Doctoral Thesis

by

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Abstract

This study focused on the needs of male Hispanic college and university students for them to persevere to graduation. Interviews were structured to answer what the fundamental themes or approaches are for Hispanic males to successfully persist and graduate from a four-year Catholic college in California.

The central research question was subdivided to pertain to the two groups of participants. Four administrators from Catholic colleges were asked what they believed the main student success attributes and themes were which contribute to Hispanic males graduating from California Catholic colleges. Five Hispanic males who graduated from California Catholic colleges were asked what they believe were important attributes to their persisting to graduation.

The interviews were transcribed into digital format. The NVivo matrix coding showed that the results of the interviews were varied between the groups and showed that financial barriers were the only symmetrical attribute in this study. Disparate attributes included: first-generation students, no specific programs for Hispanic males, lack of persistence analytics for Hispanic males, lower socio economic status, student engagement, family support, peer support, and Catholic Higher Education Values. The research concluded that there is a lack of knowledge and targeted effort on the behalf of California Catholic colleges and universities reported in this study that cater to the specific needs of Hispanic males.

Keywords: Hispanic males, persistence, education, degree attainment
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my:

loving mother Angela Maria Lecaro Knorn, who taught me to dream big, the importance of perseverance, to value life long learning, and most importantly to have fun;

kind sister Natacha Bucheli who never stopped believing in me, and who continuously encouraged me throughout this process while I chased my dreams;

wonderful father Helmut Knorn who has provided a solid foundation of support throughout my life;

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As the Hispanic population grows exponentially in California, research related to critical factors influencing improved graduation rates of Hispanic males at Catholic colleges and universities is minimal. It is also notable that, in California, most new high school graduates will be of Hispanic decent by 2019-20 (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2012). In addition, according to the U.S. Census (2010), the vast majority of population growth came from those who reported their ethnicity as Hispanic, in California and nationwide. More than half of the growth of the total population of the U.S. between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population. However, the growth rate of Hispanics has not kept up with their degree completion rates. Only 13% of young Hispanics earn a bachelor’s degree compared with 39% of whites, and 21% of blacks nationwide (Lynch and Engle, 2010). Expanding on this issue, according to Saunders and Serna (2004), of those “Hispanics who qualify to attend, approximately 40% will enroll in college immediately after high school” (National Center for Education Statistics quoted in the President’s Advisory Commission, 2003).

This study will use the term “Hispanic,” which was passed by the 1976 U.S. Congress to identify “Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or decent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries” (Passel and Taylor, 2009). The term Latino/a was not used in this study (unless it was a direct quote) since people from countries in Latin America such as Brazil or French Guiana can be considered Latino/a. Subsequently; this study refers to people of Spanish-speaking cultural background rather than their geographical background.

Lastly, although this study will focus on California Catholic Colleges and Universities it is useful to understand the broader landscape of Catholic higher education. According to IPEDS
there are 261 (247 are degree granting) Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States. Furthermore, during the 2013-14 academic year 936,800 students were enrolled in Catholic colleges and universities, while overall enrollment grew from 578,000 in 2000-01 to 936,800 in 2013-14 (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2016). As a result, the enrollment impact of Catholic higher education is significant with close to 1 million students enrolled nationwide.

Statement of the Problem

Exploring the critical factors of degree completion for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California.

The Research Problem

Hispanic males graduate at lower rates than Hispanic females and whites in California, leading, to a completion gap for the fastest growing population within the state.

Central Research Question

What are the fundamental factors for Hispanic males to successfully persist and graduate from a four-year Catholic college in California?

Hypothesis of Central Research Question

Catholic colleges and universities in California provide a supportive and engaging environment, which could lead to higher graduate rates for Hispanic males.
**Sub-questions**

Two sub-questions which supplement the central research question were identified: a) What do college administrators, Provosts’ or their designees, and Directors of Student Success departments (administrators who have responsibility for student retention and persistence) at California Catholic colleges believe are the main student success attributes which contribute to Hispanic males graduating from Catholic colleges in California, and b) What do male Hispanic graduates believe were important attributes to persisting to graduation from a Catholic College in California?

**Hypothesis of Central Research Sub-Question**

College administrators at California Catholic colleges should concur that personalized faculty and staff interactions, focus on co-curricular engagement, mentoring programs, and targeted academic support systems within the umbrella of a faith based education are the most essential success factors for Hispanic males to graduate from college. Male Hispanic graduates from a California Catholic college would agree that these factors played an important role in their persistence to graduate.

**Justifying the Research Problem**

Previous research has primarily focused on tracking the college graduation rates of Hispanics, Hispanic population increases in California, and reasons why Hispanics have high attrition and low persistence at four-year institutions. In addition, there have been a number of research studies focusing on the causality of low Hispanic graduation rates and recommended strategies to address the issue. However, there is limited research focusing on the specific
factors or approaches needed for Hispanic males to persist at four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California. Subsequently, the percentage of Hispanic males enrolled at Catholic colleges and universities in the fall of 2014 was 3.38% or 3,535 students of the total Hispanic male enrollment of 104,652 attending four-year public and private colleges in California (IPEDS, 2014).

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

There is minimal research available that focuses on the critical approaches of degree completion for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges in California. Therefore, there is much work to be done with researching the projected low graduation rates of male Hispanics overlapping with the exponential growth of the Hispanic population in California.

**The Audience**

By examining this problem using phenomenological and qualitative research methods, this study should be insightful for California Hispanic males who attend college, parents of Hispanic males attending college, higher education administrators and California elected officials wishing to make an impact on this growing population.

**Positionality Statement**

My cultural background is South American. I was born in Guayaquil Ecuador, and immigrated to the United States to a small rural town in California when I was six years old. As an immigrant coming from a Spanish speaking country I needed to learn English and assimilate.

My family had a substantial influence on my values and aspirations. Although my mother never graduated from high school and my father did not graduate from college, they both
instilled the importance of graduating from college throughout my childhood. In short, my parents inspired me to value education and life long learning as a catalyst for pursuing my career and personal aspirations. Additionally, my parents, as immigrants, believed in the “’American Dream’” and the benefits of universal education being an equalizer linked to financial stability (Brint, 1998).

Therefore, as a result of the combination of my personal immigrant experience, my aspirations, and the influence of my parents, I attended San Francisco State University as a first-generation immigrant student. As a first-generation immigrant student I struggled with financial barriers and building a strong peer network while in college. Nevertheless, I overcame these challenges and graduated from college with a degree in international relations. Pursuant to my aspirations of continuing my education, I enrolled at Barry University, earning a master’s degree in communication. My time at Barry University allowed me to work as a college administrator in the admissions office. In this role, I was able to experience first hand the challenges and opportunities students face when enrolling and working to overcome barriers to complete their degree. A large number of Hispanic students enrolled at Barry University. This is where I first started to become captivated with the challenges and opportunities Hispanic students face in order to achieve success.

I am currently pursuing my doctorate of education administration at Northeastern University.

Although I certainly had challenges as a male Hispanic college student, I persevered by having a strong network of peers, family and university personnel to assist me. Therefore, I can
empathize with some of the issues faced by Hispanic males attending college relative to the persistence required to complete their degree.

With respect to my professional career, as mentioned earlier, I started working in higher education administration soon after graduating from Barry University. Throughout my career in higher education, I have been blessed with working for institutions where educational access plays a strategic and mission driven role. Hence, I had an opportunity to research issues focused on educational access, retention, and student success through professional journals, industry specific conferences, networking, and as a practitioner. As a practitioner, I have been responsible for both student success (educational attainment) and new student enrollment (educational access). I also have experience with targeted intervention strategies that have made a positive difference by improving degree attainment for underserved populations, including Hispanics. Consequently, my work experience provides another connection to the research problem identified earlier on page 9.

My aspirations as a higher education administrator, in relation to the problem of practice, is to better understand what strategies are working, or not working, in order to provide an analysis and recommendations to improve the graduation rates of Hispanics males. Furthermore, having the opportunity to influence key stakeholders and policy makers (e.g. other higher education administrators) to invest in strategies for boosting Hispanic male educational attainment is of importance to me as a higher education professional.

Finally, although my background certainly has contributed to my perception of the "other", I believe that I have appropriately researched this problem of practice for three reasons. According to Briscoe (2005), understanding the dimensions of positionality including:
demographic, ideological and inclusiveness, helps in avoiding pitfalls and has assisted me in providing a more objective research process.

Moreover, my background as a first-generation Hispanic college student assisted me in relating to some of the experiences of Hispanic males, which in turn assisted in providing an experiential understanding of the problem of practice regarding the graduation rates of this demographic. As Briscoe (2005) articulated, "those who live in conditions of oppression develop a multiple consciousness and are better able to perceive incidents from multiple perspectives." Lastly, I have used the Northeastern University research proposal guidelines for the development of this study. Whereby, these guidelines state that students should discuss the limitations, the proposed work, and any possible threats to the validity of the data collected.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Grounded Theory was used for this study since it allowed for the primary research to be grounded in data received from individuals who have had experience with the subject matter or particular process (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) also stressed, the usefulness of the Grounded Theory lies in its ability, not only to generate the theory, but also to ground that theory in data. For this study this was an important element as the results relied on the experience of male Hispanic students. Furthermore, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) noted, a grounded theory consists of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. Accordingly, building theoretical frameworks to explain the data was critical for indicating the validity of the findings of this study. Phenomenological research was also used in this study as it provided additional relevancy to the study “by collecting data from persons who have experienced a phenomenon and developing a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals”
(Moustaskas, 1994). Additionally, the meanings of several individuals regarding their experiences and what they have in common are provided in Chapter 4 of this Phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007).

Moreover, Lester (1999) makes the case “that in a small-scale project looking across themes between participants is likely to be easy to do with physical documents by using a mail merge facility to extract and compare entries. This also enables data entered under different headings to be juxtaposed and compared, particularly useful to identify relationships between different themes and factors.” Subsequently, in this particular study, the research used the different themes and juxtaposed them according to participant type to identify trends and relationships between these different themes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The study of Hispanic graduation rates has been gaining ground due to the growth of the Hispanic population. According to the U.S. Census (2010), the vast majority of the growth in the population came from those who reported their ethnicity as Hispanic. Furthermore, by 2050 it is estimated that Hispanics will make up 39% of the school-aged population in the United States (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2010).

In addition, the Hispanic population growth rate is not directly proportional to the degree completion rates of this group. In fact, California has the “largest Latino population in the U.S., but only 16% of Latino adults (25 and older) had earned an associate degree or higher in California, compared to 38% of all adults in the state” (Excelencia, 2014). As a result of the low graduation rates, Hispanics are significantly less represented in professional jobs and more highly represented in construction, maintenance, and service jobs (U.S. Census Bureau,
American Community Survey, 2006). Furthermore, according to a study by Excelencia (2014), for the “U.S. to regain the top ranking in the world for college degree attainment, Latinos will need to earn 5.5 million degrees by 2020.”

As a corollary, the Obama administration has articulated a goal of increasing college graduation rates. In 2009 President Obama addressed prospective college students by saying, “This country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (Obama, 2009). While it can be argued how to best achieve this goal, it is clear that improving college graduation rates for Hispanics will be critical for meeting President Obama’s goal.

This literature review provides a synopsis of the research that focuses on Hispanic graduation rates. Key stakeholders such as Hispanic parents and Hispanic students are able to reference this study in order to better understand the broader issues and resources needed to impact college graduation rates for the growing population of Hispanic males in California. Moreover, this literature review also helps unpack the importance of “the cultural strengths and assets of Latino family education as a base by which new ways of schooling can be improved,” which is useful in assessing factors contributing to improvement with Hispanic male graduation rates (Villenas and Deyhle, 1999). This study is organized chronologically, whereby an analysis of the research literature will cover research on Hispanic college retention and persistence. Finally, gaps in the research literature will be addressed.
Hispanic Graduation Rates

Hispanic graduation trends indicate low Hispanic graduation rates, which will have an increasing impact on national education attainment (Kelly et al., 2010). Therefore, literature related to Hispanic graduation rates is of significance, because of the impact this growing demographic has on broader policy issues, such as the Obama administration’s goal of increasing college completion rates.

According to Lynch and Engle (2010), at the macro level 13% of Hispanics earned a bachelor’s degree compared with 39% of whites, and 21% of blacks. The graduation rates are even more dismal when proportionately compared to the exponential growth of the Hispanic population, which has been addressed later in this study. Furthermore, according to a report by Excelencia (2015), Hispanics 25 years and over nationwide had lower levels of educational degree attainment (associates degrees or higher) as compared to other groups in 2013: Hispanics (22%), Asians (60%), Whites 46%, African Americans (31%).

In addition, there are large gaps between the completion rates of Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites within the same admission selectivity category, although the gaps between white and Hispanic students are smaller at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Hispanic women graduate at higher rates than Hispanic men, and often graduate at the same rate as white men (Kelly et al. 2010).

Apart from comprehending the quantitative data pertaining to the degree attainment gap between Hispanics and other populations, more recent literature is emerging which addresses the causes for this delta and what can be done about it. A qualitative approach was undertaken by Kelly et al. (2010) to supplement the secondary quantitative data from the NCES. From a
qualitative perspective, four themes were identified as influencing the causality of the achievement gap: (a) the challenge for first-generation students, (b) financial challenges, (c) policy intervention, and (d) the importance of institutional commitment. Another dimension that was considered, from a qualitative perspective, is what the likelihood of Hispanic males “acting white and playing the game vs. selling out” is, and how this forms part of a possible challenge for them to persist in completing their degree (Urrieta, 2005).

As part of the Kelly et al. (2010) study, administrators were asked about the causes for the achievement gap for Hispanic students. A common theme that emerged was that many of the Hispanic students were categorized as first-generation students at their respective institutions; their parents never enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Unlike their counterparts, first-generation students have a number of disadvantages and therefore have a higher risk or dropping out of college (Kelly et al., 2010).

A 1998 study by the NCES that focuses on first-generation students found that at private, not-for-profit, 4-year institutions first-generation students were more likely to take remedial courses than their counterparts, whose parents had more than a high-school education. This is a considerable set-back for first-generation students, since the more remedial courses taken the longer it takes to graduate, but of more significance is how this dissuaded students from persisting. First-generation students are overrepresented among underrepresented minority groups; need additional remedial work when entering college (Engle, 2007). In addition, first-generation students know the least about the costs of attending college (Choy, 2001). These factors lead to a higher risk of dropping out of college as compared to non first-generation college students (Engle, 2007).
Consequently, everything else being equal, the influence of parents and their background in attending or not attending a post-secondary institution was critical for the success of a college student. In the case of Hispanic first-generation students, this causality needed to be taken into account and understood as it directly relates to college completion rates. Finally, the 1998 NCES study also confirmed that first-generation students persisted in post-secondary education and attained credentials at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts.

In addition, the degree completion rate for Hispanic males is in a “state of crisis, with Latino males having the lowest enrollment and college completion rate of any subgroup” (Saenz, Ponujan, 2012). The state of affairs of this college completion rate gap is concerning. In “2010 two of five associate or bachelor degree’s awarded to Latinos were earned by males” (Saenz, Ponujan, 2012). Consequently, by disaggregating the Hispanic college completion data, it is evident that if Hispanic completion rates are to increase the largest opportunity to make a difference is with the Hispanic male population.

Lastly, specifically with regards to Hispanic males, Saenz (2009) comments in her study that proportionally fewer college-age males are actually enrolling in college than in years past, and the degree attainment gap between Latino males and females are widening.

**Influence of Peers**

The influence of peers was of particular interest in this study since there is evidence that suggests that peers “play a complex role for Latino males.” Accordingly, some male Latino students “reported that some of their peers encouraged them to join the workforce as opposed to studying or focusing on educational endeavors” (Saenz, Ponujan, 2012). According to Coleman (1988), when considering the relationship Hispanics have to post-secondary education, “social
capital theory suggests that students receive information, values, norms, standards, and 
expectations for education through the interpersonal relationships they have with their parents, 
peers, and others.”

Peers are also major contributors to social capital and social reproduction, which influences 
the educational expectations of students (Wells et. al, 2011). The framework of social 
reproduction within the context of a student’s networks of family and peers was notable since the 
possible impact on a student’s ability to persist to graduation can rest heavily on these 
relationships.

Furthermore, Dennis, Phinney and Chauteaco (2005) found that “the perceived lack of peer 
support of ethnic minority students predicted their college GPA and adjustment to college, with 
high school GPA and the other variables being controlled. Subsequently, peer influence, or the 
lack thereof, can also be correlated with academic success, which has a direct impact on college 
completion.”

**Influence of Family**

In addition to peer support, the research literature also suggested that support from family 
is critically important for Hispanic student success. Torres and Solberg (2001) assert in their 
study “that students with high perceived availability of family support build connections with 
faculty and other students and believe in their ability to complete their academic goals.” In 
addition, for Latino students, one implication of growing up within a collectivist culture was the 
central role of family connections and harmony on their health (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997). It is 
important to point out that the link between availability of family support and faculty
engagement was a factor that catalyzes the relationship between family support and academic success.

Family support in terms of financial assistance was another attribute, which the literature suggested is an important factor for the success of male Hispanic students. In Padilla’s study (1996), she came to the conclusion that “family income as a part of family background was the most important predictor of educational attainment among young Latino men, all other factors remaining constant.”

Consequently, Cameron and Heckman (2001) stated in their study that parental education is lowest for Hispanics when compared to other ethnic groups, with white parents having the highest education level. Additionally, according to Saenz (2009), “the expectations to work, contribute to the family, and assume traditional gender roles remain a predominant characteristic of the young Hispanic male experience.” In this regard, for Hispanic males who assume the traditional gender role of working in order to contribute to the family, the additional stress and time away from school is seen as a contributing factor that could lead to dropping out of college or taking longer to graduate. Therefore, although family support can provide a strong foundation for Hispanic student success, other factors such as family income, the expectation to work and contribute to the family, and the educational attainment of Hispanic parents play a multifaceted role and influence the student’s chances of enrolling and persisting in college.

Financial Constraints

In some studies financial challenges have been shown as a cause for Hispanics to drop out of college. For instance, a university administrator interviewed in a study by Kelly et al. (2010) stated that the majority of Hispanic students withdrew because of financial reasons. The
Amounts owed ranged from $200 to $3000 (Kelly et al., 2010). If this relatively small amount of money is causing Hispanic students to drop out, there appears to be a more systemic issue at play. At the institutional level these types of financial matters should be identified in order to curb unnecessary attrition. Moreover, at the state and federal level these systemic financial issues should also be reviewed. With federal subsidies (e.g. Pell Grants, SEOG, ACG, etc.) being reduced and impacting the most needy, the financial concerns for Hispanic students in relation to college degree attainment may actually widen.

Another financial attribute impacting male Hispanic persistence in college is relative to financing their college education through a heavy student loan burden. According to Santiago and Cunningham (2005), there is a reluctance to borrow money by Hispanic parents, which is then transferred to their children, many of whom are aspiring students. As a result both Hispanic parents and students “reported that they were uncomfortable taking out large loans to pay for school, preferring to pay as they go rather than go into debt.” Although this may seem like a prudent practice, their white peers are taking out loans to finish college and, as a result, they can start a professional job, with a higher income, sooner.

However, according to Song and Elliot (2012) their study indicated “that number of siblings, English proficiency, academic achievement (GPA), parents' educational levels, college expectations, and parents' college savings are significantly associated with the likelihood of attending a four-year college, but income is not a significant predictor.” Therefore, although financial barriers can certainly prevent college access and student success for Hispanic students, financial constraints alone are not the primary reason Hispanic students are not attending or graduating from college.
Institutional Policies

Institutional policies can also have a positive or negative impact on retention for Hispanic and underserved students. Proactive policy intervention has proved to be successful at some institutions. For instance, it was found that students who withdrew from courses or repeated more than 20% of their coursework had a reduced probability of graduation by 50% (Adelman, 2006). Without any supervision or repercussions from their advisor or the institution with regard to repeatedly withdrawing or retaking courses, this dynamic had actually been a catalyst for students to withdraw. This example indicates that there are no policy interventions in place for students to persevere and not withdraw their classes. Accordingly, institutions would be wise to include enrollment policies that limit the number of courses that can be withdrawn from or repeated.

Supplementary policy interventions such as peer mentoring programs, summer bridge programs, financial aid literacy interventions, and student success coaching are now becoming more accepted measures to help Hispanic and underserved students persist throughout their college career. It is worth noting that the recent phenomenon of student success coaching has started to show promise with regards to retention and student success. In fact, according to a study by Bettinger and Baker (2011), “students who were assigned to a coach were more likely to persist during the treatment period, and were more likely to be attending the university one year after coaching ended.”

A Stanford study by professors Bettinger and Baker (2011) found that retention and completion rates were greater with students who received coaching services. What is striking is that this same study found that, after six months, students in the coached group were 5.2% more
likely to still be enrolled than students in the non-coached group. As the coaching example indicates, with appropriate intervention colleges can make a difference with regards to improving the graduation rates of Hispanics, and for the purposes of this study, Hispanic males.

**Institutional Commitment**

As is evident from a study of twelve state colleges and universities with outstanding graduation rates, institutional will and commitment is a key driving force behind the success of Hispanic student persistence (American State Colleges and Universities, 2005). In contrast, institutions that do not excel with high graduation rates for Hispanics do not have the institutional commitment to invest in multifaceted retention strategies (Kelly et al., 2010). Worth noting, Deborah Santiago, the author and vice president for policy and research at Excelencia in Education, stressed that there is much to learn “from emerging colleges that are producing successful results.” Santiago further states that as the number “of college-going Hispanics and HSIs continues to grow, it's important to understand what it means to serve Latino students well, and we can look to these colleges as models” (“The Hispanic Outlook for Higher Education,” 2010).

Subsequently, with higher education institutions facing a growing Hispanic demographic, colleges and universities could be well served when grasping the relative impact institutional commitment has on improving the graduation rates of Hispanics and, more specifically, Hispanic males. Since Hispanic males have one of the lowest graduation rates as compared to other student demographics, colleges and universities should be well positioned to achieve marked improvements, which would lead to improved institutional outcomes and improved fiscal sustainability.
**Hispanic Population Growth Trends**

According to the U.S. Census (2010), the majority of the growth in the population came from Hispanics. In fact, more than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population. Furthermore, in 2010, “there were 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States, composing 16 percent of the total population and between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent—rising from 35.3 million in 2000, the Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total population of the United States” U.S. Census (2010).

In comparison, the non-Hispanic population grew relatively slower over the same decade, about 5%. Within the non-Hispanic population, “the number of people who reported their race as White alone grew even slower between 2000 and 2010” (Humes et al., 2010). What is more, by 2050 the Hispanic population is projected to comprise 29% of the U.S. population, which is approximately 128 million people (Passel and Cohn, 2008). As the Hispanic population rate grows, it is also expected that the number of Hispanics high school graduates will experience exponential growth by 2020, with increases in Hispanic high school graduates reaching 90% from the baseline year of 2005 (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2008). The combination of this rapid population growth signifies a potential tidal wave of Hispanic males who have the potential to graduate from college. Therefore, colleges and universities have an opportunity to invest in retention and persistence initiatives to help these students achieve success, as their success will greatly influence the tertiary education graduation rate of the nation as a whole.
Ethnographic Research

Using ethnographic research methods is a qualitative approach that seems to be lacking in the research literature focused on the success of male Hispanic students at four-year Catholic colleges in California. A potential use for this type of research for this study is to help explain what strategies or motivating factors can be used to encourage Hispanic males to persist to graduation. Through this qualitative research process, it is likely that researchers will find the factors motivating Hispanic male students to stay enrolled, and the causes for dropping out.

As was mentioned previously, this research project focused on Catholic four-year institutions within the state of California. Therefore, the premise of the initial literature was similar; however, the scale and the focus was more granular since California four-year Catholic colleges and universities were the geographical focus of this study.

African American Males

This study also references relevant research regarding the success of black male students in higher education since the core of this research is also focused on gender and ethnic specific areas. There is a rich amount of research focused on male African American student success that has been referenced and integrated within this study. Consequently, there are a number of contemporary research publications focusing on black male college students that are authored by Shaun R. Harper, who received a Ph.D. from Indiana University, which have also been incorporated as part of this research project. Cross-referencing this type of research has provided a good foundational framework for this study. In fact, recently Harper published research on Black male student success in higher education: A report from the national Black male college achievement study (2012), and Racial differences in postsecondary educational expectations: A
structural model (2010), provides a robust amount of observations that helped to inform this research project.

Moreover, Kao and Thompson (2003; NCES, 2005) note that African Americans enroll in and graduate from college at lower rates than Whites. Concurrently, there are also gaps related to “misaligned ambitions or the ambition paradox,” which refers to “students with high ambitions choosing an educational route with low odds of success” which also relates to the success rate of Hispanic males (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999, p. 8). This additional context suggests what happens with African American students between expectation formation and the subsequent decisions to persist to graduation and therefore suffices as a lens through which this study could be reviewed.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore what the important attributes were that helped Hispanic males graduate from Catholic four-year institutions in California. In addition, two sub questions were identified, which supplemented the central research question: a) What do College administrators (Provost’ or their designees, and Directors of Student Success departments) perceive to be the critical factors needed for Hispanic males to persist to graduation? And b) What do Hispanic male graduates believe were the critical factors that led them to graduate from college?

It was also important to identify the role of the researcher for this qualitative study to strengthen the methodological section of the research project. “As a result, the researcher for this study will be considered an instrument of data collection” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This is
an important qualifier to note, because the collection of information or data is mediated through the individual who is doing the research. According to Creswell (2012), the researcher brings values, experiences and priorities within the constructivism paradigm context. Consequently, the researcher should identify their positionality as it pertains to the research paradigm and the research study. According to Briscoe (2005), understanding the demographic, ideological, discursive, and inclusive dimensions of positionality helps in avoiding pitfalls and should help in providing a more objective research process. As can be seen in the first chapter of this study, I provided a positionality statement, which demonstrates my lived experiences and the implication of how my background influences can and did have implications for this study.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2007), “qualitative researchers locates the observer in the world, in other words, qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena” (p. 36). Creswell’s definition of qualitative research aligns well with why a qualitative lens was important for addressing the central research question through interviews with Provosts’ and their designees, Directors of Student Success departments and Hispanic college male graduates, as they all play an important role in the natural setting within which the problem occurs. Additionally, through qualitative research, a complex and detailed understanding of the issue was undertaken (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, the central question that was being studied is complex, and therefore it was important to research the issue within a qualitative context as it provided an in depth understanding of the issue.

Furthermore, a constructivist paradigm, also referred to as interpretivism, was used in this study, which emphasizes a qualitative approach to research. Whereby, a constructivist approach
“adheres to multiple, apprehendable and equal valid realities,” (Ponterotto, 2005). Since this research question was studied through a qualitative perspective, a constructivist paradigm was ideal to employ to ensure that the data supplied by the interviewees was seen as equally relevant. To investigate the central question of the study, key stakeholders were interviewed in order to assess their view with regard to what they thought the fundamental themes or approaches are for Hispanic males to successfully persist and graduate from a four-year Catholic college in California. These key stakeholders included college administrators such as directors in charge of student success or retention initiatives, the chief academic officer or their designees, and Hispanic male graduates from California Catholic colleges or universities.

**Research Tradition**

A case study approach was used for this research project, because, as stated by Creswell (2007), this approach involves the study of an issue by exploring it through one or more bounded systems, which correlates with how this study was developed. In fact, this study researched two bounded systems, namely the Hispanic males who have successfully graduated from four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California, as well as the administrators at these institutions. Additionally, according to Stake (2000), using a collective approach allows for more than one case to be studied in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition as a whole. It is important to note that a phenomenal research approach was used for this study, which is oriented toward the lived experiences of participants, and also the interpretation of the narratives of the participants (Van Manen, 1990).

Furthermore, Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson (2005), also make the case that a collective case study approach assumes that investigating a number of cases leads to
better comprehension and improved theorizing. Finally, Yin (1993) provides a strong framework for the application of case study research, which was incorporated in this study. This approach seeks to examine cases in detail, enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem through more in-depth descriptions and explanations. This study has therefore used a collective case study approach aimed at ascertaining the phenomenal experience of two groups of participants. The collected data was then applied using a qualitative analysis in order to ascertain detailed descriptions and explanations of the extent of the problem at hand.

**Study Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. As Creswell (2012) states, “with purposeful sampling researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn and understand the central phenomenon”, which is the case in this study. Additionally, within the purposeful sampling context, "information rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169) participants and sites were chosen for this study. Hence, Hispanic male graduates recruited for this study were purposefully selected if they attended a four-year Catholic college or university in California. Similarly college administrators recruited for this study were employed at four-year Catholic California colleges or universities. Under the umbrella of purposeful sampling, homogeneous sampling was also used since participants and sites used in this study have similar traits or characteristics, as the participants and environment pertain to the graduation of male Hispanic students from four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California (Creswell, 2012).

Consequently, this study is centered on the lived experiences of participants in California within the following three target populations: a) male Hispanic graduates from four-year Catholic colleges and universities, b) college administrators (Provosts’ or their designees) at
four-year Catholic educational institutions and c) Directors of Student Success (or an administrative role linked to retention and student success) at Catholic educational institutions. The researcher chose these participants in order to understand the similarities and differences between what male Hispanic students believe were important factors in their success versus what college administrators perceive as important factors for Hispanic males to overcome cultural barriers in order to graduate from college. Additionally, the target populations selected are directly linked to help answer the research question and sub-questions. Below is an overview of the background of the Hispanic male participants:

• Graduate A was born in Mexico and immigrated to the U.S. with his family. He attended a selective Catholic four-year university in California, and he was the first in his family to go college in the U.S. College affordability was an issue for Graduate A.

• Graduate B was born in the U.S. and he attended a selective Catholic four-year university in California. He was not a first-generation student, but he did have financial challenges affording college.

• Graduate C was born in Mexico, migrated to California, and attended college as an undocumented student in the U.S. He was a first-generation student, and finances were a major issue for him since he was undocumented. Graduate C attended a non-selective Catholic university in California.

• Graduate D attended a selective Catholic university in California. He was born in California and came from a small town setting.

• Graduate E attended a non-selective Catholic university in California. He was a first generation student and born in California.
Since case study research typically includes input from several individuals (Creswell, 2007), a total of 9-12 individuals were interviewed. Below is breakdown of the sample distribution of interviewees from four-year Catholic colleges or universities in California:

- College administrators: 3 Provosts’ or designees.
- College administrators: 3 Directors of Student Success or college administrators responsible for student retention and persistence.
- Male Hispanic students: 6 Male Hispanic graduates.

Finally, this study defined Catholic post secondary institutions based on IPEDS classifications of Private, not for-profit religious affiliation that identify as Roman Catholic. Below is the profile of the California Catholic post secondary institutions that were included in this study:

- Institution A is a mid-size institution serving a low percentage of Hispanic and Pell eligible students;
- Institution B is a large institution serving a low percentage of Hispanic and Pell eligible students;
- Institution C is a small institution serving a high percentage of Hispanic and Pell eligible students.

**Recruitment and Access**

A letter was emailed to at least 24 prospective participants requesting their voluntary
participation in the research study. The researcher searched four-year California Catholic college websites to locate the email addresses for college administrators. Furthermore, the researcher used LinkedIn.com to search for and recruit male Hispanic graduates from the relevant institutions. As part of the recruitment process the nature of the research study as well as a consent form providing protection for human subjects was provided to the prospective participants.

In addition, prior to the interview starting, the researcher phoned the participants who responded positively and explained the research study so that the prospective participants were better informed about the study and the interview process. The researcher projected that the acceptance rate of participants would be approximately 50%, and therefore the yield for this study was projected to range between approximately 9 -12 participants.

Data Collection

The data that was collected consisted of information gathered through conference calls / Skype interviews, which were recorded. During these interviews each research participant was asked a specific set of standardized questions.

The preliminary interview tool consisted of 10 open-ended questions, which took approximately forty-five minutes to complete. These interviews took place through Skype (an interactive online communication solution) or through a conference call solution, which allowed the interviews to be recorded. It is worth noting that recording the interviews allowed the researcher to archive the content appropriately and transcribe it accordingly, which made the data easier to analyze.

During the interview process each participant was asked to fill out an interview protocol
form, which contains the following elements: a) the time of interview, b) the date of the interview, c) the names of the interviewer and interviewee, d) a statement of the problem, e) the purpose of the research, and c) the research questions. This form was also used for an additional archiving method apart from the recorded interviews following Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board archival guidelines.

**Data Storage**

The interviews were initially be transcribed and archived electronically through the use of the doctoral student researcher’s personal computer. Subsequently, all documents and recordings were backed up on the student researcher’s personal computer as well as on a back-up flash drive.

Furthermore, from an ethical perspective, Glesne & Peshkin (1992) recommend that researchers adhere to the ethical guidelines of qualitative inquiry of the American Anthropological Association. Consequently, the researcher reviewed and incorporated the ethical elements of these principles accordingly in order to build a stronger ethical foundation for this research project.

In addition to the measures taken to adhere to the Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board’s guidelines stated above, participant data and institutional data was masked in order to take further steps in protecting the anonymity of the individuals who participate in the study. Lastly, the raw data, and interview documents/recordings are to be destroyed one year after the dissertation is completed. This final step is to ensure the confidentiality of all participants.
Data Analysis

The interviews for this study were recorded and then transcribed. In order to properly analyze data from field interviews, NVivo coding was used to expand on the analytic work gathered from the interview transcriptions. According to Hilal and Alabri (2013), “qualitative data is characterized by its subjectivity, richness, and comprehensive text-based information. Analyzing qualitative data is often a muddled, vague and time-consuming process.” Therefore, NVivo coding provided the researcher with an opportunity to use software to help organize ideas, query data, and develop visual modeling of the information. In addition, the researcher was able to explore multiple meanings in the data (L. Richard, 2002), and it also challenged the researcher’s initial assumptions, as well as made them aware of gaps in the research (Wickham and Woods, 2005). Furthermore, cross-validation was used to help triangulate findings while sorting and re-labeling the data into conceptual categories.

Additionally, the coding and analysis process for this study follows the advice of Glaser & Strauss (1967), that “categories should not be so abstract as to lose their sensitizing aspect, but yet must be abstract enough to make [the emerging] theory a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing daily situations” (p. 242).

Moreover, the narratives of the participant interviews were analyzed by the researcher for each of the themes/nodes, which materialized as part of the NVivo coding. Furthermore, an analysis of the juxtaposition between the perceptions of college administrators and Hispanic male graduates was also probed.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, this study includes three-validation strategies namely a)
clarifying research bias, and using b) rich thick descriptions and c) triangulation.

A positionality statement has been included as part of this study to clarify any research
biases I may have as a first-generation male Hispanic graduate as well as a college administrator. Additionally, I have included and commented on past experiences and biases that have likely shaped my approach to the study. According to Briscoe (2005), understanding the demographic, ideological, discursive, and inclusive dimensions of positionality, helps in avoiding pitfalls and should help in providing a more objective research process. My personal lived experiences have therefore aided me in avoiding such pitfalls, while I remained focused on having an objective study. What is more, since I can relate to some of the experiences of the Hispanic graduates, as I am a Hispanic college graduate, this study was aided by my experiential understanding of this problem of practice.

Secondly, rich, thick descriptions will be used in this study in order for readers to make a personal judgment call on what information can be transferred to other settings to help determine if any findings can be transferred due to shared characteristics (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Finally, triangulation was used in order to assess evidence from different sources in order to assess corroboration and to gain a better understanding of trends or themes within the research. Since this study focused on two bounded systems (i.e. Hispanic college male graduates, and college administrators at four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California) a triangulation strategy that is a synergistic approach was undertaken.

Protection of Human Subjects

The human research participants in this study were provided safeguards through Northeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. The nature of these
guidelines is to protect human participants and their welfare in order to guarantee that they are appropriately informed on the scope and nature of the study, to ensure that the individuals taking part in the study know that their participation is voluntary, and that research is managed by high ethical standards and integrity, ensuring respect for human participants. Furthermore, a proposal to include human research participants was submitted to Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board for consideration (NU Human Subject Research Protection, 2012).

Additionally, the researcher for this study has completed the web based course for protecting human research participants from the National Institutes of Health. This courses provides the researcher with important information regarding “the risks a research project might pose to participants, understanding how to minimize the risks posed by a research project, describing additional protections needed for vulnerable populations, understanding appropriate procedures for obtaining informed consent, and understanding the importance of study design in the protection of research participants among other critical information to protect human subjects” (NIH Office of Extramural Research, 2011). As a result, the researcher also applied the following three core ethical criteria to the research study: respect for persons, beneficence, and Justice in accordance with the NIH Office of Extramural Research.

This research study includes a voluntary agreement/consent form that was provided to participants. Consequently, participants knew the purpose of the study as well as the potential risks and benefits of the research goals in order to determine if they would voluntarily participate in the study. The consent form consists of the following sections: Researcher’s name; title of research study; purpose of the project; time commitment; potential risks of the study; potential benefits of the study; how confidentiality will be maintained; and the signature of the participant. It is worth noting that, according to Creswell (2007), “to gain support from participants, a
qualitative researcher explains the purpose of the study.” This is an important point, since it is just as relevant to gain support from the participants, as it is to meet ethical guidelines since participants are volunteering their time and valued opinions.

In order to obtain IRB approval from Northeastern University (NEU), the researcher followed the process outlined on the Northeastern University – Human Research Protection website. The process is as follows: 1) the researcher was assigned a faculty advisor and the doctoral student was designated as the principal investigator (PI) in accordance with university and federal guidelines. 2) The application for approval for use of human participants in research was submitted to the office of Human Research Protection. 3) A consent form was developed and submitted to the NEU IRB for approval.

**Chapter 4: Research Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore what the critical success factors of degree completion for Hispanic males are at four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California. In addition, this study was also tasked with attempting to answer the following question: Do Catholic colleges in California provide a supportive and engaging environment, which could lead to higher graduate rates for Hispanic males?

Relative to the purpose of this study, this chapter presents the research findings obtained through interviews with participants and sample narratives from these interviews. The findings of this research were presented as an introduction to discussing the study and its implications for college bound Hispanic males, parents of Hispanic males, and higher education administrators. In addition, the themes were developed using nodes analysis from NVivo coding in order to organize and interpret the participant interviews for the qualitative analysis.
Participants

Based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), up to five Hispanic male graduates from California Catholic colleges and four college administrators from California Catholic colleges participated in the study. Furthermore, each participant was provided with a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. The following pseudonyms were administered for this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hispanic male college graduates</th>
<th>College administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate A</td>
<td>• Administrator A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate B</td>
<td>• Administrator B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate C</td>
<td>• Administrator C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate D</td>
<td>• Administrator D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher also had to mask one higher education institution (Alpha institution), which was named a number of times by one participant, in order to take additional steps toward protecting the participant.

According to Creswell (2007), the process of conducting a phenomenological study includes the meaning of the lived experiences of the research subjects. Therefore, the participants in this study provided introspective accounts of their experiences, which allowed the researcher to identify themes and trends. In addition, the grounded theory was applied to the findings of this study in order to help in the explanation of behavior and for the findings to be usable in practical applications (Glaser et al. 1967).

Data Analysis: Male Hispanic Graduates
Using NVivo matrix coding, four key themes emerged amongst Hispanic male graduates as essential reasons for being able to graduate from college:

1) Family support
2) Peer support
3) Overcoming financial barriers
4) Catholic value-based experience

Table 1 and Figure 1 include the frequency of the themes and critical attributes relative to the participant completing their degree. This information was gathered through participant interviews, whereby the phenomenological attributes associated with these interviews provided prominent examples of how these attributes manifested within the experience of each participant. Accordingly, the themes were analyzed by the researcher to identify lived experiences of participants in an effort to help decipher the meaning of the themes, to become aware of gaps in the research, and to challenge some of the researchers initial assumptions.

Table 1. Frequency of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Graduate A</th>
<th>Graduate B</th>
<th>Graduate C</th>
<th>Graduate D</th>
<th>Graduate E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial barriers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic values based experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Support

Below are excerpts from the participants expressing their perspective regarding the importance of family support in helping them persist to graduation.

Graduate A emphasized family support was the most important factor that helped him to graduate from college. He expressed family support through a general conceptual lens, rather than providing specific examples of how family was helpful. Graduate A articulated the following characteristics of family support:

“I was the first person in my family to go to college in the U.S. so that was a big adjustment. My parents were very supportive, but it's not like they really knew the system or
they could offer like much – I don’t know, like technical or experiential knowledge. But they were very supportive so that helped."

“And I think again I guess that could have been some sort of threat or danger of me not concluding my studies, but I think if I combine everything such as … plus the support I had at home, I think all those factors really worked for me to surpass any challenges that I might have encountered. And again I couldn’t really turn to them to say like ‘hey mom I’m stuck’ or ‘dad I’m stuck here’, but I knew that they were always there.”

Graduate B had a similar experience regarding family support:

“Having that constant support around from family and friends, that was something that I probably couldn’t do without. And sometimes your parents, or in my case immigrant parents, they really can’t help you on how to get there, but they know it is important that you get there. Just the encouragement, just stay on top it, helping out any way they could that was as important as anything else. And again it’s a constant reminder of this is the way we’re going to get ahead in life. And family as a group of people it’s a little bit of a burden sometimes, but you take that encouragement with you along the way and pass it on to my kids as well. So that was very important.”

Graduate C also discussed the importance of family support as a primary impetus for completing college, but in this particular example family provided direct encouragement not to quit school and levered the power of faith and prayer to encourage Graduate C to stay enrolled in college.
Graduate C shared:

“I think that and of course family motivated me, and when your family is like, backing you up, that pretty much was probably the most important part of it, because there were times where I honestly, in thinking about the money obstacle, I actually told my parents I don’t want to do this anymore. I’d rather just work or actually I even had the thought of leaving the country, just going back home where I was born and start my own business. So when I told that to my parents they were a little bit disappointed because I’ve always been the kind of person that is always very strong minded and I don’t just quit like that but they actually just told me, take the time off, not from school, but just take some time off from whatever else you’re doing and think about those things, go pray, do whatever you need to do and then think about it for some time and then make decisions. Don’t just make decisions because you’re going through some sufferings right now or some obstacles. Just look at those obstacles as pathways. And, so yeah, parents and family are very important. Talk to your siblings, your parents, your cousins, if you have cousins and uncles, and just express how you’re feeling because that helps a lot.”

In Graduate E’s case, he felt compelled to complete college as a matter of giving back to his parents for their sacrifices, and being a good example for his younger siblings. Graduate E shared the following with regard to family support:

“I think my family realized the importance of an education, it’s very important. I feel family support is 110 percent if that, very important. Again, being the oldest I felt a little bit of an obligation I guess, to some extent, but I also didn’t – I just felt like I needed to do this and I knew my parents as well and my family. I wanted to prove not only to myself I was capable of getting a college degree, but I wanted to show my brother and my sister that they can follow in
my footsteps to be successful at some point in their lives. And having my parents understand, as difficult as it may have been for them for me to leave the area, being … and helping to support them, that they knew it was important for all of us for me to receive an education. And to have that support meant a lot really, because otherwise again it would have been much easier for me to have just stayed at home and to just support them and sort of allow me to handicap them and sort of protect them and help them out. But yet it did help not only me grow, but it helped them grow also without being dependent on my efforts to help them out.”

**Peer Support**

The importance of peer support was another theme that developed among the graduates as a theme that motivated them to persist to graduation.

Graduate A described the importance of peer support as:

“I would say it was one of the most important factors to help me reach graduation. I think interesting enough a lot of my close friends from high school ended up going to the same college that I did. And I still made some new friends. Having that – I forget how many we were, but we were a fairly large cohort of students that went to the same college, and that really helped me feel comfortable.”

Graduate C shared his sentiment:

“Having good, healthy friendships outside of school was very important to me and for me to graduate because even though some of my friends, they didn’t attend school or actually were already working or even married at the time, they were encouraging me and supporting me and saying hey you know you need to graduate. And not only telling me hey you need to graduate,
but giving you that moral support and that comfort that they actually care about someone from this community, where I lived graduating, was very impressive to me. And so those friendships and faith organizations were very much a big part of me getting there to walk the stage. And so I think figuring out ways to have really healthy friendships outside of university and outside of class is very important to keep motivated. And also to have people who kind of went through the same steps, they knew what you are going through, and that have already lived those situations were very helpful to me as well. People who had already graduated from college and went through similar situations as I did at the time.”

Graduate D was more general in his approach to explaining the importance of peer support:
“The socioeconomics, they’re still different and you have to find that certain group that you can relate with and understand and feel that support, especially if you’re coming from out of state.”

Graduate E revealed that:

“Moving away for college really forced me to become independent, make new friends, and learn my new surrounding environment. So meeting new friends was important, because I needed that social network, peer-to-peer so to speak. So that I think largely not just academically but the social aspect of a college experience was important, and it helped me grow to become the person that I am. So very important and I would say that it did tremendously help me to make sure that I graduated as well, because I could see that my friends in college, they were graduating and I wanted to make sure that I was also going to be commencing with them at graduation. So that was definitely important.”
Financial Barriers

Overcoming financial barriers was a prominent obstacle, which all but one participant (Graduate A) identified as an area that was a challenge, which needed to be addressed in order to graduate from college. Since all of the participants attended private institutions, the financial barriers appeared to be the most significant institutional obstacle. For Participant C, an undocumented student, financial aid barriers were more prominent than for the rest of the participants.

Graduate B expressed his concern by stating that:

“Private school is not cheap. It wasn’t cheap when I graduated. It was very important how I was going to pay for it and I took out loans on my own. The finances were obviously very important, a decision that weighs very heavily.”

For Graduate C financial issues were even more critical because he did not have access to federal financial aid. He stated that financial barriers were:

“… A big obstacle, because at the time I couldn’t receive federal financial aid and so I had to look for scholarships here and there, and for people to sponsor me and help out. I think that was a concern and even though I also had to go out and get a job outside of the scholarships that I got, I think it helped me a lot, to feel what it feels to spend the money that you get on your education. At the end of the day I think that was the biggest obstacle, the money situation, but at the end of the day I think it was necessary for me to grow as a person and as a student. There were times where I honestly, in thinking about the money obstacle, I actually told my parents I don’t want to do this anymore. I’d rather just work or actually I even had the thought of leaving the country, just going back home where I was born. I said I’ll just go over there, start my own
business. I was actually like really serious about it too. I decided I’m just going to keep fighting the good fight and try to find a job during summers. During college I had internships, during I think four years I had internships, and the last two were paid internships so those helped a lot.”

For Graduate D, the process of navigating the bureaucracy of finding additional financial aid resources and working with his parents to complete financial aid forms were taxing for the student and family. In Graduate D’s words he communicated:

“If I wouldn’t have known through some of my mentors that there were these kind of resources or financial programs, then I don’t think that I would have ever been able to navigate such a complex issue of getting tax information, and then trying to translate that over to parents and let them know that this information was going to be properly used.

Graduate E shared that he felt responsible for his family’s financial obligations as well when encountering financial barriers. The combination of these two financial obstacles compounded the issues Graduate E had to overcome to graduate from college.

Graduate E articulated the following:

“Being the eldest person coming from a Hispanic background almost required me to go back home and just assist with financial obligations. The help that I got from high school counselors pushing me to apply for FAFSA was crucial and important, because that really helped determine what kind of a financial aid package I would get in colleges.”
Catholic Values

The significance of attending a Catholic institution relative to succeeding in college, for these participants, manifested through their experiences with spirituality and faith. The shared experiences of these participants are articulated below.

Graduate B shared:

“I had other schools that weren’t going to be as costly, but I believed that I was getting a better education at a Catholic institution.”

Graduate C said:

“To sum it up I think faith is one. Your faith based community. If you have a faith-based community during high school and then you’re going off to college, don’t just leave it. Try to stay connected to your faith community. I think that’s very important. Understanding the value of that college education that you’re getting that it’s not just for you but it’s for the whole community that’s like right behind you pushing you to succeed and to come back and give back.”

Graduate D shared:

“And then lastly it was most definitely the religious aspect for me personally. So having to go through and know that there was I guess on the higher side support there for me.”

Data Analysis: College Administrators

NVivo matrix coding was used to identify the following five themes, which emerged from interviews with college administrators, which were seen as significant factors or perceived
barriers for Hispanic males to graduate from college:

1) Financial barriers.

2) First-generation student dynamics.

3) No specific support programs for Hispanic males.

4) Lack of persistence analytics for Hispanic males.

5) Lower socio economic status.

6) Student engagement.

7) Language barriers with parents.

Table 1 and Figure 2 include the frequency of the important themes and attributes that are seen, by college administrators, as relatively important factors for Hispanic males to graduate from college. This information was gathered through participant interviews, whereby the phenomenological attributes associated with these interviews provided prominent examples of how these attributes manifest within the experiences of each participant. Accordingly, these themes were analyzed by the researcher in order to identify the lived experiences of participants in an effort to help decipher the meaning of these themes, become aware of gaps in the research, and to challenge some of the researcher’s initial assumptions.
Table 2: Frequency of Critical Attributes, College Administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Administrator (A)</th>
<th>Administrator (B)</th>
<th>Administrator (C)</th>
<th>Administrator (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation Dynamics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specific support programs for Hispanic males</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Lower socio economic status</td>
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<td>Student Engagement</td>
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<td>Language barriers with parents</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
Figure 2: Frequency of Critical Attributes

Financial Barriers

Similar to the Hispanic male graduates who participated in this study, college administrators also identified financial barriers as a major obstacle that keeps Hispanic males from graduating. It is worth noting that, in a longitudinal study by Witkow, Huynh and Fulohni,
it was found that (2014) “first-generation Latino students face challenges to their successful school completion at every stage of the educational pipeline. Even among the select, these students persisted toward a four-year college degree at a rate substantially lower than their peers. These differences were explained by differences in financial burdens.” Therefore, it is not surprising that financial barriers came up as a significant theme with college administrators. In this study the college administrators experienced similar financial issues with regard to their Hispanic students. Additionally, the administrators felt that the link between financial barriers and having first-generation status could exasperate this particular obstacle for male Hispanic students.

Administrator B’s observation is a good example of how the perceived lack of financial resources and being a first-generation student compound this particular obstacle that Hispanic males need to face in order to graduate:

“The other obstacles that I see are financial and sometimes that overlaps with first-generation, sometimes it doesn’t, it depends. And of course attending college can be expensive. And it’s not just like okay, give them free tuition, it’s often much more complicated than that. So we also get students in a real bind, where they can’t do well in their classes and then we find out it’s because they’re working 30 or 40 hours a week on top of going to college. And so the economic strain on them is not just the paying the tuition and room and board, but the fact that they can no longer help their family as much as they used to be able to.”

“We have some students who really struggle in getting through their courses and being challenged also with dealing with family issues and often times their family at home is either not stable or it’s financially challenged. So those are some of the main obstacles. Right and like I
said it’s more complicated than I can’t afford to pay tuition, it really seems to be more frequently
students who are trying to go to school and work full time and they can’t do it.”

Administrator C had the following to say about the financial barrier situation:

“Financials are a huge piece, or the perception of finance in terms of what a college
education costs, or what the associated costs are that would be a big piece. Here a lot of our
Hispanic students are also first gen and low income. And so things like understanding money and
the cost of university and navigating the system, there’s not necessarily support systems in place
that understands that.”

Administrator D reflected the following regarding the financial barriers male Hispanic
students face at the institution they work at:

“I think the first category for me might be kind of cultural and socioeconomic. I think
there are, thinking about some of my students and particularly thinking about these pressures that
males might face, some of my students I think have expressed to me pressures from their family
to help financially. Please get a job so you could help financially, support us and we need that
support now, not in four years from now. So a lot of I think maybe to some extent with the
women as well but I think even more so with the men. If their family is facing some serious
financial challenges they really look to the young men in their families to help support the family
and to go and get jobs. And so there's this tension there, I think, between ‘do I get a job right
now straight after high school and really help support my family now? Or do I postpone that and
try to figure -- for the next four years try to go to college so I can get a better job and better
support them?’ So I think that’s a tension that comes up as well for my students. So with
institutions what can we do?”
“Let’s see, well one, of course, is really trying to provide financial support for students that are going to meet the needs that they have. I think for many of these schools, and I know for our school, there is always kind of this gap between what the need is and what our institution offers. And for some students it might be no big deal to fill that gap because I know for a lot of my students and the ones that I work with are first-generation college students. And they come from a range of financial status or economic status, but many of them are from kind of lower income families and filling that gap is huge. They don't have an extra $1000 just kind of sitting around.”

First-Generation Students

It was noticeable among the administrators that a common theme regarding the barriers that keep male Hispanic students from achieving success at college was centered on identifying these students as being first-generation students.

Administrator A expressed the following with regard to this theme:

“We also need programs like our first-generation program that helps students to feel comfortable at the university and introduce them to the kinds of programs and services that they should expect. Because for a lot of them, and their parents aren’t going to be able to help guide them. Our population has become even more first-generation, lower socioeconomic status and so the analysis is difficult to tease out all the factors.”

Administrator B articulated the following experiences regarding first-generation students:

“Well, I mean there are a couple of obstacles and your study is focusing on Hispanic males, I deal a lot with first-generation college students and quite a few of those students are Hispanic. So what I’m aware of mostly are the students through our first-generation college
program. I’m certainly aware of the fact that many Hispanic males are first-generation college students. For those there are some clear obstacles with respect to being first-generation in the sense that they don’t have access to people with knowledge of what college is like and how to be successful in college and act as role models. So that is a clear obstacle, but when I look at our first-generation college students, a majority of them at Alpha Institution are Hispanic so I know that there are quite a few. The other obstacles that I see are financial and sometimes that overlaps with first-generation, sometimes it doesn’t, it depends.”

“It’s conflated with the additional problem that you have with a first-generation household where the family doesn’t understand how much time it takes to be a student. Doesn’t understand that that’s a full time job for them and still expects them to help out around the house or have an outside job. So there’s frequently an educational barrier for the parents to understand as much as they can about how to best support their child while they’re in college.”

**Support programs for Hispanic males**

It was evident that general support programs for under-represented students were available at the institutions represented by the college administrator participants. This led the case to be made that Hispanic males were served at their representative institutions. However, it was also clear that specific student support programs targeting Hispanic males were not available.

Administrator A discussed the support programs as follows:

“We have two federal grants that are Hispanic targeting institution grants, one is the STEM fields and one is more broad to support Hispanic and low income students. And, in across the academic spectrum, it’s focused on both the recruitment and articulation with community colleges that are already Hispanic serving.”
Administrator B stated the following with regard to the support programs at the institution they represent:

“We’re not specifically targeting Hispanic males but they get caught up in that group quite readily, specifically targeting Hispanics or Hispanic males other than the first-generation program. I do want to make it very clear that the first-generation program is definitely missing some Hispanic males because there are plenty of Hispanic males at Alpha University who are not first-generation. And actually let me backtrack a little bit on one of the other questions because I do realize we do have some programs that do target Hispanic students in general.”

Administrator C shared the following thoughts regarding the question of support programs:

“We don’t have any specifically geared towards Hispanic male students, like under that umbrella, no. Right now we’re really focused on primarily first year students and then we’re starting to delve into sort of sophomore, second year students. And they’re a little broad based and we have a first-generation program geared towards our first year students that aren’t necessarily Hispanic students, but again, where we are, that population often tends to be highly Hispanic or Latino.”

Administrator D shared these thoughts regarding the programs at the institution they represent:

“I don't want to brag or anything, but I think having programs like the first-generation program and similar types of programs were really important. So again, Latino or Hispanic males are such a wide range of folks that could be fourth generation, Hispanics who are well established here and parents have gone to college and all of that. I think for me, I'm speaking more about first-generation Hispanic males having a program like the first-generation program.
So first of all, we address the issue not necessarily as a male Hispanic problem but they’re kind of swept up, many of them are swept up in what we consider a first-generation issue. Yes, I don’t believe we have any programs for Hispanic males particularly. I think part of it is for the same reason that I mentioned, I mean focusing again at this part focus on ethnicity or race. I think part of it too is looking at our institution we have – well, so a couple of things; one is that we have a pretty large Hispanic or Latino population on campus, so I think in some ways maybe we’re more concerned about our African American students and kind of building the population of black students on our campus.”

**Lack of Persistence Analytics for Hispanic Males**

Another commonality among college administrators who were interviewed with regard to the graduation rate of male Hispanic students at their respected institutions was the lack of specific persistence analytics among this group.

Administrator A expressed the following sentiments:

“To my knowledge we don’t have things that are currently targeted at the male population and we don’t have a lot of analysis of individual activities or data where we can break up things that way. So it’s very hard to say.”

Administrator C responded as follows:

“Yeah, I can’t think of any here that are specifically impactful for them unfortunately. Just from literature and research I mean looking at things like – I know mentor is kind of a broad term but mentor programs that pair peers or faculty or professional staff not necessarily associated with university with Hispanic male students.”
Lower Socio-Economic Status

All of the administrators who participated in the study noted lower socio-economic status as a potential barrier Hispanic students face in order to graduate from college. This theme correlates to the financial barriers theme, but manifests differently as administrators identified lower socio-economic status with related family issues as the cause for having financial barriers.

Administrator A expressed the following with regard to lower socio-economic status of Hispanic students:

“Our Hispanic students as a whole tend to be more from lower socio-economic status.”

“Our population has become even more first-generation, lower socio-economic status.”

Administrator B articulated the following about how the socio economic status of male Hispanic students at the institution impact their graduation rates:

“We have some students who really struggle in getting through their courses and being challenged also with dealing with family issues and often times their family at home is either not stable or it’s financially challenged. So those are some of the main obstacles. Right, and like I said, it’s more complicated than I can’t afford to pay tuition, it really seems to be more frequently students who are trying to go to school and work full time and they can’t do it.”

Administrator D gave the most insight on the topic when they said the following:

“Let’s see I'm trying to break them down because I think there is a lot of challenges. I think the first category for me might be kind of cultural and socioeconomic. I just will mention one more and I kind of mentioned the financial obstacle, but definitely just the financial obstacle of paying for college, paying for solution, paying for school supplies, paying for housing, paying
for transportation, all of those as well of course a long with the added pressure of needing to support their family. And they come from a range of kind of financial status or economic status, but many of them are from kind of lower income families and filling that gap is huge. They don't have an extra $1000 or any extra just kind of sitting around.”

Student Engagement

College administrators supported the premise that student engagement is an important strategy with assisting Hispanic students’ persistence and success. However, according to McGlynn (2014), although higher engagement is typically associated with better academic outcomes, Latinos consistently report levels of engagement between their black and white cohorts. However, in this same study McGlynn (2014) points out that, even with greater student engagement of Latino males, it does not compensate for their lack of preparedness to do college level work. Furthermore the study states that, in this regard, “national data show that college readiness is a key variable in understanding a key relationship between engagement and outcomes for male college students” (McGlynn, 2014).

However, when interviewing college administrators, the theme of college preparedness itself did not come up. Nevertheless, a number of verbatim examples of student engagement were provided by college administrators.

Administrator A shared that:

“One of them is a connection to the institution through whatever means, and I think this is true for every population that are Hispanic students whether they’d be male or female, they tend to be more Catholic and I think that’s an important connection to the institution. We do have a good level of participants in athletics by Hispanic males particularly soccer and cross-country
teams. So I think that’s a double-edged sword, but I think it’s both connection to the institution and for some it’s some small amount of support, but it’s also time away in competition. For most athletes this is a positive thing for a few weeks.”

Administrator B revealed that engagement with support groups is essential by saying:

“It’s so strong and they have such a strong community support group that when they do run into problems or if they do have any issues they have a place to go to help them sort it out because they can’t go to their family.”

Administrator D had the following to say regarding student engagement at their institution:

“In my program we really try to build networks and inform students about their resources, but ultimately they have to be the ones to then reach out to me and say, ‘Oh my gosh I'm trying to figure this out and I don’t know how to do that.’ And part of that is the connections that they make with our staff and then through our college seminar they meet different professors, they have a lot of guest speakers from all over the campus, campus ministry, financial aid, study abroad, all of these different – from our advising center -- all of them will come in through our class and our students will get to meet them. And we also require all of them to go interview their faculty members. So things like that, where they’re learning about the campus resources.”

**Language Barriers with Parents**

College administrators recognized that more had to be done at their institutions with regards to overcoming language barriers with the parents of Hispanic students in order to help improve persistence. It was assumed that parents of Hispanic students might not know how to speak English. However, it is important to note that, according to Riva-Drake (2010,) scholars
have shown that immigrant parents communicate optimism and determination to make a better life for their family despite the language barriers they might encounter in the US, and that such messages encourage stronger academic engagement in diverse samples (Gibson 1988; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995). Therefore, the importance college administrators place on overcoming the language barriers with parents of Hispanics, and in this case Hispanic males, could be overstated. Conversely, Riva-Drake (2010) also noted that “language barriers are a demonstrably salient issue for the successful adaptation of immigrant families into the US society” (e.g., Cervantes et al. 1991; Lee 2005; Tseng 2006). In this regard, having an institutional strategy to connect with the parents of male Hispanic immigrant students could be beneficial to the college success rate of these students.

Administrator A expressed the following concerns regarding these language barriers:

“Depending on how the particular family and whether the families may be recent immigrants and so forth, there can be language issues, particularly with communication with parents so that can be an important factor. So making available translators, making available publications in Spanish are some strategies.”

Administrator B’s concerns regarding language barriers tied in closely with family support and were expressed as follows:

“And that barrier is difficult to cross sometimes because, even if the child speaks English because they’re obviously speaking English because they go to college, the parents may not. We can have all sorts of workshops or interactions that we do for the parents to explain that, but they may not understand because many of them don’t speak English. This is not true across the board, these are just cases where I’ve see this kind of problem sort of crop up. So the culture of going to
college is not part of their family culture, so the family doesn’t necessarily know how to support the students.”

Administrator C had the following to say about communicating with the parents of male Hispanic students at their institution:

“So in terms of what to do with that, some of that relates to things that seem as simple as communication with families and parents. So sometimes that’s conducting workshops and sessions of communication in Spanish. Especially for our first-generation students, their parents and family members don’t always speak English as well as the student does and so providing material that way is helpful for getting the parents on board for supporting the student. As part of that there is a lot of individual one-on-one connections with students from different offices, like our financial aid.”

Summary and Juxtaposition of Findings

The summary findings and juxtaposition of this study analyzed the themes, which emerged during the interviews. When comparing the themes from the male Hispanic graduates to those that emerged in the interviews with college administrators, additional insight was provided regarding the difference between the needs of male Hispanic students to complete college and the perception of what is needed by college administrators to assist these students in graduating from college. Consequently, the themes captured in the interviews from both groups were used to describe and track the similarities and differences between the perceived and actual needs of male Hispanic students at four-year Catholic colleges.

In addition, this section addresses the original research question: What are the fundamental factors or themes for Hispanic males to persist to graduate from a four-year Catholic college in
California. Figure 3 illustrates the themes male Hispanic graduates and College Administrators consider important for Hispanic males to graduate from college respectively. It is notable that only one common theme was identified between the two participant groups, namely overcoming financial barriers.

Figure 3: Juxtaposition of the Themes for Hispanic Males to Persist to Graduation as perceived by the Graduates and Administrators respectively

Symmetrical Themes: Male Hispanic Graduates and College Administrators

As noted on the figure 3 above, there was only one common overarching attribute which resonated between male Hispanic graduates and college administrators: Overcoming financial barriers. College administrators framed the financial barriers theme as a challenge facing many
Hispanic male students that have a lower socio-economic status. Concurrently, for all but one Hispanic male participant in this study, overcoming financial barriers was noted as a challenge to completing college. This dynamic may help to explain why more significant progress has not been made with regard to male Hispanic college student success in other areas. In other words, identifying only one common theme to achieve higher graduation outcomes between both groups is enlightening and it provides an opportunity for future research.

College administrators in this study perceived that Hispanic students generally come from first-generation families, and lower-socio economic backgrounds. As a result, college administrators conceptualized these students as being financially disadvantaged as well as underexposed to college expectations, since their parents did not graduate from college. Additionally, the dissonance between not having enough financial resources to persist to degree completion and grappling with insufficient institutional aid to meet the student’s unmet financial need is a critical obstacle identified by both sets of participants.

Saenz and Ponjuan (2012) pointed out that policies, with regard to financial assistance for male Hispanics, need to change in order to increase awareness about the institutional resources that are available to pay for college and help students persists.
Disparate Themes

It was surprising to discover the difference between what administrators believe are the reasons why Hispanic males do not persist at higher levels and what Hispanic male college graduates believe are important attributes in helping them to graduate from college. The dissonance or disparate themes were prominent in this study. Whereby, the extent of the dissonance between college administrators and Hispanic male college graduates relative to the main themes (factors) leading to student success distinguished areas of opportunity to research further. In other words, the disparity between both groups concerning the most critical attributes leading to student success by each group studied is exponential and these differences in
perception, as well as how large the differences in perception are, are both possible topics for future research. There is also an opportunity for further research relating to the issue of improving male Hispanic college graduation rates, by better understanding the differences between these disparate themes. These disparate themes are listed in table 3 below:

Table 3: College Administrator Themes vs. Hispanic Male College Graduate Themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Administrators Themes</th>
<th>Hispanic Male College Graduates Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-generation students</td>
<td>Family Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specific programs for Hispanic males</td>
<td>Peer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of persistence analytics for Hispanic males</td>
<td>Catholic Higher Education Values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Socio economic status</td>
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<td>Student Engagement</td>
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<td>Language barriers with parents</td>
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**Family Support: Male Hispanic Graduates**

It is worth noting that the theme relating to the importance of family support received the highest NVivo node frequency with male Hispanic participants when compared to the other themes that are part of this study. In addition, all but one Hispanic male participant noted family
support as a key motivating factor to graduate from college.

The family, moral and financial support that was needed by male Hispanic graduates who took part in this study, in order to persist to graduation was of significant importance to them. According to Saenz and Ponjuan (2012), families provide a complex influence and role in helping Hispanic males persist in college. In addition, Hispanic college bound males are motivated to attend college to be able to live a better life than their parents (Saenz, Ponjuan, 2012). Accordingly, the Hispanic male participants of this study noted the importance of family support and focused on repaying their parents for the sacrifices they made. They also noted the importance of the moral support to complete their college education that was provided by their families, which was unnoticed by college administrators.

**Peer Support: Male Hispanic Graduates**

The interviews drew attention to how important peer support was for Hispanic male participants to persist when facing challenges in college. This factor was however overlooked by college administrators in this study. Nevertheless, the importance of peer support is acknowledged in the research literature. In a study by Harper (2006), “he asserts that peers played a significant role with high achievers’ collegiate success. Whereby, male and female students alike extended tremendous support to the African American men in the sample.” Moreover, Saenz and Ponjuan (2012) point out that Hispanic males who indicated that they had positive peer support were likely to have stronger aspirations for attending and succeeding in college.

As a result, both the Hispanic male participants and the research literature support the need to develop strong peer networks in order to be successful in college. In this regard, there is a
tremendous opportunity for college administrators to explore how best to cultivate and provide resources for these peer connections to take place at their campuses.

**Catholic Higher Education Values: Male Hispanic Graduates**

The importance of Catholic values during college was another shared experience of the Hispanic male participants relative to their lived experiences in college, which was beneficial in assisting these participants in persisting to graduation. According to Lamadrid (2009), Catholic colleges and universities are committed to the whole student, to the development of that student’s mind, body and spirit. Lamadrid (2009) further poses the question of what higher value could be found in selecting a higher education for our students. Lamadrid’s reflections regarding Catholic education and how it influences various facets of a student’s psyche, appear to be synergistic with some of the reposes from the participants of this study, especially those that articulated a need for peer or social support.

**First-Generation Students: College Administrators**

There was a common perception that based on the interviews with college administrators, Hispanic males and first-generation student circumstances could be regarded as synonymous. However, “first-generation students are not a homogeneous group, and their differences can shape identity development in meaningful ways” (Roberts and Rosewald, 2001).

When taking this into consideration, the generalization by college administrators that participated in this study, that male Hispanic students are synonymous to first-generation students, is contrary to the approach of treating male Hispanic students as a non-homogeneous group. Nevertheless, it’s is interesting to note that the first-generation theme did not materialize
as an issue or barrier for student success from the perspective of the male Hispanic college graduates who participated in this study.

**No Specific Programs for Hispanic Males: College Administrators**

The college administrators in this study did not have specific programs targeting male Hispanics or have systems in place to analyze the disaggregated persistence analytics for this population. However, the importance of student engagement was noted by the college administrators who participated in this study, although, examples of student engagement strategies were not provided as an option to assist male Hispanic students, specifically with regard to persisting to graduation.

**Lack of persistence analytics for Hispanic Males: College Administrators**

The interviews also identified areas needing more attention in order to better understand what drives Hispanic males to persist to graduation. For instance, it was surprising for me to discover the systemic lack of institutional retention and student success data disaggregated by Hispanic males. In effect, most of the college administrators who participated in this study provided general descriptions, and analysis for Hispanics or first-generation students, but they were very general in their responses relative to Hispanic male persistence strategies and student support services. According to McGlynn (2014), one of a number of things colleges can do to improve academic outcomes for Latinos is to monitor engagement and outcomes for different student groups and making this practice a routine part of the institutions work. This practice is therefore something the institutions, which the college administrators represent, should look at implementing.
Again it is also worth noting that during the interviews the college administrators often categorized Hispanics and first-generation students as a homogenous. However, as it was evident in this study not all of the Hispanic males identified as first-generation students.

**Lower Socio Economic Status: College Administrators**

There was a theme among college administrators where they generally categorized Hispanics students as coming from low-income families. In the words of Administrator A, “Hispanic students, in general, come from lower economic. Our Hispanic students as a whole tend to be more from lower socioeconomic status, our population has become even more first-generation, lower socioeconomic status.” In support of this statement, according to a report by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2012), “Hispanics were the least well off financially among all races/ethnicities: their median income was $25,191, two-thirds of the California statewide median; three quarters of the Hispanics earned $42,768 or less; and one in four earned about $14,000 or less.” Figure 5 provides a comparison chart for reference.

Thus, it appears that there is congruence between what the college administrators perceive to be an issue for college access and student success and the relative income level of Hispanic families. Compounding this issue is the cost of a private college education compared to the cost of a public institution. In fact, “for the 2012–13 academic year, annual current dollar prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board were estimated to be $15,022 at public institutions, $39,173 at private nonprofit institutions” (*Digest of Education Statistics, 2013*). Subsequently, Figure 5 points out the disparity between Hispanic family incomes and other family demographics in California.
Student Engagement: College Administrators

The fact that the findings of this study challenge the hypothesis of the central research question is worth noting as it states that: Catholic colleges in California provide a supportive and engaging environment, which could lead to higher graduate rates for Hispanic males.

According to the male Hispanic graduates interviewed in this study a supportive and engaging college environment is not a primary reason for student success and is not the main reasons why male Hispanic students persist to graduation. However, college administrators
highlight student engagement as an important attribute that leads students to stay connected to the institution, which leads to yet another disparity between the college administrators and the Hispanic males who participated in this study.

However, it is important to note that Greene, Marti and McClenny (2008) say that “research also suggests that high engagement may be particularly important to the success of minority and underprepared college students.” Additionally, Cruce et al. (2006) and Kuh et al. (2007) reported, “that engagement had compensatory effects for historically underserved and minority students and, net of controls for prior academic achievement and other variables, they found that African American and Hispanic college students achieved and/or persisted at higher levels than their White counterparts as their engagement increased.” Therefore, although Hispanic male participants in this study did not include the importance of student engagement in their responses for factors contributing to earning a college degree, secondary research suggests that student engagement is indeed a factor to consider.

Language Barriers: College Administrators

Lastly, some college administrators in this study suggested that developing strategies to interact with parents in Spanish is an important initiative to help Hispanic students to persist. Accordingly, there is research, which supports this premise. For instance in a study by Gracia (2010), it was emphasized that “providing intrusive advising techniques in dealing with parents who only spoke Spanish when advisors called their advisees home to check in on their students was effective with helping Hispanic students to persist.” In addition, Tornatzky, Cutler and Lee (2002) acknowledged in their report What Latino Parents Need to Know and Why They Don’t Know It that “language barriers are a major obstacle to increasing college knowledge for parents,
and that all college information events such as open houses should be staffed with bilingual Spanish speakers.” However, language barriers for parents did not come up at all as a theme or a relevant issue with male Hispanic participants in this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic male graduates from Catholic colleges and universities in California, and administrators from Catholic colleges and universities in California relative to the factors leading Hispanic males to graduate from college.

The central research question for this study was: What are the fundamental factors or approaches for Hispanic males to successfully persist and graduate from a four-year Catholic college or university in California? Subsequently, there were a number of themes from the two groups of participants (Hispanic male college graduates and college administrators), which provide insight into addressing this central research question. The main factors which address the central research question are categorized into two main groupings: student engagement, and institutional commitment.

Student engagement includes peer, family and institutional engagement themes. Institutional commitment encompasses the themes of overcoming financial barriers, nominal persistence analytics focused on Hispanic males, and minimal programs targeting Hispanic males.

Student Engagement and Current Literature

Student engagement is comprised of two themes for the purposes of this study; peer-to-
peer engagement and family engagement. Student engagement factors are the experiences of college students while in college, which can have a significant impact on the students’ motivation and ability to persist to graduation.

**Peer Engagement**

Providing a point of reference in comparison with the current literature regarding the importance of peer engagement relative to student success helps to ground the findings of this study. Accordingly, below is an excerpt from the Saunders and Serna (2004) research article, which supports the premise that having peers, or in the words of a Latino college student, having “anyone there that could help” while in college is an important support system for student success.

I always knew I would graduate from high school, but when I got accepted to a 4-year university, I found out that it might not happen. I began slacking off in my academic coursework because I was scared of going away and being on my own [and] not having anyone there I was comfortable with or trustworthy that would help me.

Saunders and Serna (2004) further make the case that peer social capital and the social reproduction theory play an important role for Latino students by “maintaining capacity to access academic and social support while in college, and sustaining a college-going identity.” In addition, Saunders and Serna (2004) point out that there are three types of social networks:

Type 1: The Creation of New Networks and the Maintenance of the Old

Type 2: Relying on Old Networks

Type 3: All Alone
In the Saunders and Serna (2004) study Type 1 students have an acute ability to make new peer social networks and continue to rely on old peer relationships, while Type 2 students mostly rely on their old peer network and are not sanguine with making new peer connections at college. Meanwhile, Type 3 students are alone and do not have a peer network at college or at home. Consequently, Type 1 Latino students for the Saunders and Serna (2004) study were more engaged and achieved an average cumulative GPA of 2.84; Type 2 Latino students engaged mostly with their old peer network and achieved an average cumulative GPA of 2.59. Meanwhile, Type 3 Latino students achieved an average 2.18 GPA.

In reviewing the responses from the Hispanic male graduates from the study prepared for this dissertation, it was notable that they fell mostly within Saunders and Serna (2004) Type 1 category. Whereby, making new friends and also relying on old friends for support, social interaction and social capital was part of their lived experiences. Consequently, this sample is skewed since all of these Hispanic male students graduated. Therefore, a more granular approach of segmenting Hispanic male peer engagement in college should be considered for future research.

Given that developing intentional peer relationships is an important factor for Hispanic male student success, Salazar and Sanford’s (1995) findings reinforce “evidence that net-work analytic models of mobility and attainment can contribute to a better understanding of differential achievement and mobility among minority youth.” Differential achievement speaks to the more granular approach of drilling down on specific peer engagement factors rather than considering the peer engagement factor as a macro-level attribute to assist Hispanic males persist.
Figure 6 provides an illustration of the tiered approach of peer engagement juxtaposed with academic performance based on Saunders and Serna’s (2004) findings that help to support the differential approach to student persistence, which Hispanic males college students could benefit from and is suggested for future research.

Figure 6 Hierarchy of Peer Engagement

In comparison to low Hispanic male college graduation rates, African American literature will also be juxtaposed to help ground this study. Subsequently, in a study by Harper and Quaye (2009), they stressed that “students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities and experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than are their disengaged peers to persist through graduation.”
In addition, Harper (2012) reveals in his study of *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education* that there are “well-documented benefits associated with educationally purposeful engagement, and the achievers attributed much of their college success to their engagement experiences. Moreover, out-of-class experiences had spillover effects on academic performance for almost all the students interviewed.” In this regard, interpersonal engagement focused on educational interactions in and out of the classroom, which for the Harper (2012) study, differentiated the Black male students who achieved student success from the ones that did not. Interestingly enough, in this study for the doctoral thesis, peer engagement manifested as peer-to-peer interpersonal relationships through college related activities. Although academically focused activities were not necessarily articulated throughout the interviews.

Similarly Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews (2013) did a study focused on persistence among Latino males at an urban community college; whereby student engagement, and peer-to-peer connections played an important role with student success. In this study Gonzalez-Matthews (2013) concluded:

…Community colleges should encourage Latino males to create bonds with one another by hosting counseling staff or faculty-led social groups. By facilitating socializing among Latino males, they can express their frustration … and recharge their motivation to succeed in an academic setting.

Moreover, the Ingram and Gonzalez-Matthews (2013) study highlighted the need of students who participated in the study to receive assistance from staff and faculty (e.g. college administration) to help students engage with their peers in an academic setting and also with the college.

In another study by Torres and Solberg (2001), it was asserted that Latino students who do
not develop strong connections with their peers have a high propensity of feeling marginalized, and have a higher risk of not persisting since “alienation is self-defeating.”

Additionally, according to Astin (1993), the peer group of a student is the “single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.” Therefore, not only does interpersonal connections with peers provide college students with motivation to graduate, but it could be argued that the qualitative nature of these connections allows for an enriching learning and developmental experience. In this regard, there is an argument that has been made by Flynn (2013) that the peer-to-peer social experiences in college, rather than academic specific engagement activities, may carry more weight with student persistence and success.

**Family Engagement**

Family engagement is also documented in the literature as an important factor supporting persistence and student success. In the Harper study (2012), the Black male college student achievers recognized a number of factors leading them to achieve student success, including “parents who maintained invariably high expectations.” In this regard the high expectations for students to persist is a motivator, and could be considered a form of family support and family engagement.

Family support was also noted as an important factor for Latino college student persistence in the Torres and Solberg (2001) study. Torres and Solberg asserted that Latino students who have strong family support available to them “build connections with faculty and other students and believe in their ability to complete their academic goals.”
Current literature is also available concerning the segmentation of family support in helping students persist to graduation. Subsequently, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) included in their findings that role modeling and message encouragement were two important factors influencing the persistence of African American men at a Historically Black University.

Accordingly, Palmer, Davis and Maramba’s (2011) study highlights the specifics of role modeling, which sheds light on the premise of segmenting family support. For instance, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) provide an example of a student whose mother encouraged the student to attain a college degree since he was two years old while she pursued her degrees as an adult learner. There were also examples in the findings of the Palmer, Davis and Maramba’s (2011) study, which indicated that participants of the study felt motivated and support by the supportive messages received from family members. This segmentation of family support certainly provides a deeper dive into the types of family support systems Hispanic males could benefit from.

**Institutional Engagement**

Social and academic engagement initiatives at four-year colleges linked to improving graduation rates can be traced to much of Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2010) scholarly work. His work focused on student success, and why students drop out or persist to graduation. In this regard, the literature about institutional engagement initiatives relative to Hispanic college male student success is limited. However, Tinto’s description of two categories of engagement; academic engagement and social engagement, can be used as part of this study as a framework to discuss general concepts associated to the importance of institutional engagement (Tinto, 1993).
As a result, Figure 7 provides an illustration developed by Flynn (2013) grounded in Tinto’s work and is focused on student characteristics and behaviors juxtaposed with institutional engagement behavior. Figure 7 highlights the points in time where institutional and student characteristic engagements overlap in the student’s journey of persistence to graduation. It is notable that Figure 7 indicates the symmetry between social and academic engagement as part of the journey of persistence. For the purposes of this study institutional engagement through social interactions with peers developed as an important theme with the Hispanic male graduates.

However, college administrators who participated in this study (Bucheli, 2016) did not put much significance with on peer-to-peer social interactions. College administrators in this study did put more emphasis on the systemic programmatic aspects of engaging students. However, as Figure 7 suggests, both the social and institutional aspects of engagement play a role during the journey to college graduation, in short these two attributes should not be mutually exclusive.
In summary, the research literature dedicated to student engagement supports the premise of this study that the combination of peer, family and institutional engagement are important themes to help Hispanic male college students persist to graduation. Furthermore, the research literature evokes the importance of segmentation by sub-engagement category. Whereby, there are different levels and depths of engagement, which should be considered to help with Hispanic male college persistence, rather than considering the themes at face value. Although there are general frameworks (e.g. Tinto, 1993) in the research literature supporting institutional engagement, the segmentation of Hispanic males college students in this regard is limited.
Lastly, as Tinto (2010) states “engagement is being an active, participating, and engaged member of the college community as measured by an observable set of behaviors.” Therefore, apart for acknowledging the specific student engagement attributes listed above, measuring behaviors is also valuable endeavor for colleges and universities to pursue to improve Hispanic male college graduation rates.

**Institutional Commitment and Current Literature**

Institutional commitment is comprised of three themes for the purposes of this study: overcoming financial barriers, nominal persistence analytics focused on Hispanic males, and minimal support programs targeting Hispanic males. Institutional commitment initiatives, which are intended to make an impact specifically on male Hispanic college graduation rates, are not abundant in the research literature. However, general references to overcoming financial barriers are more readily available in the literature, and will therefore be referenced accordingly.

**Overcoming Financial Barriers**

In order to understand the dynamics of overcoming financial barriers for Hispanic males to improve their chances to graduate from college or university, it is critical that the differentiation between merit and need based aid is identified relative to this theme. Accordingly, Singell and Stater (2006) iterate that “merit based aid provides an opportunity for colleges and universities to attract higher academic achieving students which allows for the probability of increasing graduation rates.” Conversely, need based financial aid permits colleges and universities to
enroll students who need institutional assistance in order to enroll and persist throughout their course

Singell and Stater (2006) assert in their study, that colleges have tended to move away from providing more need-based aid for low-income students and towards merit aid instead. This phenomenon naturally biases low-income students who are not high academic achievers. Therefore, for Hispanic male college students who are low-income having need-based aid is a critical factor for access to college and persistence to graduation, but at more and more colleges and universities, this can only be attained if they achieve certain academic standards.

Nominal Persistence Analytics Focused on Hispanic Males

As was mentioned previously, it was notable that college administrators participating in this research study provide a general perspective of what motivated Hispanics to persist. However, specific student success analytics focused on Hispanic males was not mentioned in any of the interviews with college administrators.

Although research focused on Hispanic males persisting at California Catholic colleges and universities is not prevalent, there is certainly research available focused on Hispanic male degree completion at community colleges and public institutions, along with minimal research at private institutions. Therefore, college and university administrators at California Catholic higher education institutions have an opportunity to research Hispanic male degree completion patterns along with recommendations to improve Hispanic male persistence relative to their institutions. Subsequently, the importance for college administrators to segment Hispanic male
persistence analytics is critical for developing appropriate programs and initiatives targeted to improve Hispanic male college degree attainment.

In the literature there are examples such as that offered up by Ponjuan, Palomin and Calise (2015), which provide rich information concerning Hispanic male ethnic group segmentation that could allow for a road map of sorts to be developed for college administrators at Catholic colleges and universities to use in their planning. As Desmond and Turley (2009) assert, “Hispanic students have different patterns based on geography proximity to higher education institutions.” Hence, segmented target analytics by Hispanic male subgroup can help enlighten administrators to address targeted institutional strategies. Worth noting, degree completion by Hispanic male subgroups as part of the Ponjuan, Palomin and Calise (2015) highlight the importance of segmenting these kinds of data points for college administrators to consider (Table 4):

Table 4. Bachelor’s Degree Completion of Latino Males by National Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latino Origin</th>
<th>Degree completion year (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central American</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hispanic</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census (2012)
Minimal Support Programs Targeting Hispanic Males

Although the college administrators in this study affirmed that there were general programs targeting first-generation students and students of color (including Hispanics), it was evident that specific student support programs targeting Hispanic males were not present at the institutions which the college administrators were employed at. In this regard it is important to note that the literature supports designated engagement programs for Hispanic males to help them persist to college degree attainment (Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005; Nunez, 2009). In fact, Kuh et al. (2010) reported that “students’ campus engagement is a major factor associated with students’ college persistence and degree completion.”

Programs designed to develop intentional Hispanic male student engagement through academic experiences, co-curricular activities, along with financial aid literacy programming, are vital for higher education institutions to consider if improving Hispanic male college graduation rates is a goal (Ponjuan, Palomin and Calise, 2015). Additionally, the literature supports that Hispanic males can gain form participating in “male focused organizations to assist with their college engagement and student success outcomes” (Saenz and Ponjuan, 2011).

Moreover, Catholic college and university administrators can learn much from research focused on African American male college degree completion. As with Hispanic males, African American males have a low college graduation rate. In fact, African American “male college completion rates are lowest among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in U.S. higher education” (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Moreover, relative to student support programs African American males “participate less frequently in campus activities, hold fewer leadership positions, and report lower grades” (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, Carini, Bridges, and Hayek, 2004).

Lastly, with an abundance of research literature available relative to programs targeting
Hispanic and African American male student engagement success, California Catholic colleges and universities stand to gain from this research if their goal is to improve Hispanic male retention rates.

**Research Limitations**

The limitations to this study include self-reported information, that is based on past experiences, which cannot be independently verified and was not tested for validity. In other words, I used the feedback provided by the participants via interviews at face value. The Hispanic male college graduates who participated in this study, although not intentional, all graduated within a ten-year period before 2015. Therefore, their perspectives were based on selective memory, which could have attributed to telescoping when responding. Furthermore, this study did not include male Hispanic college students who graduated prior to 2005, which is another limitation that can be considered for future research. The generational differences prior to 2005 could be fundamentally different. For instance, prior to 2005 college affordability was not as significant an issue as it is today.

As the findings of this study materialized based on participant interviews, I regret not asking a variation on the question regarding peer engagement. It was evident from the male Hispanic college graduates who participated in this study that peer engagement was important to them in their journey to persisting to graduation, but understanding specific types of peer engagement activities could have contributed to further enhancing this study through segmentation. Furthermore, secondary research relative to peer engagement suggests that this is an area in which additional research segmentation can be more meaningful for practitioners to gain understanding, and for future male Hispanic students to value as a key concept that leads to degree completion.
Moreover, there is lack of prior inquiry on the research problem investigated in this study: Exploring the critical factors of degree completion for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges and universities in California. Although lack of prior research on this specific research topic has its limitations, it provides opportunities for future research as well. However, it is worth noting that there was plenty of secondary research available on related studies, which helped to inform this particular study.

This research topic was narrowly focused on a geographic area and specific institutional type: California Catholic colleges and universities. Therefore, the findings of this study include limitations with its geographic scope and institutional type. Further research with administrators at highly ranked national Catholic and non-Catholic institutions would help to provide a broader context to how other institutions address improving Hispanic male persistence.

Lastly, in this study the Hispanic male college graduates who participated in this study did not provide much reference to first-generational issues.

**Research Strengths**

The strengths of this qualitative study are concentrated on identifying trends across participant interviews, which was advantageous for studying the modest sample size in depth. As a result, the trends or themes that developed allowed me to acquire supportive evidence to address the research problem and central research question of this study. I also recognized that this study addressed only a focused set of institutions in one geographic location as well as a modest sample size.

Moreover, this study also uncovered some trends or themes that were not obvious to me until after the NVivo coding indicated clues to important patterns of the participant responses.
Another identified strength of this study is the opportunity for me to identify and describe complex phenomena. For instance, the importance of the specific segmentation of engagement among peers, and parents, as well as members of the college or university community, were an key finding which developed from coding these interviews, explaining the lived experiences and identifying such phenomena.

Finally, this study provided an opportunity to conduct cross case comparisons between two groups of participants: College administrators and Hispanic male college graduates. The strength behind these comparisons allowed me to discover the common themes/trends and disparate themes between both set of participants in order to better address the problem of practice.

**Implications for Practice**

This study provides attempts to provide college administrators at the senior leadership level, college administrators who are responsible for retention and student success, Hispanic male college bound students and their parents, with important information about the factors that can help boost Hispanic male graduation rates California Catholic colleges and universities.

College administrators should benefit from this study by taking into consideration that the main factors, which address the central research question, are student engagement, and institutional commitment. These factors, supported by this study, can assist college administrators make a positive impact with on Hispanic male college graduation rates. Subsequently, as was previously discussed, student engagement is not only an important factor that helped participants in this study to overcome barriers to graduation. Student engagement can also be used to identify the segmentation of meaningful student engagement that can assist college administrators with developing specific intentional student engagement programs. In this
regard, college administrators would be wise to drill down, and to develop impactful engagement strategies focused on peer-to-peer relationships within the academic and co-curricular areas.

College administrators should also find the information stipulated in this study relative to family engagement helpful. Whereas, apart from what initial information college administrators perceive as important with Hispanic families (e.g. staff and faculty at the college to learning Spanish, etc.), it was evident from the Hispanic college graduates in this study that having a connection with family to help motivate them to persist was critical to their success. Therefore, college administrators would be wise to learn from students how best to connect them with their parents as part of their educational journey, which would be in addition to the typical engagement opportunities with parents which most colleges provide (e.g. new student orientation including a family program and campus tours).

This study provided an indication of the wide margin between what college administrators believe would help Hispanic males persist to degree completion through the themes identified in this paper, compared to what Hispanic males who successfully graduated from college believed were important factors. Consequently, I was astonished by how mutually exclusive the disparate themes seem to present themselves between both sets of participants. As a result, it would be prudent for college administrators to do focus groups with Hispanic male students at their college campuses, and discover for themselves how close or far apart both groups are with trying to meet the same desired goal: improve Hispanic male college graduation rates.

Another alternative is for college administrators at California Catholic colleges and universities to study the themes that are important for Hispanic male graduates within this study, and attempt to do additional inquiry relative to disparate themes found in this research. Furthermore, it was clear that college administrators in this study were inclined toward putting
more weight on the importance of financial aid as being the major hindrance to Hispanic students not completing college. However, according to the Hispanic male graduates of this study financial aid barriers were not the only factor that was identified as needing to be overcome in order to graduate from college, it was one of many factors. Although both sets of participants did agree that overcoming financial aid issues was a theme and factor for degree completion, which was the only congruent theme between both set of participants.

College administrators can refer to the information in this study to possibly address developing specific student service programs serving Hispanic male students at their campuses, as well as developing a set of metrics to track disaggregated Hispanic male student persistence data. Case in point, disaggregating Hispanic subgroups similar to the Ponjuan, Palomin and Calise (2015) example on page 81 and, by level of institutional engagement can be beneficial for practitioners to track at a more granular level to establish trends and develop future intervention strategies.

For Hispanic college bound student as well as their parents, the implications and the linchpin of this study is reliant on the importance of engagement with peers, family, staff and faculty at the college or university. As was mentioned earlier in this study, when engagement is high within an academic setting students have a better chance of persisting and getting good grades. If engagement is low, the reverse occurs; grades trend lower and persistence is lower as well.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic male graduates from Catholic colleges and universities in California, and college administrators from California Catholic colleges and universities relative to the factors leading Hispanic males to graduate from
college. Therefore, this study should inspire further research on the central research question: What are the fundamental factors or approaches for Hispanic males to successfully persist and graduate from a four-year Catholic college or university in California?

The peer engagement theme in this study indicated that it was an important factor for degree completion among the Hispanic male graduates of this study. In addition, secondary research provides evidence that peer engagement is important to identify at various levels and types of engagement. Subsequently, it is recommended that future research, specifically for Hispanic male graduates at California Catholic colleges, study a disaggregated approach to peer engagement. This information could provide a clear lens regarding how best to design intentional programs to improve peer engagement. It could also help to improve academic performance and student success of this target population at California Catholic colleges and universities.

In addition, I was surprised to find the quantity of disparate themes between the two sets of participants. It appeared uncanny that there was only one overlapping theme (overcoming financial barriers) between both groups. In this regard, further research that investigates why college administrators may not have a clear understanding of what the most important factors leading to degree completion are for Hispanic male college students may be beneficial.

Furthermore, the relevance of attending a Catholic faith based institution did manifest as a shared experience between the male Hispanic graduates of this study, and was beneficial for some of the participants to graduate from college. However, I believe that there is an opportunity for future inquiry related to the significance of a Catholic faith based education in relation to institutional engagement and degree completion focused on the target population of this study. Future research can expand on specifically what factors relative to a Catholic
institution inspired Hispanic males to graduate (e.g. the curriculum, opportunities to practice the Catholic faith on campus, peer-engagement at mission and ministry etc.).

Conclusion

This research project was very enlightening for me in a variety of ways. Initially, I believed that I was going to find more evidence that college administrators had new and innovative ideas to help Hispanic males persist. This was not the case, in fact the college administrators, although knowledgeable about general retention strategies, knew very little about Hispanic male college persistence factors. The general knowledge about retention and persistence was applied across the board with most of the responses. I was surprised by this finding since the literature indicates that the Hispanic male college bound population in California is increasing exponentially; meanwhile, college degree completion for this demographic was below that of other student demographics. As a college administrator, I find that this is an opportunity not only for future research, but to really help make significant improvements with Hispanic male graduation rates.

I was also surprised by the generalizations of Hispanics as a homogenous group by college administrators. For instance, it was evident that many college administrators consider this demographic to be first-generation, low-income and that their parents spoke Spanish, which is not always the case.

Conversely, prior to this study I believed that the Hispanic graduates would come up with fundamental responses addressing the research question. However, I was pleasantly surprised how their focused, complex and in-depth responses led to many of the key research findings and opportunities for future research. If there is one key take away from the interviews it is that intentional peer-to-peer engagement is the most important factor for students persisting to
graduation. Parent engagement is the second most important factor for college persistence with this particular group of graduates.

In this regard, college administrators and parents would be wise to understand these interpersonal dynamics. Subsequently, although Catholic values were part of the dialogue of this research; the importance of these students enrolling at a Catholic institution was relevant, but was not as significant for degree completion as the engagement factors were. Perhaps a Catholic institution provides for more of these interpersonal and spiritual engagement activities to be supported, leading to improved student persistence. This could be another future research opportunity as well.

What surprised me the most was how far off the two sets of participants were relative to disparate themes. I was not expecting this at all. I expected more cross over between themes. As a college administrator this phenomenon makes me consider making sure that students are listened to with regard to their needs and what it would take to make their college experience better, based on their interpersonal needs leading to academic success.

As I reflect on my college experience in which I could identify with the graduates of this study, if it wasn’t for the strong friendships in college as well the support from my family, it would have been difficult for me to persist. In this regard, when I attended college for the first time, I was lonely and missed my peer network from high school. At one point I considered going back home to a community college to be closer to friends and family. However, I ended up meeting a few good friends in my classes, which changed my entire perspective about continuing my studies and persisting. In fact, I actually changed my major to international relations because of the influence of my peers in college. Again, although I was not expecting to find that the college graduates had more of the answers than the college administrators. I was certainly
pleasantly surprised.
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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter

Date

Name of prospective participant
Address
City, State Zip

Re: Undergraduate Degree Completion Factors for Hispanic Males at Four-Year Catholic Colleges in California, research study.

Dear [Name of prospective participant]:

My name is Hernan Bucheli, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, College of Profession Studies who is currently working on my doctoral dissertation. Consequently, I am conducting my dissertation study along with Kristal Moore Clemens, Ph.D., and principal investigator at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies.

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the undergraduate degree completion factors for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges in California. This study will explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California. The information learned from this study may help Hispanic male college bound students, parents of Hispanic male college bound students, higher education administrators and California elected officials to understand the most important factors needed for Hispanic males to graduate from college.

You were selected for this study because you have been identified as a Hispanic male who graduated from a Catholic College in California.

The study will take place using Skype, and will take about 45 minutes to complete during one session.

Please note that there will be no direct benefit or compensation to you for taking part in the study. However, by participating in this study it will help inform future Hispanic males and college administrators understand what are some of the relevant factors for Hispanic males to graduate from a four-year California Catholic College.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to contact Hernan Bucheli at Tel. 650-281-9067 or email bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in this voluntary study. If you wish to participate in this voluntary study please email me at bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Hernan Bucheli
Student Investigator

[Approval stamp]
Recruitment Letter/Email [Direct of Student Success]

Date

Name of prospective participant
Address
City, State Zip

Re: Undergraduate Degree Completion Factors for Hispanic Males at Four-Year Catholic Colleges in California, research study.

Dear [Name of prospective participant]:

My name is Hernan Bucheli and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, College of Profession Studies who is currently working on my doctoral dissertation. Consequently, I am conducting my dissertation study along with Kristal Moore Clemors, Ph.D., and principal investigator at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies.

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the undergraduate degree completion factors for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges in California. This study will explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California.

The information learned from this study may help Hispanic male college bound students, parents of Hispanic male college bound students, higher education administrators and California elected officials to understand the most important factors needed for Hispanic males to graduate from college.

You were selected for this study because you have been identified as a director of student success from a Catholic College in California.

The study will take place using Skype, and will take about 45 minutes to complete during one session.

Please note that there will be no direct benefit or compensation to you for taking part in the study. However, by participating in this study it will help inform future Hispanic males and college administrators understand what are some of the relevant factors for Hispanic males to graduate from a four-year California Catholic College.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to contact Hernan Bucheli at Tel. 650-281-9067 or email bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in this voluntary study. If you wish to participate in this voluntary study please email me at bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Hernan Bucheli
Student Investigator

[Signature]

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection
Rev. 3/28/2014
Recruitment Letter/Email [Provost]

Date

Name of prospective participant
Address
City, State Zip

Re: Undergraduate Degree Completion Factors for Hispanic Males at Four-Year Catholic Colleges in California, research study.

Dear [Name of prospective participant]:

My name is Hernan Bucheli, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, College of Profession Studies who is currently working on my doctoral dissertation. Consequently, I am conducting my dissertation study along with Kristal Moore Clemons, Ph.D., and principal investigator at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies.

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the undergraduate degree completion factors for Hispanic males at four-year Catholic colleges in California. This study will explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California. The information learned from this study may help Hispanic male college bound students, parents of Hispanic male college bound students, higher education administrators and California elected officials to understand the most important factors needed for Hispanic males to graduate from college.

You were selected for this study because you have been identified as a Provost at Catholic College in California.

The study will take using Skype, and will take about 45 minutes to complete during one session.

Please note that there will be no direct benefit or compensation to you for taking part in the study. However, by participating in this study it will help inform future Hispanic males and college administrators understand what are some of the relevant factors for Hispanic males to graduate from a four-year Catholic College.

If you would like additional information about this study, please feel free to contact Hernan Bucheli at tel. 650-281-9067 or email bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in this voluntary study. If you wish to participate in this voluntary study please email me at bucheli.h@husky.neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Hernan Bucheli
Student Investigator
Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Document [Director of Student Success]

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators:
1. Principal Investigator: Kristol Moore Clemons, Ph.D.
2. Student Researcher: Herman Buchell

Title of Project: Undergraduate Degree Completion Factors for Hispanic Males at Four-Year Catholic Colleges in California

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?
You are being asked to participate in this study, because you are a director of student success from a four-year Catholic College in California.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions and discuss your opinions about the factors that influenced you to graduate and complete your studies at your undergraduate institution.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The study will take place at the Skype/telephone or in person, and will take about 45 minutes to complete during each session. If the interview is held in person, we can conduct the interview at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers of this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Participant data will be masked in order to take further steps in protecting the confidentiality of the individuals who participate in the study. Lastly, the raw data and interview documents/recording will be
destroyed one year after the dissertation is completed. This final step will assure the confidentiality of all participants.

In 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 by the Northeastern University Institutional Review to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study. 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?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have.

**Questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Herman Bucheli at Tel. 650-281-9067 or email bucheli.hi@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kristal Clemons, the Principal Investigator at Tel. 773-396-6499 or email k.clemons@neu.edu.

**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?**
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study. This study will be used to complete a dissertation for doctoral study for the student researcher, Herman Bucheli. Mr. Bucheli is a doctoral student at Northeastern University.

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**APPROVED**

[Signature]

Northeastern University - Human Subject Research Protection
Rev 3/28/2014
Informed Consent Document [Hispanic Male Graduate]

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators:
1. Principal Investigator: Kristal Moore Clemens, Ph.D.
2. Student Researcher: Hernan Bucheli

Title of Project: Undergraduate Degree Completion Factors for Hispanic Males at Four-Year Catholic Colleges in California

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?
You are being asked to participate in this study, because you are a Hispanic male who has graduated from a four-year Catholic College in California.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions and discuss your opinions about the factors that influenced you to graduate and complete your studies at your undergraduate institution.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The study will take place at over the Skype/telephone or in person, and will take about 45 minutes to complete during one session. If the interview is held in person, we can conduct the interview at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers of this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Participant data will be masked in order to take further steps in protecting the confidentiality of the individuals who participate in the study. Lastly, the raw data and interview documents/recording will be
destroyed one year after the dissertation is completed. This final step will assure the confidentiality of all participants.

In 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 by the Northeastern University Institutional Review to see this information.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
There are no foreseeable risks to you for taking part in this study. 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?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have.

Questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Hernan Bucheli at Tel. 650-281-9067 or email bucheli.high@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kristal Clemons, the Principal Investigator at Tel. 773-396-6499 or email k.clemons@neu.edu.

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.

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Hernan Bucheli
Informed Consent Document [Provost]

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators:
1. Principal Investigator: Kristal Moore Clemons, Ph.D.
2. Student Researcher: Hernan Bucheli

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Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study, because you are a Provost from a four-year Catholic College in California.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to explore the factors influencing undergraduate degree completion of Hispanic males at four-year Catholic Colleges in California.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions and discuss your opinions about the factors that influenced you to graduate and complete your studies at your undergraduate institution.

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Hernan Bucheli

APPROVED

NU IRB

VALID

THROUGH
Appendix C: Interview Questions

A. Interview questions [Hispanic male graduates]

1. What successful actions did you take to overcome barriers at your undergraduate institution to help you persist to graduation? For each successful action, ask what knowledge is needed to undertake such action.

2. What obstacles did you encounter, which could have prevented you from completing your undergraduate degree? For each obstacle, ask what knowledge is needed to overcome these obstacles.

3. How important was your knowledge of financial issues in helping you to persist to graduation?

4. How important was your knowledge of academic advising and student support in helping you persist to graduation?

5. How important was your knowledge of institutional policies in helping you to persist to graduation?

6. How important was your peer or social network in and out of school with helping you to persist to graduation?

7. How important was family moral support in helping you to graduate?

8. What were ‘the’ most important factors, which helped you, persist to graduation?
B. Interview questions [Provosts’ or designees, and Directors’ of Student Success and Retention]

1. Are you aware of obstacles that Hispanic males encounter, which could prevent them from degree completion?
   a. If so, what are the obstacles?
   b. What is needed to overcome these obstacles?
2. What are important factors that contribute to degree completion for Hispanic males in your experience or at your institution?
3. Does your institution have any persistence initiatives in place targeting Hispanic undergraduate student success?
   a. If so which one(s) are the most impactful.
   b. If not, why not.
4. Does your institution have any persistence initiatives focused on Hispanic males?
   a. If so what which one(s) are the most impactful.
   b. If not, why not.
5. What institutional initiatives do you believe are the most impactful for helping Hispanic male students graduate?
6. Are there specific funding incentives used to help Hispanic males persist to graduation at your institution?
   a. If so, which one(s) are the most impactful?
   b. If not, why not?