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Improving College-Going Trends for First Generation Latino Students: The Importance of Habitus, School Culture and Culturally Responsive Counseling

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Improving College-Going Trends for First Generation Latino Students:
The Importance of Habitus, School Culture and Culturally Responsive Counseling

Patricia A. Marchesi

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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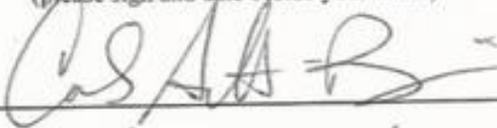
Patricia A. Marchesi, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2017.

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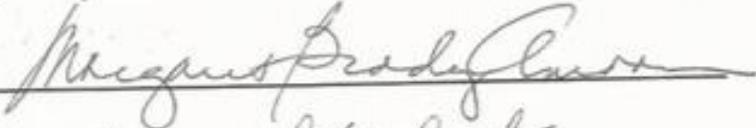
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Abstract

Throughout history, the United States has symbolized a place of opportunity, viewed as a place where achieving a better life is possible. This viewpoint still holds true for Latino immigrants, who currently account for more than half of the country's population growth since 2000. Latino families and students specifically see higher education as a means by which to attain the proverbial "better life." However, prior research dedicated to Latino students in the college-going process cites obstacles to enrollment in American colleges and universities. Inadequate academic preparation, language barriers, limited social capital, and restricted access to financial aid are among the challenges associated with lower attendance of Latino students in higher education, especially for those students who are first in the family to attend college.

Educational professionals and school counselors emerge as influential in the college-going process for all students. School culture is also prominent in promoting a college-going ethos amongst students. Therefore, as Latino students continue to emerge in larger numbers throughout the nation's schools, a further look into improving their rates of college enrollment warrant exploration. Rather than perpetuating former deficit models that highlight what impedes college enrollment for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college, current research seeks to identify aspects of school culture and culturally responsive counseling that support college-going for students in this population. This study explored the school culture and counseling programs/services offered to students at a selective school of choice in an urban environment where college enrollment rates of Latino students far exceeded data generally associated this group's entry into colleges/universities.

Using a qualitative, case study approach, this research employed semi-structured interviews with four school counselors, with ten students who were Latino, and first in the family to attend college. Questions focused on the degree to which the school and its counseling staff engaged in culturally responsive pedagogy. Furthermore, in considering school culture, the concept of “habitus” emerged as central to the positive college-going trends reported for this specialized high school. Conclusions from this research point to the importance of “habitus” as the cornerstone to improving college-going for all students and specifically for those who are Latino and first in the family to attend college.

Acknowledgments

The undertaking involved in completing a dissertation cannot be under-emphasized. It requires more than time, energy, and ambition. Even a passion for one's research topic and a drive to succeed provide only a foundation for the tremendous enterprise essential to seeing a dissertation from inception to completion. It requires a vision, coupled with support and inspiration from others. The combination of all these forces accompanied me on the journey involved in completing the dissertation process. Therefore, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the individuals that kept me going throughout this process.

Academically, tremendous thanks go to my advisor Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj and my committee members Dr. Barbara Strobert and Dr. Margaret Brady-Amoon. Dr. Sattin-Bajaj urged me to be more specific, to use a "laser-like" approach to writing and reporting results. At no point was Dr. Sattin-Bajaj's feedback negative. Rather, it pressed me forward to create a higher quality product, often necessitating that I revise and condense my writing in order to achieve a more concise, articulated message. Drs. Strobert and Brady-Amoon equally encouraged more from me, compelling me to improve the clarity and scope of my writing so that it would make better sense to readers.

Personally, I owe a significant amount of gratitude to my husband Perry, although he requested that I not mention him. He afforded me the space and time to complete the work needed over the last few years, as I devoted numerous hours to this project. Most appreciated is that after I had spent time writing on countless weekend mornings, he patiently waited and then accompanied me on different outings that provided a much-needed diversion. Trips to museums, late afternoon dinners, or a drive in the car to a surprise destination—those excursions allowed me the opportunity to decompress and appreciate life.

Dedication

On a broad scale, I dedicate this project to those who came before I even envisioned tackling this endeavor, both personally and collectively. At some point, my ancestors were immigrants who came to the United States with a dream of pursuing a “better life.” In line with the many the immigrants who came to this country and who contributed to the rich history emblematic of our country, these ancestors did not initially enjoy the benefits of higher education. Some of my grandparents did not even earn a high school diploma. My father did not earn a college degree, and my mother did not reach that milestone until later in her life. Yet, they understood and agreed on the value of education, instilling it in the family. This emphasis on education and the attainment of a better life is what inspired me to seek advanced degrees and to continuously pursue education throughout my adulthood.

This project also embodies the essence of how highly I regard education and why I chose to dedicate my professional life to teaching, counseling, and school leadership. Ingrained in the fiber of our country is a respect for the tradition of seeking a better life through education—it represents the message conveyed through my personal experience, as well as the message I strive to convey in my professional life and in interactions with students. Students I have known, and will continue to know, need the support and encouragement to aspire higher academically and intellectually, regardless of their background or circumstances. In a country as diverse as the United States, all students need to benefit from educational opportunity. As the demographic landscape of the United States changes and becomes more complex, immigrant students require access to education if they are to achieve the “better life” traditionally associated with coming to this country.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Since its inception, the United States has been a refuge for individuals seeking a better life. The search for freedom from oppression and the prospect of increased opportunity repeatedly appear in historical accounts of immigrant families who have come to the shores of the United States (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Seen as a gateway to improved social conditions, economic and financial status, education endures as one of the primary contributing factors that bring immigrant families to cities and towns in the United States (Baum & Flores, 2011; Borrero, 2011; Ceja, 2004; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Kiyama, 2010). While the faces and ethnicities of immigrants in the United States have changed from decade to decade, their goal remains the same—better education, better employment options, safer living conditions, and an improved standard of living.

With an emphasis on the growing number of Latino immigrants entering the United States in the last three decades, studies on college-going patterns for this population is an increasing focus in educational literature and research. This is especially true for those students who are the first in their families to attend college and who come to the United States seeking a “better life” through higher education (Borrero, 2011; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Calaff, 2008; Ceja, 2004; Fry, 2002; Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Haro, 2004; Kiyama, 2010; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin & Allen, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Building on the Hossler and Gallagher model (1987), which identifies three stages of the college-going process—predisposition, search, and choice—

research reveals that Latino first-generation college-going students display distinctive behavioral trends as they move through these three stages in the college process. What emerges is evidence that Latino students and their families value higher education; and at the initial predisposition phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), Latino families strongly encourage their sons and daughters to achieve scholastically and strive to attend institutions of higher learning (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin & Allen, 2009; Kiyama, 2010; Perna & Titus, 2005). However, lack of rigorous academic preparation in high school (Baum & Flores, 2011; Engle, 2007), narrow degrees of college knowledge and social capital (Ceja, 2004; Immerwahr, 2003; Reyes & Nora, 2012), in addition to language barriers and limited experience with school systems in the United States (Auerbach, 2004; Baum & Flores, 2011; Ceja, 2004), surface as identifiable obstacles that Latino first generation college-going students face when negotiating the latter two phases of search and choice in the college process as outlined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

School counselors are described as integral figures in college choice literature, particularly in the lives of Latino students (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Cutler & Lee, 2002; Engle, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; McDonough, 1997; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Tornatzky, Holland, & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). As a result, researchers are paying increasing attention to the roles that school counselors play in facilitating or impeding Latino students as they progress through the stages of college-going as theorized by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Latino families exhibit support for their children pursuing higher education, yet they also demonstrate a need for information from school counselors pertinent to college going (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Javel, 2003; Immerwahr, 2003). Conversations, or *consejos*, in Latino

homes (Auerbach, 2006; Calaff, 2008) feature encouragement for higher education, but additional information specific to college entrance requirements, the range of post-high school options, and necessary financial resources to address the cost of higher education can enrich these discussions. Research has shown that individualized advising and a strong school culture dedicated to student achievement are crucial to the college-going process for all students, and are even more essential to supporting Latino first generation college-goers (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Immerwahr, 2003; Muhammed, 2008; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Collins, 2011; Perna et al., 2008). Therefore, questions related to school counseling and whether or not school counselors address identified needs of Latino first generation college-going students during the search and choice phases of the college process, call for additional exploration.

Latino Immigrants in the United States

Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population in the United States increased by 15.2 million, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population nationwide (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Furthermore, between 2000 and 2010, the country's Latino population grew by 43%, accounting for four times the growth in the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Defined as individuals and their offspring originating from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South or Central America, Latinos currently comprises 17.6% of the nation's total population (U.S. Census Data, 2015). Additional Census data from 2015 indicates that 56.6 million individuals in the United States are Latino, thus constituting the country's largest ethnic minority. Further estimates indicate that Latino immigrants with undocumented designation add to the growth of this subgroup within the country's total population, with 1.6 million children younger than 18 years of age in the undocumented category (Kohler & Lazarin, 2008). Projected Census data indicate that by 2050, Latinos will be the largest ethnic group in the United States (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Data

from 2015 U.S. Census Bureau reports support this estimate and further anticipate that the number of Latinos in the United States will grow to 119 million by 2060, bringing the percentage of Latinos within the total population of the United States to 28.6% (U.S. Census Data, 2015).

The motives of the current wave of Latinos entering the United States echo those of previous generations of immigrants entering the country—better education, better employment options, safer living conditions, and an improved standard of living. The “better life” envisioned upon arrival in the United States remains the driving force that brings immigrants, including those of Latino origin, to United States soil (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006). However, as the immigrant population in the United States has grown, completing a college education has been elusive, particularly for first generation immigrants¹ (Staklis & Horn, 2012) and even more precisely for Latino immigrants (Cerna, Peres, & Saenz, 2009; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Fry, 2002; Immerwahr, 2003; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). This factor is particularly crucial when considering the college-going experiences of Latino immigrants, given the most current educational data which reveal that between 2003 and 2013, the number of Latino students enrolled in the country’s public schools increased from 9 million to 12.5 million (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).

Research portrays challenges that Latino students historically faced involving academic preparation, access to college-going information, and financial aid resources required to successfully transition to colleges and universities following high school. Therefore, this research aims to explore how schools and school counselors can improve college-going rates for Latino students, especially for those who are first in their family to attend college.

¹ Throughout this study, the term “first generation college-going student” refers to those individuals whose parents/guardians have not attended college. This terminology is in contrast to general references in literature and research that associate “first-generation” with immigration status.

The “Better Life”—Equal for All or A Growing Gap for Some?

Concerns about a widening gap between the desire and fulfillment of the “better life” through higher education exist nationwide for low-income and underrepresented minorities, including Latinos (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Fry, 2002; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). According to a 2010 United States Congress Advisory on Student Financial Aid (ACSFA), only 55% of low-income students enroll in college in contrast to 86% of higher-income students (Collins, 2011). Even for students who enter college, similar discrepancies exist in persistence and completion of four-year college degrees. Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in both 1979 and 1997 (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011) further depicts a socio-economic divide in college entry as well as completion rates over several decades. College entry differences between bottom and top economic quartiles in the United States are reported to have grown from 39% to 51%, and college completion rates for upper incomes students were expected to remain twice as high as college completion rates for students in the lowest economic quartiles (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011).

Students of Latino origin factor into this socioeconomic divide regarding enrollment in higher education. According to United States Census data, 23.2% of the Latino population in the country from 2007-2011 lived below the poverty level, a rate higher than the 14.3% rate reported for the total population nationwide (Macartney & Bishaw, 2013). Results from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002) revealed that while 70% to 80% of all high school students anticipated attending a four-year post-secondary institution, just 57% of Latino students indicated this choice, with a two-year college pathway voiced as their predominant college preference (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Data from the 2011 Current Population Survey further depict a trend towards Latino students seeking two-year versus four-year college pathways.

Despite increases in high school graduation and college enrollment, Latino students still trail behind other ethnic groups in attaining four-year degrees from higher education institutions. According to recent data from the Pew Research Center (Fry & Lopez, 2011), 76% of Latinos graduated from high school, which marked a record high for this population's secondary school completion. Gains in college enrollment for Latinos, therefore, are attributed partly to this subgroup's expansion in the nation's general population, coupled with the reported increases in high school graduation. Although high school graduation and college enrollment rates are on the rise for Latino students, completion of a four-year college degree for these individuals remains low when compared to other demographic and ethnic groups. While Latino students are increasingly moving on to higher education following high school graduation, they have yet to succeed in attaining four-year college degrees in comparison to non-Latino students. Furthermore, the trend to pursue two-year colleges traditionally prevailed for Latino students. In 2011, 46% of Latinos enrolled in college, closing in on 51% of White high school completers entering post-secondary institutions (Fry & Lopez, 2011). Still, data from the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics contrast 112,000, or 13.2%, of associate degrees going to Latinos with 553,000 of two-year degrees earned by non-Hispanic White students. Furthermore, of the 1.7 million bachelor's degrees awarded in 2010, 71% went to non-Latino White students, and only 9% were conferred on graduates of Latino origin (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Lopez (2009) attributes this discrepancy to two major factors, citing first low English language proficiency for many Latino immigrants. More significantly, Lopez (2009) cites financial commitments to the family as hindrances to college completion, specifically of attaining a four-year degree.

Latino immigrant students who are undocumented pose further challenges to interpreting enrollment data on college-going and enrollment in post-secondary institutions. Students under the age of 18 themselves may not be United States citizens, or they may be children of undocumented parents, both statuses that block access to higher education, compounding the educational, social, and financial barriers associated with Latino immigrants and higher education attainment (Baum & Flores, 2011; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Undocumented Latino students tend to select two-year institutions, enroll only part-time, stop college attendance to pursue employment opportunities, and delay entry into college after graduating from high school (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Furthermore, many undocumented students are precluded from federal financial aid and, until recently, have been forced to pay out-of-state tuition rates for in-state institutions due to their immigration status (Baum & Flores, 2011; Conger & Chellman, 2011).

Enduring Challenges to College Enrollment for Latino Students

A deeper comprehension of the educational pipeline and college-going patterns for Latinos is essential to address persisting disproportions in college enrollment, persistence and degree attainment (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). Based on data from the 2005 United States Bureau of the Census, Latinos overall are cited as at risk for not successfully moving through the educational pipeline towards post-secondary enrollment, with one quarter of Latino students identified as insufficiently prepared academically for the rigors of higher education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Prior research reported 59% of Latinos graduated from high school, with merely 20% attending some college (Erisman & Looney, 2007). However, as the Latino population is rapidly growing in the United States, high school completion has improved to 76% (Fry & Lopez, 2011), and college enrollments have increased. Despite the most recent gains in college enrollment for Latinos, academic underperformance,

lower post-secondary aspirations, and inadequate academic preparation are cited amongst the reasons for lingering challenges to seeking higher education and completing undergraduate degrees for students of Latino origin (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Engle, 2007; Fry, 2002; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004).

A single recurring issue reported in college-going literature underscores that Latino students still have lower college expectations, particularly if they are the first in their family to pursue a post-secondary education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Staklis & Horn, 2012). Post-secondary expectations for Latino students tend to include seeking two-year versus four-year degrees. Moreover, while Latino students enter institutions of higher learning following high school, degree completion data demonstrate difficulties in attaining post-secondary degrees. Analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), Engle (2007) found that only 53% of Latino first-generation college-goers envisioned the attainment of a bachelor's degree, contrasted with 90% for students whose parents had graduated from college. In addition, 44% of Latino high school graduates whose parents did not attend college opted for two-year versus four-year colleges (Engle, 2007; Fry, 2002; Reyes & Nora, 2012). These data underscore the concern that Latino students have lower college aspirations and completion rates, specifically for earning four-year college degrees. In light of these trends, there is a need for greater exploration of the factors contributing to Latino first-generation students' decisions on entering college and persisting to degree attainment. In addition, further investigation is warranted in order to identify potential mechanisms that promote college-going, and educational and professional success among this population.

Post-Secondary Enrollment and Latino Students—Past Challenges and Improved Trends

Research provides historical evidence of obstacles associated with post-secondary degree attainment, specifically for individuals in the Latino subgroup (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Fry, 2002; Gonzalez, 2012; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). While the Latino population grew rapidly in the United States, higher education enrollment and attainment traditionally remained low, with this subgroup demonstrating the lowest participation in four-year college attendance amongst all immigrants (Baum & Flores, 2011). An explanation for part of this disparity is the fact that many young Latino immigrant males come to the United States and directly join the workforce rather than enroll in higher education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Engle, 2007; Fry, 2002). Just one in four Latinos between the ages of 18 and 24 holds a bachelor's degree, which is in sharp contrast to the 79.4% of Caucasian students that are estimated to complete a four-year college education (Reyes & Nora, 2102).

Moreover, the parents of more than half of Latino students have not attended a post-secondary institution (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012). Lacking formal education, this large portion of Latino parents encounter two major obstacles to supporting their children's college aspirations. First, due to restricted educational attainment, Latino parents employed in low-income and unskilled labor positions have limited finances, and they are unfamiliar with resources necessary to fund higher education (Perna & Titus, 2005). In addition, a lack of experience with higher education opportunities and institutions in the United States has been shown to restrict parents' ability to assist students with the college search process (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Stern, 2008;).

The most current data, however, show increases in overall college enrollment for Latino students (Fry & Lopez, 2012). United States Census Bureau Data from 2012 indicate that 69% of Latino high school graduates in 2012 enrolled in some level of college, which exceeds that of

67% for students identified as White (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Latinos now represent the largest minority group at four-year colleges in the United States; and at 13% of 18-to-24 year olds on college campuses, Latinos surpass Black students as the predominant ethnic subgroup (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Yet, even with the most recent upturns in college enrollment, Latinos still trail behind in attendance and degree attainment at four-year colleges when compared to other population subgroups. Data from 2010 provided by the Pew Hispanic Center indicate that 9% of Latinos entering four-year colleges earned a bachelor's degree as opposed to 71% of White students. Similarly, 13% of Latinos completed an associate's degree in contrast with 65% of White students (Fry & Lopez, 2012). While the number of Latino students enrolling in post-secondary institutions has grown, this subgroup's pattern of opting for two-year institutions endures. Lower statistics on college completion and degree attainment are also associated with Latino students when compared with other ethnic groups and specifically with White counterparts.

Aspiration for Higher Learning versus Post-Secondary Enrollment

Ambition to pursue higher education is measured by the stated anticipation of attending college, seeking college information and resources, engaging in rigorous high school course work, participating in requisite standardized college testing, completing the application process, and finally enrolling in college (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Differences between stated intentions to attend college and actual college enrollment vary amongst immigrant subgroups but are commonly attributed to incomplete or inaccurate information about college-going, limited financial resources, cultural and social beliefs, language barriers, and issues with citizenship status (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Engle, 2007; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stephan & Rosenbaum 2013; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). The reality, however, is that lower statistics for college enrollment are

not associated directly with students being born outside of the continental United States; and it is necessary to emphasize, “Immigration status itself is not a hindrance” (Baum & Flores, 2011, p. 172). Rather than immigration status per se, it is the complexity and variations in college-going experiences, the level and quality of learning that students who enter the United States experience previously in their country of origin, as well as parental levels of formal education, that are more likely to be influential factors impacting educational pathways for immigrant students (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Data clearly establish the existence of an incongruity between college aspirations, defined as an expressed intent to attend college, and college enrollment for first generation college-going Latino students. This is especially poignant given that current data emphasize a trend towards two-year post-high school institutions as the predominant choice of Latino first generation college-goers. The two-year pathway is a concern in the country’s job market that demands a bachelor’s degree for many professional occupations. As a result, future research warrants a more refined insight into what transpires for this subgroup as they navigate the educational pipeline that leads to higher education. The college process is composed of a complex set of academic and social/psychological elements that affect a student’s journey through the American educational system (Baum & Flores, 2011; Engle, 2007; McDonough, 1997). Furthermore, social and cultural elements in a student’s family background, in addition to academic preparation, access to college knowledge, and support throughout the college application process, influence students’ pathways to college enrollment (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Reyes & Nora, 2012).

Financial and Socioeconomic Barriers to Higher Education

Socioeconomic barriers to higher educational attendance compound the aforementioned challenges associated with immigration status. A national survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center accentuates the impact of financial constraints on pursuing higher education for Latinos, citing that 74% of 16- to 25-year-olds in the subgroup report the need to support their families financially as a reason for not completing high school or pursuing post-secondary schooling (Lopez, 2009). To further stress enrollment gaps for Latino students, data from 2012 reveal that 13% of students in this subgroup were recorded as present in four-year public institutions and only 10% were enrolled in private four-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

The issue of socioeconomic challenges to education attainment, however, extends beyond those documented for Latinos. At-risk groups engaged in forming college-going objectives and college enrollment also include African-Americans and low-income students from other underrepresented subgroups (Muhammed, 2008). College-related data for underserved and low-income students, specifically for Blacks and Latinos, are in sharp contrast with statistics for White, middle class students. Data from 2012 depict differences in college enrollment for the nation's high school graduates. While 68% of students enrolled in four-year private non-profit colleges and 63% of public colleges/universities were identified as White, only 13% of Black students enrolled in private four-year colleges; and 12% of public university students were Black.

Government Response and Intervention to Address College Enrollment Obstacles

The nation's government and education leaders have demonstrated a continued commitment to address improving college attendance and undergraduate degree attainment for the nation's growing immigrant population. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and President

Barack Obama's Reauthorization of the U.S. Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2010) spawned a promise to support college attendance for all Americans. Both initiatives targeted an increase in academic rigor for all students nationwide by defining the content and standards students should achieve in language arts, reading, and mathematics to ensure that they emerge from the country's high schools adequately prepared for higher education, with the intent of providing the nation's entire citizenry with equity and equal access to higher education.

Developments that are more recent recognize the need to address college enrollment patterns for traditionally underserved populations and urge stronger supports to broaden college access across the nation. A call sounded for increased financial resources, better college advising, and improved equity and equal access to all colleges for low-income students. These efforts attempt to counterbalance previously reported discrepancies in post-secondary enrollment for students, especially Latino immigrant first generation college-goers, while also acting in response to the economic and social demands of the twenty-first century that emphasize the necessity of post-secondary credentials. Within this climate, the prevailing message is one that promotes and compels comprehensive college-going efforts for all students. With this goal in mind, continued research is important to discover the most appropriate means by which school counselors can support and improve college-going for Latino first generation college-goers.

Students, Families, Community and Schools—Integral Components That Impact Latino First Generation College-Goers

School culture, familial influence/support, college knowledge, social capital, academic preparation, and specific guidance programs/services for students all interact to impact decision-making throughout the entire college-going process (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Collins, 2011; Kimura-Walsh, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; McDonough, 2005;

Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Services, such as academic and career guidance, class scheduling, information regarding college entrance requirements and financial aid, application deadlines and procedures, and campus visits, are some of the elements that contribute to a college-going culture (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004). Most importantly, however, is the degree to which traditional programs and services provided by school counselors are coordinated with social and cultural elements underlying Latino students' decision-making throughout the college search and choice phases of the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Well-intended programs to foster college-going and completion may not suitably match the needs of Latino first generation college-going students and their families (Corwin et al., 2004). Research has yet to fully investigate this connection.

Predetermination, Search and Choice—Three Phases in the College-Going Process

A precise set of phases transpire as students move from college aspiration to enrollment, and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a three-step conceptual model for depicting the college-going process that is widely used with research in the field. It provides a well-defined roadmap to follow in examining the three stages in the college-going process—predetermination, search, and choice. Coupled within the framework of the three-phase college-going process defined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) is a complex set of interactions that occur among students, parents or guardians, and educational professionals.

School counselors, in addition to parents and guardians, play a significant role in influencing young students throughout this process (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Collins, 2011; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stephen & Rosenbaum, 2013). Counselors provide college-going resources about post-secondary options, campus visits, application processes and requirements, standardized tests for admissions, and financial aid opportunities. In addition, counselors serve to motivate and

encourage the advancement to higher education for students (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Within a school's culture, counselors can be vital sources of information and advocates for students in the college-search process (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines 2009; Holland & Farmer-Hinton 2009). In contrast, however, counselors can also thwart students' efforts to achieve college enrollment if their needs go unrecognized.

The experiences of students during the search and choice phases are impacted by the school's culture and driven by the supports/services offered by the school's counseling department (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines, 2009; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Research findings highlight as equally important the powerful influence of students' family members in the development of college aspirations and post-secondary decision-making (Engle, 2007; McDonough, 1997). McDonough (1997) underscores limited experience and knowledge about college-going amongst the families of first-generation college-going students as the primary reason that school counselors must play a pivotal role in providing assistance in the process. These findings suggest the key importance of linking the aspects of a college-going culture and counselor impact/influence with the expressed needs of first-generation college-going students and their families.

Understanding how first generation Latino college-going students and their families approach and move through the three phases of the college process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) can illustrate how they negotiate the many challenges they face in the college-going process. Roderick, Nagoaka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, Gilliam, and Patton (2008) identified the obstacles that Latino students encounter, specifically inadequate academic preparation, limited English

proficiency, restricted social capital, and difficulty with access to financial resources as “potholes” in their education trajectories. Therefore, insight into whether the existing supports and interventions provided to first generation Latino students and their families at the high school level is critical to determining whether their needs are met at the latter phases in the college-going process of search and choice. Exploring supports and services that counselors employ in a school setting with high college enrollment for first generation Latinos may shed light on several best practices that can improve college-going for this population.

Research into the connection amongst a college-going culture, school counselor supports, and services offered to first-generation college-going Latinos and their families may allow for deeper understanding about the factors contributing to the reported disconnect between college aspiration and enrollment for this population. One way to examine the problem is by evaluating the role of school counselors and a school’s culture as enabling or restraining (McDonough, 1997). This study starts with the premise that culturally relevant pedagogy that connects students’ home and family/school lives tends to enable more than restrain college-going outcome (Ladson-Billings, 1994). From this perspective, the research entailed in this project examined whether a school with successful results for first generation Latino college-goers relies on culturally relevant practices to promote and support access to higher learning for all students and specifically for first generation Latino college-goers.

Statement of the Problem

With an increasing number of Latino immigrants entering the United States, additional attention to college-going trends has intensified for students within this population who are first in the family to attend institutions of higher education (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Fry, 2002; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004;). More than 50% of Latino students’ parents

have not attended any post-secondary schools, creating a large percentage of potential first generation college attendees (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012). Because Latino parents tend not to have post-high school educations, their experiences with higher education are constrained, a situation that poses challenges for their children as first-generation college-goers. (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012). Immigrant status and being first in the family to attend college, therefore, combine and form a unique set of circumstances as students of Latino origin navigate the educational pipeline that includes fulfilling college aspirations through enrollment into schools of higher learning. As stated previously, Roderick et al. (2008) define these obstacles as “potholes” that first generation college-going students encounter as they attempt to traverse the college-going process.

A distinctive blend of psycho-social and educational factors combine to influence how Latino students and their families access college-going information and make decisions regarding post-secondary enrollment. The importance of family support and input into college decision-making for Latino students is emphasized in the literature, a factor that underscores the challenges resulting from Latino parents/guardians’ lack of experience with American post-secondary education (Auerbach, 2004; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Ceja, 2004; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; Kiyama, 2009). The concomitant limitation in college knowledge and scarce social capital of Latino parents/guardians contribute to forming the pathways their children follow as they develop aspirations for higher learning and subsequently strive to fulfill college aspirations with enrollment into colleges and universities (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Leasha, & Kelly, 2008; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Immerwahr, 2003; Reyes & Nora, 2012).

To manage these obstacles, or what Roderick et al. (2008) refer to as “potholes,” findings indicate that first generation students and families benefit from supportive guidance and

instruction on how to navigate college choice (Collins, 2011; Hurwitz, Smith, Howell, & Pender, 2012; McDonough, 1997; Nunez & Oliva, 2009). Schools and school counselors play a crucial role in supporting the college-going process for all students and specifically for first generation Latinos. Given this fact, it is important to understand the types of school-based supports and practices that may successfully assist students towards fulfilling college-going aspirations through college enrollment (Collins, 2011; Haro, 2004; Kiyama, 2010; Nunez & Oliva, 2009; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). The practices and pedagogical approaches taken in schools with high percentages of Latinos enrolling in college may provide examples to follow, thereby enhancing college knowledge among the growing numbers of Latino students contemplating entry into higher learning institutions in the United States.

Purpose of the Study/Research Questions

Exploring the intersection of the aforementioned influential factors in the college process for Latino students is an avenue of interest, because it may shed light on their college-going searches and outcomes, specifically if they are the first in their families to attend college. Given the Latino population's emergence in schools throughout the United States, understanding the pathways experienced by first generation college-goers in this subgroup is of value as they move from expressing post-secondary educational aspiration to actual college enrollment. The goal of gaining an increased knowledge of how Latino first-generation college-goers navigate the college search process forms the basis for this research. In addition, a close look into the practices of school counselors and the services they provide to college-goers was included to determine how and to what extent these services and supports influence college search and choice for Latino students. Investigating school counseling practices offered to Latino first generation college-goers as they search for and chose amongst college options can add to the

already existing research on college-going for this increasingly predominant population subgroup in the United States.

To this end, this study explored the following research questions:

1. What college-going services/supports and initiatives do high school counselors in the case study school provide to Latino first generation college-going students and their families?
 - Which, if any, services/supports or initiatives are designed specifically to prepare first generation Latino students during the search and choice phases of the college going process?
 - Which, if any, services/supports or initiatives are designed to engage Latino parents?
2. What information, guidance, and support do first generation college-going students indicate that they and their families need at the search and choice stages of the college-going process?
3. How do Latino first generation college-going students feel about the college-related services and supports provided to them and their families by their school?

Significance of the Study

With the projected growth in the Latino population in the United States (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004), higher numbers of Latino students continue to populate the country's school systems. As this subgroup seeks to pursue higher education, it becomes critical to provide school counseling services and programs that support Latino students in pathways that lead to college enrollment. College-going literature for this population highlights a range of critical issues, including academic preparation, family and cultural beliefs regarding education,

understanding the college application process, and obtaining financial resources to fund post-secondary attendance. It is necessary to align school counseling programs properly with the college-going needs of Latino students, especially if they are first in their families to attend college. Therefore, an in-depth look at the college-going needs of these students and their families may enhance the awareness and ability of school counselors to address these needs better, thereby improving college enrollment.

Limitations of the Study

The context and site for this research project confined itself to a small population of ten high school juniors identified as Latino first-generation college-going students in a single school setting. Based on demographic data focused on students' ethnicity and family background, the ten students selected out of an original pool of 30 fit the criteria of being Latino and first in their family planning to attend college. A participant survey confirmed that the ten selected students met these stated criteria.

The research site selected was at a magnet high school focused on rigorous college preparatory academics. One could argue that the sample population was inherently college-bound, and therefore any findings produced from this research might be restricted in application to a broader context. Nevertheless, the intent to explore the college-going needs of Latino first generation college-going students is merit worthy, and may shed light on the degree to which existing school counseling practices at this site influence the college search and choice phases for these students.

The selection of County Magnet High School as a case study site, therefore, was intentional, given higher than average rates of college enrollment amongst first generation Latino student graduates. As a result, the analysis presented herein addresses the factors, structures, and

processes that help to explain the higher statistics for college-going of Latino students at County Magnet High School beyond the school's selective admissions criteria. This high school's college-going patterns far exceed what the research, literature, and national trends indicate for students who are the first in the family to attend college. National averages indicate that 51% of Latino students opt for attendance in two-year post-secondary institutions (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Additional data (Fry & Lopez, 2011) reveal that only 13.1% of students ages 18-24 in four-year colleges are Latino. In contrast, County Magnet's students are more inclined to seek and choose attendance at four-year colleges/universities. County Magnet's post-high school outcomes indicate that 95.9% of their Latino graduates enroll in four-year colleges.

Data for the class of 2016 from County Magnet High School show an acceptance rate of 97% of students to four-year colleges and universities. Twenty-two percent of those students accepted to four-year colleges earned admission to some of the most competitive colleges in the United States (according to Barron's classification which would include Princeton and Harvard, for example), 49 % of students accepted to highly competitive institutions (Rutgers, Fordham, and Syracuse), and 20% admitted to competitive colleges/universities. Overall, 73% of students reported that they earned admission to their first or second choice college. This differential in college-going trends for Latino students graduating from County Magnet High School provoked further curiosity about the role of school culture and school counseling services on these college admissions results.

While County Magnet High School is a specialized public high school of choice and its student body is composed of high achieving and academically motivated students, the findings

derived in this research offer potential strategies and paradigms for all schools and school counselors who work with Latino students who will be the first in their families to attend college. Examining the college-going process for students at County Magnet High School presents the opportunity to generate new information and understanding about how to improve college-going trends for Latino students who are first in their families to attend college.

Conceptual Framework

College-going literature on Latino first generation college-goers reveals a number of patterns and trends attributed to this population. The importance of parents and guardians as “encouragers” in the predetermination phase of the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), the trend to choose two-year post-secondary schools for higher education, challenges with language barriers, citizenship status, academic preparation for college entry, the college application process, and financial resources to fund college attendance are recurring themes associated with explicit ways in which Latino students navigate post-secondary options offered in the United States. Coupled with the college-going characteristics for Latino students, the literature focuses on high school counseling programs and services and the extent to which they foster college enrollment for students in this population.

The paradigm of culturally responsive pedagogy has grown in educational literature as a response to the increasingly multi-cultural and pluralistic makeup of America’s schools (Banks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999). This model advocates for an acknowledgment and capitalization on the socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of specific ethnic groups (Gay, 2000). Similarly, employing a culturally responsive approach to school counseling is considered when working to support Latino first-generation students in the college-going process. Therefore, this study sought to explore whether, and to what extent, school counselors practice in a manner that

could be defined as culturally responsive to meet the college needs of Latino first generation college-goers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Better education, better employment options, and an improved standard of living—these prospects stand out as the main incentives that have attracted immigrants to the United States throughout the nation’s history (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013). In the past decade, a recent surge of immigrants seeking a better life includes Latinos, a population projected to become the largest ethnic group in the United States by 2050 (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Yet, a persistent trend of lower enrollment in higher education and four-year degree attainment for Latino students raises a challenge to the traditional notion of America as a “land of opportunity” (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz 2009; Fry, 2002; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). From kindergarten through 12th grade, inequities in academic preparation and limited post-secondary expectations of Latino students are reported (Engle, 2007; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). In addition, limitations in college knowledge and restricted post-secondary resources have been shown to impact immigrant students, specifically Latinos, as they seek a better life in the United States (Auerbach, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, & Gilliam, 2008).

Criteria for Inclusion of Select Literature for Review

Counseling literature, research studies, and census data pertinent to college-going trends for Latino students, and specifically for those students who are first in the family to attend college, comprised the majority of the literature review for this research project. Within the context of attempting to gain an understanding of the underlying factors that influence the college-going patterns of first-generation Latino students, literature chosen for review in this

study focused on several key topics emphasized as critical to college-going trends of Latinos in the United States. These topics included the rise of Latino students in high schools across the United States, post-secondary enrollment patterns for this subgroup, and an understanding of how Latino first generation college-goers and their families approach the latter stages of search and choice in the college-going process. Further consideration when including literature for review took into account the importance of college knowledge and social capital for Latino families in their efforts to support the college-going aspirations of their children. Finally, literature that highlighted the role of educators, specifically school counselors, and school culture in the college-going choices of Latino students, was deemed critical and, therefore, was included.

It is important to note that early literature on college-going trends for Latino students appeared to stem from a “deficit” perspective, one that emphasized lower college-going aspirations, the lack of college knowledge, insufficient academic preparation for college entry requirements, and limited attainment of college degrees for students identified as Latino and first in the family to attend college. This former approach emphasized barriers to college enrollment and seemingly inherent shortcomings in educational institutions across the United States, as well as within Latino students and their families. An understanding of this background was necessary to establish a foundation to the literature review provided herein. However, the inclusion of literature, research, and census data documenting improved college-going patterns of Latino students sought to depart from this “deficit” paradigm. Therefore, the literature review also stresses the important role that school culture and culturally responsive counseling play in improving college-going for Latino students by identifying strengths in the Latino community that educators can draw on to propel students towards more positive college-going outcomes.

The Emergence of Latino Immigrants in the United States and Schools

Historically, the United States has attracted immigrants. The continuous and rapidly growing flux of immigrants entering the United States over the past several decades indicates that this trend endures. Data from the United States Census Bureau (1997, 2008) show that from 1970 to 2007, the surge of immigrants entering the country tripled to over 37 million, with one in eight of the country's residents originating from a foreign land (Engle, 2007). As of 2005, census data established the highly diverse nature of the country's immigrant population. While 47% of immigrants hailed from a Hispanic country, 24% were Asian or Pacific Islander in origin, 21% were non-Hispanic Caucasian, and 8% were Black (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

As the number of immigrants, specifically Latinos, entering the United States has grown, this subgroup's presence in the ranks of the country's school systems has proportionately risen. Drawing from United States Census Bureau data, Suarez-Orozco, Onaga, and Lademelle (2010) show that in 2007 one in five children in the country had immigrant parents. Extrapolating from 2007 census data, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2007) conclude that by 2040, more than one out of three children in the United States will have one or more immigrant parents. Within this context, Fry and Lopez (2012) cite that 25% of students attending public schools in the United States are Latino. Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani (2010) add to school enrollment data for Latinos, indicating that from 1990 to 2010, their representation in public schools increased from 5.1 to 12.1 million, which is an increase from 12% to 23%. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2016) supported these findings in a report on the racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools across the United States, reiterating that between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in schools grew from 19% to 25%.

Increase in Immigrant Population—Disparities in Educational Attainment

Despite the increasingly diverse and pluralistic national identity of the United States, educational opportunity and attainment across the nation is not equal for all, and social class differences pose a considerable impact on enrollment in higher education. This situation holds true for students of Latino descent, as well as other underrepresented minorities. Latinos, similar to previous ethnic groups immigrating to the United States, share a common vision—better education, better employment options, and an improved standard of living. Achievement of “better life” is one factor what drives Latinos to enter America (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006). However, despite data that illustrate an increase in the country’s immigrants between 1970 and 2007, completing a college education has yet to exhibit comparable growth for first generation immigrants² (Staklis & Horn, 2012). More precisely, data indicate that Latino immigrants historically have the lowest percentages in the total population for college enrollment and four-year degree completion (Cerna, Peres, & Saenz, 2009; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Fry, 2002; Immerwahr, 2003; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004).

Immigrant status alone does not account for reported disparities in college enrollment, however. Bailey and Dynarski (2011) stress that “. . . college entry and completion are part of a long-term historical pattern—they are not a new phenomenon” (p. 17). Looking at data from 1940 to 2007, Bailey and Dynarski (2011) indicate that overall entry to college in the United States has increased by approximately 50 percentage points. However, Bailey and Dynarski (2011) specify that while high school graduates in the highest economic quartile rose twenty-two percentage points to 80% entering college, students from the lowest economic group increased only 10 points, from 19% to 29% enrolling in post-secondary institutions. Reardon (2013)

² Throughout this study, the term “first generation college-going student” refers to those individuals whose parents/guardians have not attended college. This terminology is in contrast to general references in literature and research that associate “first-generation” with immigration status.

attributes the widening disparity in college entry between the country's lowest and highest socio-economic groups to growing income inequality and restricted social mobility.

Bailey and Dynarski (2011) further emphasize the connection between college-going and parental income and level of education. These relationships pose a significant impact for students of Latino descent, given that less than 50% of Latino parents are reported to possess a high school diploma. Low attainment of a high school diploma creates a barrier to higher paying jobs, thus restricting parental income opportunities (Staklis & Horn, 2012). These circumstances place many Latino families in the nation's lower socioeconomic quartile, which combine to adversely influence the college-going trends for students in the population subgroup.

In line with the findings of Bailey and Dynarski (2011), a comparison of census data from 1999 and 2009 provided in Current Population Surveys (1999, 2009) depict a stagnating educational pattern in attaining high school diplomas for Latino students (Baum & Flores, 2011). Factors contributing to low education attainment include minimal levels of education prior to entering the United States and, concomitantly, engagement in less rigorous academics and lower GPA's and standardized test scores (Reyes & Nora, 2012). Related to this, Collins (2011) emphasizes a lack of growth in higher educational attainment for all immigrant students, citing only an 8.7% attainment of bachelor degrees for this overall group contrasted with 54.2% college completion for native-born students from middle and higher income families. NELS:88 data indicate that as many as 25% of qualified college-ready first generation immigrant students did not enroll in any level of college within a two-year period following college graduation (Engle, 2007). Attainment of higher education for immigrants of Latino descent also trailed behind that of the U.S. born population (Engle, 2007; Fry, 2002; Immerwahr, 2003; Staklis and Horn, 2012). While the documented influx of Latino immigrants causes shifts in the country's ethnic makeup,

the goal to foster and maintain an educated citizenry endures. The twenty-first century demands increasingly higher education and training as prerequisites for entering the country's workforce (Reardon, 2013). Therefore, as Latino immigrants progressively predominate in the country, addressing their unique learning needs and understanding their educational trajectories becomes critical.

Trends in Post-Secondary Enrollment for Latino Students

Enrollment trends for first generation college-going Latino students illustrate how this subgroup's traditionally held patterns and choices for post-secondary education have created disparities in educational attainment nationwide. Until recently, limited educational opportunity for Latino immigrants, specifically in terms of college enrollment, was widely reported. To begin with, Erisman and Looney's (2007) findings from 2005 United States Bureau of Census statistics indicated that only 20% of individuals identified as Latino immigrants engaged in some level of college education. While some Latino high school students reported interest in attending a four-year college, they did not apply (Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Of more concern, however, is the report exposing that Latino students also have recorded low college completion rates, with only 43% cited as earning any post-high school degree credential (Baum & Flores, 2011).

A major differential in college enrollment for Latino students is an ongoing trend for choosing two-year versus four-year post-secondary institutions when progressing into higher education. The educational gap for Latinos created by the tendency to select two-year institutions is a concern because it limits their ability to pursue professional occupations associated with higher incomes. A 2002 Pew Hispanic Center report, based on Current Population Survey data collected from 1997 to 2000 by the U.S. Census Bureau, provided information on Latino students and post-secondary enrollment, revealing a tendency for this group to follow a pathway into two-year versus four-year institutions of higher learning (Fry,

2002). Stating that 44% of Latinos enrolled in college attend two-year post-secondary schools, Fry (2002) contrasted this with Black and Caucasian students who comprise 24% of the two-year college population. Further findings from the 2007-2008 National Post-Secondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08) provide evidence that this trend to enroll in two-year community colleges persists for Latino immigrant students, with 51% cited aspiring to higher education by choosing a two-year, rather than a four-year, pathway (Staklis & Horn, 2012). Using data from the United States Bureau of the Census (1999, 2009), Baum and Flores (2011) reiterate the tendency for lower bachelor degree attainment for Latino immigrants, specifically if they are first-generation college-goers. Using census data to contrast Latino immigrants aged 25 to 34 by immigrant generational status, Baum and Flores (2011) report that only 9% of first-generation Latino immigrants earned a four-year degree as opposed to 16% of third-generation Latinos. Fry and Lopez (2011) present updated data from the Pew Hispanic Center that demonstrates the increase in Latinos ages 18-24, indicating that this group comprises 16.5 percent of the country's college students, up from 11% in 2006. Despite this increase, Latinos still represent only 13.1% of 18-24 year old students at four-year colleges and universities (Fry & Lopez, 2011), in contrast with 25.2% of students in this same age enrolled at two-year institutions.

Another tendency uncovered was that Latino students were more likely to enroll in college on a part-time basis. Using data from the 2000 National Center for Education Statistics, Fry (2002) reported that of all groups in the United States, Latinos were least likely to pursue higher education on a full-time basis, contrasting 75% of Latino students aged 18-24 pursuing college studies on a full-time basis as opposed to that of 85% for White students. Staklis and Horn (2012) provided further evidence of the trend for immigrant students, and specifically for Latinos, to attend college on a part-time rather than a full-time basis. Using findings from the

2007-2008 National Postsecondary Aid Study (NPSAS:08), which draws on a national sample of more than 100,000 students enrolled in higher education, data indicated that 36% of Latino immigrants were not enrolled in college on a full time basis, a factor associated negatively with the potential for college completion (Staklis & Horn, 2012). Baum and Flores (2011) point to financial difficulties and obligations for students to support their families by working while attending college as the primary reason for part-time college enrollment. United States Department of Education data from 2000 on college completion expound on a major risk factor associated with part-time college attendance. More specifically, Fry (2002) reported that after three years of part-time enrollment in post-secondary study, nearly 50% of students did not earn a degree or had dropped out from school.

Latino immigrants also tend to delay entry to post-secondary institutions following high school completion, an additional dynamic that creates a disparity in college attendance patterns for this population. NELS:88 data demonstrated that while 19.3% of the total population postpones college enrollment right after high school, 23% of Latino students choose this same deferment (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). The delay of college entry introduces certain obstacles to college completion. As students increase in age prior to college enrollment, the odds rise of their being responsible for supporting children or dependents (Fry, 2002). The existence of competing responsibilities, such as supporting oneself and one's family or being identified as "independent" for financial aid purposes, also presents a significant hindrance for college completion (Baum & Flores, 2011). Of all Latino subgroups, this latter dynamic holds true specifically for Mexican immigrants. Census data (2009) displays that 55% of Mexican immigrants, ages 25 to 34 did not earn a high school diploma (Baum & Flores, 2011). The 2009 U.S. Bureau of the Census Current Population Survey further reported that 42% of Mexican

immigrant teens were already parents, a situation that impedes attainment of a high school diploma and subsequent college enrollment (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Factors Impacting Educational Disparities for Latino Students

Nationwide, a gap between the desire to attain a “better life” in the United States and striving for that goal by pursuing higher education appear to exist for low-income and underrepresented minorities, including Latinos (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Fry, 2002; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Empirical data and research on college-going trends for students of Latino origin point to a broad range of factors contributing to reported disparities in college enrollment and higher degree attainment, including school-based structures, as well as family and cultural influences. While the Latino population grew in the United States, higher education enrollment and attainment remained low until recently, with this subgroup demonstrating the lowest participation in four-year college attendance amongst all immigrants (Baum & Flores, 2011). Data that are more current indicate gains in college enrollment for Latino students (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Therefore, a deeper comprehension of the educational pipeline and the college-going patterns for this population is essential to address and reduce gaps in their ability to achieve a “better life” through college enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment (Tienda & Sanchez, 2013).

College Aspirations

The perception of what constitutes a college education for Latino students offers an explanation to the eventual disparate enrollment patterns previously recounted for this group. A study conducted by the Educational Policy Institute and the Pew Hispanic Center analyzed data from NELS:88, following students for eight years beginning in the eighth grade. Results from this research indicate that while 73% of Latinos aim to seek higher education, only 55% equated

that aspiration with achieving a four-year bachelor's degree. The tendency was for Latinos to visualize a two-year degree in their post-secondary goals (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004).

Literature revealed that Latino students expressed lower college aspirations, particularly if they were the first in their family to pursue a post-secondary education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Staklis & Horn, 2012). Analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), Engle (2007) discovered that only 53% of Latino first-generation college-goers envisioned the attainment of a bachelor's degree, contrasted with 90% for students whose parents had graduated from college. In addition, 44% of Latino high school graduates whose parents did not attend college entered two-year versus four-year colleges (Fry, 2002; Engle, 2007; Reyes & Nora, 2012). In a project publicized by the Pew Hispanic Center, Fry (2002) revealed 40% of Latino students enrolled in two-year colleges, as opposed to 24% for White/Black students. Some students construed the application process for four-year colleges as more cumbersome than that of two-year schools. Thus, data analysis of a sample of students in the Chicago public schools from Roderick et al. (2008) concluded that “. . . enrolling in a two-year college is often something students fall back on when they encounter obstacles in the college search and application process, rather than a clearly defined plan” (p. 34). All of these findings support and emphasize the trend for attendance at two-year over four-year post-secondary institutions for Latino students.

Academic Preparation

Academic preparation is an essential element that affects all students who aspire to higher education. The importance of academic preparation is critical in establishing a college-going mindset and culture for all students, but especially for Latinos. The absence of enrollment in rigorous academic classes reduces the college-going expectations of minority students from the viewpoint of school personnel and eventually of the students themselves (George & Aronson,

2003). Rigorous academic classes, specifically higher-level mathematics, above average grades, and competitive scores on either the ACT or SAT college admissions tests stand out as examples of necessary academic requirements in the college admissions process (Engle, 2007; Gonzalez, 2012; Horn & Nunez, 2002; Roderick et al., 2008). Taggart and Crisp (2011) also pointed to participation in Advanced Placement courses, as well as the number of more rigorous mathematics and English classes taken in high school, as pivotal in shaping college choices.

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics cited in the 2003 Presidents Advisory Commission documented that less than 43% of Latino students were deemed academically prepared to move from high school to four-year colleges. In all instances, many Latino students were found to be lacking in the academic preparation for college that is available through a more rigorous high school program of studies (Erisman & Looney, 2007; Roderick et al., 2008; Taggart & Crisp, 2011). Latino students are, on average, less likely to have completed pre-requisite scholastic coursework or engaged in standardized testing required for college admissions. Based on their analysis of 2005 data from the United States Bureau of the Census, Erisman and Looney (2007) pointed to enrollment in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that preclude entry into college preparatory courses, therefore lessening exposure and opportunity for necessary college-going academics and information for immigrant students, specifically Latinos. Drawing from the NELS:88 study, Engle (2007) revealed that more than 20% of Latino high school graduates who were otherwise prepared for college were not encouraged and did not take either the SAT or ACT college entrance examinations required for admission to most four-year institutions.

A specific area cited as an obstacle to adequate academic preparation is high school enrollment in rigorous mathematics courses. Data extracted from NELS:88 revealed that over

58% of Latino students never went further than the study of geometry in their high school math sequence (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). Roderick et al. (2008) reported similar findings. Furthermore, in a report for the Pathways to College Network, George and Aronson (2003) looked at the Access to Postsecondary Education for 1992 High School Graduates and cited that tracking of minority and underserved populations, including Latino students, created a significant barrier to higher academic achievement. Lower scholastic attainment in mathematics and limited curriculum offerings were referred to as precluding Latino students from admissions to more selective institutions, creating another obstruction particularly to four-year college access.

Level of Parental Education

While the importance of academic preparation is critical to college enrollment, the level of parental education and access to significant adults during students' journey through the educational pipeline are additionally important in influencing students as they progress through the three phases in the college-going process, predetermination, search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Choy (2001) and Roderick et al. (2008) point out that when high school students' parents did not attend college themselves, their children were less likely to attend college themselves. To gain insight on the level of Latino parents' level of education, Erisman and Looney (2007) looked at data from the 2004 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES 2004). For Latino students enrolled as undergraduates in 2003-2004, more than half (51%) of parents did not possess a high school diploma. Limited knowledge and experience with higher education on the part of parents was found to inhibit their ability to assist students in the process of pursuing college attendance (Engle, 2007), particularly through the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) stages of search and choice. Perna and Titus (2005) found that the choice of enrolling in a four-year versus a two-year college was directly related to the amount of time

parents spent with their sons and daughters speaking about college-related topics. For parents who have little or no experience with post-secondary educational opportunities, there is a threshold to the frequency and type of college-going conversations in the home environment, thereby resulting in restrictions on the prospect of exploring choices regarding location and level of selectivity for colleges. Furthermore, NELS:88 data indicate that parents' lower educational attainment also contributed to the aforementioned limitations in academic preparation required by four-year colleges.

Immigration Status—Documented versus Undocumented

Educational preparation and post-secondary aspirations notwithstanding, the immigration status of Latino students also contributes to their college-going pathways and decision-making, specifically for those students who are undocumented immigrants (Baum & Flores, 2011; Conger & Chellman, 2011; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Passel, Capps, and Fix (2004) cite a substantial number of children in the United States with either undocumented status or with undocumented parents. Citing 1.6 million students under the age of 18 as undocumented, and three million children born in the United States to undocumented parents, Passel, Capps, and Fix (2004) introduce the role of immigration status of Latinos in the country to the overall picture of the college-going process. Baum and Flores (2011) add to this data, citing that children of undocumented parents constitute 7% of children enrolled in American elementary and high schools.

Pertinent to college-going trends, undocumented students face additional challenges to seeking higher educational opportunities. Financial aid is a specific obstacle, given that undocumented students traditionally are deemed ineligible for federal, as well as state, aid (Baum & Flores, 2011). Limits to financial resources further stem from lower socioeconomic status and restricted access to in-state tuition for students of undocumented status (Teranishi,

Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Because of financial constraints, data reveal that undocumented students have difficulty enrolling in college and attaining bachelor degrees. In addition, lack of money for college attendance directly correlates with the decision to attend two-year institutions, enroll in college on a part-time basis, disrupt college attendance to seek employment, and delay entry into college following high school graduation (Baum & Flores, 2011; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015).

College Knowledge

Much of the qualitative research on Latino parents and their influence in students' college decision-making highlights the struggles Latino parents face in supporting their children's college aspirations. Ceja (2004) acknowledges the important role that Latino parents play in the college process, but he also recognizes that limited college knowledge prohibits specific details and clarity in family discussions about searching and selecting colleges. "When parents transmitted educational messages that emphasized college, these messages were never attached to a specific type of institution or specific types of educational outcomes, nor were they coupled with strategies for thinking and planning for a college education" (Ceja, 2004, p. 352).

Information about the college process and handling the costs of college attendance are major obstacles that inhibit the role of Latino parents in the college-going process for their sons and daughters. Latino parents and students demonstrate limited information about access to necessary financial aid. As a result, they face restrictions in knowing how to address the tuition requirements for college attendance (Baum & Flores, 2011; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006) specify that parents encounter difficulty interpreting financial aid offers from colleges/universities, and that they are uncertain on how to balance the bottom line cost of attendance with scholarship/grant and loan offers. Auerbach (2004) stresses that parents need specific information on post-secondary eligibility, college planning, the application process

and financial requirements for tuition costs to “make sense” of college information so that they can do more than encourage academic achievement and college attendance.

Engaging Latino parents in the college-going process through increasing their funds of knowledge regarding college search and choice are cited in the literature (Kiyama, 2010). Defined as “. . . accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133, as cited in Kiyama, 2010, p. 332), funds of knowledge related to college going include information gathered over time. Latino parents often have narrow exposure to college-going in the United States, thus influencing their fund of knowledge in this area. However, Kiyama (2010) stresses that parental lack of knowledge does not mean a lack of support or interest in Latino families related to their children attending college.

Social Capital

Given the trend for Latino parents to encounter challenges with understanding the English language, as well as their documented unfamiliarity with higher education in the United States, students in this population are often left to fend for themselves as they progress through the college-going stages of predetermination, search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The networks that Latino students pursue in the college-going process highlight the impact of social capital on college decision-making. Perez and McDonough (2008) examined the manner in which social capital shaped college decision-making for Latino students, as well as the influence of parents, peers, and the school in this process. Defining social capital as the networks and resources that students seek out from key people and in their communities, the focus of Perez and McDonough’s (2008) qualitative study was to determine the role that family, peers, school personnel, and affiliations with higher education plays for Latino students in the college choice process. Perez and McDonough (2008) discovered that while students sought

information from school personnel, they still relied primarily on parents and peers for college information. Students also stated preferences to attend colleges either near home or near colleges other people they knew had attended. This study viewed parents as integral to providing emotional support and encouragement to their children, but the students did not access them for knowledge about the college process. Rather, they relayed to the parents information and opinions provided by peers, teachers, and school personnel (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Understanding the Latino Family's Role in the College-Going Process

Latino parents are pivotal in encouraging college aspirations—they see college as the means to a “better life” in America (Ceja, 2004; Auerbach, 2004; Engle & O'Brien, 2006). Parents' roles in the predetermination phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) are irrefutable—Latino families want to see their sons and daughters look forward to attending college. Yet, while Latino parents instill college aspirations in the college-going process, their restricted college knowledge and social capital constrains them in assisting students through the later stages of college search and choice (Auerbach, 2004; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Ceja, 2004; Engle, Borrero & O'Brien, 2006; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). However, the unique means by which Latino parents influence their children throughout the educational pipeline offers a better understanding of the means by which their influence affects college-going decisions.

Formal versus Informal Support for Higher Education

Latino parents, particularly low income, immigrant parents with limited education, were found to differ from traditional White, middle class parents in terms of conceptions of participation and ways to support their children's education. Specifically, research has documented a distinction between formal (school-based) and informal (home-based) supports (LeFerre & Shaw, 2012). Using a qualitative descriptive approach, LeFerre and Shaw (2012) used data from NELS:88, extracting results from the larger sample of 12,000 students to derive a

group of 1,476 students and families who identified themselves as Latino in origin. Within their selected sample, LeFerre and Shaw (2012) measured parental involvement by including how often parents contacted the school, the frequency of parent participation in school functions, the existence of family rules about education, and the frequency of family discussions about education. The authors concluded that while formal supports (school-based) demonstrated a positive relationship to high school graduation rates and college enrollment, informal supports (home-based) were equally crucial. However, LeFerre and Shaw (2012) assert that the informal (home-based) supports from Latino parents often go unnoticed by school personnel.

The manner in which parental involvement is measured is critical, given the established distinction between formal (school-based) and informal (home-based) involvement described by LeFerre and Shaw (2012). Similarly, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) conducted a quantitative study of 1,879 first-generation students and used home-based indicators to measure parental involvement. How often parents provided homework help, discussed high school courses and preparation for SAT/ACT testing with students, as well as communicated about going to college were assessed in determining the extent to which parental involvement (based on these measures) impacted first-generation students' decisions to enroll in college. McCarron and Inkelas (2006) concluded that parental involvement in the college process was a strong predictor of future enrollment in higher education. The findings put forth by McCarron and Inkelas (2006) indicated that the importance of attaining good grades was a slightly stronger influence on seeking higher education. Nevertheless, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) provide further evidence of the importance in considering informal (home-based) supports when estimating the impact of Latino parents on students' furthering their education beyond high school.

Informal methods by which Latino parents influence their children's aspirations to attend college provide insight into the importance of understanding the cultural differences they display. Using a qualitative design and interviews of 20 Chicana seniors in a Los Angeles inner city school, Ceja (2004) discovered that despite parents' lack of experience with higher education and their limited proficiency with the English language, students still held high regard for parental input that fostered higher education. Furthermore, findings revealed that what parents discussed with their children did not play an exclusive role in encouraging the predisposition to college attendance. Rather, perceiving the economic hardships their parents faced after coming to the United States led students to understand that improving their circumstances was directly contingent with attaining a higher level of education (Calaff, 2008). What distinguishes the findings related to the informal (home-based) support structures (Ceja, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; LeFerre & Shaw, 2012; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) is that they depart from traditional White middle-class means of fostering higher education primarily through visible involvement within the school setting.

In sum, there is an important distinction between Latino's parental influence on students' aspirations to seek a college education and their limited resources to provide assistance throughout the search and choice phases of college going. Kiyama (2010) specifically illustrates this point by arguing, ". . . lack of information does not mean lack of interest, nor does it mean lack of value for education" (p. 352). Stressing the importance of viewing Latino families as valued participants in the college-going process, Kiyama (2010) highlighted the importance of capitalizing on the fact that parents place a high value on post-secondary education while supplementing their lack of knowledge and resources on how to achieve higher education for their children. More in-depth interviews with six families out of the larger sample of 27 by

Kiyama (2010) revealed that parental aspirations for college enrollment for their children were sometimes impacted negatively by misunderstandings about the latter stages of search and choice in the college process. Using a “funds of knowledge” framework, Kiyama (2010) examined the level of understanding parents displayed beyond college aspirations. To augment the strong value these families placed on higher education, Kiyama (2010) discovered the importance of educators providing tangible college-going information to Latino parents and families so they can arrive at a clear vision of college options. This is an integral piece in creating a school culture by providing services and resources to supplement college knowledge for Latino student and families that fosters enrollment in American colleges and universities.

***Consejos, Educación, and Familismo*—Unique Characteristics of Latino Parental Involvement in the College Process**

Within the structure of informal (home-based) supports, researchers have documented a form of communication that transpires between Latino parents and their children. *Consejos*, which involve “cultural narrative advice and teachings,” (Auerbach, 2006, p. 281) are commonplace in Latino households. These discussions are central to the informal (home-based) supports from Latino parents and family members that promote college-going and the value of education, contributing to the documented predominance of informal (home-based) support for higher education amongst Latino immigrant families (Ceja, 2004; Holcomb-Mcoy, 2010; LeFerre & Shaw, 2012; McCarron & Inkelas; 2006). *Consejos* provide moral support connected to the role of “encouragers” that Latino parents and families provide in the college-going process. While these discussions and motivation for college-going may not be visible to educational professionals in the school, *consejos* are nonetheless highly valued by Latino students as an impetus to engage in seeking higher education (Auerbach, 2006; Calaff, 2008).

What emerges from *consejos* is a socio-emotional aspect of motivation to consider college-going, a critical component in the early predetermination phase (Hossler & Gallaher, 1987).

The informal and unseen aspect of *consejos* warrants attention in comprehending the tremendous influence Latino parents can have on the post-secondary pathways chosen by their children. Auerbach (2006) used an ethnographic case study method to explore this phenomenon of influence for parental roles in guiding students' college-going behavior patterns at a large, ethnically diverse high school in the Los Angeles area. Taking data from interviews conducted with 11th and 12th grade students, in addition to three years of observations, Auerbach (2006) found that parents saw their role to be one of moral support, encouraging students to perform well academically. Auerbach (2006) and Reese (2002) found this mode of support in Latino families to be a paradigm shift away from previously held assumptions that perceived Latino families as indifferent or uninvolved in the college-going process. However, in the final analysis, Auerbach (2006) concluded that Latino immigrant parents perceived their sole function to be that of emotional and moral encouragement, which relegates them to a position of "supportive bystander" (Auerbach, 2006, p. 287). Beyond the existence of this support via *consejos*, parents relied on school professionals to provide the educational and college-going supports to assist students in the search and choice phases of the college process (Auerbach, 2006, Lareau, 2011; LeFerre & Shaw, 2012).

Educación is another unique feature that Latino families possess in relation to the manner in which they support learning for their children. Associated with fostering a strong ethical foundation, *educación* is generally defined as ". . . moral training, based in the home, as well as academic training, based in the school, with the former a condition for the latter" (Auerbach, 2006, p. 278). Connected with the aforementioned *consejos*, *educación* is construed to create a

bond between Latino children and their parents/guardians, one that contributes to their decision-making in the college-going process. Auerbach (2006) further explored this phenomenon in the ethnographic study previously cited through interviews and observations of seven Latino parents (five of Mexican descent and two from Guatemala) and their students. While parents were found to have limited interactions with the school, the findings corroborated their role as moral supporters and encouragers of learning for their children. Within the semi-structured interviews with subjects, as well as observing these families over a three-year period, Auerbach (2006) witnessed that support from the parents came primarily through verbal interactions in the home with little interaction or intervention from school personnel. Parents stressed the importance of studying, earning good grades, and behaving appropriately as preparation for going to college (Auerbach, 2006).

The perception in the literature is that the mode of academic motivation inherent in *consejos* and *educación* is indirect and not readily appreciated in school settings, yet the Auerbach (2006) study depicts it as a driving force behind Latino students' decision-making throughout the college-going process. However, *consejos* in the home can benefit from additional information specific to the college-going process, rather than only encouragement for good grades and exemplary behavior. From this research, Auerbach (2006) stresses the need for schools to engage Latino parents and to provide them with increased college knowledge that will enrich *consejos* in the home that support the *educación* paradigm. Given the paradigms of *consejos* and *educación*, the search and choice phases for Latino students in the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) appear to include emotional, as well as academic and financial, considerations.

Another distinctive component associated with the Latino student's journey through the college-going process is that of *familismo* (Martinez, 2013). Smith-Morris, Morales-Camps, Alvarez and Turner (2012) define *familismo* as “. . . a core cultural value that requires the individual to submit to a more collective, family-based form of decision-making” (p. 3). After conducting a qualitative study that involved interviews of 20 high school seniors of Mexican origin, Martinez (2013) concluded that remaining close to home and family were strong considerations in the subjects' post-high school choices. The Martinez (2013) study also found parents to be resistant to college options that would take their sons or daughters further away from home, a factor that significantly influenced the students' selections. Tornatzky, Lee, Mejia, and Tarant (2003), as well as Marin and Marin (1991) reiterated a common tendency in Latino families to put the needs and desires of the family before one's own. This commitment to family reinforces the unique socio-cultural and emotional quality that predominate the search and choice phases of the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) reported for Latino students (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). Martinez (2013) suggested that providing families with specific college knowledge allowed them to become more open to choices that involved going to college away from home, thus giving students increasingly varied options.

School Counseling—A Factor in Creating Programs and Services to Increase College Enrollment for Latino Students

A lack of college knowledge and social capital, in addition to language barriers and limited experience with the American school system, characterizes the obstacles or “potholes” (Roderick et al., 2008) for Latino students seeking higher education. Yet, the strong influence of Latino parents in the college-going process is a conceivable strength to consider in developing services and programs to assist these students throughout all three phases—predetermination, search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The challenge for educational leaders and

school counselors is to incorporate Latino parents and families, and their cultural strengths, into the latter phases of search and choice in the college-going process.

School Counselors and the College-Going Process—A Historical Perspective

School counselors face a myriad of challenges in effectively assisting all students in the college-going process, specifically those in low income and minority groups, such as Latinos. McDonough (2005) provides a theoretical, descriptive assessment of the history and current status of school counseling in America's educational institutions. Limited resources, high student-counselor ratios, and a need for improved information on financial aid are listed as weaknesses in the college-going cultures offered to students in the nation's high schools (McDonough, 2005). Furthermore, McDonough (2005) reveals that up until the 1990s, college advising from school counselors existed only for the "dispensing of information" to students, with no emphasis on including parents and families in the college-going process. In conjunction with the factors described above, the old "dispensing" model of counseling described by McDonough (2005) may be ill suited in meeting the needs of underrepresented students and families, such as Latinos, who appear to benefit from more detailed information communicated in a culturally supported manner. Research indicates that efforts to support college enrollment for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college are more effective when they emanate from a culturally responsive approach and focus on detailed information regarding college admissions requirements, the college application process, and financing higher education (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012).

Student-to-Counselor Interactions—Quantity and Quality

A range of within-school structures and practices have created previous obstacles for Latino students seeking to obtain equal access to college-related supports, as well as college-going information and the requisites for a college prep education. Highlighted as a major consideration in evaluating college-going opportunities for students are student-to-counselor ratios, especially those in underrepresented minorities such as Latinos. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) explored the impact of school size on counselor interactions with students and families, in addition to student engagement in school sponsored events/services pertinent to college admissions. They looked at six areas of the college process: activities centered on preparation for college, discussions about college-going, advocacy from teachers, interactions with students and counselors and hands-on support from school personnel in necessary activities for college admissions. Using a quantitative design, Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) supported previous findings (Bryan et al., 2009; Corwin et al., 2004; McDonough, 2005) that in smaller schools or schools with smaller student-to-counselor ratios, students were significantly more likely to engage in a college-going discussion with an adult. The importance of personal attention to students in the college process emerged as crucial to support college search and enrollment (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).

Reemphasizing the impact of student contact time with school counselors, reports show student-to-counselor ratios as high as 725:1 and even higher in some California jurisdictions. These ratios potentially create access barriers to college information in some high schools, resulting in only the top 10% of the class permitted use of the “college corner” section of the school counseling office (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009). School counselors also have been criticized for unequal treatment of students in the college-going process, favoring wealthier or higher achieving students while having lower estimates of

minority students' academic potential (Vela-Gude, Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Campos, & Rodriguez, 2009). Tracking of students, specifically Latinos, often precludes enrollment in high school courses that align with college admissions' requirements (Vela-Gude et al., 2009). Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy and Thomas's (2009) study of 4,924 high school seniors reported findings which revealed all students, regardless of ethnicity and socioeconomic status, concluded that if the counselor was perceived as neutral ("Counselor thinks I should do what I want"), they were less likely to further approach the counselor, which suggests that neutrality does not denote support. Finally, poor or inadequate advisement pertaining to college entrance requirements, loss or lack of academic credits for prerequisite courses resulting from tracking of students, specifically Latinos, were cited as leaving them prepared for entrance only into two-year institutions. This is a phenomenon that explains previously cited data indicating a tendency for two-year post-secondary enrollment trends for this subgroup (Fry, 2002; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004).

Necessary Elements of a College-Going Culture for Latino Students

As illustrated above, Latino first-generation college-goers and their families join in approaching the latter phases of choice and search (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) in the college process in a distinctive manner. The characteristics and patterns of college-going for this population suggest a necessity for school counselors and schools to align programs and services to meet the needs of this population within a college-going school culture. Broadly, Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) concisely define school culture as one that ". . . reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and on-going formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from post-secondary academic institutions as those experiences specifically pertain to the students' current and future lives" (p. 26). A college-

going culture is one where all participants, school professionals, students, and parents, forge relationships and engage in activities that promote college readiness and eventual college enrollment (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2009). Roderick et al. (2008) further delineate a college-going culture as measured by the degree to which high school educational professionals support and involve all students in the college-going process, where the expectation to enroll in higher educational institutions prevails, and where practices and programs are structured to groom students for the college search and application process.

Considering family roles and the importance of social capital to engage in college talk (Borrero, 2011), the literature highlights that Latino parents can benefit from extensive college-going information to make sense of the process for themselves and their children (Ceja, 2004; Auerbach, 2004). More critical is that Latino parents have the opportunity to join their students and become part of a school culture that communicates a message of equity to college access for all from schools and school counselors (Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villaba, & Indelicato, 2006). The challenge for educational professionals is to integrate Latino parents into the school's college-going culture, providing them with essential services and programs to increase their college knowledge to social capital. Furthermore, in order to strengthen informal supports (LeFerre & Shaw, 2012) related to improved college talk in the home (Borrero, 2012), educational professionals are encouraged to better integrate Latino families into the school's college-going culture—this can provide a direct link to improving college knowledge to enrich home discussions centered on college-going. LeFerre and Shaw (2012) describe several means by which to make Latino parents more welcome in schools, such as providing Spanish translators and sending home school communications in both English and Spanish (Smith-Adcock et al., 2006).

Workshops for parents and community outreach appear in the literature as vehicles by which to integrate Latino parents and families in the college-going process while augmenting critical knowledge and social capital (Collins, 2011; Fann, McClafferty-Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009; Kiyama, 2010). While school counselors employ these methods traditionally for all college-going students, offering the information in both English and Spanish for Latino families is reinforced (Fann, McClafferty-Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009). In describing a qualitative study using focus groups at a program with UCLA, Fann, McClafferty-Jarsky, & McDonough (2009) underscored the significance of creating a personal/cultural connection with Latino families. Spanish speaking facilitators were recognized as instrumental to this connection, as was providing an atmosphere where Latino parents felt valued. Coupled with this, conveying information about academic requirements for admission, required standardized testing for college, and financial aid details were presented to add to the parents' college knowledge.

Calaff (2008) supports a holistic approach to college counseling for Latino students, one that integrates students, families, and the community in forging relationships dedicated to a college-going culture. Borrero (2011) expands upon this concept, emphasizing that "family" can extend to the school and the community. Outreach programs, such as one offered through the University of Michigan (Collins, 2011), are an example that includes families by establishing campus visits for both middle and high school students, in addition to offering enrichment activities and workshops focused on college-going. Fann, McClafferty-Jarsky, and McDonough (2009) emphasize the importance of providing Spanish-speaking presenters for parents, a tactic utilized by California's UCLA in offering workshops on college-going to Latino parents. Equity and equal access to higher education are at the forefront of these programs in the nation's efforts to improve education in the United States. School counselors and educational professionals can

play a pivotal role in promoting college-going for all students by establishing similar programs that connect families with the larger community and, more importantly, create partnerships among high schools, Latino students and parents, and institutions of higher learning.

College Counseling for Latino First-Generation College-Going Students— A Theoretical Framework

Given the projected growth of Latino students in schools across the United States, it is prudent to consider the services and programs designed to promote college-going for this population. The unique patterns of Latino families, such as reliance on *consejos* and adherence to *educación* and *familismo*, merit acknowledgement in school counseling departments (Martinez, 2013; Smith-Morris, Morales-Camps, Alvarez, & Turner, 2012) with a theoretical framework that emanates from the perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy (Banks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999). Dedicated to “. . . using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits . . .,” a culturally responsive approach capitalizes on the socio-cultural strengths of specific ethnic groups, using them to work with students and families to enhance educational opportunity (Gay, 2003).

When considering reported lower college-going rates of Latino students in the United States, the increasingly complex and pluralistic makeup of the country’s population, the effectiveness of former models of school counseling and college-going cultures in the nation’s high schools are being called into question (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; McDonough, 2005; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). Earlier research on college-going for Latinos specifically highlights issues, including potential disconnects between Latino students’ needs and counseling services and programs offered, high student-to-counselor ratios, and limitations of former “dispensing of information” counseling methods (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell,

Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). In response to criticism of a cultural disconnect between school counseling practices and the needs of Latino students and their families throughout the college-going process, Gay (2002) acknowledges the necessity of addressing varied student backgrounds and learning styles of the nation's increasingly diverse population. As an outgrowth of culturally responsive pedagogy (Banks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1999), school counseling programs may benefit from responding to the different manners by which Latino first generation college-goers navigate the college process. Lee (2001) identifies culturally responsive school counseling as an approach that incorporates students' families into programs and services offered while capitalizing on the diversity that varying groups bring to today's schools.

Utilizing the concept of culturally responsive counseling (Lee, 2001; Smith-Adock et al., 2006) is a departure from former deficit models attached to Latino students and their families in the college-going process. Rather than focusing on limitations in college knowledge, social capital, and shortcomings with English language proficiency, culturally responsive counseling aims to profit from the role of the family, especially that of Latino parents as "encouragers," in the college-going process. Delgado-Gaitan (1991) introduced the idea of empowering Latino families through a combination of ". . . collective process, critical reflection, mutual response and win-win . . ." (p. 22), criteria that speak to a holistic counseling process as maintained by Calaff (2008) and Borrero (2011). Rather than perpetuating a mismatch between home and school, a culturally responsive counseling framework seeks to define means by which to strengthen the bond between these two, thereby facilitating a stronger college-going culture not only in the school, but also in the community.

For culturally responsive counseling to promote a strong college-going culture, the most critical aspects are that programs and services acknowledge the diverse needs of students and their families and that the programs and services are comprehensive. Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, and Thomas (2009) emphasized the necessity for counselors to provide college-going information to all students and parents, an orientation in line with a culturally responsive framework based on equity and equal access. In line with the work of Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009), Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, and Thomas (2009) emphasize that the best-developed college-planning structure in a school-counseling program cannot be fully effective if the total school population does not access it. When considering the improvement of higher education enrollment for Latino first generation college-going students, a framework imbedded in culturally responsive counseling is a reasonable barometer by which to gauge the effectiveness of college-going counseling programs.

In the chapter that follows, research methods sought to explore what we know and do not know about culturally responsive school counseling evident in the college-going practices offered by school counselors in a school population of high-achieving Latino students. In doing so, this study sought to uncover potential gaps between students' college-going needs and school counseling practices. Through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy, the objective of this study was to uncover potential college-going approaches provided within schools to increase college enrollment rates for first generation college-going Latino students. Specific attention addressed the degree to which the counseling program observed employs approaches associated with culturally responsive school counseling. The study focused on the following key elements of school culture and culturally responsive school counseling highlighted in the college-going literature for first generation Latino students—understanding of formal and informal supports in

the home, outreach programs to families and the community, employment of Spanish-speaking school counselors, and a school counseling culture embedded in equal access to college-going for all students (Smith-Adock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006; Lee, 2001).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This study stemmed from a curiosity about the existence and potential impact of school culture and culturally responsive counseling on the college-going patterns of Latino first generation college-goers. Culturally responsive counseling was construed within a framework that observed and described the degree to which school counselors took into account students' backgrounds, family interactions throughout the search and choice stages of the college process, and current enrollment trends for Latino first generation college-goers. The intent in this research was to examine school culture and school counseling through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy. Furthermore, this research explored whether, and how, supports/resources provided by school counselors in a specific school setting of academically high achievers took into account Latino students' backgrounds and needs in the stages of college search and choices as outlined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987).

Research Design and Its Underlying Principles

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine school culture and college counseling provided to high achieving Latino students in an urban county magnet school of choice. A case study design, using recorded semi-structured interviews with select students and school counselors, allowed for an in-depth investigation of the counseling programs and services provided in this single high school setting. The choice of a qualitative case study was appropriate, because in accordance with Yin (2013), this research investigated school counseling practices “. . . within a real life, contemporary context or setting” (p. 97). The school setting for this project further supported a case study design because it attempted to investigate a case of unusual interest (Yin, 2013) in that the high school selected reported a high percentage of Latino

students selecting four-year institutions for college, a trend that is markedly different from post-secondary outcomes traditionally described in college-going literature for this subgroup.

The intent was to explore a specific population of Latino first generation college-goers at the selected school site while examining the association between post-secondary outcomes (as measured by college enrollment) and the school-based counseling services offered. The focus was on the degree to which the school culture and the school's counseling programs and services matched and addressed the college-going needs expressed by the selected student sample and therefore provided evidence of culturally responsive pedagogy. To achieve this, the research employed document collection and interviews with selected students and school counseling personnel at the case study site.

A study that examined the relationship between students' needs and school services/programs in this specific school setting afforded an opportunity to explore if school counselors demonstrated culturally responsive practices as they interacted with Latino students and their families while supporting college-going for this population. An additional focus was to determine whether culturally responsive counseling and school culture are necessary and/or helpful to students going through the college-going process. Findings from this case study in a single school setting of high achieving Latino first generation college-going students can shed light on the extent to which school culture and culturally responsive counseling services/programs influenced their search and choices in the overall college-going process. Results from this case study can offer new empirical data to educators and school counselors who seek to increase college-going patterns when working with similar populations of Latino first generation college-goers.

Site Selection for Research

History and Demographics of the Research Site

Utilizing a qualitative case study design, this research took place at a countywide magnet school, which is referred to throughout the course of this research as County Magnet High School. Established in 1991, County Magnet High School is a school of choice that offers a rigorous academic curriculum coupled with a strong emphasis on technology. County Magnet High School is unique in that attendance in this particular high school, geared towards high achieving students, is competitive and subject to admissions requirements, specifically elementary/middle school academic transcripts, standardized test scores, attendance records, and highlighted talents specific to the school's mission which emphasizes strong academic achievement, as well as strengths in the arts and/or technology.

Drawing from 12 communities, County Magnet High School recorded 622 students in attendance for the 2012-2013 school year, with 254 males and 368 females. Slightly higher than 36% of students are identified as Hispanic, which is the largest ethnic subgroup in the total school population followed by 35.6% White, 19.3% Asian, and 7.9% Black. Spanish was identified as the predominant language spoken in the home by 14.8% of students, and 243 students, or 39.4% of the student body, are designated as "economically disadvantaged" (State Department of Education, 2013-2014 School Performance Report).³

The Application and Admissions Process at County Magnet High School

County Magnet High School is a highly selective magnet public school. However, applications are open to all eighth graders living in the county's 12 municipalities. County Magnet High School does not openly recruit high achieving students from eligible middle schools. Rather, the school advertises an Open House during the month of October in local

³To protect the confidentiality of the school district, the state has not been identified.

newspapers, and this event attracts a wide range of potential applicants and their parents/guardians. According to the junior class school counselor, potential applicants line up around the block for entry to the Open House in October.

High academic achievement is one criterion essential for acceptance to County Magnet High School. Consideration for admission requires that candidates submit an application, a transcript of their scholastic grades, and standardized test scores. In addition, evidence of excellent work habits, a strong attendance record, and examples of unique talent are further requirements needed to accompany a student's application. Teacher and elementary/middle school counselor recommendations provide supporting documentation of a student's work habits, and these recommendations augment evidence of scholastic achievement found in the student's school records and standardized test results.

While applying to County Magnet High School is open to the general pool of eighth grade students, the application process itself quickly results in a "narrowing down" of prospective students. Following the October Open House, both students and parents must complete applications. The deadline for submitting an application is in late November, and elementary/middle school counselors forward applicants' records to County Magnet High School by this deadline. All applicants receive admission decisions in early February.

The school admissions committee is composed of building counselors, teachers, and administrators. According to County Magnet High School's webpage, the admissions committee strives to select members of an incoming class that comprise a representative sample of students in the county's 12 communities. They further seek to maintain a balance between male and female students admitted. County Magnet High School's website provides a detailed description of these qualifying conditions in the admissions process. The school uses census data from the

county's eligible municipalities to determine the racial/ethnic composition reflected in their populations. In seeking an entering freshmen class, the committee selects approximately 75 females and 75 males. Acceptance to County Magnet School also considers creating an even distribution of entering freshman into the four vocational programs offered.

Academic Achievement

County Magnet High School data indicate a strong commitment to college and career readiness, as manifested in college-going patterns and outcomes for its students. Evidence of this is demonstrated in the following schoolwide performance data—during the 2012-2013 school year, 100% of sophomore and junior students took the PSAT, and 89% of students participated in taking either the SAT or ACT tests for college admissions. Of the students taking the SAT test, 65% scored 1550 or above, a benchmark associated with college and career readiness by the State Department of Education. Additionally, 35% of students took at least one Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate test in English, mathematics, social studies, or science, and 69% of students taking AP tests scored a 3 or higher (Department of Education, 2012-2013 School Performance Report). It is also important to note that 96% of 11th graders in 2012-2013 passed the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), a state requirement for high school graduation.

Post-Secondary Enrollment Statistics

Given the reported data on academic achievement for County Magnet High School, the high caliber of scholastic success for students was apparent and further data on post-secondary enrollment for students at this site substantiated the school's strong commitment to college-going for all students. For White students at County Magnet High School, 84% of graduates moved on to higher education, with 5.8% opting for two-year institutions and 94.2% choosing four-year colleges. Students of Latino background at this school site showed 90.7% going on to post-

secondary learning, with 4.1% enrolling in two-year schools and 95.9% enrolling in four-year colleges and/or universities. Of students identified as “economically disadvantaged,” 91.5% percent of graduates pursued higher education, with 4.6 percent selecting a two-year pathway and 95.4% moving on to a four-year institution. Data were consistent with the school’s commitment to rigorous academic preparation and four-year college attendance for its students.

To appreciate the high level of commitment to college enrollment at County Magnet High School, it is necessary to contrast this school’s data on college-going for Latinos with other public high schools in the area. Before examining any differences, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that Latino students who seek out and gain acceptance to County Magnet High School may be qualitatively different from other Latino students in their communities. Students at County Magnet High School are academically competitive and high achieving, a factor that may influence their approach to college-going. Nevertheless, understanding what transpires specifically in the phases of search and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) raises questions about what happens at County Magnet High School in the college-going process.

Two high schools in communities within which County Magnet High School students reside depict a noteworthy distinction in college-going trends for Latino students. While 90.7% of Latino students from County Magnet High School progressed on to higher education, 70.3% and 68.3% were the reported number of Latino students continuing to college from the two local public schools (State Department of Education 2012-2013 School Performance Report). Similarly, there were differences in Latino students’ choices and enrollment for two-year versus four-year institutions. While 94.2% of Latino graduates from County Magnet High School enrolled in a four-year institution, only 45.8% and 38% of Latino students at the two public schools chose this pathway. Furthermore, 53.6% and 61.5% of Latino graduates from the local

public high schools opted to attend two-year college programs. These data underscore the unique characteristic of County Magnet High School as a site distinguished for its high level of four-year college enrollment for students of Latino background.

County Magnet High School as a Research Site—A Rationale

The data provided for County Magnet High School at first glance are incongruous with the majority of studies previously conducted on Latino students, as graduates from County Magnet High School predominantly enroll in four-year colleges as opposed to two-year colleges. As a result, the post-high school data for County Magnet High School warrant attention to identify the elements of the college-going culture and the counseling programs and services, or other possible contributing factors that exist within this high school. Because 95.9% of 2012-2013 graduates of County Magnet High School enrolled in four-year colleges, it is important to examine what takes place in the college-going process of these students as they interact with faculty members and the school's counseling staff. This study intended to uncover how, and by what means, college-going for students is facilitated at this particular school, as well as to pinpoint if anything specific is required and employed for Latino first-generation college-going students.

County Magnet High School was chosen for this study because of its high percentage of Latino students, as well as for a consistent record of high college enrollment for graduates of Latino background. The outcome data related to college going for Latino students at County Magnet High School significantly surpass and differ from statistics for other Latino students reported in college-going literature. For this reason, the college search and decision-making experiences of students at this site may stand to shed light on school services/programs that support Latino first generation college-goers. Details of these students' experiences, as well as

an understanding of the extent to which a college-going culture and school counseling services/programs demonstrate culturally responsive practices, could potentially provide a model for other educational professionals working with Latino first-generation college-goers

County Magnet High School is not representative of a typical urban comprehensive public high school, given the school's explicit college preparatory mission and the fact that Latino students comprise the largest population share in the school's overall population. The college choice activities, practices, and supports in place at this site may provide insight into creating programs/services for first generation college-going students of Latino origin that can lead to improved college-going outcomes. The increasing importance of achieving a four-year college degree has been highlighted as critical to eventual employment in professional occupations associated with higher income earnings, and County Magnet High School's mission is to foster students' pathways to four-year post-secondary institutions. Thus, County Magnet High School provided a site to directly examine if, and in what ways, college counseling services are tailored to Latino students' and families' needs in a school where first generation Latino students successfully navigate the college-going process (as measured by four-year college enrollment). Alternatively, a study at this site could also reveal that high achieving Latino students do not require different types of college counseling from their non-Latino peers in order to be successful in the search and choice phases of the college process. Simply stated, this study explored whether or not culturally responsive counseling contributes to the already high academic achievement of Latino first-generation college-goers at County Magnet High School.

Elements of a Qualitative Approach for This Study

Methodology

In conducting this research, the project combines interviews with students and counseling staff personnel. In addition, documents pertinent to post-high school planning and related

correspondence sent to students and families by school counselors were collected as evidence of the college-going efforts at County Magnet High School. Examples of these documents included letters sent home to parents/guardians, which contained literature on the college-going process, standardized college admissions tests, and post-high school options/outcomes.

Interviews with students focused on what they identified as specific needs in the college-going process, especially at the search and choice phases. Particular attention was paid to how students approach the college-going process during the search and choice phases (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students were asked to reflect on the role their parents/guardians played in these two phases, what supports they received from school counseling staff, and how they perceived the degree to which their high school and its counseling programs/services assisted them in the college-going process.

Sample Population

The college-going data for County Magnet High School reveal a high percentage of four-year college enrollments for Latino students. As a result, County Magnet High School offered the opportunity to explore the college-going supports and services offered to this population. In selecting students for interviews in this case study, school administration and the school counseling staff were asked to identify junior class students who were Latino first-generation college-goers. High school juniors were selected for the study because according to research outlined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), this subgroup was anticipated to be entering the search and choice phases of the college-going process. Isolating this specific sample was integral to the basis of this study, and the intention was to involve approximately 12 students to participate in semi-structured interviews anticipated to last between 20 and 25 minutes. The goal in selecting the population for interviews sought to include an equal number of males and

females who fit the criteria of being Latino and a first generation college-goer. Interviews with students and with school counseling staff, in addition to a collection of college-going materials utilized by the school counseling department, constituted the data collection for the study.

Student interviews entailed questions related to individual experiences and perceptions about the college-going supports and services offered within their high school setting. A list of interview questions for students appears in Appendix I for this research project. School counselor interviews examined the extent and content of college-going support services offered to students at the research site. A list of interview questions for school counselors is included in Appendix II.

Sample Selection and Procedure for Interviews

A school counselor at County Magnet High School assisted with the distribution of recruitment fliers to 35 members of the junior class designated as Latino, along with consent forms for students and their parents/guardians. In accordance with predetermined criteria, students were excluded from the study if they already had a sibling attending college or if a parent/guardian attended some level of post-secondary education. From the initial group solicited, ten students met the criteria of being Latino and first in the family to attend college, and they returned the required signed consent forms. These students, six females and four males, whose countries of origin included Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, participated in the interview portion of this study. All four school counselors, two males and two females, also took part in interviews after completing the required consent forms. While one counselor works directly with junior class students, the opportunity to interview the counselors for each grade level provided insight into the developmental approach utilized at County Magnet High School about the college-going process. On average, the counselor-to-

student ratio at County Magnet High School is 1:263, which is close in range with the American School Counselor Association's recommended ratio of 1:250. In the end, ten students and the four school counselors form the basis for the qualitative data collected in this research project.

Interviews with students focused on what they identified as specific needs in the college-going process, especially at the search and choice phases. Particular attention sought to determine how students approach the college-going process during the search and choice phases (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students were asked to reflect on the role their parents/guardians played in these two phases, what supports they received from the school counseling staff, and how they perceived the degree to which school counseling programs/services assisted them in the college-going process. Interviews with the school counseling staff focused on the content of college-going meetings with students, how often and to what degree supports and services pertinent to college-going were delivered to students and their families, and what, if any challenges counselors identified for first generation students in the college-going process.

Data Analysis

Student participants were interviewed (see Appendix I for interview questions), and an analysis of interview transcripts was conducted to determine potential trends/similarities pertinent to the college-going process, interactions with school counselors and faculty members, role of the family in the search and choice phases, as well as challenges to engaging in college-going decision-making. School counselors were also interviewed (see Appendix II for school counselor interview protocol). Interview transcriptions examined patterns of interactions counselors reported regarding their college-going supports to students and their families and, if applicable, challenges the counselors determined occur for Latino first-generation students in the college-going process. Finally, documents related to college-going disseminated from the counseling department to students and their families were collected and analyzed. The document

analysis provided evidence whether culturally responsive methodology is utilized, such as Spanish language versions of literature and correspondence, inclusion of family members in the college-going process, and resources for financial aid to defray the cost of college attendance.

Goals of the Research at County Magnet High School

In choosing County Magnet High School, a site with a high percentage of Latino graduates who move on to four-year colleges/universities, the first task was to examine the programs and services offered at a college preparatory high school that serves a large Latino population. Second, it was important to explore whether school counselors are doing anything different for Latino first generation college-goers and their families throughout the college application process, as described by the interview participants. Finally, putting Latino students at the forefront, this study investigated if, and how, Latino students at County Magnet High School perceived the extent to which the school, and its counseling programs/services, met their college-going needs. This study stands to make two main contributions to the literature on Latino first generation college-goers. First, County Magnet High School may offer examples of best practices for assisting Latino students and extend the current literature on college-going trends for Latino first generation college-goers. Second, this research may identify ways in which school culture and culturally responsive counseling may benefit all students, specifically Latino first generation college-goers.

At this juncture, reaffirming the goals of this study are best addressed by emphasizing how interview topics posed to student participants and school counselors at County Magnet High School reflected the research questions established as the basis for this study. The two tables below indicate which interview questions best focused on the goals of this research.

Table 1

Questions for Student Participants

What college-going services/supports and initiatives do high school counselors in the case study school provide to Latino first generation college-going students and their families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me a little bit about your plans for after you graduate high school? • What have you done up to this point to learn about your post-high school options? • What can you tell me about how, if at all, you have worked with your school guidance counselor on our post-high school options?
Which, if any, services/supports or initiatives are designed specifically to prepare first generation Latino students during the search and choice phases of the college going process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you get information about colleges, the college application process, and financial aid for college? • How do you get information about college admissions tests, such as the SAT and ACT? • What do you think about the information available about colleges, financial aid and the application process?
Which, if any, services/supports or initiatives are designed to engage Latino parents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What events regarding college going and post high school planning are offered by the school counseling department? How often have you attended any of these events?
What information, guidance and support do first generation college-going students that they and their families need at the search and choice stages of the college-going process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you tell me about the conversations you have had, if any, with family members about going to college? What topics do you discuss with your family about going to college?
How do Latino first generation college-going students feel about the college-related services and supports provided to them and their families by their school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What, if anything, would you like from your school counselor to help you with the college-going process that has not been offered to you at this point? • What additional information would you like? What is missing? • What events regarding college going and post high school planning are offered by the school counseling department? How often have you attended any of these events?

Table 2

Questions for School Counselors

What college-going services/supports and initiatives do high school counselors in the case study school provide to Latino first generation college-going students and their families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you tell me about your work with students across all grades on college search and choice? • What can you tell me about how you have worked with your current 11th grade students specifically on post-high school options?
Which, if any, services/supports or initiatives are designed specifically to prepare first generation Latino students during the search and choice phases of the college going process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often to you meet individually with students to assist in the search and choice phases of the college-going process? • How often do you meet with family members to discuss the college-going process for their students? • What events regarding college-going and post-high school planning does the school counseling department offer?
What information, guidance and support do first generation college-going students that they and their families need at the search and choice stages of the college-going process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you perceive to be the most significant needs presented by students and their families throughout the college-going process? • What do you think about your first-generation college-going students find most challenging about the college-

	<p>going process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What aspects of the college-going process do you think the parents find most challenging? • What is the most difficult part of your work with students and families in the college search process?
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Role of the Researcher

As a school counselor for more than ten years, and currently a district administrator for a school counseling department, a strong commitment to college and career readiness for all students is at the core of my professional practice. Furthermore, an educational background in psychology, teaching, and counseling influences my belief in looking at individual and cultural circumstances of students before advising them regarding academic, social-emotional and/or career development. As a result, my personal and professional bias coming into this research presents an interesting contrast of pros and cons. Coming from a school counseling background, I have insight into the challenges facing counselors when working with students and families throughout the college search and choice process. For me, the importance of family and cultural circumstances plays an integral role in the college process. However, while I am a proponent of acknowledging the role of the family in the search and choice phases leading up to post-secondary enrollment, I cannot assume that all school counselors share this understanding. Nor can I assume that the school counselors I interviewed in this study possessed my perspective on providing school counseling that supports college-going for all students.

An additional perspective that influences the choice of this topic for research is also a personal one. As the product of parents who attended, but did not initially complete, college, I can appreciate how important a role my parents played in instilling a regard for higher education in me from an early age. My parents, while not college educated, were supportive at the predisposition phase of college-going, much like the parents described in college-going literature

for Latino student and families—they encouraged and assumed that college attendance would be in my future. The expectation was that I would attend college, and every effort was made for me to enroll in competitive private grammar and high schools that would foster my pathway to higher education. My parents also took every opportunity to do research and seek out information from my own school counselors and college-educated friends and relatives to assist in the search and choice phases of the college process. In other words, they compensated for their lack of experience and knowledge of higher education by utilizing outside resources that could provide this. Because of my parents' efforts, I am the highly educated person I am today. I understand that not every student has the advantages I had, which is a major reason why I have chosen a professional path that included teaching and counseling with the goal of assisting all students towards attaining higher levels of learning. My bias from a school counselor viewpoint is that the job of a school counselor is to promote college-going for all students, regardless of family background.

As a socially conscious person, I am fully aware of the changing and increasingly diverse nature of our country and its public schools. Currently working in a district where approximately 20% of this year's senior class will be first in their family to attend college, I fully appreciate the important role that school counselors play in guiding these students, as well as all advisees, throughout the college-going process. Students and their families rely on school counselors to offer the prerequisites necessary for college enrollment—course selections during high school, information on college/universities and admissions' requirements, steps in the college application process, and avenues for obtaining financial resources to cover the cost of higher education. All of these complex circumstances create a critical foundation for college-going.

Finally, I perceive that the success of our country rests in the education of its youth. Therefore, I feel a strong responsibility as an educator to promote higher education, and my bias is towards supporting the college-going process for all students. That being said, I understand that the college-going process and college attendance patterns of diverse students may differ from the norms previously held by White middle-class practices. Acknowledging this opens the door to redefining college-going for more diverse learners, and allows the chance to address divergent college-going needs while still upholding the importance of post-secondary learning for all students. Counseling with a “one size fits all” approach is inappropriate for today’s high school population, a conclusion fully supported by research. My bias in this regard is towards culturally responsive counseling that takes into account the needs and goals of individual students and their families.

In collecting data for this research project, I was cognizant of the fact that I had to be aware of my personal and professional biases and take steps to both acknowledge and limit their influence in my data collection and analysis. As a counselor, however, I believe I have a distinct advantage in carrying out interviews and observations—I am a trained listener used to employing open-ended questions in a non-judgmental manner. My role is to remain objective during observations and interviews, rather than impose any opinion on the counseling practices witnessed or the student responses. I believe that I can carefully maintain that balance.

County Magnet High School offered an interesting window into how counselors supported college-going for high achieving Latino students who will be the first in their families to attend college. The high percentage of Latino students who progressed to four-year colleges presented me with opportunities and challenges as a researcher. Because of my understanding of the search and choice phases of college-going, as well as of the expected role of school

counselors in this process, I possessed insight into the impact of what the counselors in this setting are doing or, conversely, not doing to support the strong four-year college enrollment reported by this particular high school. I needed to exercise caution in interpreting my results, however, especially since County Magnet High School was uniquely distinguished as a competitive magnet high school dedicated to college going—this was not a typical urban comprehensive public high school. Nevertheless, I maintained optimism that County Magnet High School offered information and empirical data that could benefit the increasing success of Latino first generation college-goers in achieving the longstanding American dream—better education, better employment options, and an improved standard of living.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The primary focus of this research, which took place at an urban school of choice, examined the college search and choices experiences of Latino students who are first in their families to attend college, also known as “first generation college-goers.” At the forefront, specific consideration of the high school’s culture and the influence of school counseling programs and services entered into play, as students at this research site engaged in the search and choice phases when seeking post-secondary institutions for higher learning (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, & Day-Vines 2009; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). One goal of this study was to develop a broad understanding of the how County Magnet High School structured the college-going process for its students and how this school and its students achieved higher than usual college enrollment outcomes for its Latino students. An additional aim was to explore the overall school culture at County Magnet High School, as well as the extent to which its school counselors utilized culturally responsive counseling techniques.

In analyzing the results, the intersection of school culture and school counseling services/programs emerged as a focus of interest embedded in the college-going process at County Magnet High School, along with a complex progression of activities, including academic preparation, application procedures and deadlines, and obtaining sufficient financial aid to defray the cost of college attendance. Within the progression of programs and services offered at County Magnet High School, student and counselor interview responses presented evidence of a developmental approach to school counseling throughout the search and choice phases of the college-going process. The college-going process described by students and counselors at

County Magnet High School depicted a sequential and focused set of strategies and supports for students throughout their high school experience, all orchestrated to develop a pathway for students to follow in moving towards enrolling in primarily four-year post-secondary institutions following graduation from high school.

Furthermore, findings led the researcher to reflect on the degree to which families, friends, and teachers of prospective college applicants at the research site served as social and cultural influences that contributed to the students' college choice experiences (Engle, 2007; McDonough, 1997). The findings presented below responded to the main research questions motivating this study, and they reveal several trends pertinent to developing college-going cultures in schools that support all students and, more importantly, students who are Latino and first in the family to attend college.

County Magnet High School—A Foundation That Supports a College-Going Culture

The college-going data for graduates from County Magnet High School are not surprising, given the school's reputation in the community, its demanding admissions criteria, and the rigorous screening process applicants experience when seeking admission. Students and their families find County Magnet High School attractive because of its high academic standards and its favorable college-going outcomes. Because County Magnet High School is a highly selective school of choice, it differs significantly from a typical high school. Students who seek admission to this public school of choice have early aspirations and goals to seek higher education, and their reasons for attending County Magnet High School include the expectation that it is a gateway to admission into post-secondary institutions. The interviewees for this research project conveyed the perception that they considered gaining admission to County Magnet High School as integral to helping them prepare for future rigors of the college admissions process. One student conveyed that he purposely transferred to County Magnet High

School in sophomore year because he perceived that the local public school he initially attended did not meet his college-going needs.

School counselors at County Magnet High School recognize and appreciate the college-going aspirations of their students. Interview results suggest that County Magnet High School follows a well-established developmental approach in providing counseling programs and services to students, offering clearly defined activities at each grade level. In addition, some level of understanding the unique needs of Latino first generation college-going students and their families surfaced through interviews, especially with the school counselors. Specifically speaking about the Latino students at County Magnet High School, the sophomore school counselor described the attitudes of students and their families regarding academic pursuits and college-going in his statements, “. . . they take it seriously,” and “. . . they’re goal-oriented here.” The junior class school counselor elaborated further on how parents of students, specifically those of Latino first generation college-goers, connected attendance at County Magnet High School with the opportunity to pursue higher education. “They’re very grateful [the parents] that we’re encouraging them to go to school [college].”

The school’s academic accolades, combined with the post-secondary aspirations of the high-achieving students who ultimately gain entry to this high school, produce the college-going rates published for County Magnet High School. One of the school counselors described the college-going outlook of students who ultimately attend County Magnet High School: “The students that are coming here have the intention of going on to college after high school.” This same counselor, who works primarily with senior class students, explained that counselors address going to college as early as freshman orientation. In portraying the orientation for incoming students, this counselor described how counselors direct their efforts in response to the

pre-established college-going aspirations of the students when they enter County Magnet High School. “At that time, we talk about college. Generally, it’s almost everybody intends to move on. It’s a culture that starts, really, as freshmen. They’re motivated kids. That shows all the way through.”

Students at County Magnet High School—A Profile of Early College-Going Goals and Peer Influence

The results from this study align with the school’s mission to select students for attendance at County Magnet High School that are academically motivated, and they reveal that these students establish the goal to attend college well before entering high school. Students interviewed confirmed that a high level of motivation to attend college surfaced early in life. As one student of Cuban immigrants indicated, her decision to consider a college education arose initially in middle school: “About college? I think around fifth or sixth grade, I think I started. Maybe in fourth.” This student further elaborated, “Education has always been my number one.” Similarly, another female student of Mexican descent explained, “I’ve always wanted to go to college. There was never a doubt.”

Within the school culture at County Magnet High School, students also witness the success of upper-class students in the college-going process. In addition to the organizational structures and school counseling practices that promote college-going to all students at County Magnet High School, students themselves communicate the importance of attending college to one another. Younger students see upperclassmen’s college-going success first hand, and this serves to inspire all students to seek post-secondary pathways at four-year colleges and universities. One student clearly illustrated the influence older peers offer within the school culture at County Magnet High School: “You’ll learn from the seniors what it’s like to apply to

college. You watch them grow into these colleges. We have outside the wall just their pictures, with every college they're going to."

Organizational Structures—School Counseling Services and Supports That Encourage College-Going at County Magnet High School

School counselors at County Magnet High School acknowledge that this school population is unique based on the students' strong college-going intentions. These counselors capitalize on the students' strong motivation to attend college as early as freshman year. As a result, the school culture at County Magnet High School supports college-going for all students, and especially for its population of Latino first generation college-goers.

County Magnet High School works to create an atmosphere that supports and emphasizes college going. Two of the counselors interviewed accentuated that the goal of going to college permeates the school culture at County Magnet High School. Data from the Department of Education's annual School Report Card provide evidence of the successful outcomes of this school's strong college-going culture. For the 2013-2014 school year, 89% of graduates from County Magnet High School moved on to attend post-secondary institutions. More significant for this study is the statistic that 93.8% of students from Latino backgrounds enroll in four-year colleges and universities following graduation from County Magnet High School. The senior class counselor attributed the high percentage of students going on to attend four-year colleges and universities to this phenomenon, "We're a different type of school. We're attracting students who want to move on with their education."

Explicit College-Going Services and Supports for All Students

Students at County Magnet High School described how teachers and counselors continually emphasized college-going to all students. Interviewees conveyed that both teachers and school counselors offered information about colleges, assistance with resume and college

essay writing, and help with preparing and registering for college entrance examinations (SAT and ACT). The school counselors take students during their sophomore and junior years to an annual national college fair sponsored by the National Association for College Admissions Counseling. This event takes place in northern New Jersey and offers opportunities to meet with college admissions counselors from over 400 colleges and universities, as well as small group workshops to provide students and families with important information about college and financial aid applications. Students interviewed reported that they attended this college fair, although they also disclosed that they preferred seeking assistance with financial aid applications through one-on-one meetings with their school counselor.

In addition, all students take PSAT tests in both sophomore and junior years, with test registration fees subsidized by the school district. In preparation for college entrance examinations, the school offers test prep classes for the SAT to all students at a reduced rate from an outside provider, as well as at no cost within the school. These efforts produce positive results for graduates of County Magnet High School. The senior class school counselor reports on the typical college outcomes for students moving on to higher education, “. . . almost 70% of our students go to the top 100 most competitive schools in the country. We’re pretty fortunate.”

Goal-Setting—A First Priority in Establishing a Developmental Approach to College-Going

Students interviewed at County Magnet High School consistently expressed a goal-orientated view to attend college, a distinguishing characteristic of this population of high school students. School counselors interviewed demonstrated how they capitalize on this as early as freshman year, a factor that enhances the college-going culture at this specialized high school. The school counselor for the freshman class described how important setting long-term goals are to supporting students through the phases of the college-going process. This school counselor

works with every freshman student to set up goals, focus on time management skills, and to identify essential steps to follow toward meeting the students' stated goals. While the initial goal-setting exercise focuses on study skills and time management for each student, the school counselor's later meetings with students extend the activity to include searches into specific colleges/universities that match with the student's articulated educational and career goals.

In connecting the goal-setting exercise to seeking a college education, the freshman school counselor meets weekly with students in their English classes, and she follows up with them in one-on-one advisory sessions. Working on goal setting, this counselor gives each freshman the opportunity to focus on a single goal and a related college pathway. She specified, "I try to give them an area of choice, where you'd like to go, what you'd like to study." From there, the counselor then works with students to ". . . create a map of what college would be beneficial for you in your current situation and maybe in the future." Finally, the school counselor emphasizes an association with stepping-stones to create a pathway that underscores a series of events and experiences students will need in order to achieve their goals. The counselor uses a goal-setting worksheet, exercises focused on time management, and research on potential colleges to reinforce the "stepping stone" concept. She described the goal-setting process in detail, "They focused on that goal, and they worked ways of their current reality, how they can get to their desired reality, and we build a bridge of ways that we will get there." Criteria for admissions to specific colleges are a focus within the "stepping stone" model. The school counselor encourages the students to explore what courses they need to take in high school, the required grades and standardized test scores for admission, as well as the major areas of study offered by a specific college or university to determine how well these match each student's stated goals. In addition, the school counselor challenges students to visualize possible

challenges they may face on the way to reaching their stated goals. She further expounded, “A lot of them were able to build that bridge by identifying obstacles and also the resources that they have. It’s good to know what’s holding you back and what resources you have in order to get you there.” This counselor helps students to see that establishing goals is critical to the development of self-discipline and personal responsibility, qualities she works to instill in students in freshman year.

Moving From Goal-Setting to a College-Going Search

County Magnet High School stresses early on the connection between goal setting and seeking admissions to college. The freshman school counselor aptly describes this process, “A lot of them realize that it’s not as simple as just taking one step from graduating from County Magnet to becoming an FBI agent or becoming a physician. They realize that there’s a series of steps.” The school counselor communicated how follow-through on the goals is important to going further into the college-going process. This counselor effectively utilizes goal-setting to create a solid foundation in the college-going process by setting the stage for students to connect their aspirations for higher education to the next stages of college search and choice. “It gives them a realization that they have to do a lot of growing within themselves in order to become the eleventh grader that is able to get into the college of their choice.”

Academic Preparation and Initiating Students in the College Search

The freshman counselor at County Magnet High School portrayed the early introduction to goal-setting for students, followed by linking students’ goals to planning for the pursuit of higher education. By sophomore year, the school counselor maximizes interactions with students to communicate the academic preparation that specific colleges expect, to make students aware of the standardized testing options required of applicants, and to engage students and their parents/guardians in the search phase of the college going process.

Assuring Adequate Academic Preparation—A Further Step in the Developmental Approach to College-Going at County Magnet High School

The sophomore school counselor explained that he also meets with students in their English classes, providing detailed information regarding academic prerequisites for colleges, especially those with highly competitive standards. This counselor emphasized how he keeps students apprised of minimum academic requirements for admissions, such as the number of years to study a foreign language. Academic preparation is crucial for students to be competitive applicants to many selective four-year colleges and universities, a point that this school counselor stressed. “These kids need to know that in their sophomore year so they could pick the appropriate courses, rather than look at the minimum requirements to apply.” Thus, students at County Magnet High School receive guidance and encouragement to enroll in rigorous courses that will exceed the basic requirements for admission to four-year colleges and universities.

Providing Access to College Admissions Tests for All Students

County Magnet High School provides students with the opportunity to engage in college admissions testing as early as sophomore year. The sophomore school counselor furnishes information on SAT and ACT testing to all students. In addition, every sophomore participates in taking the PSAT and the school district pays the fee to the College Board for all students at County Magnet High School to take the test. The counselor also includes material regarding mandatory standardized testing required for admissions to colleges, as well as the aforementioned minimum academic requirements for entry to specific colleges. This latter information is crucial according to the sophomore school counselor because it allows students to plan accordingly by enrolling in appropriate high school courses to guarantee they are competitive to progress further through the college search and choice phases. Since students at

County Magnet High School seek admission to some of the country's colleges and universities that are more selective, this latter factor is significant.

To immerse students in the college search phase, the sophomore school counselor introduces all students to Naviance, an online computer program that assists students in researching colleges and careers. The counselor explained, "The kids are gonna log on and we'll do some searches and we'll try to get some kids, all the kids, to at least put some colleges in their thought bank." Furthermore, the counselor urges students to attend meetings with college admissions representatives that visit County Magnet High School or to attend school-sponsored trips to local college fairs. The reason behind this is for students to gain detailed information about the essential academic pathways required to be competitive in the college admissions process. The school counselor emphasized, "We encourage them to try to come to college visits when the colleges do come so they can sort of get an idea of what's expected of them in two years." This experience enhances the goal-setting exercise that occurs in freshman year by making students aware of the crucial academic stepping-stones they need to follow as they move further through the college-going process.

Efforts to Include Parents and Families in the College-Going Process

School counseling practices at County Magnet High School provide evidence that they offer programs and services to support students' college-going needs. Interviews with counselors also highlight how they bring parents into the school to understand the college-going process and to support their sons' and daughters' efforts to attend college. The sophomore school counselor indicated that he is increasing efforts to engage parents and guardians in their students' college search and choice decision-making. This counselor conveyed that he was planning an information session in mid-November for sophomore parents, a first-time event at

County Magnet High School. To promote the event, the school counselor intended to have students take part in creating an e-mail video to send home to parents. He also planned to provide information in both Spanish and English, especially for financial aid publications from HESAA, New Jersey's Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. This latter incentive suggests that a level of culturally responsive school counseling is in play.

The reason to include parents in the college search process is considered vital by the sophomore class counselor because it represents an effort to include parents in college-going conversations rather than relying solely on the students to convey college admissions information to their families. According to this counselor, the goal of the parent presentation was “. . . to give them the opportunity to ask some questions and give them some homework, have a list of suggested readings and books and things like that that they may want to look into.” Furthermore, the sophomore school counselor expressed a need to provide college-going knowledge to parents early on in the process, especially to those of Latino first generation college-goers. He underscored the value of “. . . making connections early on in terms of reality of what going to college consists of, financially, moving away from home.” The counselor cited family commitments, financial constraints, and separating from parents as issues associated with going to college for Latino students. He explained his interest in hosting a sophomore parent meeting as a means to get these issues resolved prior to the students' junior year.

Engaging Latino Parents in the College-Going Process

The sophomore counselor displayed an understanding of the importance of family engagement in the college-going process for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college. He also recognized the need for early intervention and support for college-going with this population. He stressed the need to engage parents and to offer them as much knowledge as possible of the college search and choice process. Acknowledging some challenges for these

students and their families, this school counselor stated a major obstacle was “. . . understanding the process, especially if they didn’t go to college themselves.” The counselor elaborated further, and highlighting the need for getting involved early on, “ The college application process starts much earlier than senior year,” and, “I think that’s their biggest hurdle—it’s not just understanding it and thinking you can sign up to go college.”

Remnants of a “Dissemination Model” of Counseling at County Magnet High School

Goal-setting, academic preparation, and engaging both students and families in the college-going process transpired throughout freshman and sophomore year at County Magnet High School. However, interviews with junior-year students and their school counselor revealed that a “dissemination” model (McDonough, 2005) of getting college-going information out to students still occurs to an extent in the upper grades at County Magnet High School. The counselor for the junior class explained that a general class meeting takes place two times during the school year, with packets detailing the college process distributed to the students during the first meeting. A parent session takes place as well, and the counselor estimated that 80% of families attend. I have a general meeting with them and hand out—I’ve developed a booklet that I give to the 11th graders, which tells them exactly what they should be doing, starting at that point, all the way through to the acceptance, usually in May of their senior year.” A student elaborated on the information distributed to students and equated it to a “road map.” “It’s called the junior packet. Basically, it said everything by each month what, by our junior year, what we should be doing and what we can do.”

While the large group meeting with parents and students both tend to involve dissemination of materials, counselors described one-on-one meetings that provided support to students and families throughout the search and choice phases of the college-going process. The junior class counselor described an “open door” policy, where students “. . . know they can come

in anytime . . .” This school counselor also pointed out that parental contact occurs often outside of the general large group meeting. She explained that prior to a parent presentation that takes place in spring of students’ junior year, ongoing conversations and communications have already transpired with parents. “By that time I have spoken to all of them on the phone—the parents—and they know they can call me anytime, and they do. They also email me. They’re not shy about doing that.”

Aside from distributing materials related to the college-going process to students and parents, efforts exist to match County Magnet High School’s students with potential colleges and universities. The junior class counselor described the use of a college matching service that she employed for the first time last year. My College Options is a free on-line provider that assists in matching students to potential colleges and scholarship opportunities based on the profiles that students complete and enter on the My College Options website. Once students fill out the My College Options Questionnaire, a student profile is established. According to that profile, colleges and other post-secondary institutions send information to students about their programs. Students and their families also receive free newsletters and articles that address common college-going questions/concerns.

The counselor distributed the My College Options questionnaire to students during one of the large group meetings; and for the initial roll out, approximately half of the students in the junior class completed and submitted a completed questionnaire. In response to the students’ entries, colleges that seem appropriately matched to students contacted them and sent information on their institution, admissions procedures, and scholarship offers. The junior class counselor found this service to be useful for introducing students to prospective colleges, and she expressed the intention to make participation in the My College Options process mandatory in

the coming year. Students interviewed referenced this service, indicating that after they filled out and submitted the My College Option Questionnaire, colleges mailed them information and letters of interest. They described a process where “. . . you have to start filling out what type of college you want to go to, if it’s gonna be a smaller school, a bigger school, or if it doesn’t matter to you the size.” One young man added, “Colleges started mailing me letters and stuff like that,” and he listed Montclair State University and The University of Notre Dame as two colleges that contacted him.

The senior class counselor further explained some aspects of his practice that reflected a “dissemination model” (McDonough, 2005). He also described a large class meeting in early senior year where students receive a booklet that outlines a month-by-month guideline covering the latter phases of the college search and choice process to follow throughout the final year of high school. The senior class counselor, however, did explain that one-on-one meetings with students take place throughout the students’ senior year, and he revealed that a majority of family members avail themselves of individual time with the school counselor when students are finalizing post-secondary applications and completing financial aid paperwork. The senior class school counselor schedules individual appointments with students at the beginning of their senior year. “I meet with them, really the first day of class. We try to find out what they want to major in, what schools they’re looking at, that type of thing.” The school counselor also works with students to assist them with completing college applications, whether they use the Common Application or a school-specific application. The senior year counselor further ascertains that students have all of the required elements to complete the college application process. “We get their transcripts in order. I make sure they’ve taken the SAT’s; and if it looks as if they need to take them again, I get them to take them in October or November of their senior year.” Students

receive a calendar with a monthly timeline of tasks they need to complete to finalize the college application process, and the school counselor provides instructions on how to write a resume. The senior class school counselor views his approach as comprehensive, and he reports that he meets individually with most students at least six to eight times during the fall semester.

Student Perspectives on Going to College, and the School Counseling Programs and Services at County Magnet High School

The organizational structures, combined with the supports and services offered to students at County Magnet High School are comprehensive and fully dedicated to fostering college-going for all students, especially for Latinos who are first in their families to attend college. Yet, interview data reveal that these students themselves assume a discernible responsibility throughout the stages of search and choice in the college-going process. Conversations with the students underscored their personal aspirations to seek higher education, while disclosing the influence of family obligation and intrinsic motivation on their perspectives of the pathway leading up to college enrollment.

College Going—A Personal and Familial Responsibility

Students interviewed emphasized how important going to college was, not just for them but also for their families. The goal to attend college prevails from an early age for these high achieving students, and it runs deep within their families. One young man explained, “At home there’s a huge, huge influence on going to college. There’s no other road. Not to say that I can’t make the decision to go somewhere else, but it’s like it’s always been embedded in me. It’s like you can be so much greater. This is the best road for you.” Students interviewed portrayed their parents and guardians in the role of “encouragers,” which aligns with research on Latino first generation college-goers (LeFerre & Shaw, 2012). One young woman clearly articulated this when paraphrasing what she often hears from members of her family, “You’re gonna go to a

great college. You're so smart. You're gonna get a great career. You're gonna know exactly what you want to do in life. You have the opportunity later in life to go to college and do what we couldn't, so seize that opportunity."

Students interviewed also described how parents supported their education and college-going aspirations as a means to achieve a "better life," one that these parents did not have access to themselves. One student elaborated and clarified this element of parental influence. "My parents, they really want me to go to college because they always say they don't want me to end up like them. Working hard time, working full time, overtime just to get themselves through. They want me to be prepared." Students expressed similar incentives for attending college—all to do better than their parents had. Across the board, interviewees expressed this impetus for higher education.

In contrast, one young man aptly summed up the concept of bringing honor to one's family as an extremely vital force behind the motivation for Latin first generation college-goers. "In terms of being a Hispanic young man and being first in my family to go to college is—it's definitely a gratifying feeling. It's definitely like I'm wearing my family's name on my sleeve." The students interviewed at County Magnet High School shared a common college-going purpose, and they conveyed a high level of support from their families to excel academically in order to be competitive in the college admissions process. Finally, these students perceived a strong sense of responsibility to their parents and guardians to seek higher education.

Students' Role in the College-Going Process and Access to College Knowledge

The consistent theme echoed in all of the interviews conducted is that while acknowledging the support of their families and the school, students interviewed assumed a significant level of responsibility throughout the phases of the college-going process. Interview data revealed that students initiated post-secondary searches, made important decisions, and

gathered information about specific steps in the college-going process, such as application procedures and deadlines, identifying college majors and seeking financial aid. These students further described seeking college-going information from school counselors; however, they also demonstrated initiative to do research on their own through a variety of resources, such as the Internet and on-line search engines (Google, College Board, and Naviance). Students describe spending free time, “. . . looking online mostly, “doing a lot of research,” while searching for colleges, possible majors to study, and careers to pursue. One female student summed it up, “Whenever I have a chance at home, I just get on my laptop and I start looking at the schools I’m interested in. I always go on their website. I look at what programs they offer and I look at things that catch my eye, or I can see and I can say, ‘Oh, I would like to do that.’ Then I write it down and then I’ll look into it.”

Recognizing Parental Needs of First-Generation College-Going Students

The trend revealed in both student and school counselor interviews involved the level of responsibility students at County Magnet High School assume in the college-going process. However, an additional influence in this phenomenon stems from the fact that their parents do not possess college knowledge and direct experience with the college admissions process. The freshman school counselor recognized this as a reason behind the students’ claiming a high degree of responsibility when searching for and selecting colleges: “There are certain things that the kids need to complete this whole college application process, and sometimes the parents just don’t have it. They don’t know it.” While the students who are first in the family to attend college portray their parents as encouragers in the college process, they concede that it is their job to take on the major tasks required to gain acceptance into a college or university. Several students echoed the central role they assume in the college-going process: “I work very much independently,” “I think, as a student, I am responsible,” and, “I think you have to do it

yourself.” Students further communicated a sense that the main responsibility in this process rested on their own shoulders with school counselors and other individuals acting as facilitators. The school counselor for the freshman class reiterated this sense of responsibility that students take on in the college search and choice phases. “A lot of responsibility goes on the kids. They are basically the ones creating their futures.”

While this school counselor did not perceive this sense of responsibility as a burden for these students, she did acknowledge that parents of students who are first in the family to attend college lack the funds of knowledge and resources to assist their sons and daughters in the college-going process. This theme is consistent in college-going literature for Latino first generation college-goers (Auerbach, 2004; Kiyama, 2010; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Stephan & Rosebaum, 2013). This school counselor characterized parents of Latino first generation college-goers as “shy” and “nervous,” and she underscored the difficulties these parents have communicating with school personnel in addition to struggling with understanding the college-going process. “. . . their parents, whether they don’t speak English or they speak poorly, they don’t understand the language, they—I find they have a hard time communicating . . .” Furthermore, this counselor reflected on the complexity of the college-going process, “Mom and Dad don’t really understand how complicated it is, because it is very complicated.” This school counselor identified specific areas that require addressing to parents of Latino students who are first in the family to attend college: “Definitely understanding the cost of college, the financial aid of college, the opportunities that you have because you’re a Latino in college.”

College Going Resources Outside of the School Counselor’s Office

The students at County Magnet High School claimed responsibility in fulfilling their aspirations to enroll in four-year colleges/universities, yet they also reported that teachers, family

members, and friends played a pivotal part in providing relevant college-going information. Students conveyed a level of trust in gathering information from people who had prior college-going experience, citing, “My cousin went to college,” or “Definitely, my homeroom teacher. She’s really into college stuff.” The students demonstrated a reliance on these trusted sources of information to gain insight into not only what one had to accomplish to apply to college, but more importantly, to envision what the college experience looks like. Discussions with relatives or teachers that shed light on college life and higher learning provided contextual references for students to consider. It seemed important for students to visualize the college experience and to gain reassurance that people they knew attended college and were successful.

Influence of Family and Peers on College Search and Choice

Students referenced aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends with prior college-going experiences as central influences. Students interviewed for this project all pointed to family and friends playing a critical role in their journey through the college search process. Students used these relationships to gain additional information about the college-going process, as well as to form an expectation of how college life plays out. One young woman, the daughter of a single parent, indicated that family members with college experience were resources to tap. “I’ll talk to my aunt, ‘cuz she went to NYU and she’s getting her master’s at Columbia, which those schools are really good and have a good reputation.” Similarly, a male student considered his uncle who is a teacher to be a solid resource, especially in the final college choice phase, “He said that if I had any questions on financial aid and all that stuff, to just worry about my grades now. When that time comes, he’ll help me step by step.” While family and friends did not supersede interactions with school counselors, students did express significant reliance on individuals outside of school when describing their support systems in the college-going process. Students emphasized the importance of personally knowing a family member or friend with prior college-

going experience. One interviewee explained in the following way: “Me personally, my mom knows a lot of people that have done it. My cousins have been to college. For me, it’s been a lot of family help and stuff.”

Teachers and School Curriculum—Impact on College-Going for Students

English teachers also proved to be highly instrumental in the college process through providing assistance with writing college essays as well as filling out college applications. Students held their English teachers in high regard, specifically when seeking help to compose their college essays. One student summarized this perspective, “I know she’s the one person I can count on to help me do my essays next year.” Students described how the English teachers infused elements of the college application process into the classroom curriculum. “My English teacher’s been giving us a lot of tips on how to apply for college. A lot of assignments have to do with choosing your college. What you’re gonna do for financial aid. The Common App, everything. We receive packets of work that is—all entails with how college works. How the application process works. They do give us a lot of information and a lot of feedback.” Finally, students reported that English teachers run SAT preparation classes at County Prep High School and that the school offers these classes to students at a nominal fee.

The unique curriculum at County Magnet High School places students in one of four specialized programs: Architecture & Design, Performing Arts, Science Lab Technologies, and Technology & Visual Arts. These pathways allow students to gain exposure to potential college majors and career pathways. Because of their enrollment in classes within one of these four areas, students work with teachers experienced in these fields in addition to those teachers they meet with in the core academic subjects. This structure brings students to discuss very specific college options with teachers. As one student described, “Maybe my teacher who teaches my

major has a sit-down with me, and we come up with a list of good colleges that have that major.”

The student elaborated, “He can help me find schools with that major, because he went to one.”

Other Factors that Influence College Search and Choice

Students highlighted college majors, proximity to home, and tuition costs as parameters they considered when conducting on-line research. Students deemed identifying a potential college major as crucial to their college and search process. They referred to seeking information on college majors and career pathways from teachers at County Magnet High School, especially from teachers in their specialized areas of study. A student summarized this approach, “I usually look up colleges that are more known for the major I want to be in, either business or law.” One student with a very specific interest in theatre design and make-up artistry stated, “I’ve looked up schools that have production and theatre majors and good courses. Courses that I know I can learn from. Even majors that incorporate make-up into what you learned already. I found a lot of schools that offer it to me. I mostly found it on my own. I do a lot of it on my own.”

In conjunction with providing insight into different college majors, teachers in their specialized program areas also set them up with internships. Elaborating on this, a female student of Mexican descent explained, “My teacher was able to notify me that there was an opportunity to be an intern for a law firm . . .” Students perceived that these internships offered opportunities to explore potential careers, a factor that students deemed as critical in helping them to decide upon potential college majors and field of study. In discussing the link between high school internships and college choice predicated on identifying a major, one male student asserted, “I have to do this in order to see because I can’t say I don’t like business if I haven’t tried it.”

For many students, the cost of attending college presented an additional factor for consideration in the search for potential colleges. A female student whose parents are separated

explained, “I look for places on cost rather than names and where they are. I am trying to stay as close to home as possible so that way I can save money...”

Students’ Views of the School Counselors’ Role in the College-Going Process

Students arrive at County Magnet High School positively inclined to seeking higher education, and their strong pre-disposition towards college-going affects their interactions with the school’s counselors throughout the college-going process. As previously stated, students assume a high level of individual responsibility throughout the college-going process. They view themselves as the sole decision-makers in the search and choice phases of the college-going process, more so than their families and school counselors. Yet, they do seek assistance and support from the school’s counselors, especially regarding understanding timelines in the application process, completing college applications and, most importantly, seeking potential resources for financial aid.

Students varied in their perceptions of how the school counselors at County Magnet High School met their needs in the college-going process. A notable discrepancy surfaced regarding student views of larger class meetings as opposed to spending one-on-one time with a school counselor. One student referred to the school counselor being vague in the large group setting, “At the end of the year, he stood up and introduced himself. Like who he was, what we can go to him for, like we go to him for recommendations for him to send our transcripts out, things like that. He didn’t really ask us ‘Oh, what questions do you have about school? Do you know what college is? Do you know how to apply? Do you know what really to look for?’ He left it on us.” Students’ views of the informational packets distributed by the school counselors also varied. One student found the information provided in counselor handouts at large class meetings useful and stated, “Basically, it said everything by each month,” and “This month you have to do this, this, and that.”

Increased Individualized Attention—A Need for Additional Support from School Counselors

While student interviews conveyed they take major responsibility in the search and choice phases of the college-going process, they did voice a need for individualized assistance with school counselors to manage the complex range of tasks required for college admissions. This evidence highlights the fact that while students at County Magnet High School are high achievers likely to gain admissions to the colleges of their choice, they still require support from their school counselors. Students at County Magnet High School take the initiative to meet individually with their counselors. Regarding one-on-one meetings, one student commented, “Oh, I think it’s great. Whenever I walk into the counselor’s office, I—it’s like, okay. I walk out and I have a bunch of weight off my shoulders, like okay, I know what I have to do, and I’m gonna do it.” Students indicated that school counselors provided assistance with college searches and that as they progressed through the process, counselors gave detailed “to-do” lists pertinent to registering for standardized SAT and ACT tests, going to college fairs and college admissions presentations, as well filling out applications for colleges.

To address students’ individual needs throughout the college-going process, the school counselors at County Magnet High School unanimously maintain that they follow an “open door” policy for students, making themselves available to assist students when needed. This “open door” practice demonstrates that school counselors exercise strategies in response to students’ needs, thus extending beyond a dissemination model of school counseling. The students interviewed concurred that they found school counselors to be accessible for meetings centered on the college-going process, “. . . the guidance counselors, whenever you need something, you can call them.”

However, both students and school counselors admitted that there are challenges to finding time for one-on-one meetings. A reason for this is the time constraints imposed by the school schedule. Due to the strong emphasis on academics at County Magnet High School, the school day is highly structured, thus restricting free time for students to meet with their school counselors. Students at County Magnet High School have demanding full day schedules, and missing class time creates a challenge. A student admitted, “I feel like there’s not that much free time for a lot of students . . .” Moreover, the sophomore school counselor conceded, “Because we’re a highly competitive high school, they don’t have free periods—I have to be really selective in when I can get them out of classes.”

Limitations imposed by the school schedule at County Magnet High School challenge students to seek alternative supports for college-going information from educational personnel other than school counselors. Constraints on time may be a factor that leads students to seek college-going information from classroom teachers or mentors whom they see every day. As one student explained, “I haven’t had a chance to talk to a guidance counselor yet, ‘cuz I don’t really have free periods during school. I’ve been talking to other of my teachers that I am really close with while I intern or to my homeroom teacher.” Students express the need to obtain college-going information, and they enhance their opportunities to gain college-going information by accessing the teachers with whom they have constant contact. In essence, this practice creates a scenario where teachers become a primary school-based source of general college-going information and support for the students at County Magnet High School, rather than the responsibility falling solely on the school’s counselors.

Although students relied on teachers for general college-going information and support, they did identify a preference for more one-on-one time with their school counselors for both

themselves and their parents or guardians. Students saw a need for gaining more detailed information about the college admissions process, especially regarding admissions criteria, required standardized testing, and resources for financial aid. A female student articulated the need for more time with school counselors. “I wish they would give us a set time,” and she reasoned, “Really, having an open space for all of us to talk would really help me figure out—okay, I need to do this. I didn’t even think about that.” One young man specified, “Maybe more information about financial aid, and also about the ACT.” He continued, “I’ve heard a lot about how some students take the SAT and the ACT. I really don’t know what’s the difference between the two; yeah, stuff like that, knowledge of tests and knowledge of financial aid, and especially what they do and how they help you with your college experience.” Expanding on the need for added details about financial aid, another female student stated, “I’m not very sure how it works. Yeah. In term of tuition and books, what’s the price range I should be looking at, and how can I manage that with my family and my expenses?” Finally, a student voiced the importance of more individual meetings with parents and guardians as a means of enriching conversations at home about the college-going process. “If they (parents/guardian) knew more specifically, they would probably help me out more, look into colleges themselves, and ask me if I was interested in the college they had researched and stuff like that.”

Nevertheless, interview data revealed that students viewed the school’s counselors at County Magnet High School as valued resources in the college-going process. Responses were positive, such as, “I guess they’re really open about things, you can just talk to them about anything you need.” Another student viewed meeting with the school counselor as reassuring. “I’ll be going crazy for a week, but the second you walk into that room, it’s like, ‘You need to do this, this,’ and he lists it down, and it’s simple. You just need to take the time.”

The overall picture derived from student interviews points to the multiple ways in which these students viewed the school counselors' role in assisting them through the college-going process. Interview data showed that students accessed the school counselors for many different facets of the college search and choice process. Based on responses from the students interviewed, individual meetings with school counselors entailed a range of topics, from offering information regarding college majors, standardized testing required for college admissions, and application deadlines to easing students' anxiety about college decision-making. Regarding the college admissions process, a male interviewee described, "After understanding what I wanted to do, I came to the guidance counselor and said, 'Look, this is what I want to do. How can I do it? What scores do I need?'" On a more basic level, a female student added, "My counselor has been giving me pamphlets about the SAT's . . ." In contrast, an interviewee of Cuban origin who lives with a single parent offered a view of the school counselor as a source of emotional support, stating, "It's just I think the idea of getting everything done, it's what's stressing me out at this point." Students' concepts of the role that school counselors should play in the college-going process do not fit one model. Rather, based on student responses, it is evident that each student's individual circumstances dictate how they approach the school counselor for college-going information. Therefore, students view school counselors as serving a variety of functions.

Financial Aid and Scholarships for College—A Top Priority

Unequivocally, the ten students interviewed at County Magnet High School all referenced the importance of obtaining financial aid to defray the cost of college attendance. Every interviewee brought up the topic of financial aid, whether it appeared central in conversations with parents/guardians regarding college-going, or in what students stated as a need for school counselors to improve in providing information and resources. One student characterized discussions at home, "It's usually just money. It always comes back to money."

Two students reiterated the importance of finding money for college because they came from single-parent homes. More importantly, students highlighted financial aid as the one area where school counselors could be more helpful in providing better information and support. A student summed up this sentiment by stating this need, “I definitely feel more information on how to get financial aid and how to apply for that.”

Students expressed a need for financial aid information and resources from a variety of different angles, depending on their unique personal backgrounds. The need for financial aid to attend college is significant for students at County Magnet High School, given that state data indicate that 39.4% of the school’s population meets criteria to identify with being as economically disadvantaged (School Performance Report, 2013-2014). Therefore, seeking scholarships for college was a topic of concern for all students interviewed, along with the potential for eligibility for EOF (Educational Opportunity Fund), a State program that provides academic and financial assistance to students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled at participating institutions of higher education. A female interviewee of Mexican immigrants referenced a need to learn about her chances to earn scholarships, and she wanted the school counselor to assist in the process, “. . . what scholarships should I apply for, what fits, what gives me a better chance to obtain that scholarship?” This student’s conversations at home with her parents further reiterated the need to obtain information about scholarships from school counselors, “. . . my mom usually asks me about scholarships, if I’m gonna be doing that, or what scholarships have I looked at.”

Other students described their unique circumstances, such as coming from single-family homes, having to contribute to the family finances, and whether or not their family’s income would meet EOF criteria for need-based aid. A young woman interviewed summed up one of

these concerns, “I’ve been looking into what aid they give because, of course, college is very expensive and I come from a single-parent home.” Another female interviewee’s story underscores the complexity of issues students and families face when seeking financial aid. She explained, “Financial aid is very tricky for me because my parents are separated and because they’re both handicapped.” She continued, “They file their taxes together, but my mom still gets food stamps and we don’t really have an income.” The uncertainty surrounding eligibility for financial aid for college is stressful for students with these unique and trying circumstances, as this young woman wondered, “It’s just like, oh my god, I’m not gonna be able to afford this,” and “I don’t even know where to begin with student loans and admissions.”

School counselors acknowledged the significance of addressing financial aid essentials for students and their families, and they concurred that this was one of the more challenging aspects in the college-going process for students who are first in the family to attend post-secondary institutions. The sophomore class counselor recognized the critical nature of addressing financial aid early on in the college-going process. “Kids have the goal. They know what they want, and they see the school that they want. Finances is always an issue.” In response to this need, the senior year counselor at County Magnet High School does hold FAFSA workshops for students and their families, as well as provide financial aid information translated into Spanish from Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA). Counselors offer senior year students the opportunity to meet individually with them to go over financial aid applications and to fill out required paperwork for scholarships.

Students varied in their involvement with school counselors to obtain assistance with financial aid applications. One student found that information regarding financial aid was lacking, and she commented, “I feel like they should talk more about the fee waivers for SATs

and college applications.” In contrast, a male interviewee offered a positive assessment, “With their help and how they set up college meetings and things, it helps me out.” On another level, the sophomore school counselor pointed out that student and family immigration status poses a challenge for initiating discussions surrounding financial aid. “Some of them are afraid to ask questions or don’t wanna put it out there that they’re not a citizen or their parents may not be. Lots of times that’s even detrimental to them ‘cause we have some resources that can help.”

Promoting a College-Going Culture—An Essential Characteristic of County Magnet High School

The most distinctive aspect of County Magnet High School centers on its school culture; and at this specialized public high school of choice, support for college-going is deeply ingrained. Because County Magnet’s approach to college-going displays evidence of a developmental approach to the process, discussions of college begin as early as freshman orientation. “It’s a culture that starts, really, as freshmen. They’re motivated kids. That shows all the way through.” From their entry to County Magnet High School to graduation, students are encouraged to strive to attend colleges and universities by their peers, teachers, and school counselors. The freshman class counselor describes, “It’s the whole culture of this school. The culture, the atmosphere, the environment here, it gives the student, from the first second they walk in, that idea that this is more of a college setting, more of a college mentality.” This freshman counselor further indicates that the college-going culture extends throughout all levels of County Magnet High School. “It’s not just coming down from administration. It travels down. It trickles down. Everybody has the same mentality.” While the counselors contend that the college-gong culture at County Magnet High School is critical to their practice and to the impressive percentages of students’ acceptances to four-year colleges and universities, it is significant to note that the students themselves sense this important message of college-going

within the school. One female student underscored the influence and support for college-going that permeates the atmosphere at County Magnet High School. “It just flows in the natural harmony of the school.”

Data collected from the interviews with the students and school counselors at County Magnet High School underscore the importance of establishing a college-going culture for all students. This is especially important to promote college-going for students in underserved communities and underrepresented populations, such as Latinos who are first in the family going to college. As the United States becomes increasingly more diverse, high schools face the challenge of promoting higher education for all students. County Magnet High School ascribes to this practice in its college-going culture and through the programs and services it offers to students. Academic rigor of classes, school-funded participation, and preparation for, college standardized testing, and the specialized pathways of study that students choose establish a trajectory for all students that ultimately lead to attendance at four-year colleges and universities. The findings from interview data collected for this study at County Magnet High School reinforce the value of college-going cultures, the development of early college-going aspirations, and the provision of individualized school counseling for students throughout all phases of the college-going process.

In addition, data collected from interviews at County Magnet High School provide evidence that increased efforts to support college-going for students still exist, especially for those students who are first in the family to attend college. While a high school’s strong college-going culture is effective in producing positive outcomes for post-secondary enrollment, work still needs to be done in order to improve college knowledge for students and families, as well as to offer broader access to financial resources so that families can cover the cost of college

attendance. Emphasis on including families in the college-going journey and, more critically, in finding access to financial aid, further suggest areas for school policies and practices to strengthen as educational professionals strive to support college-going for all students, especially for first-generation college-goers.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Census data document the growing number of children of Latino immigrants in the United States and more specifically the increasing prevalence of students from this subgroup in the country's public schools (Fry & Lopez, 2013; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Coupled with this demographic phenomenon, growing numbers of Latino students face challenges in moving on to four-year colleges and universities as opposed to two-year institutions (Collins, 2011; Fry & Lopez, 2012; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Explanations for the discrepancy in four-year college enrollment with non-Latino peers include factors such as low educational aspirations, inadequate academic preparation in high school, language barriers, undocumented citizen status, and limited access to college-going information and financial resources (Baum & Flores, 2011; Conger & Chellman, 2011; Engle, 2007; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Lopez, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Staklis & Horn, 2012; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Because the number of Latinos in the United States is anticipated to exceed that of other demographic subgroups by 2050 (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004), this study focused on understanding the experiences of first generation college-going students of Latino descent. The study starts from the premise that educators have a professional and moral responsibility to provide college-going resources for all students and that Latinos who are first in their families to enroll in college may require specific guidance. Therefore, this case study sought to generate new knowledge about how to support Latino first generation college-goers and their families in order to improve their current application and enrollment patterns for entry into institutions of higher learning beyond secondary school.

To explore the pathways that Latino first-generation students pursue on the way to a college education, this study concentrated on the search and choice phases of the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) for students in this population who attend County Magnet High School, a selective urban school of choice. Furthermore, this research was informed by a perspective that views school culture, or “organizational habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977; McDonough, 1997), and culturally responsive school counseling (Banks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 1999) as important influences that can either augment or impede students’ searches and choices of eventual college pathways. Electing to focus on these two phases in the college-going process provided an opportunity to explore the role of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) theoretical model of the stages in the college-going process when applied to the school counseling practices and the school culture displayed at the selected research site.

County Magnet High School—Its Students and School Culture

A Profile for Latino Students Who Are First in the Family to Attend College

Consistent with previous research on college-going trends for Latinos who are first in the family to attend college, students at County Magnet High School viewed higher education as a pathway to a “better life” (Baum & Flores, 2011; Bermeo & O’Brien, 2006; Borrero, 2011; Ceja, 2004; Engle, Erisman, & Looney, 2007; Kiyama, 2010). These students also expressed early aspirations for pursuing for higher education, specifically for attending a four-year college/university (Auerbach, 2004; Calaff, 2008; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Students identified parents, family members, and peers as influential “encouragers” throughout the search and choice phases of the college-going process, another trend prominent in college-going literature for this demographic group (Auerbach, 2006; Ceja, 2004; Kiyama, 2010; LeFerre & Shaw, 2012). Finally, the post-secondary outcomes reported by County Magnet High School

affirm the positive results of a strong college-going culture cited in research findings that link school culture and college enrollment trends for students who are first in the family to attend college (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2009; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; McDonough, 1997).

College-Going Needs of First-Generation College-Goers

Students at County Magnet High School possess an academic edge and strong predispositions to attend four-year colleges and universities. At the same time their interview responses revealed gaps in college knowledge and social capital previously found among this population subgroup (Borero, 2011; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Kiyama, 2010; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). The students interviewed at County Magnet High School indicated that conversations at home with parents/guardians about going to college predominantly involved support for seeking higher education. These students also reported that home discussions did not include concrete details about steps in the process, such as standardized testing, completing applications and seeking financial aid, another factor often cited in prior research for Latino first generation college-goers (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2012). Finally, student interviews communicated a tendency for parents to prefer keeping their students closer to home as a means to lessen the financial burden of college tuition, another trend consistent with college-going literature for Latino first-generation college-goers (Auerbach, 2006; Marin & Marin, 1991; Martinez, 2013; Tornatzky, Lee, Mejia, & Tarant, 2003).

The Role of School Culture and “Habitus”

Elements of a College-Going School Culture

Early on, this study defined a strong college-going culture as one in which educational professionals engaged in a collective effort to provide all students and their parent/guardians with the resources and supports to prepare them for pathways leading to higher education (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2009; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; McDonough, 1997). A strong college-going culture addresses the need to provide detailed information to first-generation college-goers, especially when parents/guardians lack resources and knowledge about the college-going process (Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; McDonough, 2005). County Magnet High School students’ responses affirmed the need for more explicit college-going information. Students relied on school personnel, primarily school counselors, during the search and choice phases of the college-going process to navigate successfully through required standardized admissions tests, application procedures/deadlines, and most importantly, resources for seeking financial aid. This finding was in line with prior literature on college-going trends for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college.

Consistent with previous studies of Latinos and college choice, students at County Magnet High School required specific guidance to augment the limited experience their families had with the college-going process (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Calaff, 2008; Kiyama, 2010; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; McClafferty & McDonough, 2000; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). Scheduled meetings with school counselors, a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, goal-oriented exercises, as well as access to standardized college admissions tests and financial aid applications, predominate in the programs/services school counselors at County Magnet High School offer to all students. These components form the basis of the college-going culture at

County Magnet High School and point to the types of services and opportunities that many schools could or should offer to students, particularly for those who are first in the family to attend college.

Organizational “Habitus” Underlying School Culture

McDonough (1997) developed the concept of “habitus” from an original social construct of the social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1977). “Habitus” involves a social group’s collective thoughts, feelings and actions, which intersect to ingrain habits, skills, and dispositions of a group’s members because of their shared experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). Broader than its college-going school culture, County Magnet High School displays an organizational “habitus” that facilitates the search and choice phases of the college-going process for all students and specifically for those who are first in the family to attend college. This concept of “habitus” differentiates County Magnet High School, extending the exemplar of a college-going culture to a more extensive model, one that demonstrates all members of the school community, rather than only the school counselors, can play a role in college-going outcomes for students.

A more pervasive paradigm, “habitus” aptly describes the nature of relationships and organizational structures of an organization, in this case County Magnet High School. The school’s overarching mission, coupled with the interactions amongst teachers, school counselors and students, all converge to create a cohesive sense of purpose dedicated to college-going. Within this “habitus,” one can take away from County Magnet High School that there is a unifying identity ingrained in its population. This identity directly links a high school experience for students that propel them towards enrollment in higher education and almost exclusively into highly selective four-year colleges and universities. Students enter County Magnet High School with strong aspirations to attend college, and both school personnel and school counselors nurture these aspirations. Beginning with goal-setting exercises described by the freshman

counselor to the support of teachers and school counselors in completing college applications and essays, the sense is that an “all in” effort transpires at County Magnet High School, a factor that positively influences students’ going on to attend four-year colleges and universities. The college-going “habitus” displayed at County Magnet High School is an example that other high schools can follow in seeking to improve college-going trends for students who are Latino and first in the family to attend college.

Lessons Learned—Contributing to Positive College-Going Outcomes

This study explored what made County Magnet High School different and how this school’s approach to educating students results in positive college-going outcomes for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college. Academic preparation in high school, students and families’ expectations for college-going to involve four-year versus two-year institutions, as well as the influence of significant adults on students’ college decision-making, are three distinctive features that surfaced in interviews at County Magnet High School. While early college-going aspirations proved to be a critical component in the successful post-high school outcomes for graduates of County Magnet High School, rigorous academic preparation and the influence of adults and peers on students’ college-going choices were also significant.

The Significance of a Rigorous High School Curriculum for All Students

Educational literature cites inadequate academic preparation as an explanatory factor for the lower college-going trends for Latino students, leaving this population subgroup lacking the required prerequisites to become competitive or admissible to four-year colleges and universities (Engle, 2007; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Horn & Nunez, 2002; Roderick et al., 2008; Swail Cabrera, & Lee, 2004; Taggart & Crisp, 2011; Gonzalez, 2012). One specific example highlighted in college-going literature is the significance of enrollment in higher-level

mathematics courses (Gonzalez, 2012; Horn & Nunez, 2002; Engle, 2007; Roderick et al., 2008). The curriculum at County Magnet High School is rigorous, providing students with opportunities to engage in higher-level mathematics classes, as well as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.

An implication derived from the findings in this study is for schools to promote similar demanding academic pathways for students, rather than limit options for scholastic advancement. One way to achieve this is to establish curriculum standards for high school that require all students to enroll in math classes, including at least Algebra II or its equivalent. Beginning in 2009, states across the country moved to include Algebra II or its equivalent in high school graduation requirements. To date, 26 states have added Algebra II to their graduation requirements (Education Commissions of the States, 2016), despite concerns that higher math requirements could lead to higher school dropout rates (Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Nomi & Raudenbush, 2016).

Another suggested policy is for schools to offer unrestricted access to all students who seek to enroll in higher-level Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, encouraging students to enroll in these classes and providing fee waivers for Advanced Placement tests to low-income students. While County Magnet's demanding curriculum is commensurate with the predetermined high academic achievements of its students, all schools should strive to challenge their students academically, thereby mitigating educational obstacles of low-income minority status, specifically for students who will be the first in their families to attend college. Research highlights that while access to Advanced Placement classes in high schools may be offered to all students, Latino and minority students still lag behind in enrollment to these classes (Superville, 2016; Walker & Pearsall, 2012). In addition to unrestricted access to

Advanced Placement courses, a recommendation for policy/practice is for school counselors to work with teachers to identify high achieving Latino students, and to intensify communications with students and parents/guardians about the course content of Advanced Placement classes and the benefits of taking such classes in the college admissions process. Furthermore, in addition to school policies that provide fee waivers to subsidize the cost of Advanced Placement tests for all students, district policies to pay Advanced Placement test fees in full could increase opportunities for students to enroll in the more demanding Advanced Placement courses.

Adults and Peers as Highly Influential in College-Going Decisions

The crucial input of parents/guardians, family members, and peers stand out in the literature focused on Latino students who are first in the family to attend college (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Calaff, 2008; Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; McDonough, 2005; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013), and this research netted similar data from interviewees. However, students at County Magnet High School identified a wider range of influential adults who play a significant part in their college-going decisions, specifically at the search and choice phases of the process. School counselors certainly bore a majority of responsibility in the college-going process for all students, and students expressed the desire for more one-on-one time with their counselors, which align with prior findings focused on student-counselor relationships and interactions (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). However, students at County Magnet High School additionally reported that teachers and mentors for their internships furnished vital information and assistance with college essay writing, understanding college majors, and suggestions for college pathways to follow based on students' passions and interests. This tendency broadens the range of adult sources that students can seek for college-going guidance, extending influential adults to potentially include members of the entire school community (Borrero, 2011).

Culturally Responsive Counseling

County Magnet High School possesses a strong college-going school culture or “organizational habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977; McDonough, 1997), and a shared sense of purpose to provide a rigorous college preparatory program prevails. Another goal of this research, however, was to determine whether, and how, school counselors engaged in culturally responsive counseling (Banks, 1996; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Nieto, 1999) when supporting the college-going needs of Latino students who were first in the family to attend college. Culturally responsive school counseling involves full acknowledgment of the unique needs of diverse populations, in this case that of Latino first generation college-goers and their families (Lee, 2001). Furthermore, it requires education professionals, in this case school counselors, to incorporate families into the supports and services they offer.

School Counselor Practices at County Magnet High School

Literature on Latino students who are first in the family to attend college emphasizes the need for educational professionals to augment college-going information for students as they enter the search and choice phases of the college-going process. This is especially critical for students whose families have limited experience with the college-going process (Aronson, 2003; Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; McDonough, 2005; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). The major responsibility often falls on school counselors, therefore, to provide this information, specifically regarding the application process, application deadlines, college admissions’ standardized tests, and financial aid.

Evidence on college counseling practices at County Magnet High School did not indicate that culturally responsive pedagogy alone factored into college-going supports for first generation Latino students. This conclusion stems from the information students and school counselors conveyed specifically about how the school communicates college-going information

to students and their families. Counselors appeared to engage in some aspects of a “dissemination” model (McDonough, 1997) when providing college-going information at large group meetings for students and parents, although they did not rely solely on this strategy. Several of the school counselors interviewed did cite their awareness of some of the specific obstacles for college-going Latino students, including parents/guardians’ limited college knowledge of parents/guardians, challenges of immigration status, language barriers, and concerns regarding how to finance higher education. However, school counselors provided college-going supports and services geared to all students at County Magnet High School rather than specifically tailoring their approach to meet the needs of Latino students who are first in the family to attend college.

Nevertheless, the school’s culture and “habitus” at County Magnet High School aligned with characteristics that existing literature associates with positive college-going trends (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; McClafferty & McDonough, 2000; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). County Magnet High School displayed a districtwide commitment to college-going for all students, and school counselors responded to individual inquiries of students and parents throughout the search and choice phases of the college-going process. This finding is significant because it points to the value of integrating college-going supports into multiple aspects of students’ high school experiences rather than isolating these responsibilities solely within the domain of school counselors.

The collective assumption of teachers, school counselors, students and parents at County Magnet High School positively embraced and anticipated college enrollment, despite potential obstacles in the college-going process. Lee (2001) and Smith-Adock, Daniels, Lee, Villaba, & Arce (2006) highlight the importance of rejecting a deficit model analyzing college-going for

first generation Latino students, which emphasizes the negative influence of families' lack of college knowledge and resources to support their children in this process. By virtue of County Magnet High School's strong college-going culture and "habitus, these challenges did not pose a significant obstruction to students seeking to attend four-year colleges and universities. Practices and policies at County Magnet High School, combined with students' academic motivation and achievement at the outset of entering high school, set the stage for the strong college-going culture and the positive college enrollment outcomes observed in this research. The educational professionals at this site provided the same resources throughout the search and choice phases (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) of the college-going process to all students, a structure that benefitted the entire school community, including students of Latino origin. This tactic, while not exclusively targeting Latino students, aligns fully with the literature that promotes culturally responsive pedagogy for school counselors, because County Magnet's practices and policies engage all students in fulfilling their college-going aspirations (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, & Thomas, 2009; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Counselors address individual needs of students and their families as they navigate the college-going process. Thus, school counselors employ responsive pedagogy on a case-by-case basis as opposed to instituting practices specifically designed solely for students who are Latino and first in the family to attend college.

Supporting College-Going for Latino Students Who Are First in the Family to Attend College

As the number of Latino students in the nation's public schools continues to grow, there will be a continued focus on this population's trajectory into higher learning. Organizations such as the Pew Hispanic Center (Fry, 2011) document the rise in college attendance for Latino students over the past several decades. Data show a steady increase from 13% of Latinos enrolled in college in 1972 to 27% in 2009 to 32% in 2010. The challenge to all educators and

school counselors is to support this positive trend so that the number of Latino students entering colleges/universities remains proportionate to the rise of these students in the country's high schools. Although data indicate increases in Latino students enrolling in post-secondary institutions, other areas for future study warrant further examination. Documented trends for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college still expose lower college completion rates, a continued preference for two-year versus four-year post-secondary institutions, and under-matching of college choices even for students who are academically competitive for more selective colleges/universities (Choy, 2001; George & Aronson, 2003; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Martinez & Cervera, 2012; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Reyes & Nora, 2102; Staklis & Horn, 2012) . While these topics of concern do not comprise the centerpiece of this research, they remain critical to future investigations aimed at promoting increased college enrollment/completion for the country's growing Latino population.

Policy Recommendations

Policies that incorporate rigorous academics for all students in high school stood out as one quality that predominated at County Magnet High School. It remains critical to supporting college-going pathways for all students, but especially for those who are Latino first-generation college-goers. Open access to higher-level mathematics classes, as well as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, provide students with opportunities to engage in critical, higher order thinking while enhancing the competitive edge in the college application process.

Local school districts and state educational agencies can facilitate the call for increasing academic rigor in high schools by increasing requirements for graduation, specifically by incorporating advanced algebra, or its equivalent, into the sequence of math courses for all students. In addition, to foster college-going cultures, school districts can require all students to participate in taking standardized tests for college admissions, a factor linked to increased

enrollment in colleges/universities (George & Aronson, 2003; Gonzalez, 2012). School districts can institute policies that require all students to take PSAT, SAT and/or ACT tests while in high school and fund the cost of test fees to guarantee full participation. Finally, to encourage enrollment in academically challenging Advanced Placement courses, local districts can adopt open enrollment policies for all students seeking to take on the challenge of these demanding college-level classes. While it may require cost allocations on the part of local school districts, paying fees for students to take PSAT tests and end-of-year Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate examinations, or at least to provide fee waivers for low-income students, would offer high achieving students the opportunity to earn college credits by achieving passing scores on these exams.

For students who require academic support to succeed in challenging classes, local school districts can enlist honors level students as peer tutors. Peers have been identified as influential; thereby, they can be of service to other students needing assistance with studying or competing assignments (Perez & McDonough, 2008; Perna & Titus, 2005; Ceja, 2006). Peer tutors can be particularly effective in assisting students who need help in handling more rigorous curriculum offerings in mathematics. Students who offer their time as peer tutors could be compensated with credits for community service as a distinction that could augment their own college resumes.

Improving School Counseling Practices for Latino Students and Their Families

Early Exposure to College-Going—The Predisposition Phase and Middle-School Counseling Practices

Data from County Magnet High School offer several examples of how Latino students who are first in their family to attend college can best be supported throughout the search and choice phases of the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). County Magnet High

School's approach to college-going suggests a developmental approach to this process and highlights the need to encourage college-going from an early age, even before students reach high school. While the importance of a strong college-going culture in high schools cannot be overstated, early college-going aspiration is another significant factor found to predict actual applications to four-year colleges/universities (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Ceja, 2004; Choy, 2001; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009; Martinez & Cervera, 2010).

Nurturing college and career goals for all students as early as middle school appears critical to the predisposition phase in the college-going process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students at County Magnet High School expressed that they held positive aspirations to attend college, proof that the predisposition phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) provides an essential foundation to latter search and choice in the college-going process. Therefore, school counselors in middle schools can be effective in creating groundwork for college aspirations in students before they enter high school.

School counseling programs and services that incorporate college and career readiness for students in middle schools is one practice to consider in addressing the needs of students who will be first in their families to attend college. Middle school teachers and counselors can work together to engage students in completing personality, learning, and interest surveys. Cultivating knowledge in students about their academic interests and strengths offers a means by which to form a foundation for students to begin a college and career search. Resources, such as the National Association for College Admissions Counselors, provide curriculum programs that can foster college-going to middle-school students.

Educator Training for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and A Unified College-Going School Culture

Another implication that emerged from this study relates to the role of school counselors and the importance of culturally responsive counseling to the college-going patterns of students who are first in the family to attend college. Data from County Magnet High School reveal that counselors alone do not bear the responsibility of creating positive college-going outcomes for students. Rather, a collective effort of all educational professionals, as well as a unified expectation for college-going, is vital to convey to students as a whole. This speaks to a need for school leaders to foster school cultures that promote college-going for all students and for improved education and professional development for educators to understand the importance of creating an organizational habitus in schools that support college-going for all students. This effort would expand the responsibility of fostering college-going to all school professionals, rather than isolating the task of college-going outcomes solely on the shoulders of school counselors.

To achieve improved college-going cultures in the school setting, administrators, school counselors, and classroom teachers require training in creating college-going school cultures and in developing pedagogical approaches that address the increasing diverse needs of students attending the nation's high schools. Many educational programs offered to aspiring educators at the college level include coursework geared to understand diversity in the nation's increasingly pluralistic society. These courses could enhance knowledge of first-generation college-goers' needs by specifically addressing literature and statistics on enrollment in higher education for this population. Furthermore, district level professional development can be ongoing as a means to explore strategies for promoting college-going for all students and for tracking post-secondary

outcomes. The College Board provides resources and avenues for professional development focused on improving college-going for Latino students. In addition to holding annual conferences for ten years entitled *Prepare: Educating Latinos for the Future of America*, The College Board provides on-line training courses and college-going materials in Spanish to utilize with Latino students and parents. School district administrators, teachers, and counselors could benefit from broadening their understanding of college-going needs of diverse learners and specifically for the growing number of Latino students and their families. While this information does not emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy, it can increase awareness and sensitivity in educational professionals dedicated to supporting school cultures that can take on an organizational habitus similar to that witnessed at County Magnet High School, one that has college-going ingrained within for all students.

Increased Counselor Interactions and Financial Aid Resources for Students and Families

Finally, County Magnet High School's example provides evidence to support the need for educational practices that assist students and their families throughout all phases in the college-going process. Even with County Magnet High School's distinctive outcomes for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college, the students still conveyed unmet needs in the college-going process. The most significant needs expressed by students interviewed involved the importance of having more one-on-one time with school counselors, the value of better communication and involvement of parents/guardians with school counselors, and the overwhelming necessity to gain better access to financial aid resources to defray the cost of attending colleges and universities. Correspondence from schools in the families' native Spanish language is recommended as a practice to improve communications with families who face language barriers. In addition, providing translators for parent/guardian meetings can facilitate a positive flow of information essential in the college-going process, specifically regarding

admissions procedures, application deadlines, college entrance requirements, standardized test schedules, and financial aid resources.

Obtaining Financial Aid for College—A Pressing Priority

Obtaining financial aid was the single most important need voiced by students at County Magnet High School. This is an area where school counselors can step up and provide information and avenues for Latino students and their families to seek funds to pay for college attendance. Introduction to the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and FAFSA completion nights conducted in Spanish are one strategy to employ in helping families with this financial aid process. However, prior to completing the FAFSA, Latino students and families can benefit from making connections to colleges and universities that seek to assist first generation college-goers and who also offer scholarship opportunities for this population. The Center for Student Opportunity is an organization that highlights colleges who offer support to students who are first in the family to attend college. Their website lists colleges that provide students with opportunities to visit college campuses through subsidized fly-in, summer, and outreach programs. In addition, organizations such as the Posse Foundation, which has locations in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, and Washington, DC, links students with similar peers (ergo, a “posse”) to provide mentoring and academic support. To address the cost of attending college, Questbridge extends full-tuition scholarships through partner colleges to help academically talented low-income students gain the financial resources needed for college attendance. Finally, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) has its own scholarship program in addition to links to other programs that focus their monies on Latino students, especially those who are first in the family seeking to attend college.

Bringing in the Community

Literature on Latino students who are first in the family to attend college highlights the importance of *consejos*, which involve gaining information through discussions with family members, peers, and influential adults throughout the college-going process (Ceja, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; LeFerre & Shaw, 2012; McCarron & Inkelas; 2006). Furthermore, college-going research centered on Latino first generation college-goers reiterates the allegiance and reliance these students place on their family members and peers before making college-going decisions. This highly influential factor leads to a recommendation to utilize community members as role models to encourage college going. In school districts, older students can share their college-going experiences with students in the middle schools, showing them how to conduct a college search and informing them of initial steps in the college-going process. Alumni currently enrolled in colleges or universities can also revisit their high schools and tell about their experiences and successes. Community parents whose students currently attend college can also share their experiences with other families. Bringing these parents together may help them to understand the steps in the college application and financial aid process, as well as ways to help students transition successfully into college life. If students and families sense that college attendance is feasible for members of their community, such personal connections may help to reinforce the importance of fulfilling the college search and choice process by ultimately enrolling in a post-secondary institution. Finally, tapping adult community members who have completed college, or whose children have, can serve as a means to inspire students to do the same, especially if students regard these individuals as leaders in the community. Outreach programs, parent/school associations, and alumni organizations are channels to explore in creating opportunities to engage community members effectively in a school's college-going culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings derived in this qualitative case study offer prospects for future research dedicated to improving higher education enrollment for Latino first generation college-goers. Most importantly, because this research took place at a select magnet school of choice with a student body characterized by high academic achievement, it is necessary to explore how recommended policies and practices would play out in a more traditional public high school setting. The magnitude of developing strong school cultures and a “habitus” dedicated to college-going, however, cannot be underestimated. Future studies that concentrate on educational programs for aspiring school counselors and school leaders could explore how well these individuals are prepared to address the diverse needs of students currently attending public schools across the United States. Furthermore, attempts to identify and perhaps quantify the level of school culture displayed by school administrators and counselors and correlate it to the college-going outcomes reported by a specific high school could also be explored.

Future research aimed at exploring college-going trends for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college would also benefit students by further exploring the role that parents/guardians play in this process. Both literature and the data derived in this study indicate that parents/guardians are pivotal in the decisions Latino students make regarding higher education. Thus, a better understanding of how to cultivate improved input for these adults could provide crucial information on how to bring parents/guardians into the process. Research focused in this area could additionally benefit from studies that measure the effectiveness of employing outreach programs to parents/guardians, as well as other influential adults in Latino communities, in determining the impact their involvement might play in influencing college-going choices of Latino students.

Research into how to improve financial aid resources for Latino students and offset the cost of college attendance are vital, as are studies of how to assist Latino student in their transition to college life. Access to increased financial aid can allow students to broaden their final college choices. In addition, creating programs to create positive transitions to college can address social/cultural adjustments that may arise, especially if students move away from their families. Both financial and transition research have the potential to improve completion rates for Latino students once they enroll in a college/university.

Broad Implications—Collective Efforts to Improve College-Going Trends of Latino Students Who are First in the Family to Attend College

Despite the post-secondary success of students at County Magnet High School, this case study suggests that increasing access to college knowledge, social capital, and financial aid resources are three main areas that educators and school counselors must address in creating college-going cultures for all students but particularly for Latino students who are first in the family to attend college. Additionally, a collaborative effort amongst educators, school counselors, students, and families is critical to creating a “habitus,” one that is inclusive of all stakeholders and focused on supporting college-going for all students.

The data collected revealed specific college-going needs, even among a group of students well positioned for entry into competitive four-year colleges and universities. Detailed information about the college admissions process and, most importantly, seeking access to resources for financial aid to defray the cost of college attendance stood out as significant, even for students at County Magnet High School. These students also cited that while they drew on the assistance of teachers and school counselors, they took the initiative to seek information and guidance, rather than having it provided to them.

As a case study site, County Magnet High School sets an example of how educational professionals and school counselors can create a culture and “habitus” to support college-going for all students and specifically for Latinos who are first in their families to attend college. While this research concedes that the students attending County Magnet High School are academically advanced and predisposed to higher education enrollment, their journeys offer insight for other educational professionals dedicated to improving college-going trends for this population. This research also acknowledges, however, that an over-emphasis on enrollment in solely four-year colleges may not address the post-secondary needs of all students in a traditional high school setting. The pursuit of higher education is essential in order to meet social and economic demands prevalent in the United States, and schools need to be responsive to the varying needs of all students. Therefore, when creating a school culture and “habitus” that supports higher education, the needs of students who might want something other than a four-year college degree should be included. Increasing college-going rates of Latino first generation college-goers is a priority, but it cannot be at the expense of marginalizing students seeking alternate pathways following graduation from high school.

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Appendix I
Interview Questions-Students

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your plans for after you graduate from high school?
2. What have you done up to this point to learn about your post-high school options?
3. What can you tell me about how, if at all, you have worked with your school guidance counselor on your post-high school options?
4. How do you get information about colleges, the college application process, and financial aid for college?
5. How do you get information about college admissions tests, such as the SAT and ACT?
6. What do you think about the information available about colleges, financial aid, and the application process?
7. What additional information would you like? What is missing?
8. What events regarding college going and post high school planning does the school counseling department offer? How often have you attended any of these events?
9. What resources have you used in your college search?
10. What can you tell me about the conversations you have had, if any, with family members about going to college? What topics do you discuss with your family about going to college?
11. What, if anything, would you like from your school counselor to help you with the college-going process that has not been offered to you at this point?

Appendix II
Interview Questions—School Counselors

1. What can you tell me about your work with students across all grades on college search and choice?
2. What can you tell me about how you have worked with your current 11th grade students specifically on post-high school options?
 - a. How often to you meet individually with students to assist in the search and choice phases of the college-going process?
 - b. How often do you meet with family members to discuss the college-going process for their students?
 - c. What events regarding college-going and post-high school planning does the school counseling department offer?
 - d. How do you encourage attendance by students and families at these events?
3. What are the ways you share information about colleges, the college application process, and financial aid for college with your students and their families?
 - a. What do you notice about how students/families respond to different dissemination methods? What means of communication are most successful?
4. How do you get information to the students about college admissions tests, such as the SAT and ACT?
5. What can you tell me about the conversations you have had, if any, with family members about going to college? What topics do you discuss with family members about going to college?
6. What do you perceive to be the most significant needs presented by students and their families throughout the college-going process?
7. What do you think about your first-generation college-going students find most challenging about the college-going process?
8. What aspects of the college-going process do you think the parents find most challenging?
9. What is the most difficult part of your work with students and families in the college search process?
10. If you could design the best college outreach program, what would it look like?



May 26, 2015

Patricia A. Marchesi

Dear Ms. Marchesi,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "Improving College-Going Trends for First Generation Latino Students—Are High School Counseling Programs & Services Culturally Responsive?" Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form, the stamped Recruitment Flyer and Letters of Solicitation, the stamped Assent Form, and the stamped original Consent Forms. Make copies only of these stamped forms.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.

Professor

Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj

Office of Institutional Review Board

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A HOME FOR THE MIND. THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

**REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR
RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: Improving College-Going Trends for First Generation Latino Student

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making **this application**, I(we) certify that I(we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I(we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Patricia A. Marchesi 3/2/15
RESEARCHER(S) DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

Carol Ann - [Signature] 3/2/15
RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR [for student researchers only] DATE

Please print or type out name below signature

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the April 2015 meeting.

The application was approved not approved by the Committee. Special conditions were were not set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Mary J. Ruzicka Ph.D. 5/26/15
DIRECTOR, DATE
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH