial inequities. Stemming from legal studies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement that puts race at the center of analysis. Although it does not have a set of established doctrines or a unique methodology, CRT proponents insist that race continues to be a powerful social signifier that has serious implications for the maintenance of white supremacy. CRT theorists have been particularly disillusioned with liberal positions assuming the law to be race neutral and that its proper application will lead to societal improvements. This disillusion comes from the thousands of examples of an uneven application of the law in cases where the accused are people of color. This is exemplified by how seemingly race neutral concepts such as “the rule of law” and “equal protection” are in fact racially specific tools to maintain white supremacy. Derrick Bell, (1973) for example showed how merit standards are actually race specific because they were constructed in a context of exclusion and therefore do not help emancipate social groups that have been oppressed.

Critical Race Theory has found many adherents in education because concepts of racial oppression, developed in legal studies, apply so well to education where knowledge is developed and distributed. Educational researchers have deconstructed concepts such as “everyone has the ability to learn,” and “merit standards that are race neutral” to show that they serve as mechanisms to maintain white supremacy. The curriculum negates contributions made by people of minority background, instructional strategies pressure

children of color into positions of deficiency, and assessment tools privilege the knowledge white children bring to the classroom. In other words, the classroom becomes a space where knowledge is constructed, organized, produced and distributed, while the knowledge children of color bring from their homes is backward, primitive, deprived and deficient. (Ladson-Billings, p. 4) It is not too difficult to see how children of color learn to distrust their own background and minimize the contributions made by their peers.

For the Latino community, Villenas has shown well how Critical Race Theory may serve as a powerful conceptual tool. In a study of Mexican children attending public schools in the East, she heard testimonies from teachers that clearly expressed that they had lower expectations for Mexican children. (Villenas et al, p.9) They needed to dumb down the curriculum and often recommended that they follow vocational tracks because they were more suited to their abilities. At the same time, though, Villenas shows that the curriculum included no contributions from Chicanos to American society in the forms of history, culture or language, making the experience of going to school a completely foreign one.

As part of her study, Villenas also noted that Mexican families have different worldviews of success and proper socialization than does white middle class society. Mexicans value maintaining social ties over individual success. These cultural borders serve as communication barriers that keep parents out of schools and their children's education, and bolster the teachers' notions that parents hold back Mexican children.

The contributions of critical race theory greatly enhance our understanding of the

elements involved in retention. It shows how even the most well-intentioned efforts at educational access can become naive attempts at equality where educators are co-opted into maintaining white supremacy. This concept of racial inequities in educational systems could be easily adapted to higher education and the study of persistence of Latino students in particular. An internal colonial model could explain the structural conditions that exist that make it difficult for students to persist. It is possible to explain how these structures serve particular interests in society despite apparent opposite interests being served through access tools such as financial aid based on need, open door admissions and wider availability of institutions of higher education. The Critical Race Theory approach may be even more applicable to adults since they come with informal educational systems that are far more established than children's.

K. Retention as a Cultural Studies issue

Another way of stating the problem is that for the non-traditional Latino student, we are looking at a clash of cultures. On one hand we have the culture students bring from their communities, and on the other hand we have the culture of the academy, the culture of higher education, where time is measured in semesters, relationships are based on knowledge and that this knowledge has power in terms of the teaching and learning process and how it measures success. However, the clash of cultures is a dynamic process. We cannot fall into the trap of seeing cultures as well-defined monoliths that were created somewhere in the past. Through that lens, Latino student attrition will be

simplified to the point where it can be explained by showing that two incompatible cultures clash and the students drop out. This is disingenuous. As mentioned earlier, cultures are dynamic processes where individuals are constantly constructing meanings and values to the world that surrounds them.

The problem of persistence in higher education then, presents itself as a cultural studies problem in its most accepted form. This is that Cultural Studies aims at explaining its subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power (Sardar Van Loon, pp. 3-9). For this study it is that non-traditional Latino student retention is an issue of differing cultural practices in a context where there are uneven levels of power. However, discussions related to cultural studies often remain broad and unspecific because the definition and the essence of what constitutes cultural studies is a contested topic. Still a relatively new scholarly approach to study a variety of subjects, cultural studies escapes easy definitions. Nevertheless, there is some consensus over the guiding principles of the field based on its history. These clearly fit this study at various levels, including the fact that the roots of the field lie on efforts to improve adult education in universities.

Cultural Studies has its origins at the University of Birmingham with the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The founding figures were Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson. Their main goal was to study culture from a non-elite standpoint. While there are several factors that led these scholars to develop an interest in culture, there are two most commonly cited. First, the growth of

mass media and consequently mass culture led many in academic and other social circles to refer to the dumbing down of culture through television and other mass media. The Birmingham group reacted against that by challenging the concept of high and low culture. Second, many scholars from left wing traditions of social analysis were becoming disillusioned with the economic determinism prevalent in Marxist thought. The Birmingham group offered alternative ways to view society in more dynamic ways. (Grossberg, p. 24) Most interestingly, though, the founders of the movement were originally adult educators. They were involved in attempts to help demobilized soldiers enter higher education after the Second World War. Undoubtedly, their experiences with these students shaped their thought development in how different sectors of society construct culture.

From the Birmingham school, then, the approach to studying social forms emerged as investigating how culture, power, knowledge, authority and meaning interact. (Hyttén p.41) What is valued in society, or more carefully described and qualified as what cultural symbols, practices and artifacts are valued and privileged, relates to power relations. Conversely, what cultural symbols, practices and artifacts are marginalized is also connected to power. In a somewhat overly simplified example, it is those in power that privilege what is knowledge, what is culturally appropriate behavior and so on. This connects well with this proposed study insofar as the practice of higher education in all its aspects serves certain social functions.

Beyond the basic description of cultural studies relating to cultural practices and

power, it is possible to elaborate by describing the four basic assumptions of the field. (Hytten, p.43) First is the concept that culture is dynamic. In other words, cultural forms are always changing and there is no monolithic culture coming from the past. Secondly, and related, is that there is no distinction between high culture and low culture. The only distinction is in the value that some cultural expressions receive from society. There are concepts and artifacts that may be considered high culture today but can become low culture tomorrow. Thirdly, culture and power are linked because what is valued and privileged in cultural formations today is related to the issue of who do these values serve and the existing power relations in society. Finally, Cultural Studies transcends disciplinary boundaries, since even the formation of disciplines is a cultural form.

L. Retention as an Issue of Subalterneity and Gramscian Theory

As an intellectual pursuit, the study of persistence of non-traditional Latinos becomes the interaction of two cultural systems, with unequal power relations. While this fits within the cultural studies framework, it is important to note that the postcolonial movement and the subaltern studies group in particular, have studied and have presented important advances in thinking about cultural clashes and issues of power as it relates to social movements.

The postcolonial group is often presented, but not universally accepted, as a branch or a related field of cultural studies that is particularly interested in the colonial experience, particularly the last colonial period of the early twentieth century in Asia and

Africa. The colonial experience is the experience of political domination of peoples based on ethnic and racial differences for a variety of purposes, but most often economic. But postcolonial authors are not interested in looking at this problem in terms of underdevelopment or dependency theory. As Homi Bhabha puts it, “As a mode of analysis, [the postcolonial] attempts to revise those nationalist or nativist pedagogies that set up the relationship between the first and the third world in a binary structure of opposition... It forces recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.” (Bhabha 1994 p. 191)

Perhaps the most succinct and clear explanation of the postcolonial agenda is provided by Slemon in the *Scramble for Post-colonialism*. (Slemon, 1994) In this article, Slemon presents, in a diagrammatic form, the various ways in which colonial powers regulate colonial subjects. The first way, and most obvious is through the use of force. Colonial powers control their subjects with strong armies, and whenever there are disruptions to this control, the army suppresses the subjects. But Slemon’s diagram shows that while this is the most obvious form of control, it is not the only one, and in reality, it is not the most effective. In the diagram, there is a second line, which symbolizes the institutional apparatuses, such as educational institutions, that participate in the production of colonialist relations. As critical race theorists would state it, the educational system shows the colonized, how their own social institutions are backward and primitive and develop consent for western structures. The third and final line in Slemon’s diagram looks at how the colonial relation reproduces colonial ideology through semiotic devices.

Literary works, art, advertising, and many other forms of representation reproduce colonialist relations that lead to consent.

The second and third lines are the ones that are most applicable to an understanding of persistence in higher education. In particular, it is useful to think of colonial institutions. This is similar to the problem of bringing adult Latino students into a system of higher education, which is foreign to them. Higher education serves as a form of domination, where a particular population feels it lacks an important element (namely education, degrees, certificates) to be successful in society much like the colonized people. Although the power may not be as bluntly coercive as it is in colonial situations, it is nevertheless a system of social domination.

A possible result from the postcolonial approach is that we can understand higher education in the United States from the frame of a dominant group imposing its system of education to a subaltern group. Subaltern means in this context a social group that is not part of the dominant elite in economic, social, political and cultural power. The dominant group generates consent for its power through education, but a corollary to this is that it generates consent for the educational system. This imposition is presented in a benevolent form, with policies of access and financial aid, but it is still a power relation. This is, of course, derived from Antonio Gramsci. In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony where the elites rule the subaltern groups without the use of force because the subaltern groups accept the privilege of the ruling elite through intellectual and moral leadership. For Gramsci scholars, the concept of subaltern has been

controversial. Some have argued that by subaltern, Gramsci meant working class people in strictly Marxian terms. He used the word subaltern because he was writing in prison and feared being censored. However, others have argued that Gramsci himself was from Sardinia and understood colonial relations from the vantage point of the colonized. Sardinians often express their identity as being colonized by Italy. Thus the term subaltern is far more complex than working class, and can incorporate ethnicity, education or other characteristics that make people not be in elite positions. This latter interpretation of the term subaltern is particularly appropriate, in my opinion, to the study of non-traditional Latino students participating in higher education.

The process of hegemony in Gramscian terms is complex. There are a variety of forces in civil society that lead to hegemony. But Gramsci himself visualized possibilities where rule by consent was impossible. In these cases, the state would use coercion and force. These possibilities for non-acceptance of the hegemonic processes of the elites have led to a group of intellectuals in India to develop the subaltern group of studies.

Subaltern studies started mostly as a group of scholars who wanted to study the Indian colonial past from the point of view of Indian peasants who formed the great majority of the population. Ranajit Guha, its founder, is a historian. Their goal was to counteract histories developed in the metropolis, which focused on the growth of the colonial empire and the progress brought by western civilization. But even further, they wanted to counteract the trigger response to colonial history, which is a history of anti-colonialism leading to national liberation. This interpretation is questioned because a

narrative of national liberation is a western narrative using the nation, a western concept, as its core. It is debatable whether the Indian peasantry really expressed their concerns in the form of nationalism, or whether the latter was a western expression developed by western educated Indians who took the vanguard role in liberation from colonialism and co-opted peasant movements for their own interests. In Latin American studies, subaltern studies have appeared as a way to explain the failure of both right wing and left wing linear narratives of development that have failed to bring economic prosperity or a fair distribution of wealth to the continent. The cultural complexity of the continent and its ambivalent participation in the market of modern and postmodern ideas has been approached through a subaltern lens by various scholars. (Beverley 1999) Thus the subaltern studies group's purpose can be summarized as trying to write a history that gives agency and a voice to the non-elite groups, which in Gramscian terms are called subaltern.

The idea of listening to voices of the oppressed is not altogether novel. Other scholars, particularly those interested in issues of social justice, have in the past tried to write histories from below, focusing on the people. The subaltern studies group though, does go significantly beyond this notion by bringing in, as Gayatri Spivak, a leading subaltern scholar, concepts of studying changes in signification systems with the benefit of a cultural studies lens. (Spivak, 1994)

Spivak borrows the concept of signification systems from semiotics and it is a way of studying language that looks at how signs generate meaning by systems of

relationships. It is possible to expand this way of understanding linguistic principles can be expanded to other areas. So the subaltern group tries to give voice to the subaltern by trying to understand the ways in which they give meaning to the colonial experience. This meaning may be very different from the meaning expressed in nationalist discourses.

Central to this way of understanding cultural practices is the idea of consciousness. The subaltern studies group is concerned with an understanding of consciousness rather than understanding change. (Guha and Spivak, 1988) This brings many problems, which scholars in this tradition, still debate about. First, in history, is the question of sources. The record only kept official sources and therefore the voices of the subaltern may never be known. Second, is that it is unwise to assume a single underlying consciousness, when there was a plurality of ways of signifying cultural practices. The first issue is not as important in a contemporary study, but the question still remains whether the subaltern voice is really accessible; whether our own analytic tools repress this voice. The proposed project will look at the ways in which subaltern groups give meaning to their experiences and practices.

M. Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the issue of retention is one that has concerned scholars for several decades. The fact that many students begin their collegiate studies but do not finish them bewilders everyone. Earlier models have been tested and

proven to make some contributions but fail to explain the departure process completely.

In a context that Latino non-traditional students enter and exit higher education as part of a wider social structure that includes inequities, this work views the retention process for Latino non-traditional students from a cultural lens. While there are undoubtedly, academic, financial and many other practical factors that affect the ability of Latinos to attend there is a cultural dimension as to how the Latino non-traditional students interact with the culture of higher education that has been underplayed in the literature.

III. METHODS

A. Introduction

A review of the literature on issues related to retention, adult students, and Latino students leads to several conclusions that are relevant to advancing our understanding of Latino non-traditional students and their experiences in higher education environments. These conclusions relate to the empirical knowledge that exists regarding this population, the limitations of constructs created to address persistence in colleges and universities and the larger societal context in which higher education operates, particularly as it relates to new populations entering the academy.

Latino non-traditional students have not participated in large numbers in higher education, but they represent an important population in terms of meeting the goals of having more people educated at a postsecondary level.

(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education>) The Latino population still lags behind in educational attainment with only 14.5% percent of Latinos 25 years or older having earned a Bachelor's degree. In contrast, 51% of Asians, 34.5% of whites and 21.2% of African-Americans have earned a bachelor's degree. (Lopez, H. & Fry R. 2013) To meet the national goals, it will be necessary to include adults in the educational pipeline. Understanding how Latino non-traditional students interact with the academy can inform how higher education will meet this societal need.

But beyond the empirical fact that there are a growing number of Latino non-traditional students attending colleges and universities is that as a field, retention studies

have evolved over the past forty years. As scholars have continued to evolve their thoughts on the complexities of how students make decisions to continue or discontinue their studies, they have empirically and conceptually convincingly criticized earlier approaches to the field. However, despite these criticisms, it remains true that, what Vincent Tinto's and other authors' seminal works on the field stated, the way students interact with the university plays a role in their decisions to stay or leave that experience. (Tinto, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Braxton and Hirschy, 2005; Kuh, 2005; Torres & Hernandez, 2012) This interaction involves academic and social issues that impact how students feel they own the experience.

An additional layer to our understanding of retention is that, in a highly diversified higher education environment, it is impossible to separate the collegiate experience from larger socio-economic and cultural processes, which have led to the marginalization of certain groups. Even if numerous efforts to level the field have taken place over the past thirty years, for minority students, higher education is part of a larger process of domination that perpetuates inequities. (Barrera 1997) These inequities include the way higher education is structured, how it creates expectations of when and how to attend, how to interact with different players and so on.

The collegiate experience then, is a complex interplay of transactions in institutions, which form part of a wider social context that marginalizes certain groups. Higher education has the ability to be liberating, but it can also be part of a system that does not permit the advancement of marginalized groups. These conclusions lead to the

conceptualization of the retention process as an issue of subalterneity, a field within Cultural Studies more generally, that frames the experiences of Latino non-traditional students that lead to attrition. Consequently, the research question (as stated in Chapter I) is:

How do Latino non-traditional students make sense of their withdrawal experience from a two-year Latino serving institution?

Addressing this question in the context of existing research called for using a qualitative method approach. It involved interviewing former students, both graduates and non-graduates, supported by descriptive data of a larger sample of students at an institution that uniquely serves the Latino population in the Midwest. The process involved the analysis of a survey on student satisfaction conducted at a Latino institution and then analyzing the interviews of a subset of students that participated in the survey. The interviews took place about ten years after attending college. This permitted former students to analyze their experiences in the context of a broader life experience that takes place before and after college attendance.

This chapter first provides a rationale for the methods used, followed by a description of the institutional site, a description of the process followed to analyze the survey and finally the process used in analyzing the interviews.

In essence, this approach follows a constructivist paradigm. Unlike positivist approaches, a constructivist view postulates that knowledge is socially constructed and we can only advance our understanding by accessing multiple subjective points of view. However, this work does not dismiss positivist forms of knowledge. It follows a

dialectical approach, as we seek synergy in both methods to reach a fuller understanding of human activity.

B. Choice of Methods

The selection of research site and the use of a qualitative approach were deliberate decisions that had three very specific purposes. First, the site is a two-year private non-profit institution that primarily serves Latinos, and largely Latino non-traditional students and has developed a strong Latino cultural environment. This location eliminates the possibility of confounding results where students' negative experiences may relate to being an ethnic and cultural minority in a majority white environment. Second, even though the research is qualitative, the survey yielded descriptive data on the students attending the institution and some comparative results of graduates and non-graduates on constructs associated with retention in other studies, but for this particular population and this specific educational context. And third, the qualitative approach gave the opportunity to the former students to explain how they made sense of their experience within the higher education world and how those experiences fit within the structures of civil society.

The location of this study, a two-year private institution created to serve the Latino community is important to this study because it provides an almost controlled environment when addressing issues of culture. In higher education research, studies that focus on minority populations often pay attention to the issue of climate. Even if college

climate is not the focus of the study, how minority students feel in an institution is an important element of their ability to succeed. (Hurtado 1994; Hurtado and Carter 1997; Hurtado and Ponjuan 2005; Gonzalez 2000) Climate is described as the social and cultural environments that exist in institutions of higher education and it is often argued that these environments lead to alienation and isolation in the case of minority students. However, this work draws a distinction between the social and cultural elements surrounding daily life at an institution that may be alienating to minority students and the actual conventions of higher education that exist at all institutions and that in themselves create a cultural space. For example, creating culturally sensitive activities that attempt to bring value to minority cultures, such as celebrating important dates in Latino history, acknowledging Latino contributions to United States history and many other activities may be associated with creating positive climate for Latino students, but these activities do not have an impact on the rules regarding instructor and student relationships, curricular choices made by faculty, or how students relate to other offices within an institution. All these activities are also part of a culture as students construct and interpret it to make sense of their experience. These latter conventions can also be seen as part of a white, straight male culture but it is also represented by members of other groups.

Creating a distinction between the cultural spaces that people have based on their ethnic background and upbringing and the culture of higher education as separate possibilities for creating tension for a Latino non-traditional student population, makes Latino College (LC) a unique site for this type of research because it almost offers an

experimental control for the differences between social and cultural aspects of minority culture and collegiate culture. It is an institution created to serve the Latino population and has developed numerous structures to make the Latino non-traditional student feel at home. Yet it is still a college with faculty, curriculum, staff and academic policies that resemble other institutions.

Presenting survey data to further our knowledge of aspects affecting student retention at Latino College helps assess the degree to which the population behaves like other populations. However, a pragmatic problem is that it is difficult to survey students who have left an institution. To counter this problem it is possible to administer surveys to student populations while they are still enrolled and later determine which ones did not complete. An analysis comparing the sample of completers and non-completers is potentially compelling. This is the approach followed in this research. As part of an institutional research function LC administered the survey. Later it determined which students completed a degree and which ones did not. The two groups lent themselves to group means comparison analysis.

The qualitative approach consisted of interviews of graduates and non-graduates who took the survey. The interviews took place several years after their experience as students. While the survey gives a picture of how existing constructs relate to this population, the interviews gave the participants the opportunity to describe their experience in their words without narrowing the choices for explanation.

Qualitative procedures do not lend themselves to descriptions such as those

available for quantitative procedures because the path the research project takes depends on where the subjects, the people being interviewed, take the topic. Nevertheless, it is possible to present some guiding principles of the process. (Guba and Lincoln 1992; Lincoln & Guba 1985) Also, since this study focused on a unique student population, that has cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from most other groups attending college, it is necessary to justify the choice of qualitative methodology, data collection and the ability of the researcher to reach this information in the context of the research questions being asked.

Qualitative methods is the name reserved in social science research for a wide variety of methods that, in the analysis stage, cannot be quantified and manipulated using statistical techniques. Qualitative methods include case studies, ethnographies, testimonies, and several other forms of narrative data. To gather the data, the researcher often observes and/or interviews subjects in many settings and with varying degrees of immersion into the world of the observed. There are so many different types of research methodologies that employ the name qualitative that there is much debate as to its value within the community of scholars who conduct the research. The criticisms are even stronger from scholars who are more familiar and comfortable with quantitative methods of inquiry.

C. Analytical Approach

The use of qualitative methods is growing in higher education research. However,

it is still not the most common form to answer research questions since the field has been dominated by quantitative studies with large samples. Nevertheless, I believe that it is the most appropriate tool to tackle the research question presented in this proposal. This is the case because of the ontological and epistemological stance I wish to take in this project.

All research, whether overtly or not, subscribes to a particular paradigmatic approach to knowledge and the creation of knowledge. That is, research falls into a particular ontological and epistemological view of the world. The paradigm an author follows usually has implications on the choice of research method. Positivist and post-positivist views, which hold that there is an objective reality that can be explained through research is often associated with quantitative methods that have fixed items. On the other hand, qualitative methods are often associated with constructivist paradigms that hold that reality is socially constructed. (Rocco et al, 2003) I believe that in policy analysis there is much to be gained by an approach that accepts an objective world, yet the construction of meaning is dynamic. This can lead us into new ways of looking at policy implications.

D. Institution as Subject

The students that participated in this research project were all, at some point, students at Latino College (LC). LC is a private, independent non-profit college located in a major urban center in the Midwest. This is particularly significant to this study because LC is a

unique institution in the higher education landscape and its uniqueness provides a setting for innovative analysis. It permits to look at the interaction of Latino non-traditional students with the culture of higher education in an environment that is culturally in tune with Latino non-traditional students.

LC is an institution that was created to serve the Latino community in this urban area. The stated mission of the college is

Latino College is an independent, bilingual (dual-language) institution of higher education created under the auspices of the Episcopal Diocese to make the American system of higher education accessible to a diverse student population with emphasis on those of Hispanic descent; to strengthen ethnic identity; to reinforce cultural interaction; and to build a bridge to fill cultural, educational, and socio-economic gaps.

Latino College fulfills its mission through variety of special services and cultural practices, which create an environment that is welcoming to the Latino population.

Nevertheless, it is an accredited institution of higher education approved to receive Title IV funding from the Department of Education and authorized to operate by its state's higher education regulatory agency. The result is that although the environment is culturally welcoming, it also has all the features and trappings of an institution of higher education.

1. Origins

LC is a young institution in a context where most colleges and universities date back to the nineteenth century or earlier. Founded in 1980, LC was the result of work conducted by several Latino professionals working in mental health at a major urban

center in the 1970s. The leader was a Colombian psychologist, Dr. Arturo Calvo. As he stated, he was particularly struck by referrals to the mental health clinic he directed from the court system that required psychological and emotional therapy. (Calvo 2009) In his opinion, many of the individuals referred to his agency did not need therapy, but rather had limited English and lacked the educational tools to navigate in American society, particularly the legal system. Additionally, he believed that there were no good educational options for Latinos in the urban center in which he lived at the time.

In order to address these limitations, Dr. Calvo initiated a series of educational activities. These included offering English as a second language in his agency, which led to offering other short courses on the legal system, the bureaucratic structures of city government and GED preparation classes, and the development of a Spanish GED test. This in turn led to the offering of credit bearing courses through other institutions of higher education in the region. As these activities grew, the concept of developing an independent institution emerged. He, and his colleagues, became convinced that the community could only succeed with access to higher education and that this access could only be achieved by creating an institution completely dedicated to this service.

To found a new institution was a bold decision. Still the dedication of Dr. Calvo and many other individuals resulted in the State Board of Higher Education granting authority to operate in 1980. They purchased a small building in a Latino neighborhood where they could accommodate six classrooms.

LC's first students were 200 English-as-a-second language course takers in the

fall of 1980. Soon after, however, the College offered academic courses leading to associate degrees. Dr. Calvo, in addition to being a clinical psychologist, was an Episcopal priest and he received seed funding from that church. Since that date, the college has had a loose affiliation with the Episcopal Church.

The institution grew very quickly. The first 200 hundred students became 800 in just two years. The college purchased additional physical facilities and in 1983, LC received, accreditation candidacy from the North Central Association. LC was accredited by this organization in 1987, a status which maintains to this day. (College catalog 1999; 2013)

2. Curriculum and Schedule

LC has many characteristics that were established with the purpose of facilitating access to college to the Latino population and the curriculum is no exception. The college started with only a few English classes but quickly added course work leading to several associate degrees. Over the years the college has continued to incorporate associate degrees to its curriculum.

Among the degrees offered by the College are an associate of arts for the purpose of transferring to other institutions to complete a Bachelor's degree and several associates of applied science in accounting, business management, computer information systems and secretarial science. LC has also developed associates in early childhood education, respiratory therapy and one bachelor's degree in social work.

The course requirements in LC's degrees are very traditional and similar to those at community colleges. This facilitates transfer, accreditation, and recognition of credits. They include general education requirements, major requirements and some electives. Course choice is often limited, but the breadth is there to assure that English composition, mathematics, social science, science and humanities are covered.

Even though course offerings are rather traditional, the course titles and catalog descriptions are very similar to those in most colleges and universities, the mode of offering them is not. Since its inception, and still a practice, LC offers a bilingual curriculum. Dr. Calvo and Dr. Alberto Astorga, the Dean of Academic Affairs, following bilingual education theory of the time, developed a transitional bilingual curriculum for the entire institution. This means that students with limited English can take content classes in Spanish at the same time that they take developmental English classes, which count as electives or as prerequisites in the curriculum. For example, students at LC can take general psychology or survey of United States history from 1865 to present in Spanish.

In addition to the bilingual curriculum, LC also developed a schedule for offering classes that is particularly beneficial to adult students. Most classes meet once a week in the morning or the evening for three and half hours. Although this is an undergraduate curriculum, the delivery model resembles a graduate school, which allows the adult student to participate in the curriculum with more flexibility.

3. Admission and Financial Aid

Although the college literature never mentions the socio-economic background of the target students, it was clear from the founding of the institution that the goal was not only to serve the entire Latino community in the Midwest, but a particular sector of it. While the children of more affluent Latinos attend traditional colleges and universities, the majority of the students served by Latino College are low income, first generation in college and have limited prior education. The College's promotional materials target this population.

LC has a non-selective admission policy, usually known as open door. Anyone with a high school degree from the United States or its equivalent from abroad is guaranteed admission. Additionally individuals who have completed the high school equivalency test credential known as the GED are also admitted. Even further, individuals who have not completed the GED can obtain a conditional admission to the College by passing a federally approved examination known as the ATB (which stands for ability to benefit from a college education). When the College was founded institutions could choose their own instrument to define ATB, but in the 1990s the Department of Education limited the choice to a select group of tests approved by the Department.

Since most students are low income it is not realistic to expect the students to afford tuition. Thus the College keeps its tuition very low, for a private institution, and with grant aid from the federal and state government provides packages to students so

that over 95% of the students do not pay out of pocket for tuition or the cost of books. Further, these financial aid packages use grant aid only and the students do not depend on student loans to finance their education.

4. Additional Services

While the bilingual curriculum, the admission policies and financial aid packages are core elements in defining how LC has established an institution to serve the Latino community, there are other services that are also important in this system. Among these are satellite locations. LC has a main campus in a culturally diverse neighborhood with a high percentage of Latinos and two satellite locations in primarily Latino neighborhoods. One of them is in a primarily Mexican neighborhood and the other is in a primarily Puerto Rican neighborhood. The vast majority of students, who are all commuters, live within three miles of an LC location.

Another important aspect is parallel morning and evening sessions for classes. All courses that are offered in the morning are offered at night at the same time and location. Students can mix and match also, taking some classes in the morning, others in the evening, and at other locations. They can also change during terms if required by changes in work schedule or other personal reasons.

Finally, the college also offers childcare services for a minimal fee, free parking, intensive and intrusive advising and other services, which facilitates the access and progress and Latino students.

5. Student Characteristics

It is not surprising, given the description of the institution's curriculum, services and location, that the great majority of the students are Latino. Latinos form 91% of the student body. Forty percent are Mexican, 9% are Puerto Rican, 9% represent South American countries, 9% represent Central American countries and 6% come from other countries. The last group in the demographic portrayal of Latino College is the set of students born in the United States. These are 26% of the population and the majority is of Latino descent. (Latino College Factsheet 1998-99) The average age of students is 30. Seventy-seven percent of the students are female. Over half the students care for children and hold full-time jobs. (Latino College Factsheet 1998-99)³

The academic background of the students is divided into four categories. 28% are graduates of foreign high schools, 20% graduated from high school in the United States, 39% completed the GED and 13% are attending conditionally under the ATB clause. Some students, who completed the GED, began their studies as ATB students. (Latino College: Self-Study report in preparation for the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Evaluation Visit. 1999)

6. Faculty and Staff

Since LC is an institution that developed a financial model that relies on low

³ The characteristics of the college population has not changed significantly over the years. The Latino population was 87% in 2013.

tuition so that students who qualify for federal and state grant financial aid can attend without having to pay out of pocket or requiring loans, the operation is very frugal. There is a strong reliance on adjunct faculty who teach the majority of the courses of the college. Still, here is small core of full time faculty. They are 22 and there is an even split of 50% female and 50% male faculty. Sixty-eight percent are Latino, 23% are white and 14% are African-American. Among staff, many more are Latinos, 75%. All are bilingual in English and Spanish. (Latino College: Self-Study report in preparation for the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Evaluation Visit. 1999)

7. Climate

The curriculum, the additional services and the characteristics of staff, faculty and students have led LC to have an environment that is very Latino. Most student interactions are with Latino staff, who are also peers. Spanish and mixtures of Spanish and English (often referred to as Spanglish) are spoken widely throughout the institution, most signs are bilingual and food in the cafeteria is Hispanic. Climate is an intangible that is difficult to describe, but LC definitely has a strong Latino cultural environment, which is welcoming to the student population.

Interestingly, even though LC has a Latino cultural environment, it has many characteristics that are consistent with a collegiate environment in the United States. Due to accreditation requirements, state and federal regulatory agencies, tradition, finances and the desire of the College leadership to seek acceptance from the higher education

community led the institution to form structures that resemble other institutions.

Instructors and students meet in classrooms at specific times, progress is measured in grades that go from A through F and these are converted to a numerical grade point average (GPA). This GPA is used to measure progress students are making over time and if it falls below 2.0 (on a four point scale) students' financial aid and ability to progress is compromised. (College Catalog, 2013)

In addition to the academic experience, the organizational chart is similar to other institution; academic affairs includes faculty who are responsible for teaching and assessing that teaching, student services provides advising, financial aid, and records grades, the Bursar's office collects tuition and so on.

The result of this structure and culture is that even though LC has a climate that welcomes Latino non-traditional students, it also has all the trappings of the culture of higher education, which requires specific knowledge and experiences to navigate.

E. Student Satisfaction Survey

For the purposes of understanding the levels of satisfaction students had with the institution, LC designed a satisfaction survey, which provided the quantitative data for this project. During the 1990s LC, in its efforts to further solidify its standing as an institution of higher education and to better comply with accreditation requirements, developed an institutional research function. As part of the activities of this unit was the implementation of a satisfaction survey, which is one of several traditional measures of institutional effectiveness.

Choosing the instrument was a lengthy decision that involved many at LC. While there were several commercially available instruments in the market, college administrators feared these would not measure some of the unique aspects of LC. Even though these instruments offered the advantage of being nationally tested and normed, the College decided to develop its own instrument that would capture LC's unique services. Additionally, the instrument had to be bilingual so that students in the early stages of their collegiate career could participate in its administration.

The staff from the institutional research office, several senior administrators, and two recent Ph.Ds, with strong quantitative backgrounds, participated in the design of the instrument. While it contained many items on a variety of topics related to the student experience, the instrument also specifically contained items designed to measure academic and social integration as first discussed by Tinto. The instrument is attached as appendix A. The thought was, much like other authors, that having subjects respond to a survey while they are still students could offer interesting information later, when some participants are no longer students. Even further, the implementation of the survey, while assuring the students' confidentiality, requested their social security numbers in order to identify them for later use. The social security number was the student identification number, which was standard operation in many institutions until the late 1990s. Since then issues of privacy do not allow access to social security numbers.

The instrument was finalized, pilot tested, administered twice to the whole institution and several items have been used in other research projects. (Kraemer, 1997,

Nora et al, 1997; Torres and Hernandez 2009). Unfortunately, due to financial difficulties and administrative changes at Latino College, it was not administered after 1998. This study uses the results from that last administration.

The sample for the survey consisted of students attending developmental English courses, or English composition courses during the twelfth week of the spring semester of 1998. Sections of these courses were selected from all locations of the institution and from both morning and evening sessions. Since at this institution over 90% of the students take some form of an English course every semester of their studies, the sample is very representative of the population. Students were at various points in the progress towards their degrees.

The method for implementation of the instrument was for institutional research staff to visit the sections chosen and provide a paper copy of the survey to the students. Additionally, students were provided with bubble sheet answer sheets which they used to respond to the survey questions with a number two pencil. These answer sheets were later scanned and coded using SPSS.

Since the students identified themselves by providing their social security number, the Registrar's office was able to provide additional data such as background variables and, most importantly, whether the students had either graduated (with an Associate or Bachelor's degree) or were still enrolled in the fall of 2001, or had dropped out.

The results of a survey conducted in 1998 may seem outdated for a study that

focuses on current issues related to retention. However, the data has value because this population has not responded to these questions in other studies and their contributions enhance our knowledge of how higher education and society interact. This is discussed further under limitations of the data. The analytical process followed was to run descriptive statistics of all fields in order to identify missing data. In some cases it was possible to go back to the Registrar's office and find the correct information from source materials. In some other cases, however, particularly in survey responses, it was necessary to leave the data as missing. Next, a descriptive profile of the survey responders in terms of age, gender, country of origin, background education and other data pertinent to this study was developed.

The statistical analysis was to compare the means of graduates and non-graduates. Following theory on retention, the means of items related to academic integration, social integration, commitment to complete, outside support or outside obstacles to education, were compared. The comparison was of students who after taking the survey subsequently having graduated and those who did not. T-tests were used to determine the significance in the difference of the means.

F. Interviews

In higher education research, the use of qualitative methods was unusual until relatively recent times. Most scholars used quantitative statistical techniques with large, often national data sets. Lately, qualitative methods have become more common,

but not unlike other fields, questions about the quality and rigor of this research have surfaced. Various authors have addressed these issues in other fields. Guba and Lincoln wrote one of the foundational articles addressing the issues of quality in non-quantitative research (1982). In this article, the authors provide a typology of qualitative and quantitative criteria that still serves as the main point of reference for many authors. (Anfara et al, 2002) The typology offers concepts that compare to the four basic tenets that show the strength of a quantitative study, namely, internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. The first criterion to analyze the quality and rigor of a quantitative study is internal validity. Guba and Lincoln compare this to the concept of credibility, which means that the information presented by the researcher is believable, meaning that the perception of what is being presented corresponds to the author's representation of it. The second criterion in quantitative research is external validity. This, according to Guba and Lincoln, is comparable to transferability. Transferability is the degree to which the researcher provides sufficient information and details so that the reader can connect with the subject of the study. Comparable to reliability, Guba and Lincoln offer the concept of dependability. This refers to how trustworthy is the information provided to the reader. And finally for objectivity is confirmability, essentially meaning that the data presented are not imaginary and have a real correspondent in the world.

In order to bolster the quality and rigor of the criteria offered by Guba and Lincoln, there are strategies associated with each criterion. Associated to credibility, is

the strategy of prolonged engagement in the field; the longer the exposure of the researcher to the subject, the stronger the credibility. For transferability there is the strategy, attributed to Clifford Geertz, known as thick description, namely that the subject's world is described in full detail. This strategy is also associated with dependability and confirmability. However, for the latter two, triangulation, the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals or types of data is the preferred strategy for providing rigor to a research project.

Even though these concepts have helped structure qualitative research, it is still not free from controversy. Several aspects of the data gathering process still generate discomfort to some researchers, particularly when researching populations from other cultures. Most important among them, is the role of the researcher. Scholars have noted that in interviews, subjects give answers that vary depending on how the researchers frame the questions and on how the researcher presents him or herself. The answers subjects give are often dependent on how the questions are framed and who is asking the questions. The best possible solution to this problem is to make the process as explicit as possible so that readers can best judge how information and interpretation was developed in qualitative research.

This research project employed a qualitative interview process. This was the space where Latino Non-traditional Latino students expressed how they related to the higher education process. Using interviews as a method is a well-known format in qualitative methodologies. Nevertheless, there are a variety of ways of conducting

interviews. This has led scholars to categorize interviews in several ways so as to further clarify the particular interview style being used in a situation and its applicability to the questions asked. At one end is the category of the structured interview. Essentially, this interview method calls for giving the same set of questions to all the participants. Often the responses are also limited to a set of possibilities. Many researchers prefer this method because of its consistency and the set of responses lend themselves to some levels of quantitative analysis. Another common form of interview is the group interview, or as it is often called in market research, the focus group. Several interview participants are placed together and as questions are asked, all participants answer, building on each other's responses. This allows participants to help each other recall events or frame responses to items they are shown by the researcher. The focus group can be very lively and researchers gather much data in a short period. This is what makes the focus group the preferred qualitative methods of some researchers, particularly those working on market research. (Vidich & Lyman 2000)

Opposed to structured interviews is the category of unstructured interviews. Often associated with open-ended ethnographic research, unstructured interviews let the respondents develop and structure their answers without the constraints of specific questions. While structured interviews aim at getting precise data that can be coded, unstructured interviews try to understand the complex behaviors of a particular group of people without imposing any a priori categories that may cloud the ways in which the respondents themselves would categorize their experiences.

The preferred method for this study was semi-structured interviews. The research question would benefit from an unstructured approach so that the respondents can, in their own terms, explain how they experienced higher education. This study seeks to find how a particular population understands the higher education and their particular role in it without the restraints of imposing external categories. This is consistent with an unstructured interview. Yet at the same time, it was necessary to guide the interview process to some degree in order to assure that the respondents address issues related to retention theory, how their own experiences relate to this theory, and how their experiences fit within a structure of unequal power relations regarding the role of higher education.

In order to assure that this investigation had the elements of a sound qualitative approach, (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability), it is necessary to address some of the elements that other investigators have thought are important in an unstructured interview process. These elements are accessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondents, gaining trust, establishing a rapport and deciding how to present oneself. (Mertens p. 182)

As far as accessing the setting, the interview respondents all reside in a major metropolitan area. Since they are no longer students, I gave the choice of where to conduct the interview. It could be in the residence of the respondents, or some other place where they feel comfortable answering questions about their experience. The college itself, where they studied, was avoided in all but one case. While being at the college

might have brought interesting memories, it also had the potential of placing some bias on how students interpret their withdrawal.

The second and third elements, understanding the language and culture of the respondents, and gaining their trust, are crucial to a successful investigation using interviews. In ethnographic research, the investigator achieves this understanding and trust by having a prolonged exposure to the subject being studied. This cannot be achieved under the time constraints of this study. However, I have had the opportunity to work with LC (on and off) for twenty years. I am very comfortable in the cultural environment of the Latino community, I can generate trust and I am fluent in Spanish. I believe that I have developed a deep understanding of the culture of the students.

The fact that I have worked for the institution can be seen as a potential barrier, but my knowledge of the population is sufficiently deep so that I could clearly explain the nature of the project to the participants and that it is unrelated to my professional duties for the institution.

This leads to addressing the fourth and fifth elements of the unstructured interview, establishing a rapport and deciding how to present oneself. As stated above, I have worked with this population for twenty years. So even though the data for this project was gathered over a relatively brief period, my association with the population is lengthy and profound so that establishing a rapport was possible. Even though physically I do not look like the members of this population, my ability to speak the language as a native, and my understanding of the culture allowed me to establish myself as someone

who can be trusted and as someone who is completing a project that is unrelated to the institution. Even though I believe I have strong qualifications to conduct the qualitative portion of this study, it is also important to accept that interviews are not individual and isolated processes and that the data gathered was the result of a contextual process in which I, as the interviewer, played a role. In a dialogical approach, it is necessary to accept this in the analysis of the data and to be transparent about the way in which the data was gathered. (Page, 1998)

The interviews were guided by three overriding themes in a life history mode. The first theme was to explain how, as part of their life history, they came to the decision to enroll in an institution of higher education. The second theme was to narrate how they experienced higher education. How they experienced course work, their relations with other offices of the institution, their relations with other students, and also their relations with their social circles outside of the institution. Finally, for the non-completers, I asked how they came to the decision to withdraw from Latino College. For completers, the focus was on what they attributed their ability to complete a degree as compared to their peers who do not. As the interviewer, I tried to guide the respondents into addressing the constructs developed by scholars and how they apply to their own experiences.

The first step in the interview process was to contact the potential candidates to be interviewed. The source document for this was the list of students that took the satisfaction survey in 1998. With the help of the Registrar's office at LC, this list included all potential contact information for the former students. This was address,

telephone, and emergency phone. In some cases the contact information was significantly old and outdated, but LC does try to keep up with changes in address and every time a former student makes contact with the institution, the information is updated.

Nevertheless, the task was not easy. Out of a potential 233 participants, only 49 could be contacted. After requesting whether they wanted to voluntarily participate in a research project, only 31 accepted.

In order to establish a level of comfort with the interview process, the participants chose the language in which the interview would be conducted and the location. Spanish was the language used for 19 interviews and English used in 12. In terms of location, 20 were conducted in the living room of the participant's home, 8 were in the kitchen table, one was in the front porch of the home, two were in one of the satellite locations of LC and one was at a restaurant during lunch. The interviews varied in length from one to two-and-half hours. In all cases, the participants agreed to have the interviews recorded.

Once I completed the interviews, I transcribed them in their original language (English or Spanish) to Microsoft word documents.

Following a traditional qualitative methodology approach, (Weis, L. & Fine, M. 2000; Guba and Lincoln 1982) I randomly chose four transcriptions of participants that had graduated and four transcriptions of participants that had not graduated. I read these thoroughly several times. After, I began underlining topics that seemed to be emerging as patterns in this subset of interviews. I did this several times until over 50 topics were identified. After careful re-readings these topics were narrowed into broader categories

that became the actual codes for analysis. Further, these codes belonged to a series of 7 themes in which the subset of interviews belonged.

With these codes, the process continued by looking at all the interviews (including the ones that had been part of the first tentative review) and were coded with all the codes developed. This was done manually on printed copies of the transcriptions.

Once all interviews were coded and in order to facilitate analysis, I developed an access database. All the codes were entered and then passages associated with the codes were tagged. This allowed for sorting through the interviews based on the codes, and to develop insights into the ways in which the subjects experienced higher education.

The interviews were conducted in 2009 and 2010. Much like the quantitative data, it could be argued that the information is dated. However, given the uniqueness of the research site and the population studied, it still has value. This is further developed below.

G. Limitations of the Study

Not unlike other research projects, these data and methods have limitations that are important to acknowledge. Some relate to the idiosyncrasies involved in the production of this study, while others relate to more general limitations that exist in a variety of academic projects. Nevertheless, there is value in the information provided in this study that enhances our knowledge of how populations that were not college bound find themselves in college and interact with the culture of higher education.

The first and most noticeable limitation is that the data are somewhat dated and the survey instrument has been insufficiently tested. Survey results from 1998 and interviews from 2009 and 2010 may seem to have little to contribute to a discussion of retention and higher education culture today. However, there are reasons for their value. First, the data exist and it is important to acknowledge it and evaluate it. It is also important to acknowledge the phenomena being studied. The issues present in this data still exist today and this study contributes as a benchmark analysis of the interaction of Latino non-traditional students in a Latino culturally sensitive environment yet also a higher education culture bearing environment. Data on Latinos shows that their participation in college is actually increasing. However, there is a completion problem. (Lopez and Fry (2013) Furthermore the educational attainment rates of the Latino population are significantly below those of other populations. It is necessary to understand the factors that affect the ability of these students to complete their degrees. This will contribute to our knowledge regarding the interaction of higher education and non-traditional populations and future research.

Another possible limitation in the data is that the interviews were conducted several years after the educational experience. This could mean that memories might have faded and former students do not recollect all the factors that affected their enrollment. However, this is an incomplete assessment of the data provided in the interviews. The time separation between the actual experience of attending college and the interviews where they reminisced about these experiences offers an advantage in two ways. First,

the memories present are the ones that were of importance to the experience. Students will remember what they believe to be important. Second, the participants are more reflective about their time in an institution and their testimony is less emotionally charged by what perhaps are painful memories of not achieving a desired goal of a collegiate degree.

Finally, a less apparent, but nevertheless present limitation is that the interviews were conducted in the context of an educational study by a graduate student. The participants' narratives may have been slightly eschewed towards a more favorable representation of the role of higher education in their lives and society because they were narrating to someone heavily invested in higher education processes. Still, acknowledging this situation becomes in itself an analytical element in the discursive process of the interviews and needs to be considered for its contribution to our knowledge throughout the analysis.

IV. RESULTS

A. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research for this study. It begins by presenting the results of a Student Satisfaction Survey conducted by the Institutional Research Office of Latino College, which contextualizes the study, and continues with the results of the interviews conducted with former Latino College students. The goal was to see the degree to which the gathered data explains the ways in which Latino non-traditional students experience higher education and give meaning to these experiences in the contexts of their lives. The meaning they give has an impact on the decision making process where some students graduate while others do not. The results pay particular attention to culture and the construction of higher education as an option within a complex set of variables that make up the lives of the students attending Latino College.

The structure of this chapter is that it first presents the characteristics of the students completing the survey, followed by a presentation of how the survey results explain the relation of this student population with constructs developed by prior scholars. This is followed by a description of the former students that participated in the interviews followed by a discussion of the themes that appeared in the interview process.

B. Description of Students completing Survey

1. Age, Gender, Language and Country of Origin

As established in the prior chapter, Latino College is a private independent non-profit institution with a mission to serve the Latino population of a major Midwestern city. The majority of students completing the survey were Latino adults. However, for the purposes of this dissertation the sample selected were Latinos over 23 years of age. This resulted in 233 survey takers. Of these 172 or 73% were women. The mean age was 33.5 years, which is a little higher than, but not completely inconsistent with, community colleges and other institutions that serve large numbers of adults students. (Community College Factsheet, 2012)

In terms of country origin, 22 students or 9.4% reported to the institution being born in the United States. The rest were born in different Latin American countries. Mexico was the highest represented with 63% of the total sample, but Caribbean, Central American and South American countries were also represented. Tables I, II and III summarize gender, language and country of Origin.

TABLE I		
GENDER OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Frequency	Percentage
Female	170	73%
Male	63	27%
Total	233	100%

Table I GENDER OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

TABLE II		
SELF-REPORTED LANGUAGE DOMINANCE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Frequency	Percentage
English	18	8%
Spanish	198	85%
Bilingual	17	7%
Total	275	100%

Table 2 SELF-REPORTED LANGUAGE DOMINANCE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

TABLE III		
COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Frequency	Percentage
Colombia	7	3%
Cuba	5	2%
Dominican Republic	3	1%
Ecuador	10	4%
El Salvador	3	1%
Guatemala	12	5%
Honduras	4	1%
Mexico	147	63%
Nicaragua	1	<1%
Peru	2	1%
Puerto Rico	16	7%
USA	22	9%
Venezuela	1	<1%
Total	233	100%

Table 3 COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

2. Academic Preparation

The great majority of the student sample did not have a traditional collegiate preparation. This is exemplified first by parental education. The literature supports the notion that children from families with parents that are college educated are more likely to attend and complete college. (De Angelo et al, 2011) In the case of the sample from Latino College, only 16 respondents or 6.9% reported in their admission forms that either

parent had graduated from college. Even further only 21% of the population of respondents stated that either parent had graduated from high school.

In terms of high school credentials, 12% of the sample graduated from a United States high school. Another 23% graduated from a foreign high school and 43.8% completed the high school equivalency exam know and the G.E.D. This exam can be administered in English or Spanish (or French). Finally, 20.6% of the respondents were admitted to the College through its Ability to Benefit (ATB) clause. This clause permits students to be conditionally admitted to the college for one year, while the student completes the G.E.D. exam in addition to successful progress in academic programming. The criterion for admission under the “Ability to Benefit” clause is for students to successfully pass a standardized test approved by the Department of Education for the purposes of conditional collegiate admission and participation in title IV financial aid programs.

In addition to the high school or equivalent credential that the students present at admission, Latino College does not keep much objective data regarding academic preparation. The College does not require ACT or SAT exams and does not compile that data. However, the College does administer a placement test in English and Mathematics in order to facilitate advising and class selection in their first semester of attendance. These results show that only 40 students or 17% of the sample placed at a level that permitted them to register for English Composition I, a traditional divider of college level classes as opposed to developmental or remedial English. The rest placed at a

developmental level with 53.3% placing at the lowest level, meaning they knew little or no English. Since over 90% of the students were born outside of the United States, it is impossible to determine collegiate preparation or ability through the English placement. Even the most academically gifted students would place low if they grew up in a non-English speaking country. However, the large number of students placing below composition does suggest that these students had the added burden of learning English in order to be successful in college. In contrast to the English placement, the mathematics placement test is a better indicator. In this area, the results show that only 4.2% of the students placed at a level that permitted them to register for introductory statistics or any other collegiate level mathematics. The rest had to register for developmental math courses. This is a strong of indicator that the academic preparation for collegiate was limited. Tables IV and V summarize the academic preparation of students.

TABLE IV		
ACADEMIC PREPARATION – ENGLISH LEVEL OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning Level Placement	124	53%
Intermediate Placement	52	22%
Advanced Intermediate Placement	3	13%
Pre-Composition for English dominant students Placement	8	3%
English Composition I Placement	19	9%
Total	233	100%

Table 4 ACADEMIC PREPARATION – ENGLISH LEVEL OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

TABLE V		
ACADEMIC PREPARATION – MATH LEVEL OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Frequency	Percentage
Pre-college Math I Placement	165	71%
Pre-College Math II Placement	57	24%
College Math Placement	11	5%
Total	233	100%

Table 5 ACADEMIC PREPARATION – MATH LEVEL OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

3. Academic Progress

Even though the preparation of students was limited, the sample had made some progress in their collegiate education at the time they took the survey. The average number of credit hours was 19.52. There were 57 or 24.5% new freshmen in the sample and another 65, or 27.9% had only attended one additional semester. The mean G.P.A. on a four point scale (excluding the new freshman) was 2.857.

C. Survey Results

1. Similarities

Even though one of the intended purposes of this study is to discern the differences that exist between the selected students that graduated when compared with those that did not graduate, it is interesting to begin this discussion noticing how similar the two groups responded to various survey items. In fact, there were many more similarities in the way they interpreted their relations with higher education than there were differences, as expressed in survey items.

In terms of reasons why they wanted to attend college, both groups expressed high levels of interest in bettering employment opportunities. Almost as important for both groups was the importance in their lives of getting a college degree and learning English. Less important, but still no significant difference between graduates and non-graduates was the notion that obtaining a higher education was important because it is prestigious. (See table VI)

TABLE VI		
REASONS FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
I came to Latino College because...		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
I want to learn skills to get a better job	4.5778	4.6409
I want to learn English	4.6744	4.5161
I want a college education because it is prestigious	4.1628	4.0701

Table 6 REASONS FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

In the more specific area of why students chose Latino College instead of other institutions, both groups agree that the main reasons were the financial aid packages, the support services, broadly defined, the location being near their homes and the bilingual program. Interestingly, students were neutral in whether the bilingual program played a role in choosing Latino College. (See table VII)

TABLE VII		
REASONS FOR CHOOSING LATINO COLLEGE – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
I chose Latino College because of...		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
Financial assistance	4.3991	4.3111
The support services to students	4.0682	4.1613
It being near my home	3.7727	4.1382
The bilingual program	4.1087	4.2512

Table 7 REASONS FOR CHOOSING LATINO COLLEGE – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

In terms of survey items that attempted to discern academic integration, both graduates and non-graduates agree that instructors are well prepared for their classes and that students have good relations with instructors. They are more neutral in regards to the level of professionalism and the relations they had with academic advisors but, again, no significant differences between the two groups. (See table VIII)

TABLE VIII		
ACADEMIC INTEGRATION MEASURES I – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
I believe the instructors are well prepared for their job	4.1563	3.9783
I have good relationships with my instructors	4.0652	4.2556
I believe the advisors are well prepared for their jobs	3.5455	3.8694
I have received assistance in personal issues from my advisor	3.2045	3.3148

Table 8 ACADEMIC INTEGRATION MEASURES I – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Within the academic integration construct is also the notion of the degree to which students are engaged with their course work. The degree to which they feel it fits with their goals and their intellectual curiosity. Both groups thought that classes were not

particularly difficult and that they had learned how to study efficiently. They agreed that instructors were clear and that text books were generally appropriate. They disagreed with the statement that textbooks are hard to read. (See Table IX)

TABLE IX		
ACADEMIC INTEGRATION MEASURES II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
I find classes at Latino College to be more difficult than I expected	2.6304	2.8378
I believe that I have learned how to study efficiently	3.9333	3.8251
The instructions my teachers give me are clear	4.0217	4.1041
The textbooks are hard to read	2.3111	2.5787

Table 9 ACADEMIC INTEGRATION MEASURES II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Students in this sample were not as happy with the facilities of the institution. The library and the computer laboratories received average ratings but there was no significant difference between graduates and non-graduates.

Similar to academic integration and engagement, in social integration to the institution we find that both groups do not exhibit many differences. Among the items used to discern this construct, we find that graduates and non-graduates felt strongly that they would recommend Latino College to friends and family and they believed that Latino College was important in their lives. They also strongly agreed that Latino College was the right choice for them and that they feel like they belong in this institution. Interestingly, both graduates and non-graduates responded in similar ways to the question as to whether they were registering again the following semester. They both overwhelmingly responded that they would return. (See table X)

TABLE X		
SOCIAL INTEGRATION MEASURES – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
I would recommend my friends and relatives to come to Latino College	4.1087	4.3393
Latino College is important in my life	4.2444	4.2831
I am certain that Latino College is the right choice for me	4.3333	4.3378
It is likely that I will re-enroll next semester	4.4091	4.4054
I feel like I belong at Latino College	4.3913	4.3891

Table 10 SOCIAL INTEGRATION MEASURES – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

As discussed in chapter 2, for the adult student population, scholars have argued that there additional factors that limit whether students can complete a program of study or not. Bean & Metzner, 1985 and Metzner & Bean, 1987) The majority of these are commuter and therefore have to tackle logistical issues such as the convenience of the class schedule, parking facilities, availability of food, and safety that play roles as important as academic and social integration. But perhaps counter intuitively both graduates and non-graduates had the same opinions regarding these issues. They strongly agreed that classes were offered at convenient times, although this is to be expected since the students had enrolled. The ones that did not enroll were the ones that found classes to be offered at times that were inconvenient and therefore did not complete the survey. They were neutral about food in the cafeteria and agreed that classrooms were comfortable. They also felt safe at Latino College. (See table XI)

TABLE XI		
SOCIAL INTEGRATION MEASURES II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
Classes are scheduled at convenient times	4.4783	4.4796
I like the food in the cafeteria	2.8372	3.2455
I feel safe at Latino College	4.4.2609	4.3604

Table 11 SOCIAL INTEGRATION MEASURES II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

In addition to the logistical issues associated with attending college, other areas that cause difficulty for adult students are the relations with people not associated with their studies. However, once again there were strong similarities between graduates and non-graduates. Students in both groups felt supported by their spouses, family and friends, but only slightly. They did not feel supported by employers and co-workers. They also did not report that caring for family members, housework, health or financial issues made it difficult to study. (See Table XII and XIII)

TABLE XII		
EXTERNAL FACTORS I – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
To what extent have the following persons encouraged and supported you in your decision to study?		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
Spouse	3.9474	3.8862
Family members	4.1136	3.9771
Friends	3.4500	3.5814
Employer	2.7429	3.2516

Table 12 EXTERNAL FACTORS I – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

TABLE XIII		
EXTERNAL FACTORS II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS		
To what extent do the following factors make it difficult for you to study?		
	Mean on a 5-point Likert scale	
	Graduate	Non-graduate
Caring for family members	2.9535	2.7934
Housework	3.1667	2.9014
Health Problems	1.6957	1.7463
Financial Difficulties	2.5111	2.6068

Table 13 EXTERNAL FACTORS II – SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

It is possible that these self-reported measures may be slightly misleading because these are perceptions from individuals that do not have experience with other college students that do not experience these external factors. As first generation students, they are unfamiliar with traditional students that face very few external limitations in their pursuit of a college degree. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in this sample from Latino College, there was no difference between graduates and non-graduates related to how they rated external factors affecting their possibilities to advance in their studies.

2. Differences

As shown in the previous section, there were far more similarities than differences in the statistical results that compare how graduates and non-graduates responded to the survey presented to them. Nevertheless, some significant differences between graduates and non-graduates do exist.

The first observed difference was in whether students intended to transfer to another institution. Using an independent sample t-test on the survey item that asks about intent to transfer, there was a significant difference in the mean of graduates and non-

graduates. Graduates agreed with the statement that they intended to transfer ($M=3.8751$) at a higher rate than non-graduates ($M=3.2956$); conditions $t(229) = -2.534$, $p < 0.05$. Additionally, graduates disagreed with the statement ($M=2.3556$) with the statement that teachers were very demanding while non-graduates were more neutral ($M=2.7546$); conditions $t(227) 2.059$, $p=0.05$.

At first glance these results seem to indicate that graduates have higher academic goals and are better prepared than non-graduates to academic work. However, I believe this interpretation does not capture the true meaning of what these results are telling us. An alternate explanation is that graduates, despite being adult and non-traditional students, understand and have internalized higher education practices at a higher level than non-graduates. It is very likely that non-graduates did not agree with the statement about wanting to transfer to another institution because they did not fully understand it. They interpreted it as meaning transferring to another institution prior to obtaining a degree and therefore being disloyal or demonstrating unhappiness with Latino college programming. Further, the difference observed between graduates and non-graduates in terms of feeling whether teachers were demanding, can be attributed to the knowledge they have about higher education. Graduates had a deeper understanding for the rigors and demands of higher education and therefore did not find instructors overly demanding. Non-graduates, on the other hand, were likely to find instructors too demanding and were ready to challenge this. The difference between both groups in these variables is a

testimony to the difference in the levels to which they have internalized higher education culture. These differences will be explored in the interviews.

Another area where a significant difference was found between graduates and non-graduates was that graduates did not think that the location of Latino College, being near their home, was as important in their decision to attend as it was for non-graduates. An independent sample t-test on this survey item showed that graduates ($M = 3.17727$) disagreed with the statement at a higher rate than non-graduates ($M = 4.1382$); conditions $t(218) = 1.990$, $p = 0.05$. Presumably graduates were clearer in their aspirations and understanding of higher education and location was less important than other conditions for study.

What these differences elucidate is that there are two areas where graduates and non-graduates possibly differ in a statistically significant way, namely in their knowledge about academic practices the culture of higher education and in their commitment to completing a higher education degree.

D. Interview Results

1. Subject Descriptions

To add richness and texture to the understanding of the experiences of Latino non-traditional students, I interviewed 31 former students of Latino College who were also survey takers. In order to provide balance to our understanding the sample consisted of both graduates and non-graduates. However, since there are more non-graduates than

graduates, the sample had more non-graduates. The interviews consisted of 11 graduates and 20 non-graduates. Below are descriptions of the characteristics of the former students that agreed to interviews.

a. Graduates

The graduates that responded to the interview requests represented Latino non-traditional population in all its shapes. They included immigrants and US born individuals that had all the aspirations and goals associated with life in the United States in an urban area. There were 11 graduates interviewed. Eight were females and 3 were male.

The females included Lucila, a Puerto Rican woman who was 56 years old at the time of the interview. She had been in her forties when she was a student at Latino College. She arrived in the Midwest when she was a very young girl and learned English as a child. She considers herself bilingual. Her father was a dishwasher in restaurants and hotels and her mother stayed home. Her parents were married until the passing of her father. Lucila is married and has three grown children.

Another graduate from Puerto Rico is Rosario. She came to the Midwest with her mother at a young age and considers herself bilingual. Her mother was not married and she is an only child (at least on her mother's side because she has no contact with her father). She is in her thirties now and was a student in her mid-twenties. She lives with her boyfriend and she has one daughter from a previous relationship. Her daughter has multiple disabilities and is in constant need of attention.

Clara is another female graduate. She is originally from Mexico, from the state of Guerrero. She came to the United States as a young adult. Her parents stayed in Mexico. Her father was in the military and her mother worked at home. She is separated from her husband and has five children. She was 46 years old at the time of the interview and she was in her thirties when she was a student.

Also from Mexico is Maite. Much like Clara, she arrived in the United States when she was 21 years old. Her father worked in construction and her mother worked in the home. She is married and has one adult daughter.

Another Mexican graduate is Alicia. She was 37 years old at the time of the interview and was in her mid-twenties when she was a student. She arrived very young to the United States and considers herself bilingual. She grew up with her grandparents who worked in construction in the Midwest. She is now married to her second husband and has three children, ranging in age from 3 years old to 17. Her oldest is from her first marriage and the other two from her second.

Pilar is another graduate that increases the Mexican representation. She was in her fifties at the time of the interview and she was 43 when she graduated from Latino College. Her father was a peasant in the state of Durango and her mother had been a rural school teacher. She is married and has three grown children.

Maria is the last Mexican female student in the sample of students that accepted to be interviewed. She is originally from Mexico City. She became pregnant when she was very young, approximately 15 or 16 and she came to the United States. She was in her

mid-twenties when she was a student and she is in her mid-thirties now. She is now married and has three children, including the daughter that she was carrying when she came to the Midwest.

The last of the female graduates is Carina. She is from El Salvador and she is in her late thirties. She was married at the time of the interview but she was in her mid-twenties when she was a student. She was very young when she moved to the United States with her parents who immigrated for political reasons.

There were three men in the sample of graduates that accepted to be interviewed for this project. First was Pedro. Pedro is originally from Mexico and is one of 18 siblings. He came to United States when he was 6 or 7 years old. He came to stay with an older sister that immigrated earlier and raised him. He considers this sister as a second mother. He was in his thirties when he was a student at Latino College. He is married and has two daughters. One was 19 at the time of the interview and the other one was 4. Both daughters are the result of the same marriage.

Manuel comes from Ecuador. He arrived alone to the Midwest when he was 24 years old to stay with an aunt. His father is a landowner in Ecuador but he favored his second wife and children. The father provided some financial support for Manuel while he was growing up, but his mother raised him. Manuel is now married and has three young children. He was single when he was a student at the college.

Joaquin is from Guatemala. He came to the United States with his parents and one brother when he was 19 years old. He was single and about 26 when he began his studies

at Latino College. He still lived with his parents who provided much support. He is now married and has a young child.

Table XIV summarizes all the graduates that were interviewed.

Table XIV				
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – GRADUATES				
	Gender	Age	Language dominance	Country of Origin
Lucila	Female	40s	Bilingual	Puerto Rico
Rosario	Female	Mid – 20s	Bilingual	Puerto Rico
Clara	Female	30s	Spanish	Mexico
Maite	Female	40s	Spanish	Mexico
Alicia	Female	20s	Bilingual	Mexico
Pilar	Female	40s	Spanish	Mexico
Maria	Female	20s	Spanish	Mexico
Carina	Female	20s	Bilingual	El Salvador
Pedro	Male	30s	Spanish	Mexico
Manuel	Male	20s	Spanish	Ecuador
Joaquin	Male	20s	Spanish	Guatemala

Table 14 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – GRADUATES

b. Non-graduates

There were 20 non-graduates that agreed to be interviewed for the project. Fifteen were women and 5 were men. While women are overrepresented in this sample, it is also true that they are overrepresented in the population of Latino College. Like the graduates they also were great representatives of Latino non-traditional students. They came from various countries in Latin America with dreams and aspirations of a better life. They also encountered numerous challenges in fulfilling their dreams including the dreams of furthering their education.

Among the non-graduates is Esther. She is from Ecuador and she was in her forties when she was a student. She has one daughter and is single. Her daughter was born in Ecuador and she came with her to stay with her parents who had immigrated earlier. Her parents worked various jobs through their lives and had only a few years of formal education.

Another non-graduate is Jessica. She was 25 when she was a student at Latino College. Jessica states that she was born in the United States but her parents took her to Mexico when she was 8 months old. They stayed in Mexico until she was in the ninth grade when they returned to the Midwest. Her father worked odd jobs and her mother did laundry for other families. She is unmarried and still lives with her parents. Interestingly, Jessica has a brother who graduated from Latino College's culinary arts program.

Eliza also came from Mexico, from the state of Guanajuato. She is currently married and has two children. When she was a student, she was in her twenties and she was not married yet. She was pregnant at the time she was a student. Her parents were peasants in Guanajuato.

Griselda offers a different story. She considers herself bicultural because her father is Mexican and her mother is a Latina from Texas. She was born in the Midwest. Her parents worked in manufacturing. She was in her late twenties when she was a student at Latino College. She was married but did not have children.

Andrea is also Mexican. She was 43 years old the last time she was as student, but she attempted to study several times since her twenties. She comes from Jalisco and

arrived in the United States when she was 20 years old. Her father was a rural elementary school teacher and her mother worked at home. She is the mother of 5 children.

Another Mexican student is Bertha. Bertha is from Mexico City. She was fifty years old at the time of the interview and she was in her late thirties and early forties when she was a student. She is the mother of five. Two of the five were young adults at the time she was a student. Her father worked in a tortilla factory in Mexico City. Her parents separated when she was a teenager and her mother came to the United States. Bertha soon followed.

Representing Colombia is Liliana. She was 41 years old when she was a student. She is married and has six children but her husband lives in Colombia. He travels to the United States sometimes but it is unclear whether there is a pattern to his travels.

Gloria was born in the Midwest but her parents are Honduran. She considers herself Honduran and from the Midwest. She finished high school in the Midwest and she was 23 when she studied at LC. Her parents worked in restaurants in Midwest. She was single and living with her parents when she was a student.

Francisca was also born in the Midwest. Her father was Puerto Rican and her mother was white, but she considers herself 100% Puerto Rican because, in her words, “they consider you by your father’s side.” She was in her thirties when she was a student. She was married and had one child. Her parents worked a variety of odd jobs in the Midwest.

Patricia is from Guatemala. Her parents were divorced and she was raised by an aunt. She studied tailoring in Guatemala and was also a professional singer. She married in Guatemala and had three children. She divorced and came to the United States. Her biological mother was already living in the Midwest for a long time. Patricia was in her late forties when she was a student at LC. Her children were in their teen years at that time.

Iris is Puerto Rican. She is married but was temporarily separated during the period she was a student. She had one child at that time and she was in her mid-twenties.

Another Midwest born Puerto Rican is Carmen. Her parents were married and factory workers in Midwest. She is single and has one child. She was in her early thirties when she was a student at Latino College.

Maritza also has Puerto Rican parents and was born in the Midwest. She has two children and is not married but lived with the father of her children while she was a student. She is not currently living with him, but she may go back.

Elsa comes from El Salvador. She has been in the United States since 1978 and she was in her forties when she was a student. She is married and lives with her husband. She has two adult children from a previous relationship in El Salvador. In fact, her former husband's infidelity is what led her to immigrate to the United States and leave him behind.

Veronica is from the state of Jalisco in Mexico. She was 23 when she immigrated to the United States and in her thirties when she was a student at Latino College. She

married in the United States and has four children. Her father was a truck driver in Mexico and her mother stayed in the home.

Carlos is from Peru. He was already in his fifties when he became a student at Latino College. He studied together with his wife who is also from Peru. He has three adult children and was a policeman in his native country.

Rolando was born in the Midwest of Mexican parents that immigrated from the state of Guerrero. His parents were factory and construction workers in Midwest. He is married and now has three young children but he was not a parent when he was a student.

Enrique comes from Puerto Rico. He was in his forties when he immigrated to the Midwest and has worked in the kitchen of various restaurants. He studied at Latino College for two semesters soon after his arrival. He is married and had two children at the time he was a student, three when interviewed.

Lazaro immigrated to the United States from El Salvador when he was fifteen years old. He was in his early twenties when he studied at Latino College. He has never married and still lives with his parents who are very religious and he considers himself very religious too.

Angel was born in Mexico but came to the United States as a young child. He considers himself bilingual. He was about 20 when he studied at Latino College. He was single but is now married and has two young children.

Table XV summarizes the characteristics of the non-graduates.

Table XV				
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – NON-GRADUATES				
	Gender	Age	Language dominance	Country of Origin
Esther	Female	40s	Spanish	Ecuador
Jessica	Female	25	Bilingual	Mexico
Eliza	Female	20s	Spanish	Mexico
Griselda	Female	20s	English	United States (Mexico)
Andrea	Female	20s through 40s	Spanish	Mexico
Bertha	Female	30s and 40s	Spanish	Mexico
Liliana	Female	31	Spanish	Colombia
Gloria	Female	23	Bilingual	United States (Honduras)
Francisca	Female	30s	English	United States (Puerto Rico)
Patricia	Female	40s	Spanish	Guatemala
Iris	Female	20s	Spanish	Puerto Rico
Carmen	Female	30s	English	United States (Puerto Rico)
Maritza	Female	20s	English	United States (Puerto Rico)
Elsa	Female	40s	Spanish	El Salvador
Veronica	Female	30s	Spanish	Mexico
Carlos	Male	40s	Spanish	Peru
Rolando	Male	20s	English	United States (Mexico)
Enrique	Male	40s	Spanish	Puerto Rico
Lazaro	Male	20s	Spanish	El Salvador
Angel	Male	20s	Bilingual	Mexico

Table 15 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – NON-GRADUATES

3. Themes

a. Purposes of College Education

The purpose of higher education in society and the purposes of individuals attending colleges and universities is a subject that, even though it has attracted scholarly

attention, it is also often postulated. Most agree that attending college brings important benefits to individual lives such as advanced intellectual and communication skills, job preparedness, and personal life enhancement. Also, it brings societal benefits such as better prepared workforce and stronger civic engagement. (Barber et. al, 2013 & Lagemann & Lewis, 2011) In the interviews with Latino non-traditional students who attended LC some of these topics also appeared. These were not always framed in the same way as the literature does, and additionally, other purposes that are not always associated with the more traditional purposes appeared. Among the major themes that appeared were learning English, being a positive role model for children, improved job possibilities, escape from home environment and personal fulfillment.

i. Educated through Learning English

Acquiring a language is not often associated as a major purpose for entering higher education. While traditional students often list learning or improving a foreign language as one of the outcome objectives of a collegiate education, it is not the main reason for attending. However, a common theme presented by many Latino non-traditional students is that learning English was the main reason for attending college. Clearly this was presented by the individuals, graduates and non-graduates, who immigrated to the United States as adults and not by the students that were born in this country or came as young children. The general sense presented by the former students was that learning English is a symbol of being educated and thus part and parcel of

learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge associated with a college degree. The immigrant experience melted English fluency with being educated at a higher level.

A typical example among the graduates in the sample of students was Clara who found LC in her search of institutions that would help her find a place to learn English. In her words, when asked in which English level she started her work, she stated:

I imagine that in the lowest one. At that time I remember I always had the desire to express myself in English and to truly understand like the professionals. At that time I was working in a factory and I had many responsibilities there. But I felt frustrated because when I had to communicate more extensively with people, words failed me and I yearned to have a wider knowledge of the English language...I think that is why I stayed in school. (Original in Spanish, translated by author)

Several non-graduates expressed that not knowing English was the major barrier they faced in the United States and that it remains being so. (Patricia, Esther, Carlos). Some even expressed that they did not complete their studies when they realized that learning the skills for a career were too demanding and would rather switch to an English only program (Veronica).

An interesting fact about how the former students expressed their purpose for attending around learning English is that the words chosen were often external in nature. That is, learning English is an externally socially imposed demand on them. For example, Eliza mentioned that she needed English for her boss to give her a promotion. Graduates also expressed these feelings. Pilar said it was a requirement in the unemployment office, while Clara thought that learning English would improve her job prospects and so that she would not need to work in the factory floor any more.

Another take came from a non-graduate, Bertha. She expressed the need to learn English in terms of the shame of not understanding her surroundings. She stated how uncomfortable she felt when she purchased pet food for her family thinking that it was for human consumption because she did not understand the label. The factual veracity of this account is questionable because it is a common story used in immigrant communities where they state, often in jest, that they confuse pet food with food for human consumption. It is a humorous way of making two points: first how difficult it is to adjust to a society without knowing the language and second to a country that has such different cultural values, where they treat pets almost as human. It is also a backhanded compliment to the United States, its wealth, and how this is exemplified by having a food industry dedicated to pets, something very different from developing countries where pets are not usually considered indoor animals and only eat the leftovers of food prepared for people. Nevertheless, Bertha was very eloquent, by using this example, of showing the frustration felt by Latino non-traditional students with the limitations associated with not knowing English.

The choice of language to discuss knowledge of English used by Latino non-traditional students shows a glimpse into how they build their conception of higher education. The lack of communication ability leads immigrant Latino non-traditional students to make little distinction between knowledge of English and knowledge associated with an educated person or the skill sets associated with a profession. It is all part of the same thing that keeps them apart from the successful people in society. Being

able to participate in Latino College is viewed as a small crack in a wall that does not permit them to be on the financially and socially successful side of society. This is expressed by both graduates and non-graduates. Pedro, a graduate, stated that he had shopped around for English programs and settled for LC because it offered the right combination of academic work and learning English. Liliana, a non-graduate, expressed that her goal was to be a teacher and she needed English to do that.

ii. Positive Role model for Children

Social reproduction through higher education is not a new concept. The families of college educated people expect their children to attend college so that they can also become professionals and occupy similar or better places in society. In the Latino non-traditional population sampled in this study, however, the notion appeared as a profound and emotional theme. Graduates and non-graduates expressed that they believed that their decision to attend college would serve as an example for their children so that they would also become professionals and further integrated into society. This theme appeared with both men and women participants. It was expressed in very passionate terms. It was one area in the interview process where there was significant consistence between the opinions of Latino non-traditional students and the literature which asserts that Latinos are family oriented and that success is defined in family and community terms rather than individual. (Miller & Gonzalez, 2009)

The language chosen to express the concept of being a role model is interesting. While both graduates and non-graduates agree conceptually that being a role model for

the children is good, they chose different kinds of words to express it. Graduates tended to use words that signaled a stronger personal volition. Maria stated, “I try to motivate them [her children]...I went late [in life] to school...you can do it earlier and you don’t have accents.” Pedro felt that he tried to be an example for his daughter but she did not follow it properly despite his best intentions. He was very expressive as he narrated his experience:

I was a strong example to my daughter. She came to my graduation and I graduated with honors and carried one of the flags. My sister was there and she was very proud of me. And I organized a dance party and we all went. And I wanted to show my daughter, she was an adolescent at the time, and I had taken psychology and had to speak to her about everything, my wife didn’t want to, about menstruation and all that. I wanted to be a good example...”

In these brief words, Pedro is conveying both not only how his sacrifices could serve as an example to his daughter, but also how the knowledge acquired in classes allowed him to be a better parent.

Alicia elaborated at length about how her example was meaningful to her children, in the context of a larger family, which had struggled but achieved success. In her words:

I have my daughter at DePaul and my son has a Master’s and is in the army. Both of them have fulfilled their goals. My husband did not study but he became a citizen and learned English after I supported him. But me...myself... I wanted to fulfill a promise I made to my father. That I did accomplish what he wanted for me and what I wished for myself. To know that I am worth something and that I always knew that I could...because to me to finish meant I have everything I proposed myself to do. I am married, I have my children in higher education, I do not have my parents, but I want them to see from up there. I want to show my siblings that did not go to school that it is never too late and that age doesn’t matter.

A strong comment about how through education she proved her value to herself and others and how that was an example for her children who also succeeded.

Non-graduates on the other hand, used a more indirect language. Being a role model was important but this was often externally imposed. Liliana stated that her son wanted her to study and that she did not want to disappoint him. Veronica said that her husband pushed her to be a student in order to be an example for her children. Bertha, Carlos and Patricia also mention being pushed by their children. In all three cases, even though they did not graduate, they were capable of turning the situation around and motivating their children to become college educated.

There is symmetry between graduates and non-graduates in terms of participating in higher education as a role model for children. Both believe that attending college played an important role in their children's decision to attend college. They have internalized the notion of social mobility through education but they feel stronger about the coming generations than on their own social mobility. While graduates felt stronger about the commitment coming from inside them they also felt particularly strongly that the coming generation would reap bigger benefits from college.

iii. Improved job possibilities

Thinking of a college degree in terms of its potential professional outlook and ability to obtain better employment is a fact for all populations attending college and Latino non-traditional students are not different. Almost all survey participants expressed that getting a better job, and becoming a professional, was one of the main reasons for

attending college. Graduates felt that they succeeded in this endeavor, while non-graduates presented more mixed results. Some felt like the education they received did have important professional outcomes even if they did not graduate, while others felt that having participated at Latino College made no difference in their professional growth.

While believing that one of the rewards of higher education is better employment opportunities is not new, what is different is the career choices Latino non-traditional students made. The majority of the women mentioned early childhood education as their degree goal and becoming a teacher as their professional goal. Men, on the other hand mentioned careers around business and one, Rolando mentioned Architecture. He had not achieved this goal.

In the case of Early Childhood Education, it is one of the most popular degree programs at LC. Since the sample of students chose LC as the institution to pursue a degree it is not surprising that they would choose as a career goal a degree offered by this institution. However, the relationship is probably more complex. The majority of students in this sample attended LC as their only choice for higher education and they shaped their career goals based on what LC offers. At the same time, LC chooses the programs it will offer based on the market demand and Early Childhood Education is offered because there is an interest in the student population that attends the college. The result of this complex relationship between the student body and the organization in terms of degree options actually shows that Latino non-traditional adult students are choosing career paths that highlight the knowledge they have about higher education and the professional

world. Business and Architecture are careers that are well known to everybody. If we had expanded the pool of interviews it is quite possible that doctor and lawyer would have appeared. Teacher is also a profession everyone is familiar with. So Latino non-traditional students are choosing careers on very limited knowledge of what exists in the professional world in a complex economy. Additionally, they are choosing careers with gendered expectations. Women following teacher while men following business and architecture.

iv. Escape from Home Environment

Latino non-traditional students lead very complex lives. Many live in poverty stricken neighborhoods where violence is often common and many other social issues associated with urban areas with limited resources are present. They often have the responsibility to care for children and other family members. Even further, they live in this country as immigrants or second generation individuals and members of a minority population, adding nuanced layers to their interactions with other members of society. This reality is highly demanding and the ability to attend an institution such as Latino College, which at first glance seems to present an additional challenge, actually becomes an opportunity to live in a different environment for a few hours a week and escape from their home environments.

Escaping from home is something that traditional students in the United States also associate with attending college but it is usually expressed as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood where the student moves from home to live away from the

parents but in a controlled environment represented by dormitories and student life. In the case of Latino non-traditional students it is far more pressing since it is literally escaping from dangerous environments and it is only for short periods as they attend classes and then return home. But escaping from home environment is also an intellectual category. Participating in higher education represents a space where students are thinking about academic issues that are unrelated to their day to day lives and imagining alternative lives. These thoughts came vividly in the interviews.

An additional difference between traditional and Latino non-traditional students is that, as a rite of passage, traditional students in their escape from home view attending college as life transforming event and as a point of no return. After college graduation they envision themselves leading professional and independent lives. They do not view college attendance as a temporary escape to which they are going to return after a period of four years. Latino non-traditional students however, express their thoughts in the form of temporary escapes that are always accompanied by returning to their environments at the end of the day and fulfilling their daily responsibilities.

There were interesting differences between the graduates and the non-graduates as they expressed their forms of escape. Graduates expressed their escapes with words that elicited perseverance and discontent with their current conditions in life. They also used words that categorized them as knowledge seekers and they needed to leave their own environments to do this. Non-graduates on the other hand, used language that is much more closely associated with satisfying needs that were not satisfied at home. Maritza

was in tears when she stated, “what motivated me to come, I guess, was kind of like an escape to get away from home. It was my time to breathe, to cry to scream. To just get away and meet people to get my mind off of what he was doing to me. I was just frustrated with my life, with myself. With him.” Liliana mentioned that school was a place where they took care of her, as opposed to home where she has to care of everyone. These testimonies were very deep and moving as they related to college as a place to escape from difficult home environments. In a way they were presenting education in one of its purest forms. They were presenting the educational site and all its services as a location where to go in order to improve one’s inner self. The non-graduates however, were presenting this in a far more primal way where the educational site is a space that truly provides a sanctuary from other locations.

b. Academic Knowledge

Navigating the world of higher education requires substantial knowledge for any student. There are rules, regulations and customs that are not always intuitive. This is exacerbated for Latino non-traditional students. Many factors that seem self-explanatory to people accustomed to interacting in a collegiate environment are foreign to Latino non-traditional students. As you venture into a college you need to understand what are class expectations, how the relationship with faculty is different from other learning relationships in the past, how knowledge from courses builds from one subject to another and many other minor things. Latino non-traditional students come into higher education

without this knowledge and how they navigate the system is strongly related to their ability to be successful in this system. Their comments regarding their knowledge of the academy and how it works came in patterns. They commented on how to define quality education, on their perceived academic or intellectual ability, their own pedagogical expectations, and their specific knowledge of academic policies.

i. What is quality education?

The former students participating in this project had strong opinions about the quality of the education offered by Latino College and often by extension, the quality of higher education in the United States. The views presented ranged widely. Some of the participants thought the education they received was superb and would highly recommend the institution to other Latinos. Others, on the other hand thought that higher education in the United States, and Latino College in particular, was of very poor quality and was significantly inferior to the education they would receive in their countries. There were some differences in the graduates and the non-graduates commenting on this topic. Graduates tended to give Latino College a more positive review than non-graduates but this was not a consistent appraisal by all the participants in this study.

It is quite understandable that graduates would think more highly of the education they received than non-graduates. Graduates fitted into the system of LC and received the benefits of the education while non-graduates did not and needed to express their disappointment and, in some cases externalize blame for their “failed” education paths. However, it is interesting to note that both graduates and non-graduates chose similar

language to describe quality education, whether this was in a positive or a negative vein.

Most often the way to describe quality was associated with individual instructors and not the curriculum, the facilities, or the reading materials. Alicia for example, a graduate, stated:

Some people will have different opinions. What are you looking for and what kind of person you are. You want an easy grade, etc... the teachers here are trying to benefit you but if you want to get by the easy way you're going to talk bad but you know in all fairness I think they were all fair and helpful at least in my case.

Non-graduates also spoke about instructors. Andrea said:

Me...regarding English, the plain truth, I did not like it because the teachers spoke in Spanish. There was one teacher, who came from Texas if I remember correctly, and he was just ha ha in class and all in Spanish. He just told jokes and didn't teach and all in Spanish. And I say, all that time, I don't say completely wasted, but if the teacher had been stricter, and maybe I would have learned more and I would not have wasted all my financial aid.

Carlos thought:

I came to study English with my wife but it was a little difficult for her so we asked that the teacher change his method for teaching English. Let me explain to you: there is a problem not only at Latino College, but at many institutions that teach English for free... The majority who study already work at factories and know some words and....teachers cater to them...my wife had never heard English...

The pattern that emerges is that Latino non-traditional students' opinions about the quality of the education that was offered to them at Latino college is deeply embedded with their cultural values of what constitutes good education and this is

associated with individual instruction more than other aspects of education. However, the points of reference are very distant from the educational system to which they are exposed and their opinions therefore seem to be alien to traditional comments of quality education such as depth, rigor, utility, and so on. Graduates were closer to this as their focus moved away from individuals and more to systems but non-graduates focused on the individual instructors and their methodologies.

ii. Perceived ability

The students' perceived ability to be successful in an academic program was an ever present topic in the testimonies of Latino non-traditional students. Although non-graduates were somewhat harsh on themselves, even saying "soy burra" or "I'm an ass" (Bertha) about their intellectual abilities, graduates did not see themselves as particularly gifted.

Alicia is a good example of a very successful graduate who discussed her intellectual abilities in a very non-committal way. She stated: "I'm very persistent. I'm probably average smart. I don't give up. If there's something I want to do, I will do it. I won't give up. Like I said it will take me 100 years but I will do it." Pedro expressed more in terms of comparing himself with instructors. He stated:

Personally, I do not think there are bad teachers for the student who wants to learn. Because they know more than we do...In my experience I never had a teacher I did not like, I say honestly. I suffered a lot with Chemistry, I hated it and I had to come for tutoring. It was the class in which I suffered the most, but who would have guessed? I ended up with a B, but it took a lot. Lots of tutoring...

As is the case with other topics, the language non-graduates used to describe perceived ability was often couched with other external circumstances and with comments on the service received from Latino College staff, which led them to not succeed. For example, Andrea stated:

Yes, I was very upset. If they had explained to me that yes we will give you financial aid but you have to do English from 060 [a particularly low level, although 060 does not exist at LC. She might have meant 090] and if you do not pass, the aid will run out, then I would have gone somewhere else to learn English and I would have come here just to do ECE [Early Childhood Education], so yes I was upset. But also upset with myself because I said to myself, ‘mmmh I don’t know if I failed or the teacher, or I’m no good for English, lots of things go through your head. If I’m no good for English it is a little sad and I came back to my family and worse “I told you, you were wasting your time” and the way he said it finishes you off.”

Elsa used an alternative way to frame the issue of her perceived intellectual ability but it is still associated with the service:

[Teachers]... were good in the sense that they cared whether we learned what they were teaching. The math teacher was magnificent, a Guatemalan gentleman who was very concerned about whether we understood and if we didn’t, he would go back and explained it again with great respect for the student. In Algebra we had a Spaniard and he was also magnificent. He used to say I will teach you simple steps so that you don’t get all mixed up, and for algebra, I was no good. I could multiply, subtract, divide, but algebra was little work for me...

The pattern that emerges is that graduates and non-graduates share in that they did not know what to expect when entering the system. Graduates do not see their intellectual ability as particularly high but have other reasons for their success and it is individualized. Non-graduates on the other hand feel that their inability to graduate

confirms their intellectual limitations in an educational setting and use the setting to explain their limitations.

iii. Knowledge of academic policies

Colleges and universities are replete with rules and regulations that are part of the way of how institutions interpret their world. This interpretation is, in other words, its culture. Colleges have academic policies, a particular language to communicate, relations of power and authority at varying levels with staff, faculty, students and administrators. Students have to choose majors, learn about the credit hour system, how to make payments, receive financial aid, and understand why they receive or not receive aid. Latino College has all these conventions in its operations. Latino non-traditional students need to navigate through these policies and interpret them. Their interpretations do not always coincide with the original intent. A significant pattern is that graduates do seem to interpret academic policies in a way that is closer to the original intent of the policy creators.

Pedro, a graduate expressed that his career goal was to become an architect or a lawyer. While these are very different careers and in fact Pedro had not earned a degree in either field, he understood well the process and the steps it would take to achieve them. His conception of the amount of time it would take to achieve a degree in architecture or a law degree was too short, but the explanation of the overall process was not too different from what a career counselor would say. Lucila, Clara, and Alicia also presented very clear career paths. Lucila chose to earn more than one associate degree because she

believed that she could have more job opportunities and that her family commitments did not allow for the commitment a Bachelor's degree required. Clara explained her path to a degree in a way that was very consistent with what she would have heard in an orientation. She talked about the pre-requisite courses she took, the general education requirements and the major requirements. She also explained well the financial aid she received and the supporting documentation she had to provide. Alicia is now a practicing respiratory therapist and was very articulate in her explanation of the connection between her goals and her education, and later its reward in employment.

The non-graduates painted a very different picture of academic policies at Latino College. Francisca, Andrea and Iris could not describe the program of study they were following or any of the course work they took. Veronica felt she had to repeat course work unnecessarily. Gloria did not remember what a credit hour was.

The words non-graduates chose to describe policies created a distance between the educational system and themselves. And furthermore the staff and faculty were responsible for creating that gulf. Andrea repeated several times that advisors forced her to take classes that she did not need. Iris wanted to study "social" (I believe she meant social work) but advisors insisted that she take English (either developmental English or English composition). Esther felt that the financial aid office denied her aid unreasonably.

The pattern that emerges from the non-graduates that discussed academic policies is one where they believe that the academic world is a place that can accommodate their educational needs, but it is individuals, advisors, financial aid workers and faculty that

failed them. This pattern is in no way explanatory. There seems to be a correlation in that graduates understood academic programming and policies better than non-graduates, but this does not mean that this knowledge explains why they graduated.

c. Environmental Conditions for Study

Bean and Metzner (1985) were the first to attempt to incorporate external factors to their retention model when they thought about adult students. They explained how adult students, who commute to classes, need to take care of family members, do chores, work, take time commuting and perform many other activities that impact their ability to attend school. These factors affect Latino non-traditional Latino students also. However, when considering how Latino non-traditional students described their environmental conditions to study there is a deeper temporal quality to their testimonies. The environment around them does not only include the factors that affected their ability to attend school at the time, but rather the entire history of their lives that led them to be present in college at a particular moment. This is a more complex construct than the one utilized by Bean and Metzner.

i. Parental support

Both graduates and non-graduates offered very emotional accounts regarding the relations with their parents. These accounts often went to times significantly further in the past than their collegiate attendance. With very few exceptions, all respondents talked about how parents did value education and wanted their children to be high achievers.

This included a professional career. These views were not shared by all; Andrea (a non-graduate) said that while her parents talked about the importance of education, they were not very helpful because they worked too much. Maritza (a non-graduate) said that she was not close to her family and that they played no role in her life. Nevertheless, words of support for education were far more common than not.

Interestingly, the way the participants talked about their parents was significantly different in graduates from non-graduates. Graduates used warm and supportive language to describe how their parents influenced their decision to go to college. Clara stated that even though her husband did not want her to attend, her mother supported her behind his back by caring for the children while she went to class. Lucila framed her success in college in terms of a promise she made to her deceased father. Maria's father promoted education from a young age, leaving the "seed" for learning in her. By contrast non-graduates also expressed deep love and respect for their parents but the words that emerged more often were words of reprimand. Andrea said her mother punished her for not doing her homework. But she sated this as an illustration of her mother's support. Andrea also said:

It is very different from the way it is now. My parents did encourage me to go to elementary school but they worked and I did not receive the support like I support my children. "Just go to school" but I went without having eaten anything but that is the way in Mexico that you don't even have money to buy lunch."

Since this is a study of adults, there were few examples of direct parent support for collegiate education. The narrative surrounded parents as having encouraged education in the past and that serving as a motivator when attending college. However,

parents encouraged education, but as an external unknown that has social importance. It was as if parents encouraged their children to be president or some other abstract and unreachable goal. Parents insist you must go to school and come back educated, but there is very little notion of what it takes. Additionally, encouragement does not mean support and Alicia stated. Parents want their children to study but have very few resources to support an educational process. This is a very different world from traditional students whose parents understand majors, college choice, financial aid, and so on.

ii. Spousal support

Of the 31 former students interviewed, 23 were married at the time they were students. This was one of the most complex relations described by the former students. While some former students felt supported by their spouses many did not. Often there were words of support but they felt staged. As if there was wishful thinking. The complexity went beyond the couple because the spousal relation was a topic about which other family members also had opinions. Some parents commented that it was a bad idea for women to study because they had to take care of their husbands.

There was no significant difference in the way graduates and non-graduates described the support received by their spouses. The difference that emerged was in the language they used. Graduates used a language of defiance, while non-graduates used a language of compliance with spousal requests.

Typical example of graduate descriptions of spousal support but at the same time making sure that they spouses are cared for came from Maria and Pedro. Maria stated “[my husband was fine] because my mother helped with the kids and then I arrived [at night after evening classes] and took care of him.” Pedro said:

...my wife supported me...because I needed to concentrate and she would yell to my daughter “quiet.” ...My wife did complain sometimes because I spent too much time in the dining room studying, because of sexual needs, you know. But I tried to keep her happy and satisfied...”

There were also moving and loving examples of spousal support, even if less common in the narrations. Lucila for example said:

[My husband didn't go to college] but he is smart in a different way. He is not someone that stays still. He grew up with his brother and his mother, his father abandoned them and he always had to work. He only went up to fifth grade in Mexico and he came here illegally. He came with his aunt and he worked very hard. When I met him I thought he was about 25, but he was 18 and I am six years older than him. He thought I was Mexican because the lady that introduced us told him I was from Guerrero. That is how we got together. He thought he was going to learn English with me and we are still together. He has tried very hard. He climbs to the roof to clean, he cooks, mops the floor and everything. He doesn't write well in English and does not speak it very well but he can defend himself so as not to stay behind . Sometimes he said, “I let you study so that you can take care of me in the future.”

But there was no such testimony coming from the non-graduates. Maritza's husband physically abused her, or as she said:

One day he broke my glasses by punching me. He hurt me so bad so I guess that gave me enough anger that he went to work one time, and he went to his third shift job. When he left I was awake and I packed and left with my kids really early in the morning. I stayed with my sister for about 5 months before I got my own apartment.

Andrea stated:

It was bad, but to desire is to accomplish. I did what I could to go to class. My children were young. I had three one right after the other and I would leave them with my husband and he didn't want me to go because he does not believe much in studying and he said that I was just wasting time and that I went to school to meet people. And he said that he would not take care of the kids any more. I still went to school and I would get a ride from friends because he would not take me. And I would leave food cooked for everybody because I did not come home until ten and sometimes I did not eat. Those are my memories.

But there were alternate stories about husbands. Veronica, for example, said that people told her husband that he should not let her study because she would leave him later, but he did not care and supported her decision to go to school.

A common thread, though, for both groups was the importance of the spousal relationship in their lives and that it was essential for their potential success. There is a transcendental aspect to this relationship. The descriptions associated with spouses were more important than anything else in their lives and anything else that was mentioned in interviews.

iii. Faculty support

The way former students felt supported by the faculty was one of the few topics that emerged that is internal to the collegiate relationship. Both graduates and non-graduates talked about the relations they had with their faculty and how important it was to their success. Even non-graduates appreciated the support they received from faculty. There were only a few exceptions where former students talked about bad teachers.

Both graduates and non-graduates appreciated their teachers and they used words like he or she was "good," "knowledgeable," and "well-prepared." However, the word and concept that appeared most often was "patience." This is true of graduates and non-

graduates. Over and over they referred to their instructors as being patient with them. The patience was with either lack of ability to learn, difficulties completing work in time or keeping up with the work.

Using patience as the dominant positive quality to describe faculty is an interesting way of phrasing the relationship Latino non-traditional students had with higher education. There were no words like inspiring, intellectually stimulating, discovery, and so on from the former students. The word was “patience.” It strongly symbolizes how they felt about being in that world. Teachers needed to be patient with them because they did not belong.

iv. Study conditions

Often associated with an idealized view of higher education are the quiet spaces where students need to spend the additional study time required in order to be successful. Whether that is in a room in a house, or a library space because dormitories are too noisy, the most successful students search for locations where they can spend time reading, writing, understanding concepts, resolving problems and conducting other analytical tasks. The group of Latino non-traditional students that participated in this study presented conditions that were far from ideal.

Graduates, in some cases, presented some conditions that resembled a little the ideal situation, such as finding study times each day, but even the successful students dealt with complex situations at home. Among the difficulties were illnesses in the family, helping children with daily routines, keeping the spouse happy, which, at times,

meant getting pregnant. There were cases that were far more serious including various forms of domestic violence from the spouse or withdrawing access to money if they continued to study and leading even to hunger. Some narratives were very disturbing.

But as disturbing as these stories were, the language the students chose to express them were very matter of fact and unapologetic. They expressed all these conditions as almost normal aspects of life and in no way did they represent them as completely inconsistent with the conditions necessary for the successful pursuit of higher education.

The concept of higher education is one that they have not perceived as requiring a new way of life. But when it gets to be too much you quit.

E. Summary and Discussion

This study used two very distinct methods for obtaining information about Latino non-traditional students, their relationship with higher education, and its impact on graduation. These two were a survey analysis and a qualitative interview process. The survey was an instrument used by Latino College to assess satisfaction with the institution. However, it also included items to help analyze retention. The results of the survey though, showed that there were more similarities than differences on responses to certain items that relate to constructs in higher education research.

In the survey results there were no significant differences on how future graduates and non-graduates responded to their goals for attending Latino College. They agreed that they wanted to learn English, obtain better employment and that a collegiate

education was important because it is prestigious. Additionally, both groups also agreed that they chose Latino College because of its financial aid packages, support services and its locations being close to home.

In terms of items that measure academic integration, both graduates and non-graduates agreed on several key issues. They agreed that instructors were well prepared, that classes were not particularly difficult and that textbooks were appropriate. They both disliked the facilities.

There was agreement on items that measure social integration too. They agreed that they would recommend Latino College to others, that it was the right choice for them. They also overwhelmingly agreed that they would register the following semester.

There were limited but important statistically significant differences between the two groups. First, graduates had a stronger intent to transfer to a four year institution than non-graduates. Graduates also did not believe that instructors were particularly demanding and finally graduates were willing to travel longer distances to take the correct class.

The survey results show that there are far more similarities than differences in the background characteristics and in how they relate to constructs developed by retention scholars. Academic integration, social integration and external factors do not play strong roles in differentiating among the students that were able to complete a degree to those that were not able to complete the degree. However, there are two factors that do appear in the data. One has been posited in the past, namely commitment to education. (Torres

and Hernandez, 2012) This is an important dynamic construct in Tinto's model. The other one, knowledge of the culture of the academy, does not form part of other models of retention and graduation. In fact, it is often assumed as a given, that everyone understands this culture.

The interviews brought themes that both enrich and expand the constructs in the survey. Together they provide a rounded picture that begins to provide ways in which we can access how Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education.

The interviews developed themes around why Latino non-traditional students decided to attend college, how they interpreted the quality of education, which external relations shaped their experience and also offered interpretations about their success and failures, which do not always correlate with graduation and non-graduation.

People that have lived completely outside of the university system do not know the rules and regulations, the behaviors, the power structures, the dress codes, and many other aspects of higher education culture. At times these rules match the rules of other cultural spaces and at times they do not. For other reasons though, socially created reasons, Latino non-traditional students find themselves searching for an entry to the academy and institutions like Latino college offer a welcome entrance. Once inside however, they need to abide by the rules and regulations of the academy. These findings open the door to an inquiry about higher education as a cultural system with its own logic and that Latino non-traditional students need to navigate. It is different from the systems

from which they come and are accustomed. Some students adapt quickly and fare better, all other things being equal, towards graduation.

V. ANALYSIS

A. Introduction

The results of the student satisfaction survey administered at Latino College and the interviews of former students of Latino College from the same period as when the survey was administered present two very different, yet inter-related worlds of the Latino non-traditional student. The survey results show how Latino non-traditional students at Latino College respond to items that relate to constructs associated with retention while the interviews show us ways in which former students interpret and give meaning to their experiences in higher education. In this chapter, I analyze the narratives presented by the former students through a cultural lens that leads to a deeper understanding of the relation of Latino non-traditional students in higher education.

The survey results show how there are many similarities in the prior educational, socioeconomic levels and academic achievement of the graduates and non-graduates. They also show that the two groups are similar in the way they respond to questions that attempt to measure constructs related to integration and engagement and that they are equally affected by external variables such as needing to work and needing to care for family members. Additionally, the survey results show us important ways in which these two populations differ. They differ in the way they interpret questions regarding transferring to other institutions and whether they thought their instructors were too demanding. They also disagreed to the degree to which it is important for Latino College to be near their homes.

While the survey interacts with constructs related to retention, the interviews painted a world of expectations, goals, understanding of college policies, family difficulties, illnesses and many other details about the experiences they had as college students. There were ways in which the worlds of graduates were not distinctly different from the worlds of non-graduates. However, it is also possible to see how the worlds start separating as deeper levels of meaning emerge.

In this chapter the focus is on how to construct an interpretation of the experiences that Latino non-traditional students in order to further our understanding of the space occupied by this population. It is important to note that in developing this understanding, in this chapter I am not using value judgments that state that graduates succeeded and non-graduates did not. While these value judgments are consistent with the goals of higher education, there is no assumption that they are consistent with the cultural values of the population.

Latino non-traditional students' interpretation of higher education and how they give meaning to their experiences in this system is contextualized in various ways. First, participating in higher education forms part of the social forces of North American society that define success or potential personal success in very specific ways. To a degree, former students also felt these forces in their countries of origin. However, even though Latino non-traditional students consent to participate in higher education is a result of a hegemonizing process, they lack many of the qualities necessary to have success in this environment. Qualities that involve skills and knowledge related to the

world of higher education. This analysis opens the door to a more critical look at the cultural practices and interpretations of Latino non-traditional students in Latino College. Finally, a corollary to the discussion on culture is that non-graduation is not, as stated above, a failure, but an example of not developing or acquiring the hegemonic values of dominant society. Higher education becomes both, a possibility for resistance to dominant society or an acceptance of one's place in dominant society.

This chapter first focuses on how Latino non-traditional students consent to the values of higher education. It then analyzes how they explain social capital or the lack of capital to participate in higher education. This is followed by an analysis of the interpretations of transactions in the higher education experiences of Latino non-traditional students. Prior to concluding thoughts there is a discussion of possible ways of interpreting experiences as acts of resistance or defiance of the hegemonic order, which includes higher education as part of its path.

B. Consenting to Latino College and Higher Education

As mentioned in chapter two, the concept of elites exerting power over non-elites in nuanced ways that lead to all social groups willingly accepting the social order is attributed to Antonio Gramsci. (Gramsci, 1971) This dynamic process of social acceptance, or sometimes the actual social outcome of acceptance is known as hegemony. Latino College, as a representative of higher education is one of the institutions within civil society that hegemonizes. The results of this dissertation show how former students work through this process.

Gramsci, an Italian social and political theorist, developed his concept of hegemony in the first half of the twentieth century. He worked from a Marxist tradition and in his personal life he was strongly involved in left-wing politics. He wrote most of his thoughts while in prison during Benito Mussolini's rule in Italy.

Gramsci's thoughts emanate from the period after the Russian revolution of 1917 that led to the formation of the Soviet Union. Left-wing thinkers were distressed and disappointed as other countries in Europe were not following the revolutionary example of the Soviet Union. They did not understand, in their minds, why people from working class backgrounds accepted social orders that worked against their interests. Participation in World War I was particularly disappointing. Why were lower classes participating in a war and giving their lives, for their nations, royal families and governments who did not have their best interests at heart? Gramsci offered an explanation through hegemony. In his terms, lower classes accept the social order that keeps them at the bottom through a process of hegemony.

Hegemony is dynamic and it consistently reinforces the social order whereby lower classes consent to the rule of the elites, or in other words consent to the social order that keeps them in lower class levels. There are two ways to achieve social order, through political forces or through civil society. Political forces achieve social order through force; the police, legal systems, and prisons. In more extremes cases, military force achieves the same result by stopping rebellions, heading coup d'états, or even foreign invasions. Civil society achieves social order through hegemony, that is, by

manufacturing consent. Consent is created, or as is better known in the literature, consent is manufactured through civil society. (Gramsci, 1971; Herman and Chomsky, 1988)

Civil society is formed by the structures that lead people to willingly accept social order with a common social and moral ground. Among the forces in civil society are educational systems, religion and the media. Manufacturing consent as a conceptual framework has gained significant scholarly attention since the 1970s when Gramsci's Prison Notebooks were translated into English.

Higher education, as a system, forms part of Civil Society and plays an important role in manufacturing consent. While it can also be a space to defy social order, higher education locates itself within civil society as the space that is responsible for creating, transmitting and certifying knowledge. Knowledge later translates into economic and social power as it allows people with certain certifications to obtain certain types of employment and certain kinds of influence on national discourse. In order to be a lawyer, it is necessary to obtain a law degree and pass the bar examination. Once students obtain these certifications, certain forms of employment with socially accepted remuneration levels, become available. These jobs are not available to people without those certifications.

Attending an institution of higher education in order to gain knowledge and receive a certification for this knowledge can lead to personal growth, better employment, and social mobility in an upward direction. Indeed, a road to better employment is how many institutions advertise their services and how the Department of Education proposes to

evaluate colleges and universities. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card>). Still, there is substantial evidence to show that elites have significant more access to higher education than non-elites (the subaltern) and in this respect higher education becomes an important hegemonizing tool, which certifies knowledge for elites, which is inaccessible to non-elites. Latino non-traditional students used language that is consistent with this role for higher education.

1. Improved job opportunities through education

In chapter four, many graduate and non-graduates mentioned better job opportunities as a reason for wanting to attend college. This is a well-established link. But this link is not value neutral. Groups belonging to elites graduate at far higher rates than subaltern groups. The degree to which subaltern groups accept this disparity is a form of consent. Despite the empirical evidence to show that elites benefit from higher education far more than subaltern groups, consent is manufactured by developing an image of fairness in the process of admission and the offers of financial assistance. Increasing access to higher education has led to an increase in the concept of fairness in higher education.

The surveys and interviews reveal as a theme that Latino-non-traditional students, as a subaltern group, participate in manufacturing consent in various ways. First, both graduates and non-graduates expressed an understanding in the survey of a degree and its connection with better employment. Survey participants strongly agreed with the notion that they were attending college in order to get a better job. (See Table VI) Second, in the

interviews graduates accept the connection between education and better employment readily, third many non-graduates also accept this connection, and accept their inability to access better employment due to their failure to graduate. Interestingly, there is another set of non-graduates that did not make this connection. They chose to attend Latino College for other reasons unrelated to social mobility by getting better paying jobs leading through education and thus, in their cases Latino College was not a space to manufacture consent.

In the descriptions of their academic success, graduates associated their degree completion with its connection with better employment. Pilar, who graduated with an associate degree in Early Childhood Education said:

I also worked as teaching assistant in a nearby suburb. But they gave me fifth grade and I wanted to work with younger children. I worked there for three years, but I wanted to move to the city. So a lady who studied at Latino College called and told me that they were looking for teaching assistants where she worked. She worked for the public school system of the city. I got the job and kept it because I had graduated. She could not finish and so she could not keep the job. (Originally in Spanish. Translated by author.)

In this way Pilar connected how the education matched her area of interest and how another peer could not keep that job because she lacked the credential. Similarly, Lucila also credits her degree in Early Childhood Education with her ability to work as a teaching assistant in the public schools system.

Another way of viewing the connection was presented by Rolando and Lucila. Rolando stated that he always saw that there is more to life than what was around him. He wanted to achieve more. Although his career goals changed through the course of his

studies, he first wanted to be an architect and changed to business management. He knew that he wanted to be a professional and the rewards associated with that.

An interesting theme that emerged is that many non-graduates agreed with the concept that jobs strongly linked with education and they saw their fate sealed because of their inability to complete a degree. Andrea stated that her goal was to work in schools as a teacher, but that was impossible because she “did not graduate.” Thus she had to accept her fate and remain at a lower level of employment. Liliana echoed a similar feeling:

I wanted to be a teacher because I am a teacher in my country...My first semester was very hard and I could not pass the classes so I had to withdraw. I later took the class again and I passed with a B. But then I had a problem and I had to return to Colombia...When I came back I had forgotten whatever I had learned...I have tried again but I have never finished...and I know, if I had my title I would succeed but I haven't been able... I'm going to try again next year. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author)

Another group of non-graduates did not make the connection clearly between their attendance and successful completion. Maritza stated, “I never thought of going to college or what that meant. To me it was just an escape. A place where I could breathe.”

In addition to non-graduates not being specific in their connection of education and jobs is the point that they also had limited knowledge about potential professions. The professional jobs mentioned by graduates often went to well-known fields such as architecture or law, or professions with which they have had contact, such as education. But when obstacles present themselves they end up quitting and reproducing the social order. Rolando, for example mentioned:

Actually...I wanted to be an architect because I loved to draw... but I looked at it like something really far away. Very few people in my neighborhood and family

made it very far educationally. It was more about making some income and living. I got discouraged with applying to schools and not getting into them. Starting with schools that had architectural programs...

2. Role models for Children

The ways in which higher education systems manufacture consent to the existing social order is also expressed in the narratives of Latino non-traditional students in generational terms. As noted in the previous chapter, a strong theme that emerged was how one of the major reasons for attending Latino College was to set up a positive example to their children. This was a major theme for both graduates and non-graduates.

Graduates and non-graduates viewed their roles as examples differently. Graduates felt they served as a positive role model (Pedro and Maria, for example). As their children saw the effort they placed in higher education, the impact it had on their personal growth and the rewards in the form of better employment and other corollary effects, they thought their children would follow suit. In contrast non-graduates believed they served as a counter role model. They believed that their children would become traditionally aged college students so as to avoid the difficulties non-traditional students had in the process. (Liliana, Veronica, and Bertha).

These descriptions show a form of generational consent building. Graduates feel they help their children become professionals by example. Even though in reality, they are aware that they form a minority in their peer group since not many graduate. But this is a tacit agreement with the concept that only a few can participate in society in elite or non-subaltern ways and that this accomplishment moves through generations. Non-

graduates on the other hand have a clearer way of understanding higher education's role in manufacturing consent. They understand that their failure to graduate condemns them to non-professional jobs and to maintain their subaltern status. They have hope that the next generation will not make the same mistake; that they will not delay pursuing higher education and thus will not be condemned to a subaltern life in the United States.

C. A question of Capital

A finding that appears in the analytical frame presented above is that Latino non-traditional student narratives of their experiences in participating in higher education are consistent with the frame that higher education is part of civil society and a form manufacturing consent. Alternatively explained, part of the experience of Latino non-traditional students at Latino College is that studying leads them to an acceptance of the social order in the United States in complex ways. Successful graduates feel they have paid their dues and now can enter the professional class. Non-graduates feel an acceptance of their failure that does not permit them to move out of the social space, which they occupy. At times this is expressed as a generational issue, whereby the Latino non-traditional hopes to make a difference for the following generation. However, understanding that Latino non-traditional students experience higher education as a force that manufactures consent only partially leads us into an understanding of the way they experience higher education. Higher education manufactures consent but in some cases this leads to successful completion and in other (a majority) leads to non-completion and

an acceptance of a subaltern status in society. The difference between the two groups lies in the level to which they have or have acquired cultural capital. This acquisition is not uniform. Some Latino non-traditional students did acquire tools to be successful prior to coming to LC. Other students had none and acquired none, and yet others acquired some capital as they studied.

1. Cultural Capital

The concept of Cultural Capital is attributed to Pierre Bourdieu, a French social theorist who worked in the twentieth century. As presented in chapter 2, and similar to Gramsci, Bourdieu comes from a Marxist tradition that attempts to explain social inequities and social reproduction. That is how through generations, society continues with its class divisions.

For Bourdieu, understanding inequities begins with acknowledging the limitations of traditional Marxist thought. According to that tradition, social differences are best explained by material production and the accumulation level of this production. This is the only way in which class is created. But Bourdieu argues that this is shortsighted and material production is only one form of capital. This he calls economic capital, which include money, material objects, and the means to acquire these. But in addition to economic capital is cultural capital (in later writings Bourdieu would add even more categories of capital). Cultural capital is the informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, type of discourse, educational credentials and lifestyle choices that form

individuals. In Bourdieu's language, individuals who share similar amounts of capital, share a "habitus." (Berger 2000, p, 98, Yosso 2005)

2. Higher Education and Cultural Capital

Cultural capital, as a construct is difficult to operationalize and analyze because it is purposely vague and amorphous. It is multidimensional, abstract and lacks specificity. It is difficult to enumerate all the factors that form cultural capital and they are mostly difficult to dimensionalize and quantify. This is very different from economic capital. Nevertheless, the construct has direct relevance to higher education and its requirements for success.

It is not too difficult to imagine that in order to be successful in college it is necessary to have several forms of capital. There is a need for economic capital to pay for the educational services and there is a need for what we could term intellectual capital. The latter is the background knowledge and preparation, the analytical ability, study skills, discipline and other necessary characteristics to be successful in course work. But, further, students need cultural capital or other forms of capital that permit the acquisition of cultural capital. This is so because it is necessary to have the informal interpersonal skills, habits, language and so on, that are consistent with navigating a collegiate environment. Again, these are difficult to dimensionalize or quantify as clear constructs since they involve abstract notions such as understanding the value of academic credentials and the time and intellectual investments necessary for successful endeavors.

Scholars have focused on cultural capital or closely related concepts in higher education and the ability of students to succeed. Geri Graff (2003) offers a particularly insightful way to think about cultural capital in an academic context. In his book, Clueless in Academe, Graff discusses how higher education functions as a secret society for which only an elite few qualify for membership. This society has a particular way of organizing and thinking about itself. Its primary mode of operation is through opaque language and systems of argumentation and the assumption that students know this system when they enter the academy. This “turns off” many students who abandon the endeavor. Only the ones who persist learn this language and succeed.

Graff’s argument is very insightful and resonates with thousands of students (including this writer) who often felt inadequate or ill-suited for academic work. The argument is most relevant for traditionally aged and academically prepared students attending elite institutions. However, it rings true at all institutional levels. And if traditional students have difficulties, it is even harder for non-traditional students.

3. Latino non-traditional students and Cultural Capital

It is difficult to underestimate the issue of cultural capital with Latino non-traditional students. Graff convincingly argues that students that are traditionally aged, attended strong secondary programs and come from family backgrounds where higher education was expected find the culture of higher education, and particularly its language, opaque. This is exacerbated many times over with the Latino non-traditional population,

who are older than average, have had limited or no exposure to higher education. They have had almost no opportunities to acquire capital. The experiences they shared about their participation in higher education exemplify. Interestingly Latinos did not identify class work as issues of capital.

a. Capital about Job prospects

While all college students lack some knowledge about how higher education specifically fits with future job opportunities and often enter a college unsure as to what field of study they are going to pursue, this is exacerbated with Latino non-traditional students. This is so because even though traditional students are unsure about which direction they will take as professionals when they first enter college, they have experienced in their families the trajectories this takes. Their parents, siblings, friends, school teachers, counselors and many other individuals forming part of their social networks have entered the job market with degrees. They have shared experiences in both formal and informal ways that show how their studies carefully matched their career goals and future employment, or alternatively they explain that what they studied and what they worked at are completely unrelated, yet can trace a trajectory. More often, the reality is somewhere in between these two extremes.

Latino non-traditional students have substantially different experiences when compared to traditional students. When explaining their employment goals, even years after leaving Latino College, they stated professions such as teacher, lawyer, architect, or

doctor. These are traditional fields, which it is not uncommon for people from all social strata to aspire. However, only a few, graduates, were able to articulate how this goal is achieved. They were not clear regarding most requirements for degrees, such as courses, external examinations, career paths or any other aspect related to achieving this goal.

Rolando mentioned he wanted to be an architect or a lawyer and Carlos mentioned several careers some that required higher education and some that did not, but he did not perceive this difference. Many others expressed being a teacher as a career goal, which shows their interest in one of few professions to which they have had exposure as children. Still, the interpretations of what it means to be a teacher are somewhat specific to their experiences. This is best exemplified by Andrea who stated:

Yes, I always thought I wanted to be a teacher. When I was a little girl I pretended to be a teacher. My father had a garden and every day I would move some plants and pretend they were my children. And I would grab a stick and spank them. My father would ask, “why are you spanking them?” And I would answer: because they do not form a straight line...all the time, I wanted to be a teacher...”

It is very clear that to her, maintaining discipline for tasks that are unrelated to learning (forming a line) created her image of what teachers do when she was a child.

b. Family capital

Most of the former students that participated in the interview process gave touching portrayals of the support they received from their families. They spoke of the example set by their parents, the support they received from their spouses, and even their children. But this support is not always consistent with the cultural capital for college

success. Graduates and non-graduates talked about how family members, particularly parents, thought school was important but in abstract terms. For example Clara, a graduate, stated that after her father died (when she was 14), her mother:

always told me to study. And this year you didn't study because your father died, but next year you are going to study. So I always felt that push from her and her words, "you have to study. I don't know how we are going to do it, but you have to study." Then, at 14, I got married and my husband did not allow me to study. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

Clara expressed these words with great emotion and as a way of explaining that she did feel supported by her mother in her educational endeavor. And there is little doubt that her mother's persistence was a positive energy for Clara in her aspirations. But in terms of cultural capital, Clara could not add to her narrative words about how her mother supported her financially, or helped her academically, explained options for educational paths or many other pieces of information that traditional students receive from their parents. Further she married at fourteen, very young (and illegal in the United States) with the approval of her mother, again an example of an inconsistent action with the pursuit of higher education goals, in a traditional sense.

Clara's words also are an example of a different kind, and that is how in many cases, spouses were not supportive of the educational goals of former students. Clara's first husband did not allow her to study but in the previous chapter we also saw how Maritza and Andrea felt completely unsupported and in the case of Maritza, her husband seriously abused her.

c. Time and intellectual capital

The time commitments and intellectual investments required for successful collegiate work are not readily understood by Latino non-traditional students. The idea that collegiate work requires hours of uninterrupted dedication to reach deep understanding and advanced intellectual discourses was not part of the reality of most Latino non-traditional students, whether they graduated or not. Interestingly, their descriptions of the study conditions in their lives were very matter of fact. They did not express it in terms of understanding that they were lacking in time and resources for proper investment into their higher education pursuits.

Pilar, for example is a graduate that very matter of fact explained how difficult it was to study. She stated that sometimes it was very difficult to complete homework and that she had to stay up late with a dictionary trying to understand the chapters to books. Additionally, her daughters "...complained because [she] had to stay up so late..."

Non-graduates also had very vivid descriptions of the difficulties they faced attempting to find time to complete all tasks. Esther stated:

"It was very complicated. I used to fall behind and asked friends to loan me their work. It was too much, work, study, home, sometimes I had to quit jobs..."

Or Maritza phrased her difficulties finding time the following way:

Yeah. I was taking the bus all the way to the main campus with my two kids to take my daughter to the day care at Latino College. I had to drop her off at Main and Broadway. Then I had to drop my son off at St Matthias at 21st and Ridge. Then pick up my son at aftercare, and then rush to go to school to go over here.

D. Cultural Encounters

This work argues that higher education is a system that has a culture. It is a system with rules, conventions, language, and many other social trappings and its own way of interpreting the world around it. Latino non-traditional students also lead lives that exist within cultural interpretations. When they enter an institution of higher education a process of interpretation immediately begins. It is not an interaction that can be described as a clash of cultures. This assumes that there are distinct closed systems and does not allow for a dynamic analysis of how people interact with society. The suggested approach is to look at culture as a fluid interplay that takes place in nuanced ways and in contested spaces. Latino non-traditional students enter this system with no knowledge of this culture and every interaction becomes a process of cultural interpretation and creations of new meanings.

This analytic frame originates with a definition of culture that purposely moves away from thinking in terms of rigid sets of beliefs. Traditionally, scholars and non-scholars look at culture as a defined set of beliefs, values and practices, which are primarily inherited and organize individual relations to a community. Often these sets of beliefs are seen as non-modern and remain uncontested through generations. However, in this dissertation's analysis, culture is not a set of shared and inherited things, it is a set of transactions, processes and practices that lead to ways in which we experience and give meaning and value in our lives.

This latter approach to culture is consistent with the analysis of the Cultural Studies school of thought and it provides enlightening ways to understand how Latino non-traditional students experience Latino College.

1. Cultural Studies

As mentioned in chapter 2, Cultural studies is the analytical frame that focuses on cultural practices and their relation to power. There are two major tenets to cultural studies that are of particular importance in this analysis. First, is that culture is dynamic and it is more associated with practices and interpretations than symbols or things. Second, it is important to analytically acknowledge that there is no high or low culture but rather some cultural practices are privileged over others in terms of their relations to power. The elite groups in power determine what become privileged practices and what are marginalized practices and these determinations usually help perpetuate the power relations that exist in a society.

At the risk of oversimplifying complex processes, art and music offer compelling examples of cultural studies tenets. There are certain types of art that are displayed in museums and valued, or music forms that are played in venues that are valued as belonging to elites. These help perpetuate power relations as only some have access to these forms and are considered to belong to the elite by having knowledge about these cultural forms while other art and music forms do not have that same privilege. At the same time these are dynamic and contested processes. There are cultural representations

that now fit into elite venues, such as museums, that would not have been present in the past.

Higher education is not too different in this analytical framework. Higher education is also a cultural form that has emerged with its regulations to be a way of privileging certain kinds of knowledge and forms to acquire knowledge in certain contexts. These systems of knowledge creation and knowledge acquisition do not always fit with Latino non-traditional student cultural practices and this lead to contested territories that limit the possibilities of persistence for some students.

2. Contested Cultural Practices

As presented in chapter 3, Latino College is a unique institution of higher education. It was created with the purpose of serving the Latino community and has developed numerous special services and programs, including a bilingual program, to serve the needs of its population. Still, it is an institution of higher education that is required to maintain a series of conventions in order to belong to the world of higher education. Even though the mission of Latino College is to serve Latino non-traditional students, the languages and social conventions of higher education require adjustment and Latino non-traditional students begin to interpret college culture as soon as they enter. The first space for interaction is the admissions office. In this space, students need to culturally transact the process of being admitted to the College. This process requires providing documentation that shows that they have pre-requisite conditions to be part of

this community. That is, they need to provide evidence of having completed a high school program, a high school completion program (GED) or show through examination that they have the ability to benefit from a collegiate education. This process is coupled with applying for financial aid, where they need to share personal and often intimate information about their family structures, income and debt. Then, they receive advising on which courses to take based on a perceived professional interest, which might have been expressed in very vague terms. These are all daunting experiences for people who have never entered a college.

These transactions present many complexities which are unusual to Latino non-traditional students and they place before being officially admitted to be part of the community. Then comes the process of actually entering classes, learning about expectations from faculty, managing time, adjusting to academic thought processes and beyond. In these transactions, some students learn how to adjust and others do not.

In the context of cultural interactions, the themes that emerged from the interviews with the former students become interpretations of higher education within the cultural lens of the participants. Each experience is to a degree unique to that individual but the patterns that emerged are ones that do not always distinguish how culture is interpreted by graduates and non-graduates.

The major themes described in chapter 4 that emerged from the interviews were that the purposes to attend college were to learn English, become a positive role model for children, improve job prospects, or escape from home environments are all consistent

with Latino non-traditional students interacting with higher education and making sense of that experience in the context of their other cultural experiences. This is similar to the other themes such as defining quality education for their purposes, describing their perceived intellectual ability and the conditions to study. Also such topics as the limited knowledge of academic policies and the kinds of support they received from parents, spouses, other family members and faculty.

All these issues become cultural transactions between Latino non-traditional students and higher education that lead to decisions to persist or withdraw from the process. In order to illustrate how these processes function I will focus on four prominent spaces of cultural interactions. These are pregnancies, issues of extended family membership, and spousal relations.

a. Degreed Students

Before discussing the issues mentioned above, a brief word about graduates. In the interviews it was difficult to decipher patterns that could really distinguish graduates from non-graduates. The graduates faced many of the same difficulties that non-graduates faced. However, they were able to interpret their experiences in ways which led to graduation. Lucila and Pedro, for example, delayed college attendance until their respective children were older and did not require as much attention as young children. Pedro began attending Latino College earlier in his life but could not cope and left. But

he came back and completed his career. Lucila also had a stop out behavior due to her young children but managed to return later to complete the degree.

A different approach is exemplified by Alicia. She transferred a work ethic she had developed to make a living into her higher education experience. She believed in hard work, commitment and perseverance as a way to be rewarded in employment and she used those very same behaviors and values at Latino College successfully. She even developed value judgments about her peers who were not able to do the same and therefore not complete a degree. In her mind they had a weakness where she had strength and thus continued. These ways of interpreting the experiences show resilience and the ability to succeed.

b. Pregnancies

It is no understatement to say that becoming pregnant while attending college creates many difficulties for a student. The time and intellectual dedication needed to devote to studies become compromised through pregnancy, giving birth and taking care on a newborn. Still, this is something that happens often in many institutions and Latino College is no exception. Nevertheless, an interesting difference in the experience of pregnancy with Latino non-traditional students and others is that it seemed to be a prevalent experience and it happens within married couples and they were not, in general terms, unwanted. It is also an important element in describing their experience in college and their decision to discontinue.

There were four former students who discussed pregnancies as having an impact on their ability to continue their studies. Eliza was very succinct. She stated that “when I was in my last semester, I became pregnant and did not finish.” Elsa elaborated on her situation:

Well that is what happens when a baby comes, you live for that because what else are you going to do. The father of my children helped but it wasn't much. I said I wanted to continue studying but when you are young you do not think too much. You haven't resolved one thing and you start another. I have not resolved the issue with my studies when I started giving birth and then it was worse...”
(Original in Spanish. Translated by the author.)

Bertha's words, after explaining her need to learn English were:

I went to school. But every time I started, I ended up pregnant and had to quit. My pregnancies stopped me from going to school.

Finally Andrea stated:

Oh yes, when I started studying I did about two semesters, then I got pregnant and left. After I would give birth, I would stay with my babies for a little while, because I didn't have anyone to care for them, but when they were a little older, I would go back to school.

Undoubtedly, for these former students, becoming pregnant, and in some cases multiple times, was a major strain on their time that did not permit them to stay in school. However, the experience is more complex than that and it is presented in terms of contested cultural territory. The students explain how in becoming pregnant they are fulfilling cultural expectations for the time in their lives. When asked to elaborate on why they did not delay their pregnancies until after their studies, the former students answered that it never occurred to them. Bertha went further and said, “Well, you know how men

are...” In their experiences with higher education, it was more important to fulfill the cultural expectations of their family and extended social circles rather than adjusting to the rigors of higher education and making those inclusive to their home life.

c. Extended Family Membership

It is often stated as fact that Latinos are family oriented people and that the immediate and extended family plays important support roles in their lives. This was also evident in chapter 4, where many of the participants mentioned their families as playing important roles in their decisions to study, their purposes for studying and many of the issues that created difficulties in their studies. This is another area of cultural encounters and possibilities for contested practices. Almost all participants mentioned areas of tension in their families and studies as they narrated their experiences in higher education at Latino College.

Among the more salient descriptions was Elsa’s who stated:

Once married, you know, I started to analyze the situation and I said to myself, I will try again [to study] but at that time I brought my mother to the United States because it was something that really frustrated me, to have her far away from me, so I brought her and that was the time when I started studying at Latino College. I passed the first semester well, but by the second my mother became ill and bedridden and I did not sleep well and I had to go, sleep deprived, to work and school. My husband helped me by taking turns with my mother. She was sick for a year, but the last six months were the worst in my life. I could never sleep taking care of my mother and it was very difficult to go to school. And I was never very good in English and... I can get the present tense but it is hard when dealing with the future and the past...so I dropped English the second semester and for the third my mother was even more ill and that disillusioned me and I decided to better stay home. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

Elsa is very moving in the description of the ordeal she had to go through as she tried to improve her life through education and with very limited support to deal with her mother's illness. But there is, additionally, a certain determinism in her description of how going to school was like sailing windward and that her life fell into place once she decided to stop attending college. She does not blame the institution or the lack of support for her inability to complete her studies but rather she almost presents it as going against her destiny to attend college.

Liliana presented a less vivid but similar cultural encounter related to extended family and difficulties studying. She stated:

I wanted to be a teacher, since I am a teacher in my country I wanted to continue studying the same thing but I didn't know English. So the first semester was very hard and I couldn't pass. I had to drop from classes in the last few weeks and I stopped studying. Once I decided to come back to school, I needed to pass English with a "B", and I passed English with a "B" but I had a family problem and I had to go back to Colombia. I stayed there for a year and when I came back I had forgotten whatever little I had learned, I decided to leave Latino College until I knew more English. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

So Liliana returned to her country to deal with a family problem even though, in her words, she was beginning to be successful in her education.

Patricia also had to travel back to her country to resolve a major family problem when the father of her children died. That led her to discontinue her studies.

Rolando and Carlos also expressed that they could not continue with their studies because they needed to provide for their families. It was more important to be a breadwinner and fulfill those roles than to imagine other options.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of the dynamic flow of family and studying was presented by Bertha who mentioned that her studies were compromised when she had to assume the care of a nephew who had been abused. I asked her whether she did not think that assuming this major responsibility would impact her studies and she responded:

I didn't think about it. I only acted with feelings. And I would arrive home tired and I had to care for my children and the other boy. And the psychology instructor noticed that I was not doing well. She said, "Bertha I see that you are very interested but at times you seem gone," so I started crying and I told her that I was caring for a child that had been sexually abused many times and that I could not let him see his Dad because he got really nervous. And the instructor said: "Bertha either you let that child go or you let school go, but you cannot do both." And I think about it now and I think that that reason made me quit school. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

d. Overwhelming Spousal relations

While the spousal relations are part of the family issues presented above, they appeared as a theme so often that they form their own category in terms of cultural encounters in contested spaces that impacted former students' experiences in higher education. Women were particularly affected with the tension created by how participants attempted to interpret the world of higher education and maintain their home environments.

As described in chapter 4, there were many vivid and moving descriptions of how husbands attempted to support the former students in their studies. But there was also an additional narrative that even though there was support, they felt that they needed to also comply with their duties and make sure that attending school was not perceived as a

disruptive activity in the home. This was the case with Clara and Lucila. Also, non-graduates such as Veronica, stated that her husband supported her, even if only verbally. But there were cases where attending college was a highly contested issue. Maritza was physically abused by her husband and Andrea's husband denied her money to purchase books or even food and transportation to attend school.

Former male students also felt the tension of spousal relations and studying. Carlos and Rolando felt they needed to provide for their families. Pedro also mentioned how his wife would be jealous of the relations he was developing on campus.

The way former students expressed themselves regarding their spousal relations often fell into stereotypes; women feeling that they needed to care for their husbands by cooking, cleaning and taking care of other household things, while men had to provide or assure their wives need not be jealous of their new friends on campus. But the fact that they are stereotypes does not make them less important in the construction of meaning of how the higher education experience is mediated by these former students. How they felt they could negotiate the cultural spaces of higher education and the spousal relations was an important aspect in their ability to complete or not complete a degree.

3. College is not a rite of passage

From a Cultural Studies framework, the way in which Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education has an impact on whether they decide to withdraw from their studies or continue until graduation. The evidence shows a series of

ways in which Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences. An additional element in the decision making process, which the narratives also highlight, is that attending a college or a university is not a rite of passage for Latino non-traditional students, as it is for other groups.

As mentioned in chapter 2, one of Tinto's major insights in his watershed study was to include the concept of rites of passage in his persistence model. Borrowing from anthropological theory, which presented rites of passage in various societies as major points in growth and maturation that led to full group membership, Tinto uses college attendance as such a rite. Although he intends to use it as an analogy, it is a powerful one. In elite communities, attending college is an essential step in passing into adulthood. However, for Latino non-traditional students this is not the case. The reasons for attending college, as presented in Chapter 4, are not associated with fulfilling specific social roles. Their decisions to continue attendance through graduation or to withdraw are not mediated by a process of fulfilling an established familial and social process of passing into adulthood that includes a collegiate education. The experience is not mediated by certain ways of visualizing the future. This is exemplified in the narratives by showing how the choice for Latino College was made, the described direct reasons for withdrawing, which included not liking faculty, distance from campus, and caring for family members.

Higher education institutions that serve non-traditional institutions use very traditional marketing methods to attract students. Essentially they advertise in the media

about their institutions. Latino College is no exception to this. It also advertises widely in Latino circles. This is a very different approach to choosing a college. In more traditional environments, part of the rite of passage is the process of choosing the institution. This often involves academic rigor and competition, financial assistance and family traditions. At Latino College, on the other hand, advertising plays an important role. When asked why she chose to attend Latino college, Alicia stated:

I lived close to the satellite at Armitage. And around here there's like a lot of propaganda about their programs... about the school. They advertise.

Similarly, Lucila said:

The TV ads...and I came and I met Carmen and Lourdes and I felt good, so I stayed. Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

Several other former students also mentioned the role of the media in choosing the college. These are legitimate ways of choosing an institution. However, the process does not have the rigor that other choice processes may have. And much like in response to other products chosen through advertisement, Latino non-traditional students can decide to withdraw from the institution.

When asked directly non-graduates offered a variety of reasons for withdrawing. A common one, mentioned in the previous chapter, was problems with instructors. Carmen mentioned that she thought an Early Childhood Education teacher was unhelpful, so she dropped the class. Then she dropped her other classes. Another kind of reason was distance from home. Patricia said:

I liked Latino College a lot, but unfortunately it does not have locations in the suburbs so I had to go downtown and that was very hard for me. If it weren't for that I would

have continued attending. But the distance was too much. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

Similarly Eliza said:

Well, there are subjects that are only taught at the Main campus, and that is very difficult and then in winter it is even more complicated and a great obstacle so I could not go back. We give priority to our work, obviously. (Original in Spanish. Translated by author.)

Caring for a loved one was another common reason for being unable to complete studies.

Iris, Maritza, Pedro, Carlos and others, mentioned that they had to care for a parent or a child that did not allow them to continue.

The reasons presented by Latino non-traditional students are legitimate concerns and in many cases very moving. Yet, these decisions are within reach as the choice process was not as strong and rigorous as a rite of passage process.

E. Pockets of Resistance

The experience of Latino non-traditional students in the culture of higher education is one where they are exposed to subtle hegemonic forces which value certain forms of knowledge and acquisition of knowledge through its power structures. Further, as soon as enrollment takes place, it becomes clear that they lack the cultural capital (in most cases) to be successful in this system. These experiences take place through a series of cultural transactions that lead to decisions of persistence and graduation, or, in most cases, to decisions to withdraw. In this context, it is possible to ask, to what degree is withdrawing from the higher education system a form of resistance to the hegemonizing force of

higher education? Understandably, a futile form of resistance because by not obtaining a degree, Latino non-traditional students who withdraw actually reinforce the social order, which leaves them in lower socio-economic levels. This line of thinking has a parallel in colonial and postcolonial studies that the Subaltern Group has addressed.⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Subaltern group is a set of (mostly) Indian scholars preoccupied with the history of the Indian subcontinent colonial period and the drive to independence. The major concern came from that traditional narratives of Indian history framed the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a period of struggle against colonial oppression that culminated with national liberation and the creation of the modern Indian nation state. The thought of subaltern scholars is that this narrative did not fit the experiences of millions of peasants who participated in this resistance. In fact, this narrative only fits the experience of a small minority of western educated Indians who saw a bright future in a modern independent Indian state. The result of this novel line of inquiry is a series of nuanced studies of the Indian peasantry during the colonial period, where scholars attempt to access the voice of the subaltern.

The Subaltern group is clearly influenced by Antonio Gramsci. In fact, their name derives from Gramsci's typology of dividing society into elites and subaltern and most analyses have the colonial period as a westernized hegemonic force to which subalterns resist.

I believe there is a parallel in this experience to the experience of Latino non-traditional students in higher education. Even though there are major differences in the

⁴ This section owes much to the insights of Paul Willis in Learning to Labor, 1977.

contexts, there is a duality in the relation of the colonial state and the peasantry and the North American higher education system and Latino non-traditional students. Both the colonial state and higher education have ways of interpreting the world and exert power over subaltern groups. In the case of higher education, dropping out can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the hegemonic power of higher education.

While it is possible to offer a resistance frame to Latino non-traditional student stop out behaviors, it is a particularly difficult task to analyze it because the voice of non-graduates, as subaltern subjects, is very difficult to access for two reasons. First is the research context itself. The process of obtaining information in the form of a survey and a series of interviews mediate the kind of responses elicited from the participants. Second, as individuals that belong to the higher education culture, our frames do not necessarily privilege the kinds of voices that subaltern students bring. Nevertheless, it is possible to glimpse at the subaltern voice through several expressions of thought.

Andrea, for example, who did not graduate, mentioned that the educational product of Latino college was inadequate because she had a teacher from Texas that was all laughs (see page 129) and not serious. If she had had a more serious and demanding instructor, she would have learned more and not depleted her financial aid.

Carlos talked at length, hours, about his life and his accomplishments in his native Peru as a way to deflect conversation from the questions related to his direct learning experience. He was masking his own non graduation behavior with comments about not needing the degree given his already well-established accomplishments.

Veronica thought everything was “un relajo” (a mess) because there were two sections of one course and students were moving from one to the other. This showed a lack of seriousness about the educational endeavor that led her to withdraw.

Pedro thought that education was stronger in Mexico because they only have six years of elementary school and here it is eight. Thus, in Mexico, they accomplish the task in a shorter period.

These are small glimpses into a way of viewing the world that is, for the most part, very difficult to access in traditional academic forms of discourse. There is however, one inevitable result. These interpretations of Latino non-traditional student experiences as forms of resistance to the hegemonic forces have counter-productive results. By discontinuing their studies they have not helped destroy the social order but rather they help reproduce it, leaving themselves to occupy the most vulnerable social positions.

Yet, there are valuable conclusions to draw from these expressions of resistance. In order to make higher education truly democratic it is necessary to shift the thinking from the concept of creating programs that will support non-traditional students so that they can adjust to higher education to systems that will honor, affirm and integrate individuals' identities into the organizational cultures.

F. Summary and Conclusion

From a Cultural Studies framework, the way in which Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education has an impact on whether they continue through to graduation or withdraw. This is the case at Latino College.

First, the collegiate experience is part of Civil Society's tools for creating consent to the current social structures. It is a way for people to believe they can advance or accept their status in society. For Latino non-traditional students the latter is more likely the case because even though they are welcome to the higher education community, they lack the cultural capital to succeed. These conditions impact the way in which Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in the academy.

The experiential interpretations Latino non-traditional students have in higher education are mediated through a series of cultural transactions that relate to cultural experiences they have had in other contexts. Thus as a way of making sense of their life in college, they have developed concepts that explain their path. The reasons for attending school are to learn English, to be a role model to children, to improve job prospects, or escape from home environments. Additionally the students have interpreted academic policies and requirements in ways that make sense to their experiences. Particularly interesting ways of interpreting experiences that show how Latino non-traditional students make decisions are how several female students spoke about their pregnancies, how several students spoke about issues related to their belonging to an extended family and particularly how spousal relations mediated their ability to progress to degrees or not.

How Latino non-traditional students interpreted their higher education experiences is also mediated by the fact that attending college is not an essential part of their formation as a complete adult. In other words, college attendance and graduation is not a rite of

passage. In some cases the collegiate experiences are to be interpreted as acts of defiance and resistance to the social order, but of limited value because they do not reach significant social change.

In conclusion, the decision to drop from college, which many Latino non-traditional students make, is not a decision to give up dreams of higher education and becoming a professional. They are decisions about having a baby, about getting a job, dealing with a problem at home, moving to another state, or many other possibilities. Attending college is not a decision to be part of a structure for four years, but it is part of a daily interpretation of transactions that make up life experience.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Introduction

Higher Education in the United States is a complex and multifaceted system that serves many purposes. It ranges from large institutions offering advanced degrees, producing research and delivering services in a range of areas, to small colleges offering short term programs. In this wide context, the experiences of a very particular sub-set of students, Latino non-traditional, may seem unimportant. This however, is untrue. In a highly dynamic environment, such as higher education, how a particular population interprets its space and transacts with its culture sheds a light on how higher education is facing this changing world. Looking through the lens of this particular population, there are ways in which this work informs the degree to which higher education is truly a democratic cultural apparatus that offers opportunities for liberation and advancement, or is part of a larger socio-cultural apparatus that reproduces social inequities and is not a force for social change. It is also a lens to look at how higher education transforms itself and fulfills its purposes in society.

At one level this work seems to be about comparing how Latino non-traditional students that graduated differ in their experiences with higher education from non-graduates. But it is also about discovering the spaces occupied and created by this population in collegiate culture. How can higher education serve this population better is also relevant in a context of an increasingly diversified system.

B. Higher Education in the twenty-first century

It is not a debated fact that higher education has changed dramatically in the past thirty years. The changes involve many layers; populations attending college have changed, the types of degrees offered have changed, the governance structure and the funding sources have also changed. In some regards it is so different now that many believe the entire system is in a state of crisis. (Readings 1996; Aronowitz 2001; Karabel 1998) At one level there is discussion about higher education being in a crisis of identity and at another level there is discussion of higher education being in a crisis of purpose. One of the arguments of this work, however, is that higher education is part of civil society. As higher education transforms itself, it does so within the context of changing social priorities and it is in this context that Latino non-traditional students interpret experiences within this system.

The crisis of identity is most often expressed as a lament that higher education is no longer what it used to be.⁵ Universities used to be centers of pure learning where faculty pursued and transmitted knowledge in complete freedom and unthreatened by forces outside the academy, now they are entities that need to respond to market forces and provide vocational credentials for students. Additionally, external players such as accreditation agencies and the government are defining quality in ways that limit the freedom of faculty to operate.

⁵ Interestingly, these discussions do not seem to have a traditional political bias. There are authors linked with right wing and left wing causes that lament how higher education is no longer the bastion of pure knowledge it once was.

One specific way in which this crisis of identity presents itself is how technological changes add competition from new players in the form of online degrees. (Katz et al, 1999; Christensen and Eyring, 2012). Another is that traditional structures of shared governance are giving way to corporate management styles in universities. (Ruch, 2001) And perhaps most powerfully, the rise of for profit institutions in the United States are bringing new motives to the educational world and consequently, changing it. What this means is that higher education is no longer a producer and protector of knowledge and national culture, but it is a system driven by consumer ideology, which produces graduates for the market. (Readings, 1996)

The other crisis is one of purpose. Instead of focusing on pure learning, institutions of higher education have become focused on career training. And this in itself is questioned by the public as costs have increased so much that the value of a degree in terms of its income earning potential is doubted. Add to this purpose that, by increasing access and reducing selectivity, institutions devote resources for programs that traditionally have been considered remedial. Critics believe that the curriculum now caters to the lowest common denominator in the student population.

An alternative viewpoint is that higher education insists on maintaining systems that are not serving the needs of the majority of its students. Only 25% of the college population fit the category of the traditionally aged student living in a dormitory. (Attewell and Lavin, 2012) Society has changed and participants in higher education have changed requiring for the structures of the system to change.

In this context of crisis, and belonging to this world of crisis, is that Latino non-traditional students enter and interpret their experiences. Their interpretations play an important role as to how higher education needs to adapt its identity and purpose to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. Additionally, it is in this context of crisis that the implications to improve the ability of Latino non-traditional students to complete programs emerge.

C. Implications

1. Policy Implications

By utilizing a cultural studies approach in the analytical section, this study questions the role of higher education in society. Since it argues that cultural practices are value neutral except as to how they relate to structures of power, it is possible to argue that a withdrawal behavior is not detrimental because it is consistent with the meaning some former students have given to their experience. In fact, chapter 5 mentions how deciding not to participate in higher education can be a form of resistance to the hegemonic forces of society. However, it is a futile resistance since it keeps subaltern groups in positions that deny access to power. Thus this section takes the position that educational policies should encourage Latino non-traditional students to complete degrees and that policy can be informed by how Latino non-traditional students give meaning to their experiences. In other words, in this section, this work moves beyond a pure relativistic cultural stance to one where degree completion is deemed a desirable outcome.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this work show the varied ways in which Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education. They make sense of the role higher education plays in their lives and in society within the context of their complete life experiences. In some cases this has a negative impact on retention because in the process of giving meaning to the experiences they had, as part of a complete life, it leads to non-completion of a degree. In other cases it leads to completion. This is in fact, in very simple terms, the answer to the research question of this study. The question was:

How do Latino non-traditional students make sense of their withdrawal experience from a two-year Latino serving institution in the Midwest?

In a diagrammatic form, the question can be expressed in the following form:

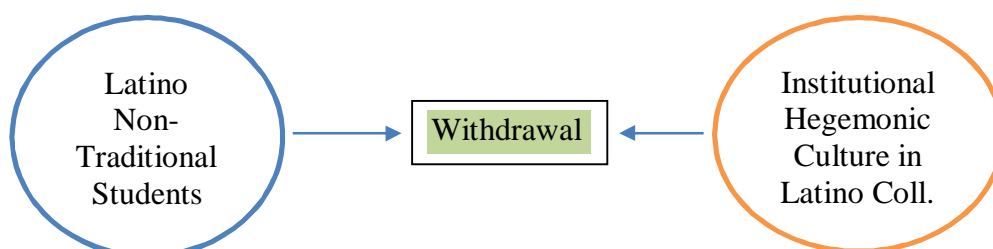


Figure 1 WITHDRAWAL

This has important policy implications in a world where higher education is transforming itself rapidly, there are explicit policy goals to increase the number of college graduates in the nation and the student population is becoming increasingly heterogeneous.

Most work that addresses issues of degree completion with non-traditional populations think in terms of an intervention process to provide support to the student. Although not always stated as such, it views students as lacking skills or resources to be

successful academically and therefore additional support is needed. This is often in the form of remedial instruction, supplemental instruction, counseling, mentoring or other activities. A common thread is that all these processes assume a largely stable and unchanging higher education structure and teaching and learning process within it. In these models non-traditional students receive support in order to fit into the structures of higher education for the transmission of knowledge. In a diagrammatic form it is as follows:

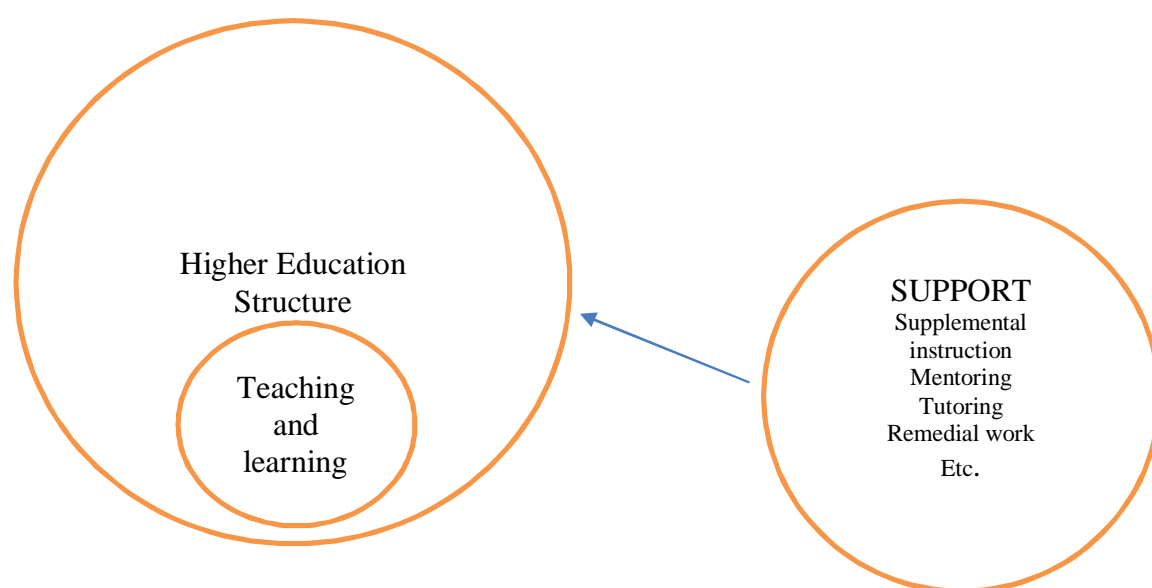


Figure 2 TRADITIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES

There are some alternative models to the one presented in figure 2 that should be mentioned. These do attempt to break the cycle by adding embedded academic support, linked courses and cohorts and learning communities. But they still belong in a conceptual frame where we need to prepare students to be successful in an established system of learning and credentialing.

But the experience of Latino non-traditional students in a Latino serving institution is that the institutional structures and systems for transmitting knowledge do not fit with the ways in which they interpret their life experiences and the experience of entering college within that. What is needed is a model where higher education becomes an intrinsic part of the lives of the students accessing the system. Higher education should enrich the lives of the participants in the system without creating structures that do not permit the participants to make sense of their experiences within it. The figure below illustrates the dynamism needed in higher education.

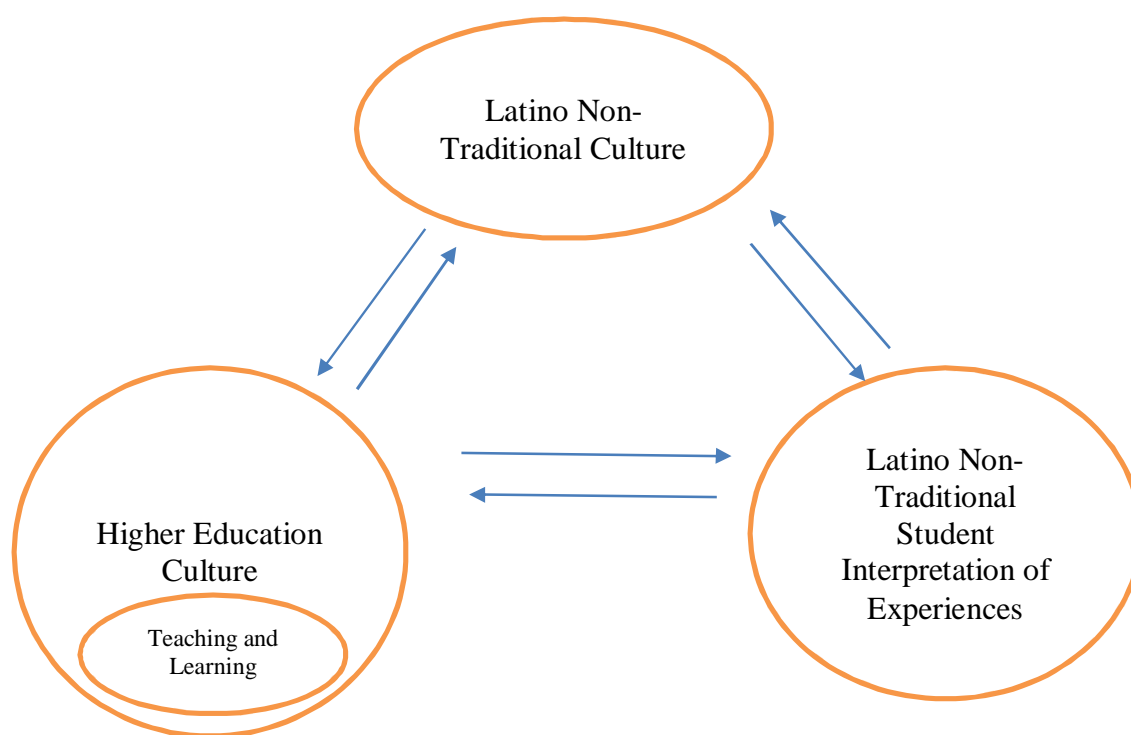


Figure 3 PROPOSED MODEL

Figure 3 attempts to show a dynamic view of the policy changes needed for effective inclusion of Latino non-traditional students. This system is not additive. It is not

a question of adding more programs and support that will make non-traditional students successful.

To achieve the goals of the model presented above is very difficult in the current policy structure of higher education. It is necessary to implement changes that lead to experiences that have cultural meanings leading to completion. Among the policy recommendations that would lead to such a structure are revisions to the credit hour system, financial aid system, term structure, and appeal systems.

The credit hour system has served higher education in the United States well. It is an intuitive way of determining the time investment required for a course, the complexity of the material, and a way to add work towards a degree. Yet from the context of Latino non-traditional students at Latino College it is also inflexible. Courses have a predetermined amount of credits and this is usually unchangeable during a term. This is true at Latino College. If conditions outside the institution create cultural contestations, there is no flexibility in the system to permit the student to earn partial credits for a course. If this were possible, students, if necessary would earn some credit, feel the reward for that, have fewer cultural contestations and have the ability to develop meaning for their experiences that lead to completion.

Related to the credit hour system is the way federal and state organisms have defined financial aid packages. In order to take advantage of the maximum awards possible, it requires students to attend full-time and continuously. Again, this is inconsistent with the needs of Latino non-traditional students that will lead to interpretations of higher

education experiences that will lead to conclusions of not belonging and withdrawal rather than persistence. In the context of Latino College, this is a difficult recommendation to implement because it requires changes in national regulations, which were designed for the reality of the traditional student.

Another related policy recommendation to credit hour and financial aid structures is the term structure. At Latino College terms are measured in semesters. These have very clear beginning and ending points. It leads to a periodization of the learning experience, which conflicts with Latino non-traditional students who do not place participating in higher education as a separate stage in life, which puts other activities on hold. Flexible beginning and ending times would lead to experiences more consistent with their lives and the changes occurring in their lives. Right now academic practices such as beginning and ending dates of a term are in competition and contestation with cultural practices such as becoming pregnant or caring for a nephew.

A final policy recommendation is to create stronger appeal systems that can empower students in the higher education culture. When confronted with difficulties, students have a limited voice to explain it in a higher education context. The voice of faculty, staff and administrators is privileged. It is recommended that appeal processes for grades, attendance records, and other processes, include student voices so that establishment voices are not overly privileged.

2. Practice Implications

The model proposed above has several practice implications. These are both at the institutional and regulatory levels. Institutionally, this work argues that Latino College is an institution that has created an environment, which at first glance, seems to be culturally friendly to Latino students generally and Latino non-traditional students in particular. The College has a climate that many other institutions would like to emulate. Through, language, staffing, support services and many other nuanced ways, the institution makes the Latino community feel welcome. However, this climate does not include the structures of higher education, which lead to cultural transactions inconsistent with completion. All the structural formats and the faculty's approach fall within more traditional ways. In terms of practice, higher completion rates would be achieved if the structures could change to create better experiences. This could be achieved with some changes to institutional practice and with significant development opportunities for faculty and staff on issues of culture that would lead to less contestation in academic spaces.

However, it is important to note that there are practice implications to this research, which are, undoubtedly, very difficult to implement. The current regulatory climate does not reward systematic changes that move too far from the norm. For these possibilities to succeed, accrediting agencies need to be able to evaluate systems that move away from traditional structures. State regulatory agencies would need to permit innovative and highly different ways of viewing higher education. And at the federal

level the Department of Education would need to change how it thinks its oversight and financing role of the system.

The interpretations Latino non-traditional students give to their cultural transactions lead to meanings that in contested and fluid environments lead to choosing non-completion as the best option. However, if Latino College creates opportunities for social interaction that include family and friends and develop a sense of community among faculty, staff and students, the latter will be more invested in the process of their education in a wider context. This also needs to be extended to academic experiences. If children, spouses and other members of students' social circles can peripherally participate in academic processes, in student projects or some classes, it will strengthen the academic experience.

A major limitation in the experience of Latino non-traditional students in Latino College, which this research uncovers, is that even though the majority of staff and faculty are Latino, they have adopted higher education culture and interpret experiences in a context that is similar to traditional higher education culture. This is an issue of training, and learning to view the educational process from a different lens.

The first area requiring training is around the issue of capital and cultural capital, as developed by Bourdieu. As chapter 5 points out, there are clear ways in which Latino non-traditional students do not possess the cultural capital necessary to be successful in higher education. However, since Bourdieu's first insights into the topic, there has been development in this area. As Bourdieu developed of social capital, other authors have

expanded and offered more details on how social capital can be divided into more categories. Tara Yosso (2005) offered additional categories of capital in relation to Latino populations and education. In her research she points out how, following Bourdieu, that Latinos enter the educational system with insufficient amounts of cultural capital to succeed. However, they have other forms of capital, which although not developed for purposes of education, educators can tap into them and transform them into useful forms of capital for educational success.

Yosso's categories of capital include:

1. Aspirational capital, which is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams.
2. Linguistic capital, the intellectual and social skills acquired through communication experiences.
3. Familial capital, those cultural knowledges nurtured among families that carry a sense of community, history and memory.
4. Social capital, networks of people and community resources.
5. Navigational capital, refers to the skills acquired to maneuver through institutions that serve communities of color.
6. Resistant capital, knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

These categories offer opportunities for faculty and staff to think about the process of transmitting knowledge in different ways that will lead to interpretations that are more consistent with completion.

Another area of training is on the issue of cultural translation (Bhabba, 2002).

Cultural translation is a term that has been used in anthropology to define how anthropologists' work in trying to explain foreign cultures, or Homi Bhabba has used it to explain his concept of "in-between," as the space where the colonized's culture develops and opportunities for resistance appear. Yet, in this context, I intend a rather straight forward use of the phrase. Namely, that when presented with unknown cultural practices, individuals will give them meaning by "translating" them into cultural practices that already have meaning. Latino non-traditional students at Latino College do this in various contexts. Staff and faculty need to develop an understanding of how this takes place in order better serve the population and lead to less contested exchanges.

Finally, an area of training for faculty and staff is on the concept of learning as part of life. In traditional educational circles, we enclose the higher education experience into a temporal capsule where students spend a few years engaged in higher learning in order to then move to a different stage in life. College functions as a rite of passage. The testimonies of Latino non-traditional students show how they do not give meaning to their experience at Latino College in this way. They do not see entering the academy as a point in time in their lives where they will study until obtaining a degree, isolate from other aspects of life, and then leave the academy in order to function as a professional. They see entering Latino College as an additional activity in their lives, which needs to be interpreted in ways that are consistent with the rest of their lives. Policies need to

match this in order for students to be successful but also faculty and staff require training to understand this alternative way of giving meaning to the educational experience.

3. Research Implications

The focus on giving meaning to higher education experiences is a valuable way to interpret how different players have entered the higher education system. Additionally, by focusing on how Latino non-traditional students interpret their experiences in higher education, this work opens the door to additional inquiry and shows its own limitations. It is a first step. First, by the nature of the data there are limitations to this inquiry that need to be analyzed. More recent data are needed to replicate the findings of this work. Also, the focus on culture can be refined in future projects by bringing additional factors into play, such as additional objective data on the educational background of participants and their socioeconomic status. This could help give more nuanced information on how differing peoples within Latino non-traditional students give meaning to higher education and how this may relate to different forms of cultural capital.

Latino College is a very interesting location for research. Its unique position in higher education brings almost laboratory like measures of control for campus climate that other institutions cannot. There are interesting possibilities for refining our knowledge following students changing experiences through their collegiate periods. This present work is a snapshot of memories; it would enrich our knowledge to conduct longitudinal interviews as students make progress in higher education. This could yield

interesting information as to how interpretations of experiences change over time. It may help to see ways in which consent is developed. Additionally, these can be compared with students in other institutions.

Latino College is also an interesting location to research faculty attitudes towards non-traditional populations and their impact on retention.

Finally, a broader research implication is that this work focuses on Latino non-traditional students. It would be interesting to learn the degree to which their experiences have relevance to other ways of defining units of study: for example, Socio-economic levels or just age across different ethnic groups.

Higher education is not a pure space for intellectual pursuits. It is part of a wider power structure within civil society where certain things and knowledges are valued and privileged and others are not. So even if some scholars lament the changes taking place in higher education, they also offer the opportunity for a truly democratic and participatory system that adapts to new social needs.

D. Final Thoughts

This work looks at how Latino non-traditional students experience higher education from a cultural view. It argues that higher education forms part of civil society and that its value in society relates to how relations of power have developed and give it its position of privilege.

Additionally, changing policies in higher education have increased access and permitted new populations to enter the academy. The Latino non-traditional population is an example of this. But if higher education does not change its structures dramatically, many students will begin their studies but not complete. Intervention programs do help. Many students manage to complete a degree because they received additional instruction, tutoring, mentoring and other services that helped them engage with their studies. This is not a small feat that should go unrecognized. Many Latino non-traditional students have completed degrees and entered the professional workforce and made important advances for themselves and their communities. However, many are left behind. The cultural transactions involved in participating in the higher education process are some of the factors that led to non-completion. Higher education has the potential to offer unique liberating opportunities that will ensure success to many, but if we do not accept the place higher education has in civil society and that it has a role in reproducing social inequalities, we will limit its liberating opportunities.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument

St. Augustine College
Student Survey
Encuesta sobre los Estudiantes

Social Security Number
 Número de Seguro Social: _____

1. Including the current one, how many semesters have you studied at St. Augustine College?
Incluyendo el corriente, ¿cuántos semestres ha estudiado en San Agustín?

a. 1 (One/uno)
 b. 2 (Two/dos)
 c. 3 (Three/tres)
 d. 4 (Four/cuatro)
 e. More than 4 (Four/más de 4 (cuatro))

2. Is this your last semester?
¿Es éste su último semestre?

a. Yes/Sí
 b. No/No

3. Which English course are you taking?
¿Qué curso de inglés está Ud. tomando?

a. IDEP 1 (Eng 101, 103, 104, 011, 014)
 b. Eng 105-108
 c. Eng 109-112
 d. Eng 121
 e. Eng 201
 f. Eng 202

4. Indicate the campus you live closest to
Indique el campus o la extensión más cerca de donde Ud. vive

a. ARGYLE
 b. SOUTH
 c. WEST TOWN
 d. AURORA

5. How many hours a week do you work?
¿Cuántas horas trabaja cada semana?

a. I do not work/ Yo no trabajo
 b. Less than 10/ Menos de 10
 c. Between 10 and 19/ Entre 10 y 19
 d. Between 20 and 29/ Entre 20 y 29
 e. Between 30 and 39/ Entre 30 y 39
 f. 40 or more/ 40 o más

6. How many children do you have?
¿Cuántos hijos tiene?

a. I do not have children / No tengo hijos
 b. 1
 How old is he/she? / ¿Cuántos años tiene? _____
 c. 2
 How old are they? / ¿Cuántos años tienen? _____
 d. 3 or more/ 3 o más
 How old are they? / ¿Cuántos años tienen? _____

7. What is the highest academic degree that you intend to earn?
¿Cuál es el grado académico más alto que Ud. desea obtener?

a. Associate degree (A.A., A.A.S.)/Grado Asociado
 b. Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.)/Licenciatura
 c. Master's degree (M.A., M.S.)/Maestría
 d. Doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.)/Doctorado
 e. Other/Otro

Use this scale for the following questions
 Use esta escala para contestar las siguientes preguntas

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree
Muy en desacuerdo 1 2 3 4 5
de acuerdo muy de acuerdo

I came to St. Augustine because / Vine a la Universidad San Agustín porque

8. I want to learn skills to get a better job
Quiero aprender destrezas para conseguir un mejor trabajo 1 2 3 4 5
9. I want a college education because it is prestigious
Quiero una educación universitaria porque es prestigiosa 1 2 3 4 5
10. I want to transfer to another four year institution
Quiero transferirme a otra institución de cuatro años .. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I want to learn English
Quiero aprender inglés 1 2 3 4 5
12. It is important to me to get a college degree
Es importante para mí obtener un grado universitario .. 1 2 3 4 5

I chose St. Augustine because of
Yo escogí la Universidad San Agustín por

13. the bilingual program
el programa bilingüe 1 2 3 4 5
14. the English program
su programa de inglés 1 2 3 4 5
15. the opportunity to start college classes in Spanish
la oportunidad de empezar con clases universitarias en español 1 2 3 4 5
16. the Support Services to students
sus servicios de apoyo a los estudiantes 1 2 3 4 5
17. instructors speak Spanish
los profesores hablan español 1 2 3 4 5

18. financial assistance
la ayuda financiera 1 2 3 4 5
19. it being near my home
que está cerca de mi casa 1 2 3 4 5
20. a friend/relative studies at SAC
un amigo/pariente estudia en San Agustín 1 2 3 4 5
21. other reasons/ otras razones

22. What does it mean to you that St. Augustine has a bilingual program?
¿Que significa para Ud. que San Agustín tiene un programa bilingüe?

Using the same scale, please answer the following questions.
Usando la misma escala, por favor conteste las siguientes preguntas.

23. I believe the instructors are well prepared for their job
Yo creo que los profesores están bien preparados para su trabajo 1 2 3 4 5
24. I have good relationships with my instructors
Yo tengo una buena relación con mis profesores 1 2 3 4 5
25. I believe the advisors are well prepared for their job
Yo creo que los consejeros están bien preparados para su trabajo 1 2 3 4 5
26. I have received assistance in personal issues from my advisor
He recibido ayuda en asuntos personales de mi consejero/a 1 2 3 4 5

37. I find classes at St. Augustine to be more difficult than I expected.
Encuentro las clases de San Agustín más difíciles de lo que esperaba 1 2 3 4 5
38. I believe that I have learned how to study efficiently.
Creo que he aprendido a estudiar eficientemente 1 2 3 4 5
39. The instructions my teachers give me are clear.
Las instrucciones que me dan mis profesores son claras 1 2 3 4 5
40. I have problems understanding what I read in English.
Tengo problemas para entender lo que leo en inglés 1 2 3 4 5
41. The textbooks are too hard to read.
Los libros son muy difíciles de leer 1 2 3 4 5
42. The teachers are very demanding.
Los profesores son muy exigentes 1 2 3 4 5
43. I would recommend my friends and relatives to come to St. Augustine to study.
Yo les recomendaría a mis amigos y familia que vengan a estudiar a la Universidad San Agustín 1 2 3 4 5
44. St. Augustine is important in my life.
San Agustín es importante en mi vida 1 2 3 4 5
45. I am certain that St. Augustine is the right choice for me.
Estoy seguro de que San Agustín fue la decisión correcta para mí 1 2 3 4 5
46. It is likely that I will re-enroll next semester.
Es bien probable que me voy a re-matricular el semestre que viene 1 2 3 4 5
47. I feel like I belong at St. Augustine.
Me siento bien en San Agustín 1 2 3 4 5
48. Classes are scheduled at convenient times.
Las clases se dan a horas convenientes 1 2 3 4 5
49. Parking facilities are adequate.
El estacionamiento es adecuado n/a 1 2 3 4 5
50. I like the food in the cafeteria.
Me gusta la comida de la cafetería 1 2 3 4 5
51. Tutoring has helped me improve my grades.
Las tutorías me han ayudado a mejorar mis notas n/a 1 2 3 4 5
52. The childcare service gives good care to my children.
El centro de cuidado de niños cuida bien a mis hijos n/a 1 2 3 4 5
53. The classrooms are comfortable.
Los salones de clase son cómodos 1 2 3 4 5
54. I feel safe at SAC.
Me siento seguro en San Agustín 1 2 3 4 5
55. The library has materials that help me learn.
La biblioteca tiene materiales que me ayudan a aprender 1 2 3 4 5
56. The computer labs have helped me learn.
Los laboratorios de computación me han ayudado a aprender 1 2 3 4 5

Use this scale for the following questions
Use esta escala para contestar las siguientes preguntas

not at all nada	little poco	some algo	much mucho	a great deal muchísimo
1	2	3	4	5

47. St. Augustine has given me the opportunity to develop friendships with other students.
San Agustín me ha dado la oportunidad de desarrollar amistades con otros estudiantes 1 2 3 4 5

To what extent have the following persons encouraged and supported you in your decision to study?
 ¿Hasta qué punto ha recibido Ud. ayuda y apoyo de las siguientes personas en su decisión de estudiar?

48. Spouse
 Esposo/a n/a 1 2 3 4 5
49. Family members
 miembros de la familia 1 2 3 4 5
50. Friends
 Amigos 1 2 3 4 5
51. Fellow students
 compañeros de clase 1 2 3 4 5
52. Teacher(s)
 profesores 1 2 3 4 5
53. Advisor(s)
 consejero(s) 1 2 3 4 5

If employed:
 Si está empleadola

54. Employer
 empleador 1 2 3 4 5
55. Co-workers
 compañeros de trabajo n/a 1 2 3 4 5

To what extent do the following factors make it difficult for you to study?
 ¿Hasta qué punto le dificultan los estudios los siguientes factores?

56. Caring for family members
 Cuidar a miembros de la familia 1 2 3 4 5
57. Housework
 trabajo de casa 1 2 3 4 5
58. Family pressures
 presiones familiares 1 2 3 4 5

59. Family problems
 problemas de la familia 1 2 3 4 5
60. Long work hours
 largas horas de trabajo n/a 1 2 3 4 5
61. Job too far from school
 el trabajo está demasiado lejos de la universidad n/a 1 2 3 4 5
62. Work schedule too heavy
 el horario de trabajo es demasiado pesado n/a 1 2 3 4 5
63. Health problems
 problemas de salud 1 2 3 4 5
64. Financial difficulties
 dificultades financieras 1 2 3 4 5

St. Augustine College has as its mission to make higher education accessible to populations traditionally underrepresented in institutions of higher education, primarily those of Hispanic descent.
 San Agustín ha tenido como misión hacer la educación superior accesible a poblaciones tradicionalmente poco representadas en instituciones de educación superior, principalmente los de descendencia hispana.

If you are Hispanic:
 Si Ud. es hispanola

To what extent do each of the following help you feel at home at SAC?
 ¿Hasta qué punto cada uno de los siguientes factores le hacen sentirse como en casa en San Agustín?

65. Hispanic faculty and staff
 Profesorado y personal hispano 1 2 3 4 5
66. Other Hispanic students
 Otros estudiantes hispanos 1 2 3 4 5
67. Hispanic cultural activities during break-times
 actividades culturales hispanas durante la hora del "break" 1 2 3 4 5

68. If you are non-Hispanic, we would like to know whether you have other reasons why you feel at home or not at St. Augustine. Please use the space below.

Si Ud. no es hispano, nos gustaría saber si tiene otras razones que lo hacen sentirse cómodo en San Agustín. Por favor use el espacio abajo.

69. If a class that you need to take is offered at the main campus or another extension (not the one closest to you), which of the following options would you take?

Si una clase que Ud. necesita tomar, la ofrecen en el campus principal u otra extensión (no la más cercana a su casa). ¿Cuál de las siguientes opciones tomaría Ud.?

- I would travel to it
Yo viajaría hasta allá
- I would wait for another semester, even if that will delay my studies and there is no guarantee that they will offer this class at the site closest to me
Yo esperaré otro semestre aunque eso atrase mis estudios y no hay ninguna garantía de que esa clase lo ofrezcan en la extensión más cercana a mi casa
- I would change majors so that I would no longer need that class
Yo cambiaría de carrera para no necesitar más esa clase

Use this scale for the following questions

Use esta escala para contestar las siguientes preguntas

never <i>nunca</i>	seldom <i>rara vez</i>	occasionally <i>de vez en cuando</i>	often <i>seguido</i>	very often <i>muy seguido</i>
1	2	3	4	5

During one semester at St. Augustine, how often do you
Durante un semestre en San Agustín, ¿qué tan seguido

70. participate in classroom discussions
participa en discusiones de la clase 1 2 3 4 5

71. use the library
usa la biblioteca 1 2 3 4 5

72. come for tutoring help
viene a tutorías 1 2 3 4 5

73. use a computer lab outside of class
usa el laboratorio de computadoras después de las clases 1 2 3 4 5

74. meet with instructors outside of class to discuss academic topics
se reúne con profesores después de la clase para discutir temas académicos 1 2 3 4 5

75. Meet with your academic advisor
se reúne con sus consejero(a) 1 2 3 4 5

76. participate in student activities
participa en actividades estudiantiles 1 2 3 4 5

77. socialize with other students
socializa con otros estudiantes 1 2 3 4 5

78. St. Augustine College now offers a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. Are you interested in this program? *San Agustín ofrece ahora una licenciatura en Trabajo Social. ¿A Ud. Le interesa este programa?*

- Yes / *Si*
- No / *No*
- I would be more interested in other Bachelor's degree programs!
Yo estaría más interesada en otros programas de licenciatura

79. If you answered c, what other programs would you be interested in? *Si contestó c, ¿qué otros programas le interesarían?*

- Business/ *Negocios*
- Computers/ *Computadoras*
- Education/ *Educación*
- Allied Health/ *Salud*
- Other/ *Otra* _____

80. In general, what final grade would you give St. Augustine College?
En general, ¿Qué nota final le daría Ud. a la universidad San Agustín?

- a. A
- b. B
- c. C
- d. D
- e. F

Do you have any other comments about St. Augustine College's services?
¿Tiene algún otro comentario sobre los servicios de San Agustín?

APPENDIX B

Latino Non-traditional Student Retention and College Culture

Interview questions and topics

Andrew Sund

1. Name and background questions, including age, marital status, number of children and years living in the United States.
2. Describe your life, your professional and personal expectations prior to entering college, including immigrant experiences, if applicable.
3. How did you find out about St. Augustine College and how did you decide to attend?
4. Describe your experiences in St. Augustine College with instructors, administrative offices, and social environment.
5. How did you manage your studies with your life outside of college; your work, your family responsibilities, your relationships with people outside college?
6. Describe how you decided to leave.
7. Describe your life since leaving St. Augustine College.
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in college?

VITA**ANDREW SUND****OBJECTIVE**

To consolidate and align twenty years of professional, educational and personal experience in higher education into a senior leadership position in a multicultural environment that prepares underserved students for the professions of the twenty-first century.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY SUMMARY

St. Augustine College	Chicago, Illinois
2008-present	President
2002-2004	Associate Dean of Student Services
1999-2002	Acting Dean of Academic Affairs
1998-1999	Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment
1996-1998	Director of Institutional Research
1993-1996	Coordinator of Institutional Research
1991-1993	Coordinator/Counselor of Initiative Transfer Center
1991-2004	Adjunct Instructor
Olive-Harvey College, One of the city colleges of Chicago	Chicago, Illinois
2006-2008	Dean of Workforce and Community Education
2005-2006	Assistant Dean for Research and Planning
Northwestern University	Evanston, Illinois
1990	Teaching Assistant
Institute for Latino Progress	Chicago, Illinois
1988-1989	Adult Education English and Math Teacher
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Madison, Wisconsin
1986-1987	Research Assistant and English teacher

EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

ADMINISTRATION, LEADERSHIP, AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

President, St. Augustine College (2008-present)

Responsible for all aspects of leading the college. This includes enrollment management, accreditation, faculty issues, physical plant and others. During four year tenure as president, successfully turned around an institution that suffered from declining enrollment, negative balance sheets and low morale into a thriving institution of higher education in the Chicago area.

Dean of Workforce and Community Education, Olive-Harvey College (2006-2008). Led division of Workforce and Community Education of Olive-Harvey College. Successfully turned around a division that suffered from low morale, low enrollment and inadequate staffing. Established procedures where none existed, developed faculty manual and training programs, established new clinical sites for allied health programs, analyzed cost effectiveness of unit, developed new contract training opportunities, and hired new staff and faculty. Developed several new special interest courses and two new certificate programs approved by the Illinois Community College Board. Created new marketing strategies. Enhanced the College's relations with community agencies, churches, city and state agencies. Oversaw daily activities, supervised staff, and managed a \$2,000,000 budget. Enrollment doubled during my tenure as Dean.

Associate Dean of Student Services, St. Augustine College (2002-2004).

Managed the advising unit, the financial aid office, admissions and registrar, the transfer center and the student support services program. Coordinated the functioning of all these areas and provided leadership and mentoring to its directors. Worked closely with other offices in the design and implementation of a new continuous registration process, operational reports, and catalog revisions. Supervised the organization of commencement.

Acting Dean of Academic Affairs, St. Augustine College (1999-2002). Began managing St. Augustine's academic and student service units when the College was suffering low enrollment, was nearly bankrupt, and was receiving intense scrutiny from accreditation agencies. Oversaw daily activities, hired and evaluated faculty, developed curriculum, reported to internal and external stakeholders, controlled several budgets, and led a strategic planning effort to take institution to a state of solvency. Developed and implemented new advising services, created a new recruitment campaign, hired new director of recruitment

and administered several grants. Through a careful process of administering very limited resources, increasing productivity and making strategic decisions, our three- member team helped grow St. Augustine's enrollment by forty percent and decreased expenditures by forty percent. In 2002, St. Augustine reached its highest enrollment ever. This helped the college re-emerge into economic and academic viability.

GED Chief Examiner, St. Augustine College (1997-2003). Directed the GED testing program for St. Augustine College. Hired and trained examiners and proctors and coordinated all examination sessions. Reported results to the Cook County GED office and represented the College at the county level.

ACCREDITATION AND DEGREE-GRANTING AUTHORITY

Certificate granting authority for Forklift Operator and School Bus Driver, Olive-Harvey College (2006). Led the staff and faculty of the Transportation Department in the development of two new certificates. Completed and submitted appropriate forms and wrote narrative.

Degree-granting authority application for Associate of General Studies, St. Augustine College (2001). Led research efforts that identified the need for an additional associate degree. Developed curriculum, wrote the degree-granting authority application and successfully represented the College to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

North Central Association self-study report, St. Augustine College (1999). Led various committees, gathered information and wrote the academic portions of the self-study report for comprehensive accreditation. The result was eight years of accreditation, the longest accreditation term in the history of the College.

North Central Association change of affiliation status report and visit, St. Augustine College (1998). Coordinated process and was the primary writer for the report requesting the North Central Association to include the Bachelor of Social Work in the college's accreditation status. The change of affiliation status request was successful and St. Augustine integrated its first Bachelor's degree into its curriculum.

Degree-granting authority application for Bachelor of Social Work, St. Augustine College (1997). Coordinated the exploratory process, the development of the curriculum and the research as to the feasibility of the program. Wrote

degree-granting authority application for the first Bachelor's degree offered by St. Augustine College. Represented the college to the Illinois Board of Higher Education at various stages of the application process.

PLANNING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Assistant Dean of Research and Planning, Olive-Harvey College (2005-2006). Directed all research efforts of the College. These included survey administration and analysis, coordination with district office for the production of state and federally mandated reports, coordination with faculty and staff for preparation of program reviews, and the production of various other reports for district, state or accrediting agencies. Additionally, represented Olive-Harvey College in district-wide committee to develop "Vision 2011." The City Colleges of Chicago Strategic Plan for 2006-2011.

Director of Institutional Research. Promoted after eleven months as Coordinator of Institutional Research, St. Augustine College (1993-1998). Developed and managed office of institutional research. Created numerous reports on student demographics, retention, and enrollment patterns. Established benchmarks for graduation rates, retention rates and formulas for recruitment thresholds. Developed, implemented, and analyzed a student satisfaction survey. Also implemented and analyzed survey of St. Augustine graduates. These reports are still part of standard planning and management efforts at St. Augustine.

Assessment of student learning, St. Augustine College (2001). Provided training, guidance, support and supervision to staff and faculty who developed a comprehensive assessment of student learning process that culminated in the production of an interim report on assessment for the North Central Association. The North Central Association accepted that St. Augustine was making adequate progress in assessing student learning.

Presenter of Latino adult student research project, Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Richmond, Virginia (2001). Received excellent reviews for a presentation on the cultural aspects of retaining Latino students in higher education.

Co-author of *Breve Historia de los Estados Unidos* (1997), A 250-page history textbook in Spanish published by St. Augustine College to be used in the College's survey of American history courses.

Author of encyclopedia entries for Salem Press (1994-1995). Wrote over thirty entries covering historical events and figures in Latin America from the sixteenth

century through the eighteenth century for the *Latino Encyclopedia*. Wrote entries on *historical archaeology* and the slave ship the *Wanderer* for the *African American Encyclopedia*.

Research assistant for the Land Tenure Center of the University of Wisconsin (1986), Responsible for research on the former Portuguese African colonies for a bibliographical study of Land Tenure in Africa.

GRANT WRITING AND DEVELOPMENT

Chicago Department of Children and Family Services grant for training in early Childhood Education and Child Development Associate (CDA), St. Augustine College (1999-2004). Wrote application that resulted in \$500,000 per year in funding from the City of Chicago.

Student Support Services grant application, St. Augustine College (1992-2001). This is a federal grant belonging to the TRIO programs. Wrote application that secured funding for St. Augustine for three consecutive competitive cycles of three and four years each. In each cycle, the grant received between \$700,000 and \$1,000,000 in funding.

National Science Foundation grant (1994). Authored application for grant that brought Internet connectivity to St. Augustine College. Resulted in funding of \$30,000.

Grant evaluator for U.S. Department of Education, Washington D.C. (1999). Evaluated applications for grants from Upward Bound programs (TRIO).

Participant in the planning process of numerous other applications by St. Augustine and Olive Harvey for grants from federal, state and private sources.

TEACHING

Lecturer of Latin American History survey course, Olive-Harvey College (2006). Selected textbook, developed syllabus, taught the course, assessed student learning.

Adjunct instructor of American History from Civil War to present, St. Augustine College (1991 to 2006). Selected textbooks, prepared syllabi,

materials, and exams and served as a mentor to other St. Augustine history instructors. Participated in various committees related to student learning.

Co-developer and adjunct instructor for Introduction to College Life course, St. Augustine College (1999-2001). Designed, in conjunction with other members of a committee, a course that helped incoming first-generation Latino adult students adjust to collegiate life. Later taught portions of the course.

Incorporated use of multimedia into American History courses, St. Augustine College (2004). Faculty participant in federally funded program to bring multimedia to the classroom.

Teaching Assistant for African history course, Northwestern University (1989-90). As graduate student, responsible for leading discussion sessions and grading all course work of undergraduates taking the course.

English-as-a-second-language teacher and math instructor, Institute for Latino Progress (1988-1989). Taught English as a second language ranging from beginning level to advanced writing and introductory mathematics.

English teacher for Nicaraguan exchange students, University of Wisconsin-Madison (1987). Provided Basic English instruction to Nicaraguan exchange graduate students.

Tutoring and workshops, St. Augustine College (1991-2004). Provided tutoring in English to numerous students. Taught workshops on cultural diversity and on transferring from a junior college to a senior institution.

MEDIA OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Dominican University (2009). Panelist in “Overcoming academic challenges: Strategies for breaking the cycle for African-American and Latino students - - Dominican University 2nd annual African American and Latino Social Work symposium.

Contratiempo (2008). Wrote article titled “Veintiocho años de exitosa experiencia en educación superior bilingüe.”

Univision Channel 66 in Chicago. Frequent contributor as a news analyst for the News at 5, the News at 10 and election coverage. Appeared first as a

representative of St. Augustine College and continue to appear as a political analyst and historian.

Univision Radio in Chicago. Frequent guest to provide political opinions and historical background on Spanish-language talk radio.

International Business Conference: Latin America at Northeastern Illinois University (2004). Presented paper *Globalization and Multiculturalism: the Need for Bilingual Professionals*, followed by question-and-answer session.

Catholic Charities in Chicago (2004). Taught series of cultural diversity and awareness workshops for childcare and Head Start staff.

Public Policy Institute (2000). Panelist in Working Group Initiative led by former U.S. senator Paul Simon on the college loan default rate.

Illinois Association of Educational Opportunity Programs Personnel (1993). Presented *Retention and Graduation of Hispanic Adults*, followed by question-and-answer session.

OTHER RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

As an undergraduate and graduate student, participated in honors programs and won several scholarships and awards.

Well-versed in several computer software applications, including those for word processing, graphic display, presentations, databases, statistics and Internet communication and research.

EDUCATION

2014	University of Illinois at Chicago <i>Ph.D.</i> Major: Educational Policy and Administration-Higher Education	Chicago, IL
1993	Northwestern University <i>Master of Arts</i> Major: African History Minor: Latin American History	Evanston, Illinois

1988	University of Wisconsin-Madison <i>Bachelor of Arts</i> Major: History Major: Philosophy Concentration: African Studies	Madison, Wisconsin
1981-1984	Waterford-Kamhlaba <i>International Baccalaureate</i>	Mbabane, Swaziland

LANGUAGES

English	Native ability
Spanish	Native ability
Portuguese	Near-native ability
Swahili	Advanced fluency
French	Two years of college study

MEMBERSHIPS

Association for the Study of Higher Education
 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
 Council of Independent Colleges
 Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, member of executive
 Committee
 Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education, Board Member

REFERENCES

Available upon request.