THE DROP OUT DECISIONS OF LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

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by
Dennis Camacho

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Abstract

Scholars in the field of higher education administration have researched the factors that mold the collegiate experience for Latino college students, specifically how they affect retention at campuses in the midwest, southwest and west coast regions of the United States. However, there is limited research on this topic in the northeast region of the United States. This phenomenological, qualitative study supplements current research by providing findings on the drop out decision considerations of Latino former college students who attended a college or university in the northeast region of the United States and were members of Latino Greek lettered organizations. Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1993) was utilized as the guiding theoretical framework for this research study. Five themes emerged as factors in the drop out considerations of the participants: socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students, the expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students, Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life, Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds, and financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students. Implications for higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners are discussed. Additionally, recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords: Latino(s), Hispanic(s), Chicano(s), northeast, Greek lettered, drop out, socioeconomic, first generation, persistence, acclimation, retention, graduation
Dedication

I dedicate this to my:

loving mother Linda Veronica a single mother who always put me first and
was my rock growing up;

amazing wife and better half Catherine for supporting me throughout this process and
being there every step of the way as I chase my dreams;
son Leo and future child(ren) (yet to be named) for inspiring me to be the best father ever
to the best children ever;
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Uncle Miguel Angel for always encouraging me to be the best;

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Latino students with a goal of pursuing an education of higher learning and beyond,
don't ever lost sight of your dreams!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are many comprehensive studies on the experiences of undergraduate students and models of attrition and graduation that identify factors of academic progress and retention strategies for college students (Arbona & Novy, 1991; Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nuñez, 2009; Tinto, 1993). Higher education researchers have studied the factors of academic progress, retention strategies, and have presented implications on practice (Tinto, 1993). Nevertheless, there is a mismatch between enrollment rates of Latino collegiate students and their alarmingly-low retention and graduation rates. More studies that focus specifically on the persistence and graduation of Latino students are needed.

In this chapter, a problem statement and research question introduce the research presented. The theoretical lens chosen to study this phenomenon is presented and an overview of Tinto's Model of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) is included. Finally, the application of the theory to the research question is presented as a structural guide for the research.

Problem Statement and Research Question

The student population on college campuses has become more diverse in recent decades. According to Brainard (2009), the

…total enrollment in degree-granting institutions will increase to 20.6 million by the fall of 2018, an increase of 13 percent from 2007. During the same period, enrollment is expected to grow by 38 percent among Hispanic students, 26 percent among Black students and only 4 percent among white students. (para. 3)

Latino student enrollment has increased exponentially across the country. In fact,

… a record seven-in-ten (69%) Hispanic high school students in the class of 2012 enrolled in college that fall, two percentage points higher than the rate (67%) among their
white counterparts, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new data from the U.S. Census Bureau. (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Project, 2013, p. 4)

However, the bachelor’s degree attainment percentage for Latinos does not equal that of non-Latinos.

In 2012, 14.5% of Latinos ages 25 and older had earned one. By contrast, 51% of Asians, 34.5% of whites and 21.2% of blacks had earned a Bachelor’s Degree. Hispanic college students are also less likely than whites to enroll in a four-year college, attend a selective college, and enroll full-time (Fry & Taylor, 2013, p. 1).

The exponential growth of the Latino college student population will continue to increase in the next decade. However, graduation rates currently do not parallel the projected growth. Thus, this exponential growth has brought about new challenges for institutions of higher learning.

The college dropout rate is high, with institutions reporting a 35% decrease in graduation rates overall (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). Latino college students represent a substantial percentage of the collegiate dropout rate in the United States (Hernandez, 2000). There is limited research on the nature of these trends, and colleges and universities have made little investment in understanding what factors may contribute to the Latino undergraduate college student dropout rate. The purpose of this study was to identify trends and factors that contributed to the high dropout rates of Latino undergraduates and to recommend retention strategies for this population. The overarching line of inquiry guiding this research was: What are the lived experiences and decision considerations of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college? To elaborate on the research topic, key terms are defined and brief summary of previously published scholarly work for this research study are discussed.
Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the ‘Latino college student population’ refers to undergraduate students who were raised in the United States by parents who migrated to the United States from Latin America. The student population in this study includes individuals who enrolled at accredited, four-year non-profit colleges and universities. Participants include those who fit the cultural profile and who were enrolled in a private or public four-year institution of higher learning. To establish the context of the study, previous research completed on this topic by other scholars will be considered.

A Gap in the Literature

Institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to properly retain and graduate Latino students. Solely admitting Latino students into the institution is insufficient. Colleges and universities need to understand how to increase retention and graduation rates for such a vastly-growing student population. Many of those who have conducted research on first-generation Latino college students were first-generation Latino college students themselves, and many now work at institutions of higher learning with Latino college student populations. Their research included non-cognitive factors related to retention (Arbona, 1990), the improved academic performance of Latino students when they become engaged in extracurricular activities (Hernandez, 2000), the importance of awareness of the level of campus inclusivity for Latino students (Hurtado et al., 1996), and the significance of access to rigorous academic support services that can enhance opportunities for Latino students to develop into scholars (Nora, 1996).

Most of these notable researchers identify as first generation Chicano college students from the midwest, west coast, and southwest regions of the country, and most conducted their research in those regions. Data were obtained from Chicano students, who are the majority in
these particular regions (Nora & Cabrera, 1996), with only a subgroup of the population being researched. Findings from these studies are notable, but do not represent Latinos from every region of the United States. Regional characteristics such as socioeconomic status, family structure, legal status, values, academic aptitude, and pre-college education may vary from region to region and among different Latino subgroups.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto’s Model of Student Departure (1993) informed this research study as the theoretical lens for this research study, guided by the following research question: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college? This section provides an overview of Tinto's Model of Student Departure (Tinto, 1993) and relates the theory to the research question, presenting it as a structural guide for the research.

Tinto’s Model of Student Departure.

Dr. Vincent Tinto is a renowned author who presented a model of student departure in 1993. He presented factors that may lead to a student’s withdrawal from a college campus. A major ontological assumption of the model (Creswell, 2007) is that the experiences that are described are applicable to the general population of college students, regardless of their cultural background (Hernandez, 2000). Professor Tinto earned his doctorate in education and sociology from The University of Chicago. He was a Distinguished Professor at Syracuse University and was the chair of the higher education program from 1999-2006 (Hernandez, 2000). His best known work is the heavily cited book, *Leaving College* (1993), published by the University of Chicago Press. In it, Tinto (1993) presented a theory derived from the work of Emile Durkheim on suicide. Tinto compared student departure to that of leaving society (i.e., via suicide) due to a
failure to create a sense of belonging for the student. Tinto conducted research and has written extensively on higher education in the areas of student retention and the impact of learning communities on student growth and attainment.

Throughout his research, Tinto has worked with federal and state agencies, with independent research firms, and with two- and four-year institutions of higher education on several issues in higher education. However, retention and education of students in higher education receive a strong emphasis in his work. Tinto is widely cited in a range of publications. For the purposes of this research, he is a seminal author within the topic of the Latino collegiate student experience (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1993). Tinto is widely cited in a range of publications. For the purposes of this research, he is a seminal author within the topic of the Latino collegiate student experience. Specifically, his work has been cited in previous research on Latino collegiate student experiences (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella, et al., 2004). Dr. Tinto’s theory is linked with research that focuses on the traditional college student, and specifically on Latino college students.

Tinto (1993) “identified three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution” (p. 99). He also defined persistence as the combination of all experiences a college student has once he or she has enrolled (Tinto, 1993). Considering student retention, it is important to understand how negative encounters can lead students to withdraw and that positive encounters can cause students to invest in the college experience. Students who are able to have good experiences building connections with others on campus are more likely to persist and ultimately graduate (Tinto, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates the various components of a college student’s experience and
how the lack of synergy between academic integration, social integration, and goal commitment can lead to students opting to move towards drop out decisions (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration refers to students succeeding academically, while social integration is when a student becomes actively engaged on campus. Both of which allows students to achieve their goals of earning a college degree. According to Tinto, institutions need to commit to nurturing that synergy among these three components so that students may navigate their way through college and avoid dropping out.

Figure 1. Tinto’s Model of Student Departure. Adapted from Tinto, V. (1993). Leaving College. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Summary

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Departure was used as the primary theoretical framework for this research. The model presents pertinent areas of college life that need to work in synergy in order for a student to become engaged with the institution. A concept that, according to Tinto (1993), is transferable to the Latino collegiate student population. A review of the extant research, produced by key authors who cited Tinto’s work in describing the Latino collegiate experience, identified a gap in the literature. There is a lack of empirical research on this student population, despite its rapid growth and the implications retentions of Latino students would have for practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many comprehensive studies on the experiences of undergraduate students and models of attrition and graduation have been conducted. Comprehensive research on the Latino collegiate student population has been conducted since 1990. Literature on Latino college students produced since 2011 generally has provided statistical data on the growth and progress of the population in higher education. While this information is pertinent, it is limited. This chapter focuses on the earlier research, a body of work that is more comprehensive in its scope. Several studies noted the pertinence of examining factors related to academic progress and retention strategies for college students in general, in addition to those with a Latino college student focus. Nevertheless, scholars and researchers have yet to produce current research that fully explains the factors that affect academic progress and retention for Latino college students and how these two areas have become major considerations for colleges and universities in the northeast.

Researchers claim that student engagement has strong associations with several outcomes such as academic progress and retention, which lead to degree attainment (Astin, 1977; Tinto, 1987). Several higher education researchers have studied the factors of academic progress and related retention strategies (Astin, 1977, 1993; Tinto, 1987). A variety of research studies are available where participants from various U.S. regions offer a plethora of information on Latino students (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Hernandez, 2011; Hurtado, 1992). A number of research approaches, theoretical frameworks, samples, and sites have been utilized to collect and analyze data on the topic. Surveys, interviews, and national databases have been used by researchers. While much of the research that has been done shares similar approaches, authors applied tools to produce unique conclusions.
Researchers have discussed the identity, family values, cultural values and differences that Latino students bring to college campuses, mostly in the southwest. A strong cultural Latino identity has been linked to academic success (Aguayo et al., 2011). Additionally, studies on particular aspects of Latino/Hispanic identity on a college campus, such as student involvement and its effect on retention, are useful in addressing the needs of Latino college students (Hernandez, 2000). Key research findings include the effects of the family and of prejudice on the college experience of Latino students (Auerbach, 2004; Kane, 1998; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Volumes on multicultural identity theories show similarities between Latino/Hispanics and other students of color (Cabrera et al, 1999; Torres, 1999).

However, despite these studies, there is a lack of research on the Latino/Hispanic student population located in the northeast region of the U.S. A void is also present in current research as researchers fail to make connections between low retention and implications on practice. With the number of Latino college students growing exponentially, developing retention strategies for this student population are significant to institutions. This chapter identifies studies and models that provide a context for this research.

**Environmental Factors that Mold the Collegiate Experience for Latino Students**

‘Environmental factors’ include student spaces on campus such as residence halls, common lounge space, academic buildings, and campus cultures that are influential in their collegiate experience. These factors contribute to and influence the college experience for Latinos (Hernandez, 2000). They also provide a unique challenge, in that they are not easily modified. For example, campus cultures are deep rooted and not easily malleable. Thus, students have no choice but to navigate their way through environmental factors.
The Diverse Democracy Study (Nuñez, 2009), a national longitudinal study, noted how engagement in a campus environment affects Latino student outcomes. Students from nine four-year public research institutions were surveyed during their first (13,520 students) and second years (4,403 students). The nine institutions pro-actively implemented initiatives to address the needs of Latino populations. The students were questioned about their “demographic characteristics, high school experiences, college expectations, perceptions of campus climate, general college experiences, and anticipated behaviors.” (Nuñez, 2009, p. 51-52). The findings confirmed that an insensitive racial climate impeded the students’ ability to become connected to the campus, but the environment increased their social consciousness on campus and in society at large. Additionally, positive student-faculty relationships were identified as strong, beneficial contributors to a sense of belonging. Thus, Latino students developed a sense of engagement in various ways, and the “one size fits all approach should not be applied to all racial/ethnic groups when measuring sense of belonging and perceptions of the campus climate” (Nuñez, 2009, p. 59).

Nora (1996) investigated perceptions of a hostile racial climate by students and the effects it had on academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience. Nora provided insight into the effects of discrimination on the collegiate experience. Over 800 students were surveyed at a predominantly-white institution in the midwest with a racial breakdown of 11% African American, 17% Latino, and 51% White. Nora (1996) found parental support and prejudice were significant in shaping educational experiences for the students. The level of commitment and the goals of students were mostly affected by parental encouragement. Persistence for Caucasian students was defined by goals, while parental encouragement was a determining factor for Latinos. This is vital to understand Latino college students’ transition to college. It is important
to value the role that family plays in the transition from high school to college for these students (Nora, 1996).

Hurtado (1992) examined the issue of racial tension on a college campuses. Hurtado researched the differences in views of racial tension at various institution-types. She worked with over 2,000 students (76% Caucasian, 13% African American, and 14% Chicano) who attended public or private colleges or universities. Private four-year institutions were said to have a better campus climate than public colleges and universities. Institutions that were perceived to be very student-centered were reported to have had less racial tension. Mexican American students did not report that their institutions were student-centered (Hurtado, 1992). Thus, the Chicano students had different perceptions than Caucasians about the environment at private and public institutions.

In many cases, Latinos adjust to environments that are perceived to be unwelcoming by clustering with peers with similar interests Levin (2006). Levin (2006) studied the effects of students of color associating themselves with students from similar cultural backgrounds in a four-year longitudinal study that looked at Caucasian, Asian, Latino and African American students at a large, diverse university (Ponterotto, 2005). Data were collected from several students within each of the four racial groups at the end of each academic year. The students' sense of feeling as though they mattered at their institution was measured through surveys. The findings showed that Latino students with more friendships among their peers with similar cultural backgrounds felt more marginalized than traditional students by their senior year (Levin, 2006). This was unlike the African-American who students showed an academic commitment and were more motivated by their senior year. Levin concluded that associating with students of
similar backgrounds hindered the development of the Latino students who participated in the study.

Torres et al. (2003) provided a different perspective as to whether or not geographic location, institutional type, or stress had any influence on acclimation for students in the southwest and southeast. The authors used Torres’ Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM) as a framework to guide their research. Students who participated were from Texas, Florida, and Georgia. Texas and Florida had Latino populations in excess of 60% at the time of the study, while Georgia had less than 4%. A total of 372 students participated in the questionnaires and surveys (Torres et al, 2003). The results demonstrated that Latino students at four-year institutions in Georgia became more acclimated to the Caucasian culture due to the population being predominantly Caucasian. Enrolling in a community college was not a significant factor in acculturation of the Latino students in this study. Stress was not a factor in their acclimation. Thus, Torres and colleagues (2003) underscored the significance on the size of the population and their minority status within the larger culture as a bigger determinant of acculturation than institutional type or a student’s level of stress.

Malaney and Shively (1995) researched expectations of students of color during their first year at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Over 700 students who were Caucasian, African American, Asian American, and Latino were interviewed via telephone throughout their freshman year. The questions were geared towards understanding the students’ expectations before they arrived on campus and during their tenure at the institution, as well as any information regarding racial harassment. African American students reported that “they experienced more racial harassment and had lower GPA and degree earning expectations than the other groups; Asian Americans also had low degree earning expectations” (Malaney &
Shively, 1995). However, Latinos were more interested in obtaining higher GPAs but participated in fewer extracurricular activities by their spring semester, while involvement increased for the African American sample of students. Therefore, Latino students may enroll in college with higher academic expectations but experience unique experiences that modify how they act on campus in a different manner than other groups on campus.

It is evident that environmental factors present on college campuses have an effect on the college experience for Latinos. The circumstances that these students encounter can either benefit or hinder their acclimation and ultimately their college career. In addition to environmental factors, societal factors also shape the collegiate experiences for Latinos. Societal factors are present as a result of the circumstances provided by the community at large.

**Societal Factors that Mold the Collegiate Experience for Latino Students**

Societal factors are those experiences a student is exposed to in ‘society,’ mostly during their upbringing and as a result of life events prior to enrolling in college. These factors can be amplified by instances that occur while students are enrolled in college. Many Latino students are first-generation college students: the first in their family to attend an institution of higher learning. As a result, they may not be as prepared to navigate their way through the trials and tribulations of college life in comparison to their peers who come from families of college graduates (Pascarella et al., 2004). Students with college graduates within their immediate family are more likely to be familiar with various expectations of earning a degree of higher learning (Filkins, & Doyle, 2002).

Hurtado et al. (1996) studied a group of 203 Latino students who performed well academically in high school and were in their freshman and sophomore year in college. Their findings noted environmental and social factors that helped form the collegiate experience for the
students using data from the National Survey of Hispanic Students. The students reported that academic and social acclimation were more difficult at campuses perceived to have racial tension. These perceptions of the social environment impacted their success. The environment, in this case, seemed to be a negative factor for the students (Hurtado et al., 1996).

Hurtado and colleagues (1996) found that during their sophomore year maintaining family ties, proper time management, financial stability, managing anxiety about their school work load, and an organized routine were positive factors in their acclimation to college. The top three most difficult aspects of their first year were adapting to the new academic demands of college, maintaining positive social associations, and time management. Peer groups and family were the top two sources of support (Hurtado et al., 1996). Their findings suggest guiding Latino students to build associations or relationships that will help them become acclimated to campus.

They also suggested that racial tension is a negative climate for Latinos. Thus, according to these researchers, institutions should make every effort to raise awareness about diversity issues on their campus to increase sensitivity levels for students of color. Helping students maintain their family support network was vital to retention as well. Parental programming to educate them on the expectations of college life could help strengthen the support network for this student population (Hurtado, 1996).

In 1990, Arbona and Novy found that students of color are often not properly groomed for college life during their high school years. In high school, Latinos are generally not taught to value standardized testing when compared to their Caucasian peers (Arbona & Novy, 1990). This created a disadvantage for Latino students, as their peers may value college entrance exams, such as the SAT, more and may be better prepared to perform at a higher level. Preparation for
college facilitates their college application process, opening doors to better opportunities in obtaining an education of higher learning.

Hernandez (2002) pointed out an important retention strategy for Latino students in his qualitative study. The author interviewed ten students at a predominantly Caucasian state university. Seven out of the ten students reported that they did not feel as though they were properly prepared for college at the secondary level, regardless of the advanced placement courses they took in high school. Four out of the ten participated in extracurricular activities and the others reported that they would rather focus on their academic progress. The major transitional issues were stress and time management. Strong family support was noted by the students as a significant factor in their success. The author suggested a strategy to conduct family outreach to better educate the family members on the various facets of college life (i.e. academic curriculum, getting involved, building relationships with faculty). Doing so, he posited, would enhance their abilities to support the college student in their lives (Hernandez, 2002).

Building on the critical nature of parental involvement, Auerbach’s (2004) work supported developing a parental engagement piece for non-traditional students, including Latinos. Parents who participated in his study valued and understood their role in the student’s ability to earn a degree, moving up the ladder in college, and the importance of earning a four-year college degree to their families. Through parental engagement models, such as college pathways, parents were able to develop pertinent social networks and gain confidence in how to be an effective source of support for the student. Auerbach (2004) believed developing a pipeline for families to further develop and enhance their support of students of color for
generations to come, a similar dynamic to many of their Caucasian peers, could be accomplished through these programs.

Arbona and Nora (2007) studied how challenging Latino students at the secondary level results in attainment of a college education. The authors found that students who enrolled in high schools with scholarly academic programs that had high expectations were more inclined to attend a college or university. They were also 46% more likely than students in vocational tracks. Latino students in their study who opted for community colleges immediately following their high school graduation and maintained continuous enrollment during their freshman and sophomore years had a degree-attainment rate of 97%. Contributing factors Arbona and Nora (2007) cited for the attainment of college degrees included motivation from their parents and peers of similar backgrounds.

Pascarella et al. (2004) shared general information on first generation college students. The authors collected data over three years from Chicano students with parents who had no more than a high school education and then compared them to their peers. Their findings showed that first generation college students worked more hours than their peers, did not live on campus for the most part, and took less of a course load (Pascarella et al., 2004). As a result, these Chicano students did not participate as much in extracurricular activities, but, ironically, they benefitted more from the limited time they did commit to those activities in comparison to their peers.

What is significant about the information provided by Pascarella et al. (2004) are the differences between the out-of-classroom experience for first generation college students and their peers. Less affluent and less stable family structures meant that the students could not focus solely on academics, dividing their time between work and school. However, while socioeconomics did
affect the college experience of Chicanos, research also indicates that Latinos are able to succeed regardless of their socioeconomic status (Pascarella et al., 2004).

In fact, Arbona and Novy (1991) determined that socioeconomics did not affect retention and academic performance of the Chicano students who participated in their study. The sample group consisted of 141 Chicano students and 45 students who were either South American or from the Caribbean. These students performed well on their SATs and were in their first year in college at the time of that study. The major difference between groups was that the Chicano students came from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Arbona and Novy’s (1991) study was conducted at a large public university in the southwest that was predominantly Caucasian. They found no notable difference in retention and academic performance between groups. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were able to perform at the level of their peers regardless of their socioeconomic status. This is an important finding utilizing the lens of post-positivism, as students were able to rise above their status to avoid this societal factor from becoming a negative aspect of college life.

Much of the research regarding the college experiences of Latinos is rooted in counseling, psychology, and sociology. Students’ academic progress and their retention are a result of the interaction of several elements such as psychological processes, socioeconomic status, structural processes, and environmental factors (Arbona & Novy, 1990). A review of the literature has also revealed key scholar practitioners who have conducted notable research on this topic. In the following section, the researchers and their work will be described.

**Seminal Works’ Research Approaches**

This body of research work represents the implementation of different research tools and strategies. A number of research approaches, theoretical frameworks, samples, and sites were
utilized to collect and analyze data in the seminal research on Latino college student success. Even when using similar approaches, the authors applied different tools and strategies to produce unique conclusions. Surveys, interviews, and national databases were data collection tactics used by researchers. Although there is always a need for more in-depth analysis on the topic, the extant researcher offers diverse findings that are appropriate for drawing general conclusions about Latino college students.

**Methodological approaches.**

A wide range of research methodologies has been used to address the problem of practice. Historical research approaches were utilized to describe student experiences via an analysis of statistics from national data bases (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado et al, 1996). Student perceptions of campus racial climates, their sense of inclusion, as well as environmental, cognitive, and social factors were identified via this approach. The researchers’ findings are significant because they describe how the collegiate experience for Latino students was shaped. Auerbach (2004) used a case study methodology to focus on parental involvement in their child’s collegiate advancement. The approach documented student perceptions of the effects of parental involvement, an area without significant at the time. The most popular approach seems to be phenomenology (Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez, 2002; Torres et al., 2003).

**Theoretical frameworks.**

The theoretical frameworks underscoring these studies have more similarities than differences. Seventy percent of the studies reviewed utilized Tinto’s (1987) Stages of Student Departure, Tinto’s (1993) Model of Students’ Persistence, and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement to guide the research. Tinto (1993) “identifie[d] three major sources of student
departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution” (p.97. In his Model of Student Persistence, he defined factors that led to persistence as the combination of all experiences a college student has once he or she has enrolled. “If a student has positive experiences, forming connections with others at the institution, then he or she is more likely to persist and graduate” (Tinto, 1993).

Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement was utilized in five of the seminal works reviewed. Astin’s theory of involvement proposed that students became more academically engaged by becoming engaged in campus life, such as clubs and organizations and faculty interaction. Conversely, students who do not become involved tend not to be as energetic academically, spend less time on campus, and interact much less with faculty. Most importantly, Astin (1993) found the most influential types of student engagement are "academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups" (p. 126). Together, these theoretical frameworks allowed researchers a lens to focus on student engagement and retention.

Sampling strategies.

There were several similarities and differences apparent in the samples that have been used throughout the research reviewed. Simple, random, cluster, and purposive sampling were implemented for the studies. Forty-five percent of the studies reviewed used simple sampling (Malany, 1995; Pascarella et al., 2004) and twenty-five percent utilized random sampling (Auerbach, 2004; Levin et al., 2006). Ten percent were cluster samples (Kane, 1998; Cabrera et al., 1999) and purposive sampling made up twenty percent of the studies’ approach to sampling (Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez, 2002; Torres et al., 2003). Simple and random sampling included Chicano, African American, and even Caucasian students as a point of comparison in some cases.
(Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez, 2002; Torres et al., 2003). An example of a cluster sample is a study of thirty students divided into three groups based on the education levels of their parents which was designed to determine the effects of family support on academic success (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Additional screening criteria was often included, such as first-generation college students and first-year students being generally targeted as a purposive sampling.

Undergraduate students were invited to join in all of the studies. The major cultural group included was Latino college students due to the nature of the research. Due to the similarities in their experiences, the inclusion of Latino students was pertinent to the findings. A commonality among the three historical research studies was the use of national databases that only surveyed Latino students, such as the National Survey of Hispanic Students (Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996). Coupled with the sampling strategies, an examination of the sites selected reveals pertinent observations as well.

**Site selection.**

The sites selected denote a unique pattern with considerable implications for further research. Seventy-one percent of the institutions studied were located in the midwest, southwest or southeast, with large public institutions making up sixty-three percent of the institutions included. The majority of the information pertaining to Latino students was collected from studies centering on Mexican-American (Chicano) students due to site selection and each site’s regional characteristics (Torres et al., 2003; Arbona & Novy, 1991). The researchers generalized the data to the Latino community as a whole due to the large numbers of Chicanos in their studies’ regions (Murguia et al., 1991).
**Implications for Professional Practice**

The enrollment rates of Latino students in higher education institutions contrast the alarmingly low retention and graduation rates of Latino students. The literature suggests that students’ academic progress and retention are a result of the interaction of several elements including psychological processes, socioeconomic status, structural processes, and environmental factors (Arbona & Novy, 1990). The Latino college student population has grown exponentially. Student affairs practitioners working with this population on campuses across the United States must take note of the needs of the Latino collegiate student population. Producing current research on this student population that can enhance student development and retention efforts is a focal point of this study and vital to refining professional practice.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to capture lived experiences of Latinos’ decision considerations to drop out from, or remain enrolled in, colleges and universities in northeast region of the United States. The overarching line of inquiry guiding the research was: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college? This study presents research from participants in the northeast to fill a gap in the body of current research. The findings may influence theoretical advances in research on the factors of academic progress and retention strategies of Latino college students and have practical implications for institutional services and policies. A phenomenological approach was beneficial for studying the lived experiences of the participants. The data was analyzed using Tinto’s (1993) Theory of Student Departure.

Positionality

The researcher is a first generation college student of Latino background who attended a four-year private institution in the northeastern region of the US and joined a Latino Greek-lettered organization. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the spirit of the axiom of naturalistic inquiry as that which the researcher is predisposed to by their values, exemplified by the choice of a problem or policy as well as how they frame and focus on that problem or policy. Naturalistic inquiry involves research assumptions and presents certain values that influence the investigation about the phenomena. A major assumption within this research was that Latino students may have a different collegiate experience than traditional college students, which may affect their ability to complete higher education or attain a degree. In light of this assumption,
information was presented pertaining to how campus culture, racial climate, socioeconomic status, and ‘minority’ status are factors that shape the collegiate experience for Latino students. These factors positively influenced the researcher’s own college experience, ultimately leading towards graduation. Like previous scholars, the researcher believed that institutions of higher learning have a responsibility to properly retain and graduate Latino students, an axiological assumption, per Creswell (2007). This study was designed to collect data and provide an in-depth analysis of Latino participants from the northeast region of the United States. The northeast region was selected because there appears to be a lack of research on the Latino population in this region.

**Social constructivism.**

Social constructivism is the thought pattern, or paradigm, most appropriate to explain how a phenomenon develops in social contexts (Ponterotto, 2005). The philosophical assumptions are considerable in this research (Creswell, 2007). In order to determine what may enhance retention and graduation, it was important to understand how the students realistically defined their collegiate experience, an example an ontological assumption (Creswell, 2007). What factors, internal or external, in the campus environment did the participants in the study see as effective in enhancing their academic success? As a first-generation Latino college student and higher education administrator, the researcher was aware of the epistemological assumptions (Creswell, 2007) present. The intention was to produce trustworthy, scholarly research that was not self-serving. Remaining aware of the position of researcher and utilizing bracketing techniques helped to eliminate potential biases that could alter the trustworthiness of the study. Research should be scholarly and objective in nature. Research was therefore presented in the third person to provide an objective perspective, thus preventing the production of rhetoric.
Methodological assumptions.

Methodological assumptions are research techniques that “are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). Interviews with a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions was developed in order to obtain trustworthy data. Probing questions were used to obtain further details on key points when applicable. In the following section, the research methodology is described in detail.

Qualitative, Phenomenological Approach

Although there is variance among the approaches utilized in the extant research on the topic of Latino student retention, one method that seemed to be highly effective was a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of individuals and the meaning they make in light of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). It may also be categorized as an ‘interpretive qualitative approach.’ Phenomenological research “involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). More specifically, the approach is hermeneutical; that is, oriented toward the lived experiences and interpretation of the lived experiences of the individuals in the study. In this approach, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p.6). The researcher must “identify the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data” (Merriam, 2002, p.7).

A phenomenological approach is appropriate to learning about the experiences of the Latino students. This interpretive research was conducted in light of a basic set of beliefs that
guide action, otherwise known as ‘paradigms of inquiry’ (Creswell, 2007). Manning (1992) described the benefits of a qualitative approach: “Through qualitative research, information completely unanticipated by those soliciting input about the quality of campus life can be collected. The resulting data are richly descriptive and faithful to students’ perspectives” (p. 133). Moustakas (1994) explained that in phenomenological studies, researchers focus on a particular topic, create a study guiding question, refrain from assumptions, and note findings that will encourage future research and reflection. The researcher becomes an expert on the subject matter, is familiar with previous research on the topic, obtains new knowledge on the subject matter, and gains a thorough understanding of future research that would provide more in depth information on the topic (Moustakas, 1994). The approach allowed for an in-depth and thorough study of phenomena that are not easily quantifiable. It is a suitable method of inquiry because this problem of practice and subsequent research questions seek to comprehend how events are understood by individuals (Creswell, 2007). The process provided data that were analyzed and presented as the findings of the study.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit potential subjects. Six participants were selected for the study. Maximum variation was used as the sampling strategy in order to document variations and identify important common patterns among the data collected (Creswell, 2007). Latino former college students from various Latino American backgrounds who had enrolled in four-year private or public institutions in the northeast U.S. region were invited to participate. All were members of Latino Greek-lettered organizations.

Degree completion was not a requirement for participation. The sampling strategy provided a sample of students who completed their education and a sample of those who chose to
drop out of higher education. The sampling was restricted to those who enrolled in colleges and universities in the northeastern United States.

The research plan included forwarding correspondence detailing the specific inclusion criteria to potential participants (Appendix C). Potential participants were screened in order to determine if they met inclusion criteria. Research details and consent forms were forwarded to each participant via the postal service or by e-mail. Each participant was asked to sign their consent prior to the interview. A 50/50 ratio of males to females was sought, but was not achieved.

**Recruitment, Access and Protection of Human Participants**

Two organizations were approached for permission and assistance in identifying participants: the leadership of a national umbrella group for Latino Greek-lettered organizations and the leadership of a national Latino fraternity. Permission to recruit members from the northeastern region was sought. The prospective study population included former undergraduate students who were members of the respective Latino Greek organizations. Approval from senior leadership was obtained from both organizations, and documented in Appendices A and B. Samples of recruitment solicitations are included as Appendix C.

As an exploratory qualitative research study, data were collected through structured interviews. Signed consent forms (see Appendix D) from all participants were obtained. The consent forms stated that data would be collected in a secure location and personal information would be kept strictly confidential. Incentives were not provided to participants. The analysis focused on determining common factors, external or individual, that could shed light on the research question: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college?
The researcher conducted structured in-depth interviews with the research participants utilizing an approved protocol (Appendix E). Seidman (1998) suggested that in-depth interviews are pertinent in developing an understanding of the experience of participants and the meaning they make of those experiences. Additionally, Seidman (1998) suggested researchers should conduct a three-interview series, and that was implemented in this study.

As a primary consideration for the participants’ time, a first interview, a second in-depth interview, and a final step for member checking were planned. The data collection occurred by interviews being conducted in December 2013 and January 2014. The first interviews established the context of the study and the participants’ experiences. The first interview was also used to answer any questions the participants had regarding the consent form. It was a chance to provide each participant with the opportunity to reconstruct the specifics of their experiences within the context they occurred. The second interview concentrated on the details of the participant’s experiences. The first interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, while the second was 45 - 60 minutes. The third and final step asked participants to reflect on the findings extracted from the meaning of their experience, known as ‘member checking’. Member checking allows each participant to discuss the findings, revise their statements if necessary, and finalize them in an effort to add to the credibility and accuracy of the findings.

Two interviews took place on site in Boston and were recorded via a digital recorder for transcription purposes. The other four interviews were conducted and recorded via face-to-face (synchronous) online software as the participants were out of state. All digital recordings were forwarded to Rev (www.rev.com) a third party professional transcription service. Data analysis began with the delivery of the first transcript.
Data Analysis Procedures

“Data analysis in qualitative research is an iterative and continuously comparative process that involves reducing and retrieving large amounts of written (and sometimes pictorial) information.” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 436). Moustakas’s (1994) method of phenomenological data organization guided coding and analysis. The procedures were outlined as follows:

1. Using a phenomenological approach obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.

2. From the verbatim transcript of your experience complete the following steps:
   a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
   b. Record all relevant statements
   c. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.
   d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes.
   e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a *description of the textures of the experience*. Include verbatim examples.
   f. Reflect on your own textual description. Through imaginative variation, construct a *description of the structures of your experience*.
   g. Construct a *textural-structured description* of the meaning and essences of your experience.

3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other co-researchers, complete the above steps, a through g.
4. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers’ experiences, construct *a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience*, integrating all individuals’ textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole. (original emphasis Moustakas, 1994, p. 122)

The data analysis process started with the first interview and ended with the coding of the last interview. The researcher reflected on personal experiences and interactions with the participants throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Data Analysis Process**

Upon delivery of the first transcript, coding began, working “intensively with the data, line by line” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158), preliminary ideas were formed and they were placed into “invariant meaning units and themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Inevitably, the researcher’s personal experiences surfaced throughout the interviews with the participants. As such, tools to keep the data analysis process objective, and to further analyze the data and discover common themes in an accurate and efficient fashion was sought.

MAXQDA is a professional, computer-based qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software. In order to conduct further coding through MAXQDA, transcripts were uploaded and open coded a second time online. This process was helpful as similar themes emerged upon completing the open coding process online. It was immediately evident that there would be several common themes for each participant. Additionally, it was apparent that there would be significant common themes between among all participants.

This study was and will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher in the study had access to information about each participant. The researcher assigned a pseudonym to each
participant, and the information provided was only used under the pseudonym, and did not allow
the participant to be identified. All recorded data will ultimately be maintained as an electronic
file. All recordings were be saved as password-protected files under the assigned pseudonyms
on a PC, and backup hard drive, and will be destroyed once the doctoral thesis has been fully
approved and published.

The data files were accessible to the researcher and transcriber only. A third party
transcription service with confidentiality protocols transcribed the documents, which were
labeled with pseudonyms. No reports or publications contain information that can identify
participants as being part of this project. In very rare instances, authorized people may have
requested to see research information in this study in accordance with University or Institutional
Review Board policies. Open coding, comparison, and interpretation of the codes and themes
followed Creswell’s (2007) and Saldana’s (2009) processes. Table 1 summarizes the data
analysis processes.

Table 1.

Data Analysis Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection First and Second Interviews</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>December 18th, 2013- January 15th, 2014</td>
<td>Technology that allowed for real-time interaction between the researcher and the participant was utilized. Landline or smartphone was used to conduct the four long distance interviews. Two interviews were conducted face to face. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder application on a smartphone. All interviews were saved under pseudonyms, uploaded to google drive and forwarded to the professional transcriber.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing</td>
<td>Transcriber</td>
<td>Completed by January 15th, 2014</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rev.com">www.rev.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness Criteria

Validity is a vital component of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest researchers consider credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Fraenkel et al., (2012) defined credibility as the researcher’s ability to address “not only instrument validity and reliability but internal validity as well.” (p. 458). Several techniques were invoked to address credibility. First, a three-step interview process was designed to minimize inconsistencies. The same appropriately-designed interview protocol was utilized with each participant. Fraenkel et al., (2012) also recommended that “using audio and video recordings when possible and appropriate” (p. 459) is effective to assure accuracy. Each and every interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Written notes were made during each interview, conforming with Fraenkel and colleagues’ advice to “[write] down the questions asked (in addition to the answers received)” (p. 458). The notes proved valuable throughout the data analysis process. Another strategy employed was learning to “understand, and where appropriate, speak the vocabulary of the group being studied.” (p. 458). For example, participants were asked to explain unfamiliar terms, but the researcher’s similar background provided additional insights that a non-Latino researcher may not have understood.

Finally, credibility was maximized by conducting member checks with each participant. This is consistent with Fraenkel et al.’s (2012) recommendation to “…[ask] one or more or more participants in the study to review the accuracy of the research report” (p. 458). The findings
were reviewed with each individual during a final interview, which was also electronically recorded. Alpha, Beta and Delta made minor revisions to the findings. The other participants did not submit any revisions.

‘Transferability’ refers to whether the researcher has provided sufficient information about themselves, the context of the research, participants, and the researcher–participant relationship to allow for the reader to decide how the information may be transferred (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Thorough discussion of the data collected also contributes to transferability. Since this is a phenomenological study, naturally the intention was to provide comprehensive findings about the experiences of the participants’ experiences and how they led to the contemplation of dropping out of college. It was not intended to be transferable like a quantitative study would be, but instead focused on the particulars of the participants at a certain point of time. In order to do so, the researcher opted for a purposive sampling strategy for participant recruitment as suggested by Creswell (2007). This approach should bring “readers to the setting and gives the discussion an element of shared experiences” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

Dependability refers to the how the researcher accounts for changes in the research study phenomenon and research design as it relates to in depth understanding of the setting (Creswell, 2007). This was achieved quite easily, as the first six participants who volunteered to participate in the research study completed every step of the interview process, although two other interested parties were disqualified because they did not meet inclusion criteria. The first interviews for Alpha and Epsilon had to be rescheduled due to work commitments, but otherwise there were no deviations from the data collection process schedule or the interview protocols. Themes were triangulated between participants, looking for similarities and differences to achieve saturation of data.
Whether the findings of the study can be confirmed by others is an important aspect for qualitative research and referred to as confirmability. An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is a well-known strategy for confirmability. A secured hard copy journal file was created to store all written personal interview notes. Secure and protected electronic files saved via Google Drive and MS Word were created for all word documents, transcriptions, and digital recordings. Transcripts were checked for accuracy against the digital recordings.

**Delimitations**

There were several delimitations throughout the study that are important to note. Because of the gap identified in the literature, the participants attended colleges and universities in the northeast region of the United States. Beta, Gamma and Epsilon represent the same institution, while Alpha, Delta and Zeta were the sole representative of their respective institutions. All of the participants were members of Latino Greek-lettered organizations. Although the contemplation of dropping out of college is prevalent among the Latino collegiate population in America, it is not a unique to the sub-populations in this study. Thus, this study represents only a portion of the Latino collegiate population that is represented in college dropout statistics.

**Limitations**

Qualitative research has limitations as a consequence of its design. “A limitation of qualitative research is that there is seldom methodological justification for generalizing the findings of a particular study” (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 436-437). Internally, conclusions can be generalized within the setting or group being studied, while externally general conclusions can be made outside of the setting or group (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This research study focused on Latino former college students who contemplated dropping out of college, attended private
colleges or universities in the northeast region of the United States, and joined Latino Greek-lettered organizations on their respective campuses in the past few decades. With a small sample size indicative of phenomenological research, the research is only representative of the experiences of the participants. The conclusions from this study are not generalizable to all Latinos at colleges and universities in the northeast who fit this profile of this research study’s participant group. The experiences of those not in Latino Greek-lettered organizations and those at public institutions were not studied although they were among those recruited. Additionally, while several female participants responded to initial recruitment outreach efforts, only one female actually participated in this study. Thus, the experience of Latinas and their voices are limited in this study. However, findings from this study may inform the practice of higher education professionals who work with Latino students at various levels. Finally, the findings could help Latino families in their quest to understand the collegiate experiences of their current or prospective students.

**Summary**

This research study examined the decision considerations as communicated in the lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college. This chapter described the methodology used in this study, a qualitative phenomenological analysis. The essential principles that guide a qualitative study, such as the position of the researcher, approach, participant recruitment, data procedures, design concerns, delimitations, and limitations were presented.

The next chapter presents the findings. Institutional and participant profile summaries are provided. The chapter also describes the common themes among the participants. The final chapter discusses the findings and relates the findings to the theoretical framework. Connections
between the findings and the literature in the final chapter. Implications for practice and future research on this topic are also presented.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to apply Tinto’s (1993) Theory of Student Departure to explore the lived experiences of Latino former college students who were members of Latino Greek-lettered organizations at colleges or universities in the northeastern region of the US. The findings focus specifically on the experiences of Latino college students and their decision considerations as they contemplated dropping out of college. The overarching line of inquiry guiding this research was: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college?

This chapter presents the research findings obtained through interviews with participants in the study. Additionally, it provides demographic information for each institution represented by participants in the study. Some of the participants were first generation college students, while others had siblings who attended a college or university; however, the participants were each the first in their family to attend and/or graduate from an institution of higher learning. The findings of the research study are presented as a prelude to discussing the study and its implications for higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners in Chapter 5.

Sampling

Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007) was invoked to recruit participants. Prospective former college students of Latin American descent were eligible to be participate. Participants represented Central America, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. All participants were members of a national Latino Greek-lettered fraternity or sorority, as recruitment was done through a national umbrella group for National Greek-lettered organizations. The majority of the
pool contemplated dropping out from a 4-year public or private institution in the northeast region of the United States. Three of them actually did.

**Defining the region.**

In 2007, the census defined the northeastern region as two divisions of nine states (Census Regions and Divisions of the United States, 2007). Division I – New England included Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Division II – Mid Atlantic includes New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. With such a vast region, it was necessary to establish strategic partnerships to streamline the participant recruitment process. Identifying national organizations that were well established within the region was essential. Strategic partnerships were then established to assist with the participant recruitment process.

**Strategic partnerships with national organizations.**

The National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) and Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity Inc. were the two partner organizations chosen. Twenty historically Latino national fraternities and sororities are members of NALFO. Phi Iota Alpha was established in New York and has expanded to over 75 campuses nationwide including several in the northeastern region. Combined, these organizations represent thousands of current and former Latino students who had enrolled at institutions of higher learning in the region. Organizational approvals are included as Appendices A and B. Upon IRB approval, a recruitment letter detailing recruitment criteria and introducing the study (Appendix C) was distributed to non-current student members via national list-serves in December of 2013.

**Participant profiles.**

Eight initial interviews were scheduled with potential participants. Two of these were disqualified because they did not meet inclusion criteria as they did not attend institutions of
higher learning in the northeastern region. The remaining six participants moved forward in the study.

During first interviews, the consent form was reviewed and participants were asked to recall their experiences within the context in which they occurred. Additionally, participants were asked to identify the cultural background they identified with, as well as information pertaining to the institution they attended, their status while enrolled and its location (see Appendix E). Table 2 summarizes the profile of the study participants.

The six participants in the study were given the pseudonyms Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, and Zeta. All six participants identified as Latino and provided their birth parents’ nations of origin and whether or not they were born abroad. Alpha and Beta shared similar Central American roots. Alpha was born in El Salvador of El Salvadoran parents. Beta was born in Costa Rica. His mother is El Salvadoran, while his father is from Costa Rica. Gamma, Delta, Epsilon and Zeta were born in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean Islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, respectively.

Four out of six participants were not born in the U.S. and migrated to this country at very young ages. Although they were born abroad they have spent the majority of their lives in the United States of America and are not considered international students. The other two were born and raised in the United States. While these individuals share a common language and some cultural commonalities, they are by no means homogenous. The participant pool as a whole represents students who attended colleges or universities in the northeastern region over a 27-year time period. This dynamic will prove to be pertinent to the findings of this study. All six participated in the three phases of the interview process.
Table 2

Profile Summary of Research Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place of Birth/Parents’ Nation of Origin</th>
<th>Years Lived in the U.S.</th>
<th>Years Attended Institution</th>
<th>Residential Status at Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>El Salvador/El Salvador</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1987-1988/Transferred and earned Law Degree from Tier 1 law school</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Costa Rica/Father from Costa Rica/Mother from El Salvador</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1995-2000/Transferred and earned Bachelor's degree from an FPCU</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Puerto Rico/Puerto Rico</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1997-2004/Earned degree from the only institution Attended</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Cuba/Cuba</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2003-2008/Earned degree from the only institution Attended</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>New York/Dominican Republic</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1988-1992/Did not earn a degree</td>
<td>Resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Boston/Dominican Republic</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2009-2013/Earned degree from the only institution attended</td>
<td>Commuter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants attended four very different private institutions, with both commuter and residential populations, in the states of New York and Massachusetts. One of the institutions was a small private college with a Division III Athletics program near a cosmopolitan city. The second was a mid-sized institution on a suburban campus, with a Division I Athletics program, conveniently located near a major metropolitan city. The third and fourth institutions are large institutions that have Division I Athletic programs with campuses located in downtown areas. The institutional demographics are listed in Table 3 and were significant to the findings of the study.

Table 3

Institutional Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4-year private college Division III Athletics</td>
<td>983 undergraduate students</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4-year private university Division I Athletics</td>
<td>12,000 undergraduate and graduate students</td>
<td>NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-year private research university Division I Athletics</td>
<td>21,000 undergraduate and graduate students</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4-year private research university Division I Athletics</td>
<td>33,000 undergraduate and graduate students</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instrumentation

A phenomenological study details the meaning of lived experiences of participants in light of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This process entails revisiting an experience lived by participants to obtain in-depth accounts that allow for the “reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). It is important to understand how the research study participants “…make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. This
meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p.6). The researcher then “[identifies] the recurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data” (Merriam, 2002, p.7).

For every participant in this study, the questions successfully captured the factors that contributed to considering or actually making the choice to drop out. In order to construct “a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122), this chapter is organized to provide participant profiles, a description of the data analysis process where themes emerged from participant statements, and finally the actual themes with supporting verbatim evidence.

**Participant Profiles**

Participants profiles, included in this section, tell each participant’s story. They start with a description of their backgrounds, including overviews of family structures and high school experiences. The collegiate experience for each participant follows. The descriptions of collegiate experiences include collegiate experience overviews, considerations on dropping out, the factors that determined why they stayed or dropped out, what they overcame to make it as far as they did, and how they overcame any related issues.

**Participant Alpha.**

Alpha is a 45-year old Latino male who migrated to New York City at the age of ten from El Salvador, Central America. He grew up in a low-income, single-parent household. Alpha is a first-generation college student, having been the first to attend and the first to graduate from college in his immediate family. He was ranked in the top ten of his high school graduating class at a high school in a New York City neighborhood with major distractions such as violence, drugs, and gangs. He was able to rise above his circumstances and received several admissions
offers from reputable private Research I institutions, including Ivy League universities. He opted to attend an out-of-state institution in the northeast, Institution 4.

However, Alpha’s initial college experience was short lived, lasting only one year (1987-1988). While Alpha was a high academic achiever at the high school level and enthusiastic about attending Institution 4, he was unable to complete his education at Institution 4. Alpha admitted that he did not know what the expectations of a college student were. He did not have the preparation in high school or from his family about the rigors of college life. He was, therefore, unable to receive any support during his transition from high school to college. He also struggled with the burden of financing his college education from the very beginning.

While he was able to develop relationships with fellow classmates, join a Latino fraternity, make a connection with the academic department for his major and with the financial aid office, those connections were not sufficient for him to persist.

Alpha was a residential student, and his roommate was an international student from an affluent family. They were able to make a connection right away, but his roommate did not share the same financial burdens that he encountered. Alpha experienced financial difficulties and although he was able to do well academically, the financial burden had an effect on his academic progress. Alpha struggled with keeping up with payments to the university to cover his family's estimated contribution. He had to take private loans from friends and was even given money by one of his professors to make payments. He developed a close connection with the financial aid office as a result of trying to work out his student accounts during his first two semesters.
Ultimately, the financial burden became too overwhelming. While Alpha did not want to drop out, he was forced to do so in 1988. He was simply unable to meet his out-of-pocket financial obligations to the institution and could no longer stay.

Years later, Alpha persevered. He went on to attend a law school without an undergraduate degree with the help of student loans and he excelled academically. He transferred to and graduated from a Tier I law school in southern California. He now describes himself as a successful attorney, a happy father, husband, and homeowner.

**Participant Beta.**

Beta is a 37-year old Latino male of Costa Rican and Salvadoran descent who migrated to the United States at the age of 13. He hailed from New York City. Beta described growing up in a low-income, single-parent household. His mother and grandmother helped raise him and his younger sister. He was a bright high school student, who took advanced placement courses at a New York City public high school. Beta’s academic record led him to becoming accepted into Institution 2, a reputable institution in New York, and he became the first in his immediate family to attend an institution of higher learning. Accordingly, Beta can be labeled a first generation college student.

Beta described his transition from high school to college as more of a challenge than it should have been. He believed his high school did not adequately prepare Beta for college. His high school was underfunded. Supplies such as books were often times recycled and discussions about how to prepare for college life were obsolete. Although Beta was an AP student, he stated that the number of AP courses offered was insufficient and he did not feel challenged enough. Beta believed his high school not only failed to prepare him for college, but actually provided misinformation.
During the college application process, his college advisor at the high school did not provide accurate information pertaining to his options. An affirmative action program at Institution 2 was available to at-risk, inner city youth from low-income households who intended to pursue higher education. The program provided funding and support to its students. He may have qualified for such a program at Institution 2, a reputable and expensive institution in New York. He suggested that his college advisor’s own bias against affirmative action programs meant that he did not advise Beta of the opportunity, preventing Beta from attending Institution 2 under that program.

Instead, Beta was admitted as a regular student at Institution 2 and was a residential student throughout his tenure at the university. He described his initial reaction to the campus environment as foreign and isolating at times. He did not understand the expectations of being a college student and lacked the familial moral support because of his first-generation college student status. While new student transition programs, such as orientation programs, were helpful, he felt that students were pretty much left on their own to navigate college life at the conclusion of those programs. There were expectations with which he was unfamiliar.

Despite these feelings, Beta made strong connections on campus by affiliating with the Latino student club on campus and with the national Latino fraternity on campus; organizations of which he became President and where he made lifelong friendships that he maintains to this day. He also became connected with the institution through on-campus employment with the information technology department, which ultimately led him towards his career of choice. He credits these affiliations with extending his stay at Institution 2. They were motivating factors in his perseverance. Unfortunately, they were not sufficient to retain him.
While Beta became acclimated via his affiliations, he struggled academically, changing majors several times. Beta also had to manage the financial burden of financing his college education. In order to pay for college, Beta needed a parents’ plus loan and participated in the Federal Work Study program. By the end of his tenure with the college, he was struggling academically and felt too guilty to ask his mother to continue to take out loans for him, and decided to drop out. Beta entered the work force and described himself as a successful information technology professional, father, husband, and is a homeowner on the west coast. He never returned to Institution 2, but did successfully complete his college education online via a for-profit college.

**Participant Gamma.**

Gamma is a 35-year old male, originally from New York City and is of Puerto Rican descent. He grew up with his mother, father, and two siblings in a low-income household. He described both of his parents as his role models. Most notably, his father was a key role model for him throughout his life. Gamma attended a private high school in New York. He described his former high school as having a great reputation for preparing students for college, a unique circumstance among this participant pool. He stressed how valuable the role of family and his high school mentors were in his pursuit of higher education.

Gamma’s parents encouraged both him and his siblings to work at a very young age to learn the value of earning a dollar. He acknowledged that this provided structure for him and kept him off the dangerous streets of New York City. His attributed his high school experience with being influential in his college aspirations. The school is a prestigious religious institution and required that students become involved in community service as a way to give back to their
community. He mentioned that the institution was also not shy about promoting their education as rigorous, challenging students to excel academically.

At the time of his enrollment, the institution achieved an over 90% college placement rate among its high school graduates. Gamma left high school with a clear understanding of the expectations of college life. Gamma’s two siblings attended the same high school and went to college, but they did not complete their education. Gamma was determined to change that trend.

Gamma attended Institution 2 in New York, a reputable private institutions in the state. The institution’s student population was predominantly Caucasian. He was a resident student, attending college between 1997 and 2004. While he did not describe his transition to college as tumultuous, due in part to his high school preparation, he did acknowledge the difficulties of fitting in and recalled an experience during orientation as a helpful.

During orientation, he met a Latino male orientation leader who introduced him to student engagement opportunities on campus. Gamma recalled feeling different as one of the only Latinos in his group. Regardless, having a Latino orientation leader was helpful in his transition. He was introduced to the Latino student club and national Latino fraternity on campus. He immediately became involved in the Latino student organization, and felt a sense of community among the members and shared common interests. He also ended up joining the national Latino fraternity on campus. This organization played a significant role in molding his collegiate career. He became president of the organization and of the umbrella group which granted the fraternity campus recognition.

Regardless of his status as an active student leader, Gamma emphasized that his years at Institution 2 were very stressful due to the burden of financing his college education. While he did receive some scholarships, they were not nearly enough to cover his educational costs. His
parents were required to take parents’ loans to help him make ends meet. Even with a substantial financial package, his estimated family contribution was significant. He struggled to make payments on time each semester and struggled academically.

Gamma mentioned not being able to afford books for class and often relying on classmates to borrow class text books. One of the most troubling experiences that Gamma remembered was that classmates who were not students of color and who were more affluent than him were made aware of additional scholarships by faculty members. This information was not made readily available to him when he would visit the financial aid office seeking financial resources that could help with his estimated contribution. By chance, he found a book of scholarships in the career center, which helped him obtain additional scholarships for one year. He also worked on campus in the Information Technology department to help meet his financial needs. However, it was not enough to retain him.

In 2001, after his fourth year, Gamma’s financial struggles continued. He said that it reached the point where he had exhausted all of his payment options and funding sources. The financial aid office could not help him any further. He admitted that the distraction caused academic difficulties which led to him being placed on academic probation in 2001. Coincidentally, at the same time he was presented with a lucrative full-time employment opportunity in IT through a fraternity member. He decided to drop out and take that opportunity to earn money and refocus. He was immediately able to pay off a parent plus loan to relieve his parents of the burden. Gamma stated that this was one of the most stressful times of his life because of his uncertain future.

Although he experienced difficulties, both financial and academic, he returned to Institution 2 in 2002 and completed his education part time with financial aid. In doing so, he
became the first in his immediate family to graduate from college. Today Gamma describes himself as very happily married, a part owner in a dual family home, and a successful IT administrator at an institution of higher education. He also owns his own wedding photography business and described himself as a successful entrepreneur, as well.

**Participant Delta.**

Participant Delta is a 29-year old male originally from Cuba, and he came to the United States at the age of sixteen. His mother settled in the city of Boston. He mentioned that his father was not a part of his household. He described his household as a single family low-income household. Delta shared that he was a product of the Boston Public School System and was a high academic achiever as a high school student. As a consequence, he was offered and accepted admission into Institution 3, a prestigious private four-year institution in the state of Massachusetts. He enrolled in 2003.

Delta and his family were very proud of his acceptance into Institution 3. He described being very excited and determined to take full advantage of the opportunity. As a high academic achiever with a bright future at a very reputable institution, Delta felt confident that he would succeed. He opted to be a resident student so he could have a full, positive collegiate experience. However, his description of his actual experience was very different from his expectations.

Delta’s transition to the university was an interesting one. He admitted being a confident and high academic achiever, but he lacked the understanding and maturity to face the expectations of being a college student. He initially was introduced to student engagement opportunities through orientation activities and upperclassman students in his residence hall. Delta was recruited to be on the crew team, to join a vocal group called the Crooners, and to become involved in student government. However, the tenure of each was short lived.
Delta described his involvement in these campus groups as a culture shock because the student population involved in these groups consisted primarily of Caucasian students from affluent communities. He did not feel a connection while involved with the student groups, and he described them as being different from him. They dressed differently and spoke differently than he did. Although he tried to conform in order to fit in, he was not comfortable doing so.

In some cases, he met other Cuban students and tried to connect with them. However, he was not able to relate to them. Delta described feeling disconnected from the campus community which led him to struggle academically. He sought other student engagement opportunities to help him fit in.

Delta became involved with the Latino community on campus where he was introduced to a national Latino fraternity dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Latino culture. He was so impressed with the mission and values of the fraternity that he decided to become a member. He described joining the group as validation of his culture as well as for the intellectual stimulation and purpose he needed to engage him at Institution 3. However, after becoming a fraternity member with a newly-found purpose, Delta was asked to leave the university in 2006 due to his academic struggles. He was asked to take a year off to rethink his intentions at the institution. During his time off he remained active with the fraternity, often providing mentorship to future members, and participating in philanthropic and social events in the city of Boston. His involvement with the fraternity assisted him in refocusing on his goal of obtaining a college degree, and he ultimately returned to Institution 3 the following year.

Delta described his fraternal experience as the motivation and purpose he needed to become a scholar. He felt validated as a Latino male at a predominantly Caucasian institution through his involvement with the fraternity. He dedicated himself to the growth of the group so
that future members could benefit from the same experience he had. As a result of his involvement, Delta was able to get back on track academically, and he graduated in 2008. He is currently pursuing a master’s degree.

**Participant Epsilon.**

Originally from New York City, Epsilon is a 44-year old Dominican male from a low-income household. He grew up with his parents and his three siblings, of which is he is the second youngest. He described having had a very difficult childhood, being raised in a neighborhood where there were drugs, violence, and gangs. Epsilon was very clear during his interview that the high school he attended, part of the New York City Public System, provided an inadequate education for him in a very toxic environment. Therefore, he did not feel that his high school prepared him for college life. He described his love for the sport of baseball and his siblings as positive distractions that kept him from being caught up in the mischief that surrounded him in his neighborhood on a daily basis. They were positive influences on his pathway to college.

Epsilon dedicated himself to playing baseball in high school and became a very good player with aspirations to play college baseball. Additionally, he visited his older brother and sister at the colleges they attended. He explained his baseball aspirations his structure, and his visits to his sibling’s respective college campuses as motivation to stay focused and pursue an education of higher learning.

Epsilon stated that he was recruited as a baseball player by several institutions. Epsilon chose to enroll at Institution 2, a reputable private institution, as a student athlete on the baseball team. He was also accepted into the affirmative action program on campus which provided scholarships, guidance, and support to inner city youth. Epsilon had a bright future as a college
baseball player and a member of a program that would support him financially and morally. It seemed as though his college career would go just fine. However, the outcome was different than expected for Epsilon.

Epsilon described a campus culture that was not accustomed to students from diverse cultural backgrounds similar to his. Epsilon felt a sense of marginalization even though he was a student athlete. This led him to not only cluster with other Latino students, but to start a chapter of a national Latino fraternity on his campus.

While he was very active on campus, Epsilon admits not having the maturity or sense of responsibility to focus academically. By his third year, he did not maintain the necessary grade point average to remain a student athlete, and eventually fell below the minimum requirements for enrolled students. He was asked to leave the institution after his third year because of his low academic performance. He was the one and only participant in this pool who did not eventually complete his college education. Regardless, Epsilon describes himself as a successful entrepreneur who had a great tenure on Wall Street, has been happily married for over 15 years, is a father of three, owns a home, and is now working towards opening his own business within the next year.

**Participant Zeta.**

Participant Zeta is a 22-year old female whose parents were born in the Dominican Republic. She was born and raised in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, in a low-income household. Zeta described herself as a product of the Boston Public School system where she excelled academically, earning a 3.6 grade point average. Zeta mentioned that there was never any pressure from family members to attend college, but that it was the expected thing to do.
Her father was in the hotel industry, inspiring her to major in the same field. She was the first to attend college, making her a first generation college student.

Zeta attended Institution 1 between 2009 and 2013. She explained that it is a small college in Boston with a very diverse student population. She received merit-based institutional scholarships in addition to financial aid at Institution 1. Zeta continued to excel academically in college, earning a 3.7 cumulative GPA. Time permitting, she was also an active student leader on campus. She admitted that while she was very successful, she recalled a very difficult time during her sophomore and junior years where she seriously considered dropping out.

Zeta was a high academic achiever. However, she acknowledged that she did not really understand the expectations of being a college student. She did not receive guidance from her high school, from family, nor from Institution 1. She struggled with stress and time management, primarily due to the expenses of being a college student.

Zeta worked two, sometimes three, jobs at a time throughout her college years to help pay for educational and living expenses. She paid for her own books and supplies, car costs to drive to school, meals, and cell phone bills. Because she came from a low-income household, these significant costs were enough to become a financial burden on her. She worked on campus through the Federal Work Study program and also maintained part time jobs at hotels in the city of Boston. She enjoyed being an active student leader on campus during her first two years, but she had to sacrifice those activities in order to work to maintain her status as a college student.

Zeta described becoming very overwhelmed during her junior year. She questioned whether she should continue or if she should drop out. What prevented her from leaving were her on-campus job, an academic counselor, and her family. She felt an obligation to make her parents proud by completing her education. Zeta described her Federal Work Study job on
campus with commuter student affairs as giving her a sense of purpose. Her boss, a student affairs administrator who was Latino and a first-generation college student himself, was flexible and helped nurture her growth throughout her college years. She voluntarily met with an academic counselor on a weekly basis during her freshman and sophomore years to discuss her difficulties. The academic counselor listened to her concerns and they developed a strong relationship. By her junior year, Zeta opted to stop meeting with the same academic counselor on a weekly basis but would check in on occasion for casual conversation. Zeta graduated in 2013 with honors, and she described the start of her career in the hotel industry as very promising.

**Data Analysis Process**

During the interviews and throughout the coding process several common descriptions emerged from the data. Commonalities among the participants were derived from their profiles, and some of these salient features are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

*Common Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Gamma</th>
<th>Delta</th>
<th>Epsilon</th>
<th>Zeta</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation college student</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Single parent household</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in the northeastern region</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Low income household</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically successful in high school</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felt prepared for college</td>
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<td>Academically successful in college</td>
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<td>Used financial aid to attend college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Used Parent PLUS loans to attend</td>
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<td>Financial concerns in college</td>
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<td>Left college because of financial issues</td>
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<td>Left college because of academic issues</td>
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<td>Graduation from initial institution</td>
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<td>Graduation from another institution</td>
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</table>
Whether they came from single parent households or not they all came from low income households. The members of the participant pool are all Latinos who were very successful academically at the high school level. Initially participants also succeeded academically and became engaged in the college campus community; some were high academic achievers at the college level, as well. All of the participants also found the costs of a college education to be a very stressful burden, which ultimately were considerations in their decisions. Appendix F provides representative samples of statements made by the participants, which were significant in determining the themes for this research study.

Congruent with previous research, the main statements were placed into two major categories of factors that have been found to influence the collegiate experience for Latino students, societal factors and environmental factors. They are labeled ‘Category I - Societal Factors’ and ‘Category II - Environmental Factors’ in Appendix F. Societal factors are experiences college students undergo prior to entering college that they are not able to easily change, such as their family background and preparation for college at the high school level (or lack thereof) (Arbona & Novy, 1990). Environmental factors, such as campus climate and home lives, were included as elements of the participants’ surroundings. These factors help mold the collegiate experience for Latinos (Hernandez, 2000). The main statements placed in these two categories denote the trajectory of the experiences described by the participants and their drop out decision considerations. Appendix F provides verbatim evidence from all participants organized in the two categories as well as researcher conclusions for each category. The information included in Appendix F supports the themes of this research study.
Participants were able to find student engagement opportunities, either on campus or by visiting other institutions, by clustering with other students on their campus with similar backgrounds within groups that validated the Latino identity. The participants felt validated through their involvement with these groups on a national level. They also became influential student leaders in multiple groups to form relationships with other fellow Latino students on campus. Additionally, the role of family was a strong factor in their perseverance. Ultimately, their involvement on campus and family influence helped shape and define their collegiate experience. Those factors provided motivation to perform well academically and remain in college and shows resilience on their behalf.

While participants were all cognitively capable of completing a college education, all six of the participants still contemplated dropping out, and five of them did drop out for some period of time. Of the five who did drop out, all but one went on to complete their education at either the institution where they began or after they transferred to another institution. The common descriptions among all of the participants provided themes that help address the research question: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college?

**Themes**

Data were analyzed by identifying all non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements and then clustering them in order to decipher the meanings of the participant’s experiences. There were several commonalities among the main statements made by the participants, commonalities that became a part of their drop-out considerations, and these have been labeled as themes for this research study. Examples of verbatim evidence that supports each theme are included. The themes that emerged were:
1. Socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students.

2. The expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students.

3. Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life.

4. Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds.

5. Financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students. Each is detailed in the following sections.

   **Socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students.**

   Participants disclosed their respective socioeconomic statuses during their second interviews. All were raised in low-income households. In some cases, only one parent was present during their childhood. As a result, the participants experienced unique difficulties in obtaining an education of higher learning due to their socioeconomic status that they believed were unknown to their more affluent classmates.

   All of the participants used financial aid to attend their respective college or university. The majority of the funding sources were student loans (and parent Plus Loans in some cases). Most of the participants claimed that they had difficulty meeting the estimated family contribution calculated by the Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). This dynamic provided extra stress to the participants and was a factor in the drop out decision considerations. For example, Alpha said,
My recollection, and this was in the 1980s, is that it was about 60% loans, and 35% grants, and 5% scholarships. I did not drop out until I did because I was having desire to stay. I never had any reason to want to drop out. My grades were fine. They weren't stellar. I wasn't performing at a college level the way that I had at the high school level but I was never in academic parallel. What prevented me from dropping out was just my desire to stay. I eventually did stop attending college simply because of money problems.

Beta had a similar experience:

Some government assistance in the form of financial aid, some grants. I would say easily two-thirds of it was student loans from my mom, plus Student PLUS Loans, Stafford Loans. I would say a third was Stafford, so my loan and a third was a Parent PLUS Loan. After my fifth year, I was pretty close. I was only a few credits short but I just couldn't ask my mother to take out any more money. I don't know that I could go back for a sixth year. It was entirely too much, even if it was only for a handful of credits. I felt that professionally if not academically, professionally that school had prepared me, just through different experiences. I decided to take a risk and see if I could make it out there with the knowledge I had so far. I had to get out there and start helping my mom as well. My mom was a single parent raising two children. My sister was not a good student ever at any point for most of her life. My mom worked anywhere from three to sometimes four jobs, and all crazy hours of the day where she would come home in the middle of the night, wake up late morning and go to work. We would barely see her even when I was in high school so it bothered me that my mom had to work that hard for that long to support me and I felt that I had a responsibility to contribute. Then, my grandmother lived with us as well. She took care of us. She was a babysitter growing
up. My sister’s five years younger than I am but she’s another mouth to feed. She has Social Security but not much. There was, my mom was running that household by herself.

Zeta shared,

Well my family it’s a low class family so I had to pay… for everything else, like I have a car, I have to pay for my car, food expenses, I had to pay for my food, school supplies like books I would have to pay myself. Basically everything financially, for myself I had to pay it myself. That basically put pressure on me financially and I knew that if I left school I could work more and take care of those expenses.

Accordingly, the researcher determined ‘Socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students.’

The expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students.

First generation college students are defined as students who are the first to attend an institution of higher education. The unique circumstances presented by this status include the fact that that family members are not able to provide guidance, moral support, or serve as role-models to set expectations for college life for the enrolled student. The students were, therefore, left to fend for themselves once they enrolled and started their college careers. Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Zeta were all first generation college students. They all mentioned that they felt they were not prepared for the rigors of college life because they did not understand the academic and social expectations. As they described in the verbatim evidence below, this made their transition from high school to college tumultuous and affected academic progress in some cases:

Alpha said:
My family is from El Salvador. We are Salvadoran immigrants to the country. I did not have a grand scheme about going to college. It seemed as though it was the right thing to do because I was good in school. In high school, I excelled. I did that and then most of my friends, and so I was encouraged by teachers and others to attend school, but I did not possess sufficient understanding to really have a great notion that really pushed me forward to attend school. It just seemed like the right thing to do. In high school, I was in the top ten of my class. I don't remember the exact number. It might have been somewhere from number four, or five, or six, or something like that, but I attended an inner city public high school where the dropout rates in the first, second, and third year of school were significant. If you made it until the end, you were one of the few of the crowd to begin with. If you were in the top ten, chances are you were a pretty good student. Because none of my family had gone through college, and I was not trying to go to college growing up. I didn't care. I didn't sit on somebody's lap who told me what college was about. I didn't really focus on college, to be honest with you, until about a couple of years before it was time to decide and pick a college, and so forth. I think that in the school system, the public school system, there really isn't … There might have been occasionally a teacher who mentioned when you go to college, this is what you should expect, but for the most part, there was not a system delivery of that message throughout my education, and because my family didn't have that background, it was not delivered. It was not until the last couple of years leading up to the graduation that there was really a sense of this is where you're going to go next so you better start thinking about it. There was not … For example, when you show up as a junior or a sophomore in high school, there was not a day of let's review what you've done. You've gone through
elementary school. You've gone through middle school. Now, you're in high school. What's next? There was not that explanation of how the system works. It might have been useful if somebody had done that.

Beta shared:

All of us of similar backgrounds were pretty much left on our own. I think the university, I think it would still would have been in their best interest to give us at least similar tools to handle college coming from our background. So I understand it wouldn't pay for our education. But it should at least help us with the maturity level needed to succeed at college. I just think that, when you come from a high school from a better neighborhood like the high schools that I know some of my cousins attended on Long Island. Some of the kids that I knew that I met in college that attended a lot of these more affluent neighborhoods, they have programs in their high schools that are geared towards how to handle the class work, how to be mature enough to attend school, to attend classes, how to properly study for the class work. In contrast, when I get to college, it's pretty much, “Here's your dorm key. Here's your class schedule. Be there.” I came from an environment where I was forced to go to school. I still went but there were consequences for not going to class. Attendance was taken. You were expected to be in class. I get to college and there’s just nobody watching me. I often said, “Okay. I just won't go to class.” I lacked the maturity to … Those are the tools I think we're missing. Helping me mature and realize even though I'm on my own, I should be taking on the responsibility.

These experiences validated the theme of ‘The expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students.’
**Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life.**

While not an anticipated theoretical lens, it seems that when commencing their college careers, the participants were caught in the Marginality vs. Mattering conflict Schlossberg (1989) described. Verbatim evidence confirmed that they felt marginalized during their acclimation to campus due to being from a different cultural background that their peers. This caused a sense of alienation on campus and directed the participants towards clustering with other students of similar cultural backgrounds via recognized Latino student organizations. These organizations became bridges towards shifting their sense of isolation to a sense of belonging or ‘mattering’ (Schlossberg, 1989).

Delta said:

I just think that arriving at my freshman dorm and they had all these activities prepared and getting to know each other and learning the policies of the college, et cetera and social activities and all that. It was very clear to me early on that I was different than people by the way that I dressed, by the way that I... the inflection of my speech, and I think that the first reaction I had was to sort of try to mold my behavior and my speech to fit in. That was just... It forced me to be someone more or less artificial, so I abandoned that pretty quickly. I sought some support and some help from the Latino community at Institution 3.

Epsilon shared:

I was a college baseball prospect coming out of high school and committed to Institution 2 because I was promised the best opportunity to play and obtain a college degree.

Although I was on the baseball team, I honestly felt that I was treated differently because
of the color of my skin. For my own sanity, I needed another outlet at the university. I met other Latino students who were members of the Latino student organization on campus. However, that wasn't enough. I would visit my Brother at University X and met members of a national Latino fraternity and it was then that I found that other outlet. I went back to Institution 2, recruited some of my good friends to join, and we became the founding fathers of the chapter on our campus. Our intentions were rejected by the university administration and we were not given university recognition at first because there was no room for a Latino fraternity...we were literally told to join either white or black fraternities. We did it anyway. Our chapter would validate the Latino male identity, which at the time was non-existent, at a predominantly Caucasian university, ‘til this day twenty four years later. It has helped other Latino males we didn't even know back then. All we knew is that we need to create our own identity so that future Latino students did not have to go through what we did.

These experiences validated the emergent theme ‘Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life.’

**Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds.**

All of the participants were eager to find student engagement opportunities that would help them experience traditional college life (Hernandez, 2000). Although several mainstream student engagement opportunities were provided by all of the institutions represented by the pool, the participants felt disconnected. The participants felt a need to have a sense of belonging at their respective institutions. Participants were able to find student engagement opportunities, either on campus or at neighboring institutions, where they clustered with other students on their
campus with similar backgrounds within groups that validated the Latino identity. The groups were not only opportunities to meet new people, but helped develop their leadership skills and extended their stay at their respective institutions.

Beta said:

The first thing I found was the Latin-American club. They're the first ones I remember identifying with. I was also introduced to the Latino fraternity on campus. I felt a sense of community. I was dorming. I wasn't far from home. I was only about half an hour, but I didn't get to drive, so it was half an hour if my mother came to pick me up, but it was a little over an hour if I took public transportation home, so it was still a difference. It was a good way to find familiar faces or people with familiar backgrounds.

Gamma shared:

There was, I guess the student government held kind of a fair for only incoming students. This fair had a table of all the prominent social groups that were there for students to partake in. At that time, you were paired with a counselor to kind of give you the tour and the walk around on the campus. Some of them were biased, some of them weren’t, because that counselor is pretty much giving you their impression of the organizations to look into or whatever. I also happened to have a Latino counselor. He said, “We have a lot of Latin American and Spanish groups,” and I felt a little taken aback because it was a very small number in my orientation group regarding to the skin color. I was the dark … pretty much I was the darkest skin color in my orientation group. Everybody was from New York and I was Latino Hispanic and I was the darkest one in that group. I happened to meet someone else who was Latino, but he was light skinned and I couldn’t tell right away if he was Spanish or not. We kind of clicked once we found our way to this social
table, which was introduced to us. It was an organization of Latin Americans. That’s where I met fellow Latino students and got introduced to pretty much that life. Through this group I was also introduced to the Latino fraternity on campus which I joined later on. I became a very active leader and worked my way towards becoming president of one of them and an active leader for another.

Delta reflected:

It was very clear to me early on that I was different than people by the way that I dressed, by the way that I... the inflection of my speech, and I think that the first reaction I had was to sort of try to mold my behavior and my speech to fit in. That was just... It forced me to be someone more or less artificial, so I abandoned that pretty quickly. I sought some support and some help from the Latino community at Institution 3 and the first thing that struck me was this fraternity that was there, I know that Institution 3 doesn’t allow fraternities and so it's intriguing. The history was very intriguing and I decided to give it a shot and loved it after a whole semester of learning about it and becoming very close and bonding closely with the people, the brothers that were part of it. I think that that was the kind of the defining moment for me when I started actually feeling a sense of belonging at the campus.

Epsilon shared:

I was a college baseball prospect coming out of high school and committed to Institution 2 because I was promised the best opportunity to play and obtain a college degree. Although I was on the baseball team, I honestly felt that I was treated differently because of the color of my skin. For my own sanity, I needed another outlet at the university. I met other Latino students who were members of the Latino student organization on
campus. However, that wasn't enough. I would visit my Brother at University X and met members of a national Latino fraternity and it was then that I found that other outlet. I went back to Institution 2 and recruited some of my good friends to join and we became the founding fathers of the chapter on our campus. Our intentions were rejected by the university administration and we were not given university recognition at first because there was no room for a Latino fraternity... we were literally told to join either white or black fraternities. We did it anyway. Our chapter would validate the Latino male identity, which at the time was non-existent, at a predominantly Caucasian university til this day twenty four years later. It has helped other Latino males we didn't even know back then. All we knew is that we need to create our own identity so that future Latino students did not have to go through what we did.

The experiences of the participants validated the theme ‘Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds.’

**Financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students.**

As a result of their status as first-generation college students from low income households, most of the participants struggled with the stress of financing their college education. Participants shared that the majority of their financial aid packages consisted of student loans. In some cases, participants had to ask their parents to take out parents Plus Loans to supplement financial aid packages in order for the participants to continue their studies. Working one or two on and/or off campus jobs was common among the participants. The participants described the financial burden as an impediment to their academic progress. For
some of the participants, this impediment prompted them to spend so much time working that it interfered with their academics, resulting in academic dismissal from their respective institution. The academic dismissals happened to participants who were high academic achievers at the high school level.

Alpha said:

I never had any reason to want to drop out. My grades were fine. They weren't stellar. I wasn't performing at a college level the way that I had at the high school level, but I was never in academic parallel. What prevented me from dropping out was just my desire to stay. I eventually did stop attending college simply because of money problems.

Beta shared his financial concerns:

After my fifth year, I was pretty close. I was only a few credits short but I just couldn’t ask my mother to take out any more money. I don't know that I could go back for a sixth year. It was entirely too much, even if it was only for a handful of credits. I felt that professionally if not academically, professionally that school had prepared me, just through different experiences. I decided to take a risk and see if I could make it out there with the knowledge I had so far. I had to get out there and start helping my mom as well. My mom was a single parent raising two children. My mom worked anywhere from three to sometimes four jobs, and all crazy hours of the day where she would come home in the middle of the night, wake up late morning and go to work. We would barely see her even when I was in high school so it bothered me that my mom had to work that hard for that long to support me and I felt that I had a responsibility to contribute. Then, my grandmother lived with us as well. She took care of us. She was a babysitter growing up. My sister’s five years younger than I am but she's another mouth to feed. She has
Social Security but not much. There was, my mom was running that household by herself.

Zeta contributed her thoughts

I thought about leaving college in my junior year. I just felt like it was a very hard year. Financially I know I was struggling. I know there was like one semester I was taking six classes and working at the same time and it was just too much. I think it was also my sophomore year too. My sophomore year but it was mainly because I was working full-time so I had to lower my hours at work and then be able to focus in school more. It was a matter of, do I want to leave school, work more and not have a degree and take care of expenses and save money? Or do I want to stay in school and work less and even though I’m struggling, keep going and finish.

These accounts validated the theme ‘Financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students.’

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the findings of this research study were presented and ultimately brought to life via the stories of each of the participants. As a result, the verbatim evidence provided from all of the participants confirmed the themes that emerged from this study:

1. Socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students.

2. The expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students.

3. Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life.
4. Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds.

5. Financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students. Collectively, the themes provide an understanding of what are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college.

Interviews with the participants provided comprehensive descriptions of each of the participants’ experiences as they contemplated dropping out of college. They were all high academic achievers at the high school level and capable of performing well academically at the college level. They were all accepted into prestigious private four year institutions in the northeast and had bright futures. Additionally, they all found an avenue by which to become engaged in campus life, which helped retain all but one of the participants. Through their experiences and stories, the voices of the participants defined and brought to life decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings of the study and provides additional connections to relevant literature and the theoretical framework guiding this research study. The chapter also includes a discussion on implications for higher education administrators and faculty who work with Latino college student populations in positions such as vice president for student affairs, dean of students, academic advisors, student activities administrator, financial aid administrator, residence life staff, and campus counselors. These implications are also pertinent to the families of future Latino college students to help them obtain a better understanding of what the students may experience. The limitations and strengths of this research are also
presented, as well as recommendations for future research. In the final section, I present my personal reflections on my expedition throughout this research study.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Reflections

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Latino former college students who were members of Latino fraternal organizations as they contemplated dropping out of college. The primary research question for this research study was: What are decision considerations as communicated in lived experiences of Latinos in Latino Greek-lettered organizations who contemplated dropping out of college? As a result of this study, there were five themes identified that contributed to this phenomenon. The findings support Tinto’s (1993) Model of Student Departure, and should be addressed by institutions of higher learning in order to increase retention. The factors can be categorized into two categories: societal factors and environmental factors, consistent with existing research. Ultimately, the findings of this study have provided significant answers to the primary research question.

Societal Factors

Societal factors are experiences college students undergo prior to entering college, including their upbringing. Most of the participants in this study were first-generation college students, a trend among Latino college students as they are often the first in their family to attend and graduate from an institution of higher learning (Arbona, & Novy, 1991; Hernandez, 2000). As a result, the participants felt they were not prepared to navigate their way through the collegiate experience in the same way their peers who came from families of college graduates. This dynamic brought about negative experienced that leads to student departure Tinto (1993). Latino students who lack that exposure need to become socialized into the college experience on their own, and participants in this study said this contributed to their contemplating dropping out
of college which supports the lack of synergy between academic integration, social integration, and goal commitment that leads to student departure (Tinto, 1993).

The research participants described factors which made their collegiate experiences tumultuous. In general, it seems as though they initially experienced a sense of exclusion or marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989). Marginality is the sense of not feeling central, needed or included within a particular group or environment (Schlossberg, 1989). It is a sense of being an outsider looking in. On the other hand, Mattering is feeling included, as though one is depended on and is an integral part of a group of environment (Schlossberg, 1989). Marginalization was described by participants as an additional negative experience because they did not initially become engaged in campus life and incorporate into the social scene on their respective campuses. The lack of engagement in campus life was a factor in the consideration of dropping out for the research participants. Tinto states that students need to become socially acclimated to avoid student departure (Tinto, 1993). Thus, institutions of higher learning need to minimize marginalization to prevent student departure.

Participants attributed the feeling of marginality as being due to a lack of understanding about the expectations of being a college student. The lack of understanding stemmed from the participants’ status as first generation college students. Families of first generation college students are unable to provide the support necessary to help, both interpersonally and financially. This dynamic set them apart from their peers who came from college-educated families that had experience with the college experience.

**Environmental Factors**

Environmental factors such as a campus’ racial climate were described as elements of the participants’ surroundings. This is consistent with the literature review. These factors help mold
the collegiate experience for Latinos (Hernandez, 2000). The major challenges presented by
environmental factors are that they are less flexible and will not change in the short term.
Students are therefore forced to traverse their way through them.

**Overview of Findings in Relation to Current Literature**

Several conclusions can be drawn from this research study. There are distinct differences
between Latinos and non-Latinos, which have an impact on persistence in college. Socio-
economic status is one factor supported by current research (Hernandez, 2000). It is quite
evident that there is a significant disparity between the college dropout rates of Latinos vs. non-
Latinos. Latinos who enroll in colleges or universities are less likely to complete a bachelor’s
degree than non-Latino students (Aguayo,Flores, Herman & Ojeda 2011; Arbona & Nora 2007;
Hernandez, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Notably, this study provides further evidence that the
disparity exists even in private institutions.

Many Latino collegiate students come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This
has several negative effects on their ability to obtain a higher education (Hurtado, Carter, &
Spuler, 1996). Latinos, in comparison to those who are not Latinos, tend to experience
additional financial stress while enrolled in a college or university. The stress of financing an
education of higher learning has been shown to have a negative effect on Latinos pursuing higher
education (Torres, Winston, & Cooper, 2003). Comparisons between Latinos and Caucasian
students have shown that Latinos experience stress due to financial reasons, which is consistent
with findings the findings in this study (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Pascarella, Pierson,
Wolniak, & Ternezipi, 2004; Torres, Winston, & Cooper, 2003). Additionally, many Latino
students must work while they are in college in order to be able to afford a college education
(Hernandez 2000). This was an important factor the participants in this study considered before dropping out of college.

Several studies have confirmed that environmental factors have an effect on college persistence, with campus climate denoted as an external factor (Arbona, & Nora, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Ternezi, 2004). Data from the research participants in this research study indicated that campus climate had an effect on their adjustment to college and their level of comfort as they were trying to find a place for themselves within their respective college/university. Considerable research has been devoted to evaluating the significance of campus climate on acclimation and persistence at the college level (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter & Spuler, 1996).

The role of family has been highlighted in several studies as being important for student success (Aguayo, Flores, Herman, & Ojeda, 2011; Arbona, & Nora, 2007; Auerbach, 2004; Hernandez, 2000) and it was emphasized by participants in this study as well. Latino college students are motivated to complete a higher education as an obligation to their parents (Aguayo, Flores, Herman, & Ojeda, 2011; Arbona, & Nora, 2007; Auerbach, 2004; Hernandez, 2000). Because Latino college students frequently come from lower socioeconomic statuses, their parents often struggle to support them towards obtaining an education of higher learning; yet Latino students are motivated by a notion that they owe it to their parents to earn a bachelor's degree (Hernandez, 2000).

The three areas identified by Tinto (1993) as major sources of student departure were “academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution” (p. 99). Tinto found that negative experiences can lead to student withdrawal, while
positive encounters facilitate commitment to their collegiate experience. Students who are able to have good experiences in building connections with others on campus are more likely to persist and ultimately graduate (Tinto, 1993). Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon struggled to become incorporated into the intellectual life of their respective institutions. These participants attributed this to a lack of understanding of the expectations of being a college student and limited to no institutional support in assisting them with navigating their way towards earning an education of higher learning. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon and Zeta all failed to incorporate into the campus social life initially. They did not feel accepted at their respective campuses due to their different cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, their ability to independently connect with student organizations dedicated to students with similar cultural backgrounds, developing relationships with key staff members or individual peers with common interests extended their enrollment at respective institutions. Gamma, Delta, and Zeta ultimately graduated from the first and only college or university they attended and attributed their success to the connections they made on campus which were the positive experiences that Tinto (1993) is referring to. Although Alpha and Beta transferred, the relationships they did develop became the positive experiences that extended their stay at their initial institutions. According to Tinto, institutions need to commit to nurturing that synergy. For the participants in this research study, their institutions failed at facilitating that synergy.

In addition to Tinto's Model of Student Departure, Schlossberg's Marginality vs. Mattering theory (Scholssberg, 1989) was naturally applicable to the findings. More specifically, Schlossberg's theory was pertinent in discussing theme three (Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life) and theme four (Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar
backgrounds). Schlossberg’s theory, when combined with Tinto’s clarifies why the participants did not become acclimated to campus immediately and why they felt the need to cluster with student from similar cultural backgrounds in order to become acclimated and pursue their goals of achieving and education of higher learning.

Figure 2 illustrates the various components of the participants’ college experience and how the lack of synergy between the previously mentioned major sources moved students towards drop out decisions. In particular, Figure 2 is an illustration of the experiences as described by Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Zeta. The grey arrows and circles represent synergetic parts according to the participants. The black arrows represent sources that became disconnected at one point, interrupting the synergy for these participants.
Two major findings among the participants in this study were 1) lack of family support and 2) stress from financing their college education. Additionally, participants confirmed that their lack of preparation prior to enrolling in college at the high school level affected their progress and ability to remain committed to their goals. Although the participants were high academic achievers prior to enrolling in institutions of higher education and became engaged by independently clustering with other students from similar backgrounds, they eventually contemplated dropping out of college regardless of these actions. Five of the six participants actually did drop out, of which one never returned to finish his education. The sixth participant remained at their institution and completed their undergraduate degree without a break.

Delta and Epsilon described experiences that were slightly different from the other participants. Figure 3 illustrates Delta and Epsilon's experiences. They did not have the financial burden of the cost of their education. Delta attended his institution mostly on institutional scholarships. Epsilon was a student athlete on full scholarship at a Division I university. Additional benefits of their student statuses were also afforded to them -- educational resources, financial support and access to facilities not available to general students. The illustration shows that, unfortunately, the institutions failed to nurture the synergy (Tinto, 1993), and failed to retain capable students.
Figure 3. Tinto’s Model of Student Departure based on data given by participants Delta and Epsilon. Adapted from Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

**Limitations and Strengths**

Chapter 3 presented an overview of the primary limitations of this qualitative research study. All participants in this research study attended private institutions of higher learning in northeastern United States. Site generalizations cannot be made. The experiences of those who did not join a Latino Greek-Lettered Organization were not studied because of the inclusion criteria of the study. Additionally, while several female participants responded to initial recruitment outreach efforts, only one female actually participated in this study. Thus, the experience of Latinas and their voices are underrepresented in this study. Again, the nature of a phenomenological study precludes generalization to other settings therefore the study is only representative of the research participants.
Implications for practice

The findings from this study provide several implications for higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners. The results present important information about the factors that negatively influence the collegiate experience for Latino college students. For example, staff should understand that students may not understand the expectations of being a college student. Latino students need dedicated resources to address the unique issues presented by this student population. Some of the topics might include information to address the burden of financing their education. Colleges should consider that students may need to work multiple jobs for income to attend and meet their financial obligations. Additionally, campus racial climates can negatively affect the collegiate experience for Latino students. The negative influences may eventually result in their departure from campus (Tinto, 1993). Thus, the findings may be valuable to administrators, professional staff, and faculty members to provide pro-active services to Latino college students in order to increase retention.

Environmental factors were described as important elements of the participants’ experiences. For example, how accepting a campus is to students of diverse cultural backgrounds, or a campus' racial climate, and resources afforded to the participants by the college, or lack thereof, played a factor in their collegiate experiences. This is consistent with current research, in that these factors help mold the collegiate experience for Latinos (Hernandez, 2000). The major challenges presented by environmental factors are that they are less flexible and will not change in the short term. For example if a student is a part of a campus community that is biased against students from diverse cultural backgrounds they are forced to navigate their way through any negative experiences as a result of such an environment.
Societal factors are experiences that college students undergo prior to entering college such as the households and communities they were raised in, their high school education and socioeconomic status. Most of the participants were first-generation college students, and they became the first in their family to attend and graduate from an institution of higher learning. They were not prepared to navigate their way through the collegiate experience, unlike their peers who came from families of college graduates. Families that had not supported college graduates within their immediate family may be less able to help their student understand and manage the various expectations of earning a college degree. Institutions of higher learning that fail to recognize the need to fill this void are unable to support these students towards graduation. Thus, Latino students who lack that exposure need to identify other ways to deal with the societal factors that affect their experience on their own. For some of the participants in this study, this led them to contemplate leaving the institution.

It is not merely enough to admit Latino students. It is vital that strategies be developed to pro-actively address the needs of this population. Participants described a lack of genuine outreach to Latino students who struggled with unique circumstances. This was credited to a lack of knowledge or disregard of the unique circumstances Latino students present to institutions.

Summer bridge programs or specific orientation tracks dedicated to families of Latino first generation college students are tactics to increase to the success of this population. Such action could create an environment in which families could feel free to ask questions about supporting their college student through a college career and building the associative skills. It would also provide the opportunity for families and administrators to develop partnerships that can help foster a nurturing environment for supporting first generation college students. Lastly,
educating the families of first generation college students can help reduce anxiety and stress levels for all parties involved that can be detrimental to the success of the student.

A perception of a negative racial climate can impede the students’ ability to become engaged in campus life. However, it does increase the students’ social consciousness as they tend to cluster with students with similar cultural backgrounds (Nuñez, 2009). Thus, Latino students become engaged in a multitude of ways and the “one size fits all approach should not be applied to all racial/ethnic groups when measuring sense of belonging and perceptions of the campus climate.” (Nuñez, 2009, p. 59).

Higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners should not forget that Latino students strongly connect with each other through organizations that validate the Latino identity, whether on campus, nationally, or both. They do so to fill a void within the larger campus atmosphere. There is a sense of cultural promotion and preservation, as well as a positive family feeling among Latino based groups. These organizations were significant sources of support for the study’s participants.

With large numbers of Latino students currently enrolling, the challenges that Latino students face on campus are being formally discussed within higher education in all regions. This study filled a gap by including the voices of Latino students in the northeastern region. Acting on the results of those discussions is occurring more frequently. As such, intentional discussions and retention models should consider the findings of this research study. Specifically, leaders and student affairs professionals should note:

1. Socioeconomic status is an important consideration in persistence of Latino college students.
2. The expectations of what it means to be a college student are challenging for first-generation Latino college students.

3. Latino college students struggle with acclimation to college life.

4. Latino college students find student engagement opportunities by clustering with other Latino college students of similar backgrounds.

5. Financing a college education was an overwhelming burden for Latino college students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The original intention of this research study was to supplement current research by examining factors that influence Latinos dropping out of college. The findings present insights into Latino college student retention. Previous research has studied Latino students, specifically Chicano students, in the southwest, west coast and midwest regions of the United States (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado, 1992; Nora, 1996; Nuñez, 2009). This study focused on students who attended institutions of higher education in the northeast region, including a wider range of background, specifically those from Central American and Caribbean countries of Latin America. It supplements previous research by adding findings from students from a different region and different Latino backgrounds. Additionally, this study encourages further research on the drop-out decisions of Latino students who have different profiles.

Future research should venter on students who attend public institutions of higher learning in the northeastern region of the United States. Remaining questions include: Are the factors that cause students to consider dropping out of college similar at public colleges or universities? Do the factors change due to the lower cost of a public college education? Are there institutional differences between private and public institutions that should be considered as
factors to Latinos dropping out? Each of these questions should be addressed to understand retention within Latino populations.

There is equally a need to research Latinos who are not affiliated with Latino Greek-lettered organizations. There are students who do not choose to join a Latino fraternity or sorority and opt to only remain active in a Latino student club or organization, for example. What is the experience for this student population? Are there distinct differences between being a member of a Latino fraternity or sorority or student club or organization and the drop out decisions of Latino college students? Different engagement opportunities produce different retention results and this should be explored.

Latinos also opt to join Caucasian fraternities and sororities or Historically Black fraternities and sororities. There are also Latinos who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Would the findings be different for those students? Are their experiences dissimilar than those who participated in this study? Are there other factors to be identified?

Finally, further research on current Latino college students who attend institutions of higher learning in the northeastern region of the United States is also warranted. Research in the southeast and northwest regions is also lacking and merits future research as well. These are populations that have not been thoroughly studied. Further research would provide additional resources and a more accurate perspective on the phenomena involved in this study.

**Conclusion and Reflections**

Conducting this research was a very intriguing journey. I originally wanted to conduct contemporary research on 16 - 20 current Latino students from 12 institutions in at least 5 states in the northeast. I felt that I needed to provide a recent snapshot of the experience for as many
Latino students as possible from a very broad area. However, that was a bit unrealistic within
the scope of the dissertation process. My committee members and mentors advised me to narrow
my scope and refine the topic for this study, keeping me grounded. After a lengthy initial
discussion with my advisor Dr. Carolyn Bair about the reasons for pursuing this topic, she
immediately noted my passion, knowledge, and dedication towards providing scholarly research
that would help shed light on such an important and ‘publishable’ issue in higher education. She
also made it clear that my intended sample size and target areas were unrealistic and that if I was
to be successful that I narrow my focus and sample size. How right she was.

What follows are my personal reflections on how my topic emerged, my role as a
qualitative researcher, and lastly my experiences with the participants. I am a first generation
college student. I came from a single parent household being raised by my lovely mother,
assisted by my now 87-year-old amazing grandmother. I come from very humble beginnings,
having been born and raised in the projects of Queens, New York. In high school I was a gang
member, with a C- overall GPA and a four-year attendance record of 51%. As such, I was
labeled an “at-risk” youth who was expected to become no more than a statistic with a college
education far from reach. High school counselors and administrators guided me towards
enrolling in the US Marine Corps. I was tentatively scheduled to arrive in Parris Island on June
27th, 1990, just days after my high school graduation. Thankfully, my mother stood in the way
of my military plans and in conjunction with my college advisor they guided me towards
applying and being accepted into the one and only university I applied to. I was accepted into a
prestigious private institution on Long Island, New York under the auspices of the Higher
With the assistance of the H.E.O.P. staff, it was during my undergraduate years that I developed my identity as a Latino male scholar, my passion for the career path of higher education administration, and ultimately the topic for my dissertation research study. I, too, was challenged by the environmental and societal factors noted in the literature (Arbona, & Nora, 2007; Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez, 2011; Hurtado, 1992). I lived experiences that were very similar to those described by the participants in this research study. While I was not driven to contemplate dropping out of college, I knew far too many classmates who did contemplate it, and far too many who actually did. I misunderstood my role as a college student, felt marginalized, and considered myself academically incapable. I was grossly wrong.

Now in my professional career, it is alarming to me that the same issues are still being faced by other Latino students across America today. Thankfully, I persevered and went on to graduate school at Teachers College, Columbia University and have the privilege to write this dissertation. A countless number of other Latino students do not have this same opportunity. More attention needs to be paid to the drop-out rates of Latino college students.

My theoretical lens stems from having met Dr. Tinto as a part of the 2008 Regional Conference Staff for the Long Island College Student Personnel Association - L.I.C.S.P.A. He was the keynote speaker. I learned more about the focus of his Model of Student Departure through his presentation and through one-on-one conversations. With this model being so well known in mainstream education circles and Latinos now becoming such a significant portion of the college student population, I was interested in applying a mainstream theory to a population that is quickly becoming a strong part of the mainstream collegiate student population.

I have gained considerable experience as a qualitative researcher. As noted by my advisor, my interview protocol was a living document, and I should not be hesitant to build on
the protocol with each interview. I most certainly did so as the protocol evolved accordingly particularly after the second and third interviews. Ultimately, the flexibility facilitated my ability to probe and obtain more in depth responses that assisted with my findings.

Without question the most enjoyable part of this process for me was data collection and analysis. I was blessed with selecting six participants who followed through without reservation throughout the entire process. There were countless inevitable scheduling conflicts, but once the interviews started there were no interruptions and all participants were committed and passionate about the responses they provided. They frequently stated that they strongly believed in my topic. The quality of their responses was no more apparent than during data analysis where I was fascinated with the quality information that I easily identified with. The participant pool represents experiences that came before and after me, and yet the experiences were alarmingly similar. As mentioned earlier, this is the main reason for conducting this research.

Throughout my research, I often found myself reflecting back on my own collegiate experience. As I asked each question, it felt as though I was repeatedly asking myself the question throughout the interviews. I initially viewed each question through my own personal lens and context, but was immediately able to visualize the experience through the participants' lens and context. I believe that was due in major part because of my ‘insider’ status. I was able to relate almost instantly because I had a personal connection through my own similar experiences. As a result, throughout this process it was quickly confirmed for me that for decades Latino college students have continued to contemplate, and in several cases actually go through with, dropping out of college regardless of the location, size or reputation of the institution. This is a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored by institutions of higher learning.
References


Appendix A: NALFO Consent

National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations
NALFO

Nan C. Regina,
Director, Human Subject Research Protection
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board
960 Renaissance Park
Northeastern University,
Boston, MA 02115

October 13, 2013

Ms. Regina,

Please note that Mr. Dennis Canacho, NEU Doctoral Student, has the permission of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations to conduct research with our organization for his study, “The Drop Out Decisions of Latino College Students”. Mr. Canacho will contact alumni groups to recruit members via our listservs. His plan is to have all information distributed by the end of October. Mr. Canacho’s research activities will be finished by January 15, 2014.

Mr. Canacho has agreed not to misuse any of our internal communication tools or sanctioned events. Mr. Canacho has also agreed to provide to our office a copy of the Northeastern University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before he recruits participants, and will also provide a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact me.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Dennis Gonzalez
NALFO Chair
Appendix B: Phi Iota Alpha Consent

Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity Inc. Est. 1931
9322 3rd Avenue Suite 412
Brooklyn, NY 11209 USA

Nan C. Regina,
Director, Human Subject Research Protection
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board
960 Renaissance Park
Northeastern University,
Boston, MA 02115

October 13, 2013

Ms. Regina,

Please note that Mr. Dennis Camacho, NEU Doctoral Student, has the permission of Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity Inc. Est. 1931 to conduct research with our organization for his study, “The Drop Out Decisions of Latino College Students”. Mr. Camacho will contact alumni associations to recruit members via our listservs and/or by approaching them at our sanctioned events. His plan is to have all information distributed by the end of October. Mr. Camacho’s research activities will be finished by January 15th, 2014.

Mr. Camacho has agreed not to misuse any of our internal communication tools or sanctioned events. Mr. Camacho has also agreed to provide to our office a copy of the Northeastern University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before he recruits participants, and will also provide a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact me.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Francisco Lugo
Executive Director
Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear Potential Participant,

I am Dennis Camacho a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Organizational Leadership Studies, College of Professional Students at Northeastern University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study on the lived experiences of former undergraduate Latino college students with regard to decisions to drop out from, or remain enrolled in, college. You may participate if you are former undergraduate Latino college student at a 4-year private or public college or university in the northeast Region and a member of a Latino Greek lettered organization that considered dropping out of college; completion of the degree is not a requirement. As a participant, you will be asked participate in interviews to be held November 30th, 2013 – January 30th, 2014.

What will happen in the study?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following interviews:

1) Initial meeting with researcher (15 minutes)
   The study will be described and the consent form will be reviewed and signed.
2) Research interview with researcher (45-90 minutes)
   A brief overview of the study will be given, and the research interview will begin. The questions on the attached interview protocol will be used as a guide for the interview.
3) Brief meeting for member checking with researcher (15 minutes)
   The research interview will be summarized, and you will be asked to review it for accuracy. You will have the opportunity to say whether or not the summary reflects your experiences and to request any changes that you think will make the summary more credible.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

There are no expected or foreseeable risks, harms, or discomforts connected with participation in this study.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

Payments:

There is no payment or monetary incentive for participating.

Costs:
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

*Confidentiality:*

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher in the study will hear and see the information about you. The researcher will assign you a pseudonym, and the information you provide will only be used under this pseudonym and will not allow you to be identified. A professional transcriber will transcribe the interviews; however, those will be provided to the transcriber using your pseudonym. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Only the researcher will have access to your information. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way as being part of this project.

In very rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized, such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

*Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:*

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with your institution or organization.

You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.

There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please reply to camacho.de@husky.neu.edu so that I may send you the information approved by Northeastern University’s Internal Review Board including consent forms for you to review and sign. If you have questions, please contact me at camacho.de@husky.neu.edu or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Carolyn Bair, at c.bair@neu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dennis Camacho, M.A.
Appendix D: Signed Informed Consent

| Northeastern University, Department of Organizational Leadership Studies, College of Professional Studies |
| Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Carolyn Bair and Dennis Camacho, M.A. |
| Title of Project: The Drop Out Decisions of Latino College Students |

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to participate in a doctoral research study of Latino individuals who either considered dropping out of college or who dropped out of college. You were selected because you meet the criteria of a former undergraduate Latino college student at a 4-year private or public college or university in the Northeast Region of the United States, who was also a member of a Latino Greek-lettered organization.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand recollections, perceptions, reasoning, and/or experiences of former undergraduate Latino college students with regard to their decisions to drop out from or remain enrolled in college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in the following meetings:

1) Initial meeting with researcher (15 minutes)
   The study will be described and the consent form will be reviewed and signed.

2) Research interview with researcher (45-90 minutes)
   A brief overview of the study will be given, and the research interview will begin. The questions on the attached interview protocol will be used as a guide for the interview.

3) Brief meeting for member checking with researcher (15 minutes)
   The research interview will be summarized, and you will be asked to review it for accuracy. You will have the opportunity to say whether or not the summary reflects your experiences and to request any changes that you think will make the summary more credible.
Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed either using a synchronous online service, such as Skype, or face-to-face in the city of Boston at a time and place that is convenient for you. As indicated above, the meetings are estimated to take 15 minutes, 45-90 minutes, and 15 minutes, respectively.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no expected or foreseeable risks, harms, or discomforts connected with participation in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher in the study will hear and see the information about you. The researcher will assign you a pseudonym, and the information you provide will only be used under this pseudonym and will not allow you to be identified. A professional transcriber will transcribe the interviews; however, those will be provided to the transcriber using your pseudonym. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Only the researcher will have access to your information. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way as being part of this project.

In very rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized, such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Choosing to be in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and you can refuse to answer any question. You are free to discontinue participating in this study at any time, for whatever reason. If you choose not to be in this study or to discontinue, it will not affect your current or future relations with your organization. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.
Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dennis Camacho, M.A. at camacho.de@husky.neu.edu or 917 842-9800, the researcher who will be conducting the research interviews and the study. You can also contact Dr. Carolyn Bair, Faculty Advisor, at c.bair@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

There is no payment or monetary incentive for participating.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Is there anything else I need to know?

No, but please feel free to ask questions at any time.

I agree to [have my child] take part in this research.

____________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part  Date

_______________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

_______________________________
Printed name of person above

Depending upon the nature of your research, you may also be required to provide information about one or more of the following if it is applicable:
1. A statement that the particular treatment or procedure may involve risks to the subject (or to the embryo or fetus, if the subject is or may become pregnant) which are currently unforeseeable.
2. Anticipated circumstances under which the subject’s participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject’s consent.
3. Any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.
4. The consequences of a subject’s decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.
5. A statement that significant new finding(s) developed during the course of the research which may be related to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.
6. The approximate number of subjects involved in the study.
Appendix E: Interview Protocols

1-Student Interview Protocol
Institution: N/A
Interviewee (Pseudonym): XXXX
Interviewer: Dennis Camacho

Initial Meeting with Participant (15 minutes)
Introductory information: The study will be described and consent form reviewed and signed.

2-Student Interview Protocol
Institution: N/A
Interviewee (Pseudonym): XXXX
Interviewer: Dennis Camacho

Research Interview (45-90 minutes)
Introductory information reviewed, objectives discussed and interview conducted. Overview of the study and research interview will be discussed in detail. The participant will be interviewed utilizing the questions listed below.

Introductory Protocol
You have been selected to participate in this study because you have much to share about the Latino college student’s decision to drop out from, or remain enrolled in, college. My research project focuses on capturing the lived experiences of Latinos’ decisions to drop out from, or remain enrolled in, college. As a result, I hope to gain more insight into the lived experience of Latinos who contemplated whether to continue their college education or not. The study will hopefully shed light on the experience and possible implications for practice in higher education administration.

I would like to record your answers so that I have your entire answers to analyze. Do you grant me permission to do so? In addition, I will be taking notes. All information will be kept strictly confidential and coded with a pseudonym to protect your identity. A hired professional research interview transcriber and I will be the only ones with access to the transcripts. For your protection as a participant in this study, I will review the consent form that you will need to sign before proceeding. The consent form states that participation is voluntary, that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and that the information you provide will be kept confidential and no harm will be inflicted on you as a result of the study. Do you have any questions?

We have planned this interview to last between 45 minutes – 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?
**Interviewee Background**

Objective: To obtain background information on the subject

1) Where is your home town?
2) What is your family’s background? Did anyone in your immediate family attend college?
3) What was your major?
4) Why did you decide to attend college?
   a) What were your goals when you began?
   b) How did you think a college education would assist you?
5) How did you finance your college education?

**Support**

One of the things I am interested in learning about is your sense of the support you received as an enrolled student. I would like to learn about your experiences at the college/university. I would like to hear about your collegiate experiences and the influences they had on you as a college student. To get your personal perspective, I am going to ask you some questions about your experiences and what you feel you needed at various times. Responses can be about academic or social resources that you feel were pertinent.

**Transition**

1) What was your definition of being a college student prior to entering college?
2) What is your definition now?
3) What helped you make the transition from H.S. to college?
4) Did you receive encouragement or support for attending college from anyone in your home town or your high school? Did anyone discourage you from attending?
5) What experiences or resources were pertinent to you becoming a college student?
6) Describe any reaction you had to these experiences, either academic or emotional/personal.

**Co-Curricular Activity**

1) Were you introduced to student engagement opportunities on campus?
   a. If so, when?
2) Were you involved in campus life activities on campus?
   a. Describe how you felt when being involved?
   b. Describe how you felt about not being involved even though your classmates were?
3) Were you involved in academic co-curricular activities?
   a. Describe how you felt when being involved?
   b. Describe how you felt about not being involved even though your classmates were?
4) Were you involved in off campus co-curricular activities?
   a. Describe how you felt when being involved?
   b. Describe how you felt about not being involved even though your classmates were?

**Networks**
1) Tell me about a person whom you feel was influential during your college career.
2) How did the interaction with this person help you think about yourself as a college student?
3) Tell a story about an interaction with the person who was most influential in your collegiate experience.
4) How did this interaction with this person help you think about yourself as a college student?
5) Tell me about a department which you feel was helpful in your college career.
6) How did this interaction with the departmental staff help you think about yourself as a college student?
   a. Did you hold a position in College Work Study or as a student worker on Campus?
   b. Was this a positive experience?
7) Were there any faculty members who were helpful or influential?

**Retention**

1) Describe a time, if any, when you thought about leaving college.
   a. Why did you feel that way?
2) What prevented you from dropping out?
3) Why did you stop attending college?
4) What could the college/university have done to make your collegiate experience better?
5) What things that your college or university did helped you to remain in school?
6) What experiences did you have in Greek life that helped you make the decision to remain in college/university or reconsider whether or not to drop out of college/university?
7) Were there any negative experiences in Greek life that prompted you to consider leaving?
8) Were there any social issues that caused you to want to leave college/university?
9) Were there any academic issues that caused you to want to leave college/university?
10) Do you have any additional comments or information you would like to add that I may not have asked a question for?
11) Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your participation in this study!

**3 - Student Interview Protocol**

**Member checking**
The findings will be provided for you and you will be given an opportunity to provide feedback about its accuracy. This will allow you to critically analyze the findings and comment on them. You will either affirm that the findings reflect your views, feelings, and experiences, or that they do not reflect the experiences. If you affirm the accuracy and completeness, or if you request that changes/clarifications be made, then the study will have greater credibility. Member checks are not without fault, but serve to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation of data. The overall goal is to provide findings that are authentic, original and reliable.
## Appendix F: Theme Emergence and Verbatim Evidence

### Category I - Societal Factors

| Participant Alpha: “My family is from El Salvador. We are Salvadoran immigrants to the country. I did not have a grand scheme about going to college. It seemed as though it was the right thing to do because I was good in school. In high school, I excelled. I did that and then most of my friends, and so I was encouraged by teachers and others to attend school, but I did not possess sufficient understanding to really have a great notion that really pushed me forward to attend school. It just seemed like the right thing to do. In high school, I was in the top ten of my class. I don't remember the exact number. It might have been somewhere from number four, or five, or six, or something like that, but I attended an inner city public high school where the dropout rates in the first, second, and third year of school were significant. If you made it until the end, you were one of the few of the crowd to begin with. If you were in the top ten, chances are you were a pretty good student.” | Researcher Observations: Participants:  
- were not properly prepared for college prior to enrolling in an institution of higher learning  
- were high academic achievers at the high school level  
- did not understand the concept of obtaining an education of higher learning  
- were first generation college graduates  
- lacked family moral support  
- the financial stress of a college education was a major consideration in drop out decisions |
| “Because none of my family had gone through college, and I was not trying to go to college growing up, I didn't care, I didn't sit on somebody's lap who told me what college was about. I didn't really focus on college, to be honest with you, until about a couple of years before it was time to decide and pick a college, and so forth.” | |
| “I think that in the school system, the public school system, there really isn't … There might have been occasionally a teacher who mentioned when you go to college, this is what you should expect but for the most part, there..." | |
was not a system delivery of that message throughout my education, and because my family didn't have that background, it was not delivered.”

“It was not until the last couple of years leading up to the graduation that there was really a sense of this is where you're going to go next so you better start thinking about it. There was not … For example, when you show up as a junior or a sophomore in high school, there was not a day of let's review what you've done. You've gone through elementary school. You've gone through middle school. Now, you're in high school. What's next? There was not that explanation of how the system works. It might have been useful if somebody had done that.”

“My recollection, and this was in the 1980s, is that it was about 60% loans, and 35% grants, and 5% scholarships.”

“I did not drop out until I did because I was having a desire to stay. I never had any reason to want to drop out. My grades were fine. They weren't stellar. I wasn't performing at a college level the way that I had at the high school level, but I was never in academic parallel. What prevented me from dropping out was just my desire to stay. I eventually did stop attending college simply because of money problems.”

**Participant Beta:** “When I began, it was definitely graduating was always obviously my first goal in doing as well as possible in school meaning grade-wise. I also went in there knowing I wanted to take part in the college experience, which is why I dormed. I thought that any real career I would seek would require a college degree, not just a high school diploma. I don't know that I had any definition other than what I saw on TV just because my cousin that attended college was a commuter student in a city university and my half-sister also attended
as a commuter at a city university. I didn't have much to go on other than it being a higher level of education, more of the same education that I had already been receiving: classes, homework, things like that.”

“I don't know that anything did help me. I think that was part of my struggles that I don't know that my high school education properly prepared me for college. I think just because I did well academically, I was able to maintain, but I don't know that I was … More so, I don’t think I had the emotional preparation to handle college.”

“My high school was severely underfunded to the point where resource guides that were handed out, we had to hand copy and then leave for the next classroom. Yes, they were recycled resources. I attended advance placement, A.P. classes and that helped but I don't think there was anything pertinent from my high school education that really helped me.”

“One of the things that I have always resented is my college, I specifically remember having this conversation with my college advisor. There were two things that stood out to me. One was, for whatever reason, my college advisor did not believe in the Higher Education Opportunity HEOP Program at the campus. My college advisor, I remember specifically telling me not to apply to HEOP programs but the reason I didn't apply to because my college advisor didn't even know what HEOP was and made no attempt to figure it out. I found out after I started school that there was a program for minority students called HEOP which more than just financially helping students, I think it emotionally prepared students for college, at least that was my experience from my classmates that were going through the program whereas if you were a minority student and I don't want to limit it to just to minority students. If you're a low
income student or a student coming from low
income neighborhood, through the public school
system, there wasn't the same attention given.
We weren't prepared the same as those students
in the HEOP program. It was rare to see a
HEOP student struggle academically, not due
to intelligence but more emotional maturity as
you did other students from the same
background as a HEOP student that didn't go
through the HEOP program.”

“In hindsight, even if she had realized what
HEOP was, she wouldn't advise me not to sign
up because of her own bias, but I remember her
asking me … There's a question here, "Do you
want to sign up for HEOP?" She didn't give
me any more context so I thought HEOP was
like a veterinarian program. That's really what I
thought. I was like the only HEOP I know was
the guy who took two animals on an ark with
him, so it has to be some kind of veterinarian
program. I said, "No, I'm not interested in the
vet sciences at all," but I mean, even if she had
known what HEOP was, she would have told me
not to sign up for it, which now I think is terrible
advice. It's biased advice. I think, regardless of
her bias, I think her responsibility was to tell me
what the pros and con were of the program and
then let me decide, but not to influence me on
with her beliefs. Yes, absolutely, and this was
at high school, yes. I would have absolutely …
Now, knowing what I knew once I got to
Hofstra University and I met HEOP students
and understood what the program was, I would
have signed up for that program.”

“There were students of my same background
that didn't make it, weren't accepted into the
HEOP program but there were still accepted
into regular campus.”

“All of us, whether we applied to HEOP or not,
all of us of similar backgrounds were pretty
much left on our own. I think the university, I
think it would still would have been in their
best interest to give us at least similar tools to
handle college coming from our background so I understand it wouldn't pay for our education but it should at least help us with the maturity level needed to succeed at college.”

“I just think that, when you come from a high school from a better neighborhood like the high schools that I know some of my cousins attended on Long Island. Some of the kids that I knew that I met in college that attended a lot of these more affluent neighborhoods, they have programs in their high schools that are geared towards how to handle the class work, how to be mature enough to attend school, to attend classes, how to properly study for the class work.”

“In contrast, when I get to college, it's pretty much, ‘Here's your dorm key. Here's your class schedule. Be there.’ I came from an environment where I was forced to go to school. I still went but there were consequences for not going to class. Attendance was taken. You were expected to be in class. I get to college and there's just nobody watching me. I often said, ‘Okay. I just won't go to class.’ I lacked the maturity to … those are the tools I think we're missing. Helping me mature and realize even though I'm on my own, I should be taking on the responsibility.”

“Some government assistance in the form of financial aid, some grants. I would say easily two-thirds of it was student loans from my mom, plus Student PLUS Loans, Stafford Loans. I would say a third was Stafford, so my loan and a third was a Parent PLUS Loan. After my fifth year, I was pretty close. I was only a few credits short but I just couldn’t ask my mother to take out any more money. I don't know that I could go back for a sixth year. It was entirely too much, even if it was only for a handful of credits. I felt that professionally if not academically, professionally that school had prepared me, just through different
experiences. I decided to take a risk and see if I could make it out there with the knowledge I had so far. I had to get out there and start helping my mom as well.”

“My mom was a single parent raising two children. My sister was not a good student ever at any point for most of her life. My mom worked anywhere from three to sometimes four jobs, and all crazy hours of the day where she would come home in the middle of the night, wake up late morning and go to work. We would barely see her even when I was in high school so it bothered me that my mom had to work that hard for that long to support me and I felt that I had a responsibility to contribute.”

“Then, my grandmother lived with us as well. She took care of us. She was a babysitter growing up. My sister's five years younger than I am but she’s another mouth to feed. She has Social Security but not much. There was, my mom was running that household by herself.”

**Participant Gamma:** “I’m the youngest of three from a household of an older sister and older brother who attended and didn’t graduate. At first, I wanted to make sure I attended and surpass their shortcomings.”

“My initial going for college, one of the reasons was to make sure that I did better for my family and for myself, to make sure I attended a great school and to actually finish.”

“Very few members in my household or amongst my immediate family attended college, so being a college student was highly-sought after thing amongst my family. Once you became a student, you became kind of on a higher plateau, maybe even put on a pedestal, I would say, when it came to the family.”
“The high school I attended was a private institution. It was a Catholic high school in the Bronx, which was the part of New York that I lived in at the time. The guidance counselor, which it’s a requirement for you to meet with the guidance counselor once a week, got us started on our college applications back in junior year. It was highly enforced and it’s stressed that 90% of their graduates from the high school would be attending a college the next fall.”

“In high school, I took some college-level prep courses that kind of gave us college-level work to kind of get us ready for it. We also did a lot of extra credit activities to boost for the recruitment and everything as well. We did a lot of social and community service projects that will help us get ready for the college environment during my junior and senior year of high school.”

**Participant Epsilon:** "I grew up in a very tough neighborhood in Queens, New York. Kids often got into trouble, serious trouble, as we all came from low income families, in some cases only one parent was at home, and kids ran all over the streets. Kids got involved in gangs, drug dealing, fights, would not go to school -- all sorts of bad things. Thankfully, I had supportive parents and siblings that looked out for each other. I also was heavily involved in sports in high school. I played baseball and was committed.”

“I was a college baseball prospect coming out of high school and committed to Epsilon University because I was promised the best opportunity to play and obtain a college degree. Even though I was a student athlete I struggled as I did not understand the expectations of going to college, and the campus seemed foreign and at times unwelcoming to me. I was a baseball recruit, and while it seemed as though I would be part of a group that would
help me become familiar with college life, instead, I felt ostracized as a Latino on a pre-dominantly Caucasian team, at a pre-dominantly Caucasian institution. I did not fit in with the rest of the players, and was often excluded from hanging out with them socially, etc. That made it difficult to fit in at a place that felt very foreign to me.”

**Category II - Environmental Factors**

**Participant Alpha:** “After I dropped out, there was never any effort to reach out. There wasn't a call to say, hey, we noticed that you dropped out but we want you to know that we know. We’d love to help you figure out how to get back in or that we have a program for people that have dropped out, and maybe financial counseling or something to help you figure something out. There wasn't any of that. It was just sort of like once you’re gone, you’re gone, adios amigos, and see you later. I can tell that they value their alumni. They have a huge alumni network, but you can't become an alumni unless you finish the undergraduate program. They didn't seem to have any kind of plan in place for helping you out once you had been forced to drop out.”

**Participant Beta:** “All of us of similar backgrounds were pretty much left on our own. I think the university, I think it would still would have been in their best interest to give us at least similar tools to handle college coming from our background. So, I understand it wouldn't pay for our education, but it should at least help us with the maturity level needed to succeed at college.”

“I just think that, when you come from a high school from a better neighborhood, like the high schools that I know some of my cousins attended on Long Island ... Some of the kids

**Researcher Observations:**
Participants:
- were unfamiliar with the rigors of campus life
- initially struggled with acclimation to campus life due to their backgrounds
- experienced a sense of marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989) as enrolled students
- felt isolated at times
- navigated their way through college via a self-guided approach and/or peer to peer mentoring
- felt that dropping out was of no consequence to the institution
- showed resiliency in achieving their goal of obtaining an education of higher learning
that I knew, that I met in college that attended a lot of these more affluent neighborhoods, they have programs in their high schools that are geared towards how to handle the class work, how to be mature enough to attend school, to attend classes, how to properly study for the class work.”

“In contrast, when I get to college, it's pretty much, ‘Here's your dorm key. Here's your class schedule. Be there.’ I came from an environment where I was forced to go to school. I still went but there were consequences for not going to class. Attendance was taken. You were expected to be in class. I get to college and there's just nobody watching me. I often said, ‘Okay. I just won't go to class.’ I lacked the maturity to … Those are the tools I think we're missing. Helping me mature and realize, even though I'm on my own, I should be taking on the responsibility.”

**Participant Delta:** “I just think that arriving at my freshman dorm and they had all these activities prepared and getting to know each other and learning the policies of the college, et cetera and social activities and all that. It was very clear to me early on that I was different than people by the way that I dressed, by the way that I... the inflection of my speech, and I think that the first reaction I had was to sort of try to mold my behavior and my speech to fit in. That was just... It forced me to be someone more or less artificial, so I abandoned that pretty quickly. I sought some support and some help from the Latino community at Delta University and the first thing that struck me was this fraternity that was there. I know that Delta University doesn't allow fraternities, and so it's intriguing. The history was very intriguing and I decided to give it a shot and loved it after a whole semester of learning about it and becoming very close and bonding closely with the people, the brothers that were part of it. I
think that that was the kind of the defining moment for me when I started actually feeling a sense of belonging at the campus.”

“There were a lot of things that I wish I was involved in and maybe I should have the courage to get involved in like student government and things like that, but people were very different. They dress very differently. It was fun to explain kind of my adversary at first, but it was just like I have to do it all the time as soon as I said my name and people would be like, oh what's that from or whatever, and it wasn't building tension or anything. It's just like it gets old having to tell the same story over and over again. I felt a little bit excluded, but I'm sure that I wasn't the only one. A lot of the other Cuban students at Delta University are, they are Cuban but they are slightly different just in terms of socioeconomics, so I didn't necessarily develop a relationship with other Cubans there. I developed relationships with Latinos in general.”

**Participant Epsilon:** “I was a college baseball prospect coming out of high school and committed to Epsilon University because I was promised the best opportunity to play and obtain a college degree.”

“Although I was on the baseball team, I honestly felt that I was treated differently because of the color of my skin. For my own sanity, I needed another outlet at the university. I met other Latino students who were members of the Latino student organization on campus. However, that wasn't enough. I would visit my Brother at University X and met members of a National Latino Fraternity and it was then that I found that other outlet. I went back to Epsilon University, recruited some of my good friends to join, and we became the founding fathers of The chapter on our campus. Our intentions were rejected by the university administration
and we were not given university recognition at first because there was no room for a Latino fraternity...we were literally told to join either white or black fraternities. We did it anyway. Our chapter would validate the Latino male identity, which at the time was non-existent, at a predominantly Caucasian university til this day twenty four years later. It has helped other Latino males we didn't even know back then. All we knew is that we need to create our own identity so that future Latino students did have to go through what we did.”