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UNDERSTANDING FIRST-GENERATION HISPANIC STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH
COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS RESOURCES

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies
at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

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10/01/2021
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Abstract

Community colleges serve as an essential gateway to higher education for Hispanics. Although first-generation Hispanic (FGHC) students continue to enroll in community colleges, there is limited research to explain their experiences using campus resources. This study's purpose was to contribute to the existing literature on FGHC students and determine if their use of campus resources helped them succeed. This study used the conceptual framework of academic engagement (Tinto, 1996). Nora's (2003) and Nora et al's (2006) student engagement theory as lenses to explain how FGHC students can have pre-college characteristics that can affect their social, academic, and overall goals for success in a college setting. This study examined how seven FGHC students were able to use their pre-characteristics to successfully navigate college life. Five themes emerged after coding interview data; background, challenges, college, resources and support, and lack of role models. These themes answered this study's three research questions. Participant responses showed a disturbing result: Although the seven participants lacked information on college resources or how to use them, they were able to successfully navigate college life and graduate from college. It is important to note that FGHC students are high in population yet lack the knowledge on college resources and how to access them. It was the goal of this study to help shed some light on the need for more culturally appropriate resources for success in college. This study can help college administrators, staff,

educators, and students by shedding light on the needs for more cultural resources like bilingual staff to help FGHC navigate college life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank God for giving me the strength to be here today. I would also like to thank my mom, dad, sisters, brothers, and best friend for their support. A special thank you to my daughters Alazay and Alexis and my husband Victor for being my biggest supporters and always encouraging me to keep going.

Thank you for the consistent support in assisting me through this journey to Dr.Collay, Dr.Grasky, Dr. Moralez, and my cohort. A very special thank you to Dr. Luevano for providing me with the resources that I needed to complete my dissertation successfully. Dr. Luevano, your feedback always pushed me to improve my thinking and brought my work to a higher level and better understanding.

In addition, I would like to thank my fur babies Bentley, Brady, and Bonnie thank you for consistently showing me love despite the type of day I was having. Finally, I would like to thank myself for never giving up when life became difficult. I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of becoming a doctor. I hope to inspire others to not give up on their dreams and continue to dream big.

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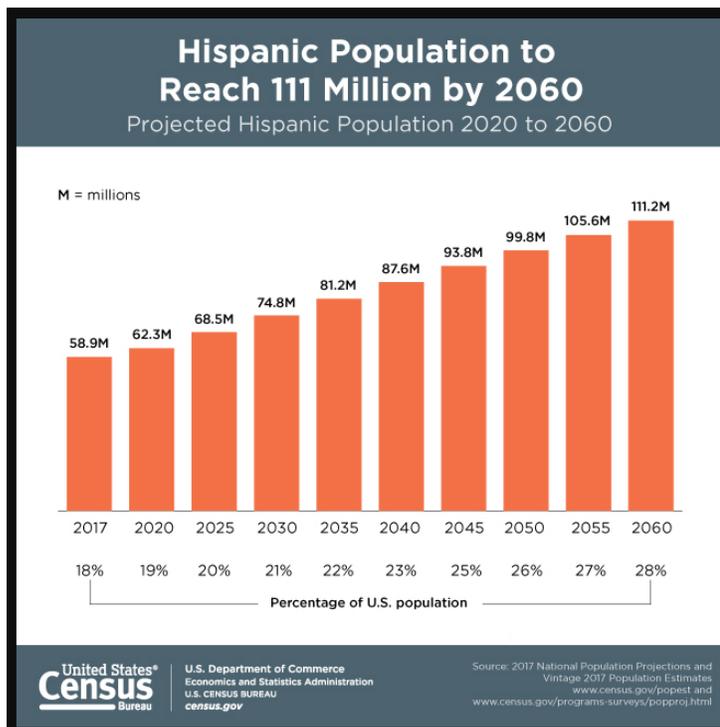
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the Hispanic population continues to grow, it will make up the largest portion of the United States labor force (Cerda-Lizarraga, 2015; see Figure 1). In 2018 Hispanics accounted for about 52% of all U.S. population growth (Flores et al., 2019). An educated workforce can benefit their families, communities, and the United States as a whole.

Figure 1

Projected U.S. Hispanic Population from 2017 to 2060



Community colleges serve as an essential gateway to higher education for Hispanics (Clarke, 2016). In 2016, roughly 500 institutions met the federal enrollment criterion of having at

least 25% of full-time undergraduate enrolled Hispanics and were defined as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), enrolling approximately 2 million Hispanic students (Excelencia, 2021). Among ethnic groups in Texas, Hispanics are the largest population of public two-year college enrollees (Paredes, 2019). As the largest minority group with the fastest population growth, it is imperative to understand and document how first-generation Hispanic college students experience community college retention strategies and find academic success.

According to the EAB (formerly Education Advisory Board), in 2018, nearly a third of U.S. undergraduate students were first-generation students, defined as the first in their immediate families to attend college (Escarcha, 2018). First-generation Hispanic students often decide to attend a community college to help their families have a better life (Banks-Santilli, 2015) and enroll in programs located close to home to assist with family responsibilities (Reyes & Nora, 2012). Hispanic students whose parents had some college education felt that support from school personnel would be available to them, unlike Hispanic students whose parents had no college education and knew nothing about campus resources (C. Hernandez, 2014).

Community partnership in colleges sets the stage for a lifetime of learning, reaching out, and building connections that bridge barriers to cultural understanding and communication (Kemp, 2017). The National Center of Education Statistics (2018) stated that “minority students are more likely than White students to be first-generation students, 42% of Black students and 48% of Hispanic students were first-generation compared to 28% of White students” (para. 9). First-generation Hispanic students arrive on campus with less academic preparation, fewer social skills, and more fiscal challenges (Lascher, 2018). According to testimony before the U.S. Senate on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, FAFSA verification difficulties were significant

for first-generation college students, adding to the burden of securing financial aid (Reauthorization, 2019).

Campus resources, including financial aid, diversity centers, and counseling centers, are essential for first-generation students, who often need them to help ease their college transition (Falcon, 2015). In 2017, the Students for Education Reform (SFER) survey found that 36% of first-generation Hispanic college (FGHC) students felt that high school did not prepare them for college (Romero, 2017). This study examined how FGHC students engage with different campus resources and whether such students understand those resources to be beneficial to their academic success. The expectation was analyzing the experiences of FGHC students who use campus resources could provide more insight into FGHC students who succeeded and failed to complete a degree or certificate. Overall, the goal was to identify ways to help more FGHC succeed and complete a degree or certificate.

Ensuring that FGHC students and their parents understand the higher education process and how to access support services can change the graduation outcome for students (Paredes, 2019). Members of ethnic groups in Texas, including Hispanics, are the largest population of public two-year college enrollees and graduates (Paredes, 2019). Although Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 34 make up 41% of the Texas population, only 26% earned a degree or certificate. While 80% of Hispanic students at two-year schools intend to transfer to a four-year college, less than a quarter do. According to Field (2020), 54% of Hispanic students finished college within six years, compared to 46% in 2002.

Statement of the Problem

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that not all students have experienced college in the same way. Many Hispanic first-generation students, who enroll in a community college, face

challenges such as financial barriers, insufficient family support, low self-esteem, difficulty adjusting to college life, and lack of college readiness (Falcon, 2015). Many FGHC students are not aware of campus resources or how to access them. Research has shown that learning about how to navigate the first year of college is essential as it prepares students to be more successful in their college life (Yan & Sendall, 2016). If students can persist from the first to the second year of college, the likelihood of persisting to graduation increases (Romero, 2017). The Hispanic population continues to increase throughout the United States. Likewise, the number of Hispanic students pursuing higher education grew from 22% to 37% of all college students between 2000 and 2015 (Field, 2018). Assisting students from diverse backgrounds to enter, engage in, and complete a higher education degree/certificate is crucial. Just as important is finding solutions to help remove or minimize obstacles FGHC students face (Taylor, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

FGHC students are susceptible to doubts about their academic and motivational abilities and may believe they are not college material (Brown University, n.d.). The Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations declared it a national priority to improve the access and success of Hispanic students in higher education (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Campus involvement can contribute to student learning, support for educational and personal goals, retention, and success (Komives, 2019). This study aimed to document and interpret experiences of first-generation Hispanic students who have relied on their institution's on-campus academic and social resources that have helped students succeed. This will help administrators and faculty identify programs that influence the success of Hispanic students. These academic and social resources will help bridge the knowledge gap that adversely affects many first-generation students' undergraduate experience, thereby improving their chances of success in the community college environment.

Research Questions

The researcher asked the following questions to guide the study:

RQ 1. How do first-generation Hispanic graduates describe their use of campus resources throughout their community college experience?

RQ 2. What campus resource(s) did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their college experience and or college success?

RQ 3. What social/cultural support on campus did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their college experience and or program completion?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study comes from Nora's (2003) student/institution engagement model. The model focuses on the students' interactions with the institution as the student's interactions are influenced by different elements that lead to persistence (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Wayt (2012) argued that students are more likely to stay enrolled in college if they connect to their social and academic life. Many Hispanics lack experience with the college-going culture and support from their families. Even more, they are part of a low socioeconomic group, may speak English as a second language, or feel the pressure of balancing family needs and school (Lincoln, 2014). The framework outlines one way to study the challenges of being an FGHC student and how they perceived using campus resources helped them connect socially and academically in a college setting.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The participants for this study were selected based on their stated interest in the study and also the degree to which they met the criteria of being an FGHC student who have received a

degree or certificate in a community college setting. Only students who met the criteria and completed the consent form were scheduled to participate in the interview.

There are several assumptions inherent in this study. The researcher assumes those who agree to be interviewed have relevant experience. One key assumption of this study was that participants answered questions in a manner they perceived to be true. The possibility existed that some participants may have felt compelled to respond in ways they perceived to be the researcher's desired response, rather than responding in an unbiased, truthful manner.

Limitations are any aspect that hinders a study and the study's findings (Moura, 2017). Language fluency could have been a limitation because Hispanic students were the primary population for this study, and many such students are English as Second Language learners. During interviews, there could have been some words that do not translate well between Spanish and English. The sample size could have been a limitation to this study, as obtaining a sufficient number of participants to validate results can be a challenge in a qualitative study (Archibald & Munce, 2015). The pandemic constraints on personal contact and shift to virtual learning for children, and the status of many students as full-time workers at home or job facilities, also limited the availability of students to participate in the study. Students' need to assist at home in many ways could be expected to increase due to the pandemic. Limiting recruitment of FGHC participants to those who have graduated with a degree or completed a certificate from a community college could have affected the study because that population was smaller than the number of FGHC students enrolled in a postsecondary program.

Rationale for the Study

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product that “explains, either graphically or in a narrative form, the main things to be studied—the

key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 39).

Maxwell (2012) described a conceptual framework as something that is constructed, not found, and something that can be built and does not already exist. This study evaluated the experiences of FGHC students who relied on on-campus resources and explored to what degree those resources influenced the students’ college success.

Navigating entrance into higher education can be challenging for first-generation college students and parents because they lack knowledge of educational culture, the terminology of education, and English language skills (Banks-Santilli, 2015). Low-income and underprepared students, specifically Hispanic community college students, can benefit from more access to knowledge about institutional academic, social, and cultural intervention and support services (McClain, 2019). This study translates to first-generation students going from a home environment where they may be the first individuals to attend a campus environment focused on competitive academic success. Barriers to formal education often occur because of a cultural disconnect families experience between their culture of origin and the host culture (McClain, 2019).

Significance

This study’s significance was that its findings were designed to provide insight into FGHC students’ use of resources in community college settings. Those findings may then help administrators and faculty understand the first-generation student experience with campus resources concerning how and why those resources assisted or did not assist students with having a successful college experience. Historically, higher education opportunities have been limited for specific ethnic and racial populations, namely, Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans (Falcon, 2015). FGHC students should feel that they belong and that the college’s

services will provide the resources necessary to overcome the challenges they might face (Banks-Santillan, 2015). Community colleges can redesign their institutional cultures, teaching curriculum, and support services to be more inclusive of any first-generation college student (Banks-Santilli, 2015). Because the number of Hispanic students attending two-year colleges has increased, it is imperative to understand their experiences to assess if they have benefited from using campus resources (Paredes, 2019).

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following definitions were used:

First-Generation Student: A first-generation student is described as the first in their immediate family to attend college (Checkoway, 2018).

Graduate: A graduate is someone who completes a degree or certificate at a community college.

Hispanic and Latino: Hispanic students are defined as those from 20 different nationalities, including individuals in the United States with origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central or South America. The term also describes descendants of early Spanish settlers and immigrants from Latin America (J. Hernandez, 2015).

Hispanic Serving Institutions: Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) are postsecondary schools where full-time undergraduate enrollment is comprised of at least 25% Hispanic students (White House, 2018).

Immigrant: An immigrant is a person who intends to stay in a new country permanently and is seeking residence (Bolter, 2019).

Latino: Latinos are individuals with origins from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America, or other Hispanic cultures or origins (Lopez et al., 2020).

Low-income College Student: Rollins (2019) described low-income students as ones who face unique financial challenges in college.

Non-traditional Student: Non-traditional students are over 25 years of age, married or separated, divorced or unemployed, have an education gap, delay initial enrollment, or attend part-time (Alton, 2012).

Retention: Retention is defined as a student's continued enrollment from the first year to the second year (Burke, 2019).

Student Services: Student services are essential to the educational mission; not tangentially connected to the core of learning (Barbezat, 2013).

Underprepared: Defined as students who lack the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college (Nora & Crisp, 2012).

*The terms Latino and Hispanic were used interchangeably throughout this study.

Conclusion

Hispanic students in the United States begin their educational experiences at a disadvantage (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Today, many Hispanic students start college without economic and social resources, and colleges are often not prepared to recognize and help solve challenges arising from these disparities (Schneider et al., 2006). All students, especially FGHC students, should be aware of the different resources colleges offer and how and when to use them (Hoyt, 2017). About 50% of first-generation college students are Hispanic, and 36% of those students are reported to be underprepared (Postsecondary National Policy, 2021).

Non-academic factors like confusion regarding financial aid, registration, culture shock, or other transitional factors can hinder a student's success (Romero, 2017). Understanding each campus resource's benefits can help students with their various needs and help them transition

into a college setting (Banks-Santilli, 2015). As a researcher, it is imperative to become familiar with students' needs and redesign services to help FGHC students in college. The findings can be used by educators who seek to improve students' access to and success with college-based resources.

Chapter 1 described the purpose of the study and contained background information and the research questions for this study. Chapter 2 contains a discussion of literature pertaining to this study, and Chapter 3 explains the research method for this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the participant interviews of the study, and Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of the participants, the data collected, recommendations, and reflections on future research suggested from the results of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review presents an overview of first-generation Hispanic college (FGHC) students and their experiences with or without use of campus resources. The chapter begins with an overview of demographics for the Hispanic population and its relation to other population groups. The literature review provides a broader context for Hispanic higher education and background culture, demographics, the history of community colleges, first-generation students, FGHC students, opportunities and threats to college success for FGHCs, and underprepared college students. It also provides an overview of HSIs regarding their structure and what they have to offer, along with community college programming, and provide a glimpse of how colleges provide services to assist with this population.

Conceptual Framework

Academic engagement is a multifaceted term that refers to how students use their college resources and their eagerness to learn. Cabrera and Nora's (1996) model found that support from external sources does have an influence on the decision of minority students to persist in college. In a model Tinto (1975) developed, students were more likely to remain enrolled in institutions if they became acclimated to the institution's social and academic life (Karp et al., 2008). Cabrera and Nora's (1993) model acknowledged persistence as leading to a student interaction, the importance of pre-college characteristics, and argued that persistence was influenced by the fit between student and institution (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Community college students who lack time to participate in campus activities or clubs or organizations have a lower social integration rate (Karp et al., 2008). Academic engagement is also generally perceived as an indicator of

better learning outcomes; therefore, college leaders strive to find solutions to improve a student's engagement (Bae & Han, 2019).

Tinto's (1993) final iteration of his student integration model suggested that students enter college with goals and commitments in mind and that pre-entry attributes like family, background, and skills play a role in the initial goal of attending a community college. Institutions continue to create avenues and take actions to improve FGHC students' completion rates. Supportive resources include transition assistance, community building experiences, academic involvement and support, counseling, advising, and early monitoring (Falcon, 2015). Educational programs like summer bridge programs and other pathway programs help FGHC students feel more comfortable and help address cultural, social, or physical concerns (Martinez, 2018).

Programs such as Upward Bound exist to help prepare first-generation students of low-income families in which English is a second language (Greenwood, 2012). Upward Bound is a program funded by the federal government and is available to higher education institutions; it provides a framework and resources for academic instruction to assist FGHC students in math, foreign language, limited English, and literature. Having a diversity of educated staff, faculty, and administrators can help students feel comfortable and allow them to grow, learn, and prepare them to be citizens of a global world (Greenwood, 2012). The premise of this program and others like it is that if community colleges provide FGHC students opportunities to become engaged, they will feel sufficiently comfortable to persist in their programs and be successful.

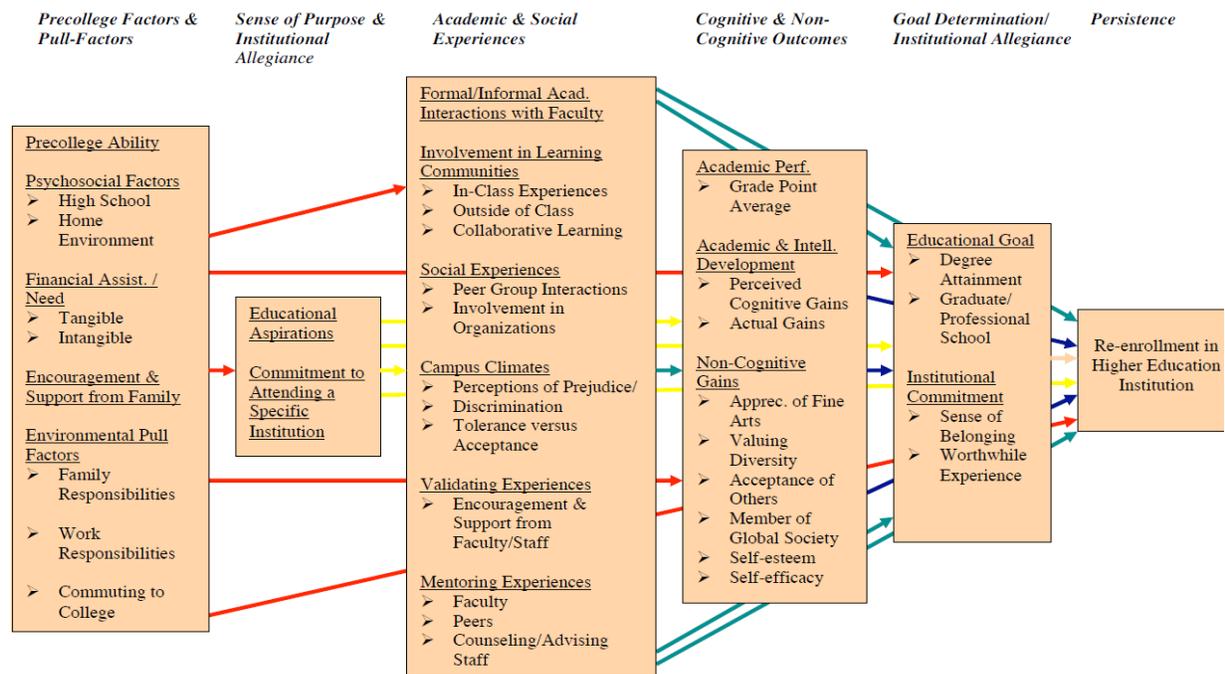
Theoretical Framework: The Student/Institution Engagement Model

The theory used to frame this study is the student/institution engagement model (Nora, 2003; Nora et al., 2006). The model has six major components: pre-college/pull factors, a sense

of purpose and institutional allegiance, academic and social experiences, cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, goal determination/institutional allegiance, and persistence (Nora et al., 2006). Nora (2003) proposed that student/institution engagement develops from increased interactions between students and institutions (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Nora Student/Institution Engagement Model



Note: Reprinted from “An Assessment of Hispanic Students in Four-Year Institutions of Higher Education,” by A. Nora, E. Barlow, and G. Crisp, in J. Castellanos, A. M. Gloria, & M. Kamimura (Eds.), *The Latina/o Pathway to the Ph.D.* (pp. 55-78), 2006, Stylus Publishing LLC (Sterling, VA). Used with permission.

Students entering higher education bring distinct pre-college characteristics that can be influenced by environmental factors, high school experiences, financial circumstances, and psychological factors that can develop in a home or school setting. (Arbona & Nora, 2007).

Nora's work has shown the significance of culture and ethnicity in the retention process. Crisp

and Nora (2010) proposed that Hispanic community college students decide if they want to persist and/or transfer to obtain a baccalaureate based on “demographic, pre-college, sociocultural, environmental, and academic experiences” (p. 317).

Different types of obstacles influence the education of FGHC students. Balcacer (2018, para. 5) noted “The domains of academic, financial, cultural, and social capital and family concerns, assumptions about Hispanics' backgrounds, and unwelcome campus climates pose significant challenges to Hispanic student success. Considering these collectively portray a bleak picture for future Hispanic college attainment.” Without institutional recognition of the FGHC students’ challenges and making commitments to provide supports for overcoming these obstacles, it is less likely that FGHC students can succeed (Schneider et al., 1970).

A commonality between Nora’s (2003) and Nora et al.’s (2006) iterations of the theory is that educators and institutions must recognize that students from diverse backgrounds carry their cultural traits into the college setting. Instead of changing their cultural orientation, institutions must find ways to help students maintain their identity and, more importantly, help them develop their unique strengths to contribute to their success in a college setting (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012). Figure 2 shows Nora et al.’s student engagement model of the factors students face before entering college and during their college career.

The theories currently driving the research questions and conceptual framework are well-researched. Such theories give an overview of FGHC students' challenges and options community college leaders can take to help this population. O’Meara noted that Hispanics “represent one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in the United States” (p. 3), with about 80% of them not completing a baccalaureate degree. Some researchers of FGHC students have sought to understand how students’ cultural background and holistic experiences in a

college setting may influence their use of campus resources. Nora's (2003) model of student/institution engagement shows that some reasons FGHC students do not complete college or make poor choices is a collection of pre-entry characteristics, institutional factors, and some environmental pull factors. Other literature also suggests that social support networks can play an essential part in helping FGHC students feel a sense of belonging in a college setting (Nuñez, 2009). Therefore, it would be beneficial for community colleges administrators to have current information on understanding the culture, needs, and challenges of FGHC students inside and outside a college setting. The knowledge can facilitate the organization of programs and resources to assist this population of students.

Research reveals that Hispanics often have limited access to higher education primarily due to significant stressors such as family obligations, childcare, higher education costs, and balancing work and school (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Several factors can hinder FGHC students' education, including age, culture, language, and family support (Schneider et al., 2016). In fall 2018, 758,113 students enrolled in two-year institutions in Texas, 45% of whom were Hispanics. In the same year, 124,570 degrees and certificates were awarded, with Hispanics earning 43% (Paredes, 2019). Challenges can arise during the enrollment process, as many FGHC students do not know how to complete an application or inquire about services that may benefit them, including financial aid, enrollment counselors, and other services. Identifying the best resources to assist FGHC students can help students succeed in a college setting and build the confidence needed to succeed in other life areas.

Hispanic Higher Education

The following sections are explorations of Hispanic culture, background, and demographics to the group's beliefs and customs outside of a college setting. This section also

presents the history of community colleges, first-generation college students, FGHC students, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and opportunities for and threats to FGHC students. Discussions include other research issues that play a role in this study.

Hispanic Culture: The Educated and Literate

Culture encompasses the beliefs, morals, customs, art, law, and other habits acquired by humans (Jokilehto, 2005). Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, or country of birth of the person's parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States (Balcacer, 2018). Latinos or Hispanics can be any race and are unique because they can be from various places and possess different attributes such as ethnicity, economic status, family roles, language, and religion (Balcacer, 2018). However, there are some common cultural characteristics among Hispanic students, including a strong commitment to family life, viewed as being loyal. Thus, Hispanics are more likely to reside in family households than non-Hispanic groups (Landale et al., 2017).

Hispanics originate from 20 North American, Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries (Fry, 2006), including Spanish settlers and immigrants, in which the primary language is not English; the need for English language acquisition is one challenge many Hispanic students face as they try to acclimate to college (Dias, 2017). Hispanics speak both English and Spanish or Spanish only (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). Mexicans are the largest group of Hispanics in the U.S., with over 30 million people (Pew Hispanic Center 2010a). Most Mexicans are English-proficient and live in the West and South of the U.S., and their level of education is among the lowest of all Hispanics. The second-largest Hispanic group in the U.S. is Puerto Ricans, with 4.2 million. Most Puerto Ricans speak proficient English and in 2010 earned about \$5000 more than other U.S. Hispanics (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010b).

Demographics

From 2000 to 2010, the state of Texas garnered the greatest increase of Hispanics in the U.S (Murdock, 2011). The Hispanic population grew 41%, increasing from 6.6 million to 9.4 million within the same timeframe. According to the 2010 Census, there were 50.5 million Hispanics in the United States, which is 16.3% of the total population and a 43% growth rate of Hispanics from 2000 to 2010 (Passel et al., 2011). Geographically, most Hispanics live in nine states with long-standing Hispanic communities: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, and Texas (Passel et al., 2011).

Contributing to the increase in the Texas Hispanic population is the birth to death rate; for example, 1.5 White babies are born in Texas for every White person's death. As opposed to every Hispanic person's death, eight Hispanic babies are born in Texas (J. Hernandez, 2015). Hispanic births are a primary determinant of general population growth and are expected to exceed immigration by 40% in 2030 (J. Hernandez, 2015). In 2017, the United States Census reported that the Hispanic population was 58.9 million, making it the nation's most significant origin of ethnic minorities (Census Bureau, 2020).

Community College History

Community colleges in the U.S. date back to 1862, when the Morrill Act established them. The Morrill Act (1862) allowed those denied access to higher education at four-year colleges an opportunity to attend post-secondary programs. The Morrill Act of 1890 mandated the withholding of funds to colleges that denied students admission based on race. As noted by Cohen and Bower (1996), the most prominent forces behind this movement included (a) the need for workers to be trained to operate the nation's expanding industries, (b) the lengthened period

of American adolescence, and (c) the national drive towards social equality. Society perceived schooling as a means of upward mobility and an opportunity to contribute to society.

Community colleges offer short-term training that people enrolled in a “welfare-to-work” program need to enter the workforce (Coley, 2000). As a result, community colleges often offer remedial courses and services to inadequately prepared students (Laden, 2002). Community colleges supply an adaptive secondary education that meets students’ basic needs and provides a full range of education and training that meets society’s demands for a skilled workforce (Laden, 2002). Academic accomplishments were considered beneficial to society. Implementation of this act allowed some minorities to be admitted to colleges (Drury, 2003).

Several societal forces contributed to the development of the community college. As stated in *Recovery*, by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some form of post-secondary education or training (Carnevale et al., 2013). As noted by the American Association of Community Colleges (2014), community colleges have served as an essential bridge linking together workforce development, community needs, and personal goals. “Community colleges are vibrant hubs of aspiration, learning, and workforce training. They open their doors to everyone willing to enter and provide affordable education to almost half of all the undergraduate students in the United States” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014, p. 4). Although high school graduation rates have continued to rise, many state education agencies and school districts are softening their requirements, making it easier for students to obtain a high school diploma (Raymond, 2020). The demand for higher education has risen as the value of a high school diploma has declined. The result is students unprepared academically and personally for college.

First-Generation College Students

First-generation students are defined as the first in their immediate family to attend college (Checkoway, 2018). Terenzini et al. (1996) found that first-generation college students were more likely to (a) have a lower family income than college students with college-educated parents, (b) have a racial/ethnic minority background, (c) be a woman with dependents who is older than traditional-age students, and (d) have a lower desire to earn a degree. Choy (2001) stated that 45% of first-generation college students were more likely to leave college without earning a degree and were less likely to return to college. Bailey (2009) stated that “students who enroll in remediation are less likely to complete degrees or transfer than students who [are not required to] take remedial courses” (p. 5). Leary et al., 2020 suggested,

“Nothing is more critical to student retention than academic support, especially during the critical first year of college, when student retention is still very responsive to institutional interventions; indeed, the first few weeks of that semester are critically important” (para. 3).

Part of the reason 45% of FGHC students do not complete college is their lack of preparation (Bailey, 2009), not having specific academic goals upon entry to college (Hatch & Garcia, 2017), and changes in financial or personal circumstances (Carreon, 2017). First-generation students come to college with special skills like recognizing the importance of higher education, and many have accomplished a lot to get themselves into college (Checkoway, 2018). As stated, first-generation college students need the help and support that begins early in school, like programs and resources that support the cultural needs of both the students and parents.

First-Generation Hispanic College Students

Acculturative stress is a form of stress associated with being an immigrant or an ethnic minority; this type of stress can be another culture-specific influence that Hispanic students

encounter when entering a college (Berry et al., 1987). Taking advantage of the best practices that one's college offers can be an even more significant challenge for some, depending on the institution's demographics and the available resources (Barbosa, 2012). Improving Hispanic students' financial situation is important because Hispanic immigrants encounter more significant economic hardships than the average American (Barbosa, 2012). Hispanic students are more likely to have acculturative stressors in an unfamiliar college setting with few people of their own culture (Cerda-Lizarraga, 2015).

According to Vega (2016), Hispanic students enroll in college at a higher rate than other ethnic groups but still fall short of earning a degree. Although many immigrants and non-immigrants seek a college education to attain a higher salaried position, 66% of Hispanics attend college to improve their economic status (Krogstand, 2016). Culturally, Hispanic students bring essential family values to the community college they attend (Marrero & Albizu, 2016). Hispanics are raised to value close family relationships; therefore, attending a college close to home is vital, allowing them to keep a family relationship while attending college (Dias, 2017).

For the first time in history, the Hispanic population is the majority-minority group, and for every Hispanic age 65 and older, there are 15 Hispanics under the age of 18 (Patten, 2019). To help FGHC students attain greater economic parity in the United States, institutional leaders must understand the needs of FGHC students and create campus resources to meet those needs. About 70% of Hispanic students in higher education come from families with low-income earners (Quintana, 2020). FGHC students face many challenges that can hinder their college experience (Balcacer, 2018).

Opportunities for and Threats to First Generation Hispanic College Students

According to Lumsden et al. (2010), “There is a large body of research on the factors that affect performance and persistence in higher education, it is also presumed that having an early adjustment to higher education is reflected in better grades” (p. 3). Between 1972 and 2011, Hispanic college students made significant progress in post-secondary education, becoming the largest minority enrolled in higher education in 2011, and earning the largest number of associate and bachelor’s degrees conferred on Hispanics to date (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

Education can be a means to economic freedom for some, and for minorities, it can be a form of survival to move up the employment ladder with better pay and benefits. Low-income and FGHC students remain underserved by some colleges due to language barriers and socioeconomic status, limiting their academic and cultural integration into community college life. Keup (2013) stated that students are supposed to view college as an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills to help with career advancement.

Hispanics are an alleged threat to other ethnicities because of their cultural history and social identity (Chavez, 2013). The average income of Hispanic immigrant families is 46% lower than that of native-born Hispanic families in the United States. Hispanics are now acquiring more years of education with each generation in the United States; in 2014 46% of Hispanics had some college education (Costa et al., 2014). Many FGHC students delay their college enrollment after high school due to family responsibilities or financial concerns. In other cases, Hispanic students are likely to attend inadequate facilities with fewer resources and less qualified teachers (C. Hernandez, 2014).

As the largest ethnic minority group, Hispanics make up a high percentage of the United States labor force. Data of the U.S. Census Bureau indicates the Hispanic population grew in all

50 states and the District of Colombia, and the largest increase was in Nevada, with 15.6 percent growth of Hispanic residents (Espinosa et al., 2019). Hispanics from Mexico made up 61 percent of the labor force in 2018, and 66% of Hispanic people 25 years or older had attained at least a high school diploma (Espinosa et al., 2019). According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2020), from 2000-2019, the number of first-generation Hispanics aged 25-29 with an associate degree increased from 15% to 31%. There is a large discrepancy between starting a degree and finishing one in the Hispanic community.

Underprepared for College

Researchers have identified that many students feel significantly underprepared socially and academically for college life and study (Harris, 2011). Underprepared students are encouraged to enroll in remedial courses (Nora & Crisp, 2012). It is also well documented that African American and Hispanic students are overrepresented in developmental programs (O'Meara, 2012). While parents of FGHC students may have a positive attitude towards education, those who cannot understand the education system in the U.S may be limited in the help they give their children. The lack of parental support due to parents having limited schooling and the inability to afford exceptional tutors or educational programs can be a challenge for FGHC students (C. Hernandez, 2014).

Students also face other common challenges during the college application process: application fees, writing essays, and applying for scholarships (Pham, 2016). The focus of this study was on the type of background the students came from and how that played a role in the students' college experience. Under preparation for college can stem from attendance in previous schools that had fewer resources. Studies early in the 21st century, such as Gándara (2001), considered five factors that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to face while in school:

poverty, one parent in the household, primary language other than English, a parent with less than a high school diploma or an unmarried mother at the time of birth.

Administrators and faculty need to be aware of the factors that contribute to the limitations that many FGHC students face when trying to complete a degree. Awareness of these factors will assist educators in finding solutions that will assist with retention. Research has demonstrated that students who complete college degrees have a more positive, interactive relationship with faculty, become more knowledgeable about making effective use of campus resources, and show better time management (Strengthening the First, 2018). Hispanic students may be designated as *non-college-bound* from the beginning and do not take advantage of college pre-college courses offered in high school (Lincon, 2019). College administration needs to have a deeper understanding of FGHC students to improve retention and academic success for community colleges.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs) are instrumental in creating supportive campus resources for students of color that can culturally adapt better with educational practices to make a difference to student success (Tran et al., 2016). Educational attainment for the Hispanic community has been challenging historically, perhaps due to the cultural values of a strong work ethic and the need to contribute income to help their families (Vela & Gutierrez, 2017). The concept of Hispanic-serving institutions came to light in the 1980s, noting that only a few institutions were enrolling many Hispanic students (Velez, 2019). Hispanic students have been expected to integrate and adapt to a campus that does not reflect their cultural background, which can be a difficult barrier to retaining Hispanic students. Because of HSI institutions' diversity and the problems that limiting who can and cannot enroll may cause, HSIs started to move away

from the mainstream model and intentionally serve Hispanic students and other overlooked students by acknowledging their cultures (Velez, 2019).

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and tribal colleges that serve Native Americans, HSIs did not specifically begin to serve the Hispanic population; they began as a resource for any underserved students. The federal government defines HSIs as having no obligation to serve Hispanic students (Velez, 2019) and thus, a higher education institution becomes an HSI according to the Hispanic student enrollment, not the overall college enrollment. HSIs are defined as accredited and degree-granting, public or private not-for-profit institutions in higher education with 25% or more undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment.

In the century's second decade, student enrollment in HSIs grew by 93%. In 2018-2019, 539 HSIs and 352 emerging HSI's have served a total of 1.44 million undergraduate Hispanic Students. Twenty-seven states, including Washington D.C and Puerto Rico, have HSIs, and Texas alone has more than 30 HSIs as of 2018-2019. Over 84% are in a city or suburb, while only 16% are in towns or rural areas (Excelencia in Education, 2019). By 2019, about 45% of the 85% of Hispanics that enrolled in higher education, did so in Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

The Structure of Hispanic Serving Institutes

HSI colleges and universities serve all students but reach out to specific ethnic groups by understanding their culture and creating resources to enhance their opportunity to succeed. Those same resources also can be used for all other students (Santiago et al., 2004). Many colleges provide programs that reinforce student success beyond the academic programs that are offered. The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) developed a plan for Hispanic students that provides students a first-year seminar, learning communities, tutoring, and other support (Santiago et al.,

2004). In describing the results of interviews with six presidents of HSIs, Santiago et al., (2004) summarized the essence of their mission as “Our institution has a responsibility to recognize and be responsive to the people in our community” (Santiago et al., 2004, p. 4). The basic definition of an HSI institution focuses on the enrollment of Hispanic students but, being an HSI is much more than just numbers; institutional leaders understand the data and the culture to provide the access needed to be successful in completing a program or degree.

Hispanic Serving Institutional Resources

Studies have shown that students interacted more on campus and with faculty in some HSI colleges where Hispanics make up more than 10 percent of the faculty (Kuh et al., 2006). Minority faculty are more likely to use practices that are effective for students of diverse backgrounds and FGHC students feel a sense of satisfaction when they have a supportive environment (Kuh et al., 2006). In this study, the researcher asked students about their type of college environment and its effects on college learning.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), HSIs primarily offer Hispanic students a unique education by providing resources that cater to their needs. Because most HSIs serve a large percentage of low-income students, the HSIs have more resource opportunities for students to complete their education. Funding is also important to the existence of HSIs; when the Department of Education recognizes a school as an HSI, it is eligible to receive exclusive federal grants authorized by Title V, Higher Education Act of 1998. Those federal grants can be used for student services, building upgrades, faculty development, tutoring, counseling, and similar student supports (Lee, 2020). HSIs have helped bridge the gap for students, leading them into in-demand jobs, internships, mentoring programs, and many more such partnerships.

Community College Resources/Programming

Community colleges offer an associate college degree, and most community colleges also have programs to grant a technical or vocational certificate that serve high schools and the community. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Early College High Schools (ECHS) can also be found in community colleges. ECHS are open-enrollment high schools that allow students who are least likely to attend college the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school.

Programs offered should be designed to meet the needs of diverse students in accord with their backgrounds (Kuh, 2006). The Texas Success Center has a list of other resources found in Texas community colleges, including disability services, career services, financial aid, guided pathways, first-year experience, peer support, academic support, and developmental education. Despite such efforts, (Kuh et al., 2006) also stated that offering such programs does not guarantee the success of FGHC students.

Conclusion

Overall, the Hispanic population is continuously growing, and because of the unique needs this population brings to higher education institutions, college program leaders must understand the nature of those needs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), “There is strong evidence that one of the most important ways colleges and universities have contributed to students' development is by providing high-quality experiences that expose students to a diversity of intellectual, social, and cultural perspectives” (p. 36-37). The needs of this population of students can vary from family support, one-on-one campus guidance, specific mentor programs, or parent entrance college guidance; whatever the support may be, gaining insight will benefit the FGHC student and college. High demand for skilled workers has made it

more critical for college leaders to understand the differences between the Hispanic population and the diversity of other students to offer access to the resources Hispanic students need (Baum & Flores, 2011). Analyzing the research presented in this chapter helped me understand what issues had been explored previously and to what extent. In the next chapter, I provide an in-depth discussion of the rationale for the methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter presents the details of the qualitative study concerning how first-generation Hispanic college (FGHC) students learned about and used campus resources. This chapter covers the research questions that guided this study and the design used to answer those questions. It will also describe the process used for collecting data and ensuring its integrity and the study's limitations. The chapter ends with a description of the procedure for credibility and ethical issues of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document how members of one of the largest growing ethnic groups overcame obstacles that may have influenced their levels of success while attending a community college. The theory that guided the research questions was drawn from Nora et al.'s (2006) student/institution engagement model. The student/institution engagement model was drawn from research on first-generation college students and gave an overview of some challenges faced by FGHC students (Nora et al., 2006). This study's findings can help community college leaders retain this population and inform them about programming options that support FGHC students. O'Meara (2012) attested that as much as 80% of Hispanics do not complete college and stated Hispanics "represent one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in the United States" (p. 3).

Some researchers of FGHC students have sought to understand the influence of these students' cultural backgrounds and holistic experiences seeking and using campus resources in a college setting. Nora's (2003) and Nora et al.'s (2006) student/institution engagement model shows that some reasons FGHC students do not complete college, or make poor choices, reflect a

collection of pre-entry characteristics, institutional factors, and some environmental pull factors (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012). Other research suggests that social support networks can play an essential part in helping FGHC students feel a sense of belonging in a college setting (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005), Lee & Davis, 2000; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Therefore, it would be valuable for community colleges to have current information to inform leaders' understanding of the culture, needs, and challenges that FGHC students face in and outside a college setting. The information will allow college leaders to organize programs and resources to assist FGHC students.

Research Questions

This study answered the following questions:

RQ 1. How do first-generation Hispanic graduates describe their use of campus resources throughout their community college experience?

RQ 2. What campus resource(s) did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their community college experience and or college success?

RQ 3. What social/cultural support on campus did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their community college experience and or program completion?

Research Design

The study used one-on-one interviews to document and interpret FGHC students' experiences with academic and social campus resources to produce findings that could aid administrators and faculty in identifying programs that can increase Hispanic students' success. Accessing academic and social support resources can help bridge the gap between students' limited understanding of community college expectations and what is needed for success in a community college. The researcher used a set of interview questions with individuals who meet

predetermined recruitment criteria. Participants were fluent in either English or Spanish, and the interviews were conducted in the participant's language of choice; either English or Spanish.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Eight participants were drawn from the researcher's personal Instagram account, a social media platform. Participants on Instagram were targeted by hashtags they had made to make sure they meet the criteria to participate in this study. Hashtags included #graduated, #Hispanic, #Latino, #Latina, #Latinx, #firstgeneration, and #communitycollege. If necessary, additional hashtags would be included. An Instagram post advertising the criteria needed for participation was created. Three criteria were needed for this study: (a) attended a community college, (b) have completed a degree/certificate, and (c) be a first-generation Hispanic student. The interested participants were asked to send an email to the researcher. A consent form explaining the expectations of participating in the study and the list of interview questions were sent to those that meet the criteria to collect signatures as the final step before scheduling the interview. This study required participants to complete a recorded, one-on-one 30-45-minute virtual meeting via the Zoom videoconference platform.

Interviewing is a strategy or approach used to gather detailed information from the participants to gain insight into their personal experiences. In qualitative research, interviews are used to gain the meanings of central themes of the subject at hand. Often, open-ended questions are asked to try and get impartial answers, while close-ended questions often force the participants to answer in a certain way (Creswell, 2012). The interview questions were semi-structured, and the interviews were recorded through the Zoom website that contained the transcribing software NVivo embedded in Zoom to ensure that all information from the participants was appropriately gathered. The purpose of recording the interviews was to

transcribe them to be suitable for coding and analysis. Data were organized in a chart showing commonalities in the participants' responses. Each interview consisted of 10-12 open-ended questions, during which former first-generation Hispanic community college students who had completed a degree or certificate described their experiences with campus resources of a community college.

Data Analysis

Thematic coding was used in this qualitative study by identifying passages or texts linked by a common theme or idea, with pre-identified words for applying codes and categorizing the themes (Gibbs, 2018). The words identified came from participants' responses to the interview questions. Qualitative data analysis used in this study required the researcher's self-awareness, care, and reflection (Miles et al., 2020). Saldaña's (2020) data analysis method for data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification led to themes that inform the study's findings.

This study provides campus leaders with helpful information on services that can assist FGHC students to succeed. Findings also suggest new topics, shed light on ways to assist FGHC students in becoming successful in a community college, and help the college administration develop programs to bridge the gap between pre-entry student experiences, entrance, and student completion. Documenting the benefits and challenges of attending community college that FGHC students describe can help produce programs or resources for this group of students. Findings can lead to recommendations for helping students succeed when entering a community college.

Limitations

Qualitative case studies can have limitations because the researcher has to find previous research evidence on which the research topic can be built. If the researcher interprets the interview in their own words that are beneficial to the topic and not actual answers from the interviewee, the data presented may be biased. Considering the interviews for this study were virtual videoconferences via Zoom for both the interviewer and interviewee, the data collection process itself could have been a limitation. Knowing these limitations and noting the challenges was part of planning this study.

Credibility and Ethics

Being able to supply credible findings is important to the researcher. Providing in-depth results from seven participants can build trust between the reader and researcher. Giving step-by-step instructions on how data were collected can also supply credibility. In other cases, showing how the work was done or where it came from without bias also supports credibility.

Consistency was provided by being organized and presenting each interviewee with the same information. Creswell (2013) described how “reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing a good-quality [recording medium] and by transcribing the [audio record]” (p. 253). This study provided notes and recordings that reflect the interviews to describe the participants’ answers and the settings where the participants completed programs.

Member Checking Procedures

Member checking is defined as soliciting feedback about the data and conclusions from the participants themselves (Maxwell, 2012). It was essential to member-check as it would rule out any misunderstandings about each participant’s experience and viewpoint presented in the interview transcript. A follow-up with the participants of this study afforded them the

opportunity to view their recorded answers and edit them if they chose. As member checking is a voluntary process, participants may decline. Carlson (2010) cautioned that the member checking process can inadvertently threaten the relationship with participants by causing participants embarrassment or other negative emotions. If a participant declines member checking, the researcher would review the transcriptions specifically for possible misunderstandings, mispronounced words, or garbled speech in the audio record.

Ethical Issues

Written approval from the University of New England's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the study, including a review of the interview questions, was confirmed before conducting this study. Written consent from each participant was collected. Confidentiality of participants' information was always held securely and not shared. The ability of participants to withdraw from participating in the study was made clear, and decisions accepted without any issues.

Conflict of Interest

As an FGHC student, I experienced many challenges during my first year in community college. Both of my parents are immigrants, and while they verbally encouraged me to continue my education, it was concrete support that I felt I needed the most. I already had pre-entry obstacles; being a female Latina, single mother of a toddler, and going through a divorce. I knew for sure that I wanted to better my life and my family's life by getting an education and helping my family as much as possible. The college admissions application itself was overwhelming from not knowing what to expect and where to begin. Because I did not have anyone to guide me or tell me what to expect from a college setting, I felt like quitting many times. My first semester at a community college was very confusing; I was given orientation and did not know the

terminology that was being spoken. I did not know what a grade point average (GPA) was, nor what a Texas State Initiative (TSI) assessment was.

Even after the orientation, I was determined not to give up and prove to myself that I could be successful. Slowly but surely, I began asking questions about campus resources. I looked on the college website for information about what was being offered. I developed a relationship with an advisor who took the time to give me information that greatly benefited me. Because of my passion and determination, I became involved with college clubs and organizations and was hired as a work-study student shortly after. I knew the challenges for me as an FGHC student and vowed to advocate for students and equitable access to campus resources.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand the experiences of FGHC students with academic and social campus resources and produce findings that can help administrators and faculty identify programs or support services that can influence Hispanic students' success (Fry, 2004). Improving access and success of Hispanic students in higher education was declared a national priority by the Clinton and G. W. Bush administrations (Nora & Crisp, 2010). Campus involvement can contribute to student learning, support for educational and personal goals, retention, and success (Komives, 2019). Identifying how to remove the obstacles to overcoming any challenge students face can help them succeed in community college. The following chapter contains a discussion of the results collected from the interviews.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges first-generation Hispanic College (FGHC) students face using resources in a community college setting such as tutoring, library services, note-taking, food pantry, etc. Growing up in a diverse population and working in higher education has led me to understand that Hispanic students lack resources catered to their culture. Seven participants who were first-generation Hispanic students who received a degree or certificate from a community college were interviewed for this study. The following discussions present the themes and subthemes from the data analysis process.

Analysis Method

The results of this study derived from interviews of seven FGHC students in a community college. All students had an interest in the study and voluntarily participated after signing a consent form. Each interview was audio recorded on the Zoom videoconference platform and transcribed on Otter.ai software. The interviews began mid-June 2021 and were completed by mid-July 2021. Within the Atlas.Ti® qualitative data analysis software, I was able to organize the participants' comments into themes as the comments applied to the commonalities of background, challenges, college, resources and support, and lack of role models.

Data Analysis

Each interview conducted was scheduled for an hour but did not exceed 45 minutes. There were no member checks conducted. According to Carlson (2010), traps of threatening the relationship with participants can be unknowingly set during member checking. Questioning the participants more as part of the member checking process can make them feel embarrassed, as if

they did something wrong. Instead of member checking, I analyzed the transcriptions to clarify mispronounced words then coded and organized the data. Nora's (2003; Nora et al., 2006) framework of student/institution engagement pre-college factors, in college factors, and goals were used for this study.

Coding

After trying several coding software options Atlas.Ti® was selected as the coding software for this study. Atlas.Ti® has a feature with Zoom that allowed me to record the interview on Zoom and transferred it into Atlas.Ti®. Once each interview was in Atlas.Ti® it was read over for any grammatical errors and saved using a pseudonym for each participant. Atlas.Ti® has several tools that allowed me to arrange and analyze data to fit the study best. Nora's (2003; Nora et al., 2006) framework of pre-college, in college, and goal contributions student/institution engagement was used as a guide for coding. Once I established codes, I reread the transcripts and coded the data to develop themes and subthemes.

Organization

Once all the interview transcripts were coded, Atlas.Ti® software tools were used to organize the data. There was a total of five networks in this study that were created using Atlas.Ti®. The data is presented logically and sorted into five themes: background, challenges, college, resources and support, and lack of role models. These themes were created from the responses of the interviewees and their commonalities.

Interpretation

After all themes and subthemes were created, the data were interpreted. Nora's (2003; Nora et al., 2006) research states that students carry their cultural traits with them, and in a college setting, it is best for administrators to identify those cultural traits and implement

resources to help the students. Most students from this study had cultural traits that were a challenge in a college setting. All students knew that attending college would be of great benefit to them but did not have the knowledge of where to begin or whom to ask for help.

Presentation of Results

After conducting all seven interviews, several commonalities arose. Most participants shared some of the same background, being raised in a household where it was known that education was important but rarely discussed. Another commonality was that the Hispanic culture was shared through religion and food. Most participants did not know about campus resources that were offered during their initial year of college. Textual themes that emerged were (1) background, (2) challenges, (3) college, (4) resources and support, and (5) lack of role models (see Table 1).

Table 1

Results of Data Analysis: Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1 Background	Theme 2 Challenges	Theme 3 Attending College	Theme 4 Resources & Support	Theme 5 Lack of Role Models
1.1. Childhood	2.1. Family	3.1. Intimidated	4.1. Cultural & Language	
1.2. Schooling	Obligations	3.2. Motivated	Assistance	
1.3. Tradition	2.2. Finances		4.2. Tutoring & The Learning Center	
1.4. Primary Language			4.3. Family Support	

Demographics of Participants

All participants for this study met the criteria of FGHC students who had completed a degree or certificate in a community college. Each participant was given a pseudonym by assigning a number to each individual, e.g., “Participant 1, Participant 2.” Table 2 explains the demographics for each participant.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Degree/ Certificate	Primary Language	Parental Education	Country of Birth
Participant 1	Female	Degree	Spanish	Elementary ^a	US
Participant 2	Female	Degree	Spanish	Elementary ^a	US
Participant 3	Female	Degree	Spanish	Elementary ^a	Mexico
Participant 4	Female	Degree	Spanish	Elementary ^a	Mexico
Participant 5	Male	Degree	English	High School ^b	US
Participant 6	Female	Degree	English	High School ^b	US
Participant 7	Male	Degree	Spanish	High School ^a	Mexico

Note: ^a Parent/s were educated in Mexico. ^b Parent/s completed high school in the U.S.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 mentioned that their parents were educated in Mexico. Participants 5 and 6 were educated in the United States, and they were the only ones whose parents completed high school in the United States. Participants 1 and 2 mentioned that their parents only completed elementary school in the United States. Participants' parents for 3 and 4 completed only elementary school in Mexico. Participant 7 mentioned that their parents completed high school in Mexico. Although the participants had different demographics, they held the same belief that continuing their education would benefit them.

The following themes were developed from the participant interviews. Each participant explained their background, challenges they encountered before college, their college experience, the available resources, and the support or lack of support they had during their college education.

Theme 1: Background

Asked to describe their background, each participant explained what it was like growing up. Some mentioned their childhood; others reminisced about their traditions. All seven participants had unique backgrounds. For example, Participant 2 said, “My house was very

traditional growing up, my dad was the male lead and provided for the family, and my mom stayed home and took care of the house needs.” Four subthemes emerged within the Background theme.

Subtheme 1.1: Childhood

Overall, all participants had some form of familial relative care for them while they were growing up. All seven participants reported that their childhood had a direct impact on how they viewed higher education. Participants 2 and 6 mentioned that their childhood had family troubles. Participant 6 recalled, “My childhood, we kind of bounced around everywhere. My grandparents pretty much raised all of us, my mom, her five siblings, most of their children, and we just all lived in one house.” Participant 2 mentioned, “I grew up with my mom and dad in the house, but we went through many things in life; I have siblings I do not talk to.”

Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned that their parents divorced at an early age and said, “I grew up with my mom and brother. My parents were not together; they divorced when I was nine years old, and it was just my brother and I living with my mom.” However, Participants 1, 3, and 4 recalled life with both parents in the household. Participant 1 recalled, “I had both my mom and dad and even my uncle help raise my sisters and I growing up.” Similarly, Participant 3 described their childhood like Participant 1. They said, “I grew up with my mom and dad in the household; we were very close.” Participant 4 stated, “I had both my mom and dad growing up, and they attended many of my teacher-parent conferences.”

Subtheme 1.2: Schooling

Participants mentioned how and if schooling was important growing up and why. Participant 3 mentioned, “School was very important to my family. My family, my mom, and my dad did not get to finish school. They both had to work to help feed us and pay bills.” Similarly,

Participants 1, 2, and 4 mentioned that their parents only completed school at the elementary level. Participant 1 said, “Both of my parents were only able to finish sixth-grade school in Mexico; all of my aunts and uncles only went to sixth grade.” Participant 2 said, “For my mother, [who was educated] in Mexico, she only went up to the fifth grade. And for my father, he was [educated] in the United States, and he only completed the third grade, they told me it was because they had to help their parents with money.” Participant 4 stated, “My dad completed elementary level only in Mexico, and my mom did elementary also in Mexico.”

Participant 7 mentioned the reason why they were only able to attend elementary school. Participant 7 recalled, “My dad was only able to complete elementary because his parents took him out of school to help with the children that were in the household, my aunts and uncles because [it] was a family of six immigrant migrant workers.” Participants 5 and 6 mentioned that their parents completed high school in the United States. Participant 5 said, “My mom was able to finish high school here in a Dallas school.” Participant 6 said, “My mother attended high school until 11th grade and then had to get her GED.” For some, schooling was important and encouraged, and for others, it was not. One experience that was the same for all participants was the passing down of traditions from older to younger generations.

Subtheme 1.3: Tradition

Tradition can be customs or beliefs that can be passed on, In some cases, the language spoke at home was a tradition; food and religion can be traditions also. Six of the seven participants stated that there are different ways their family shared their Hispanic/Latino culture with them. For example, Participants 1, 2, and 5 mentioned food as a way their family shared the Hispanic/Latino culture. Participant 1 said, “My culture was always in front of my face, especially food, it was the one thing that would bring us together.” Participant 2 recalled, “The

process of making tamales that is done between the women of the family. It is very labor-intensive but a great tradition.” Participant 5 mentioned, “My family shared the tradition of having Sunday dinners at my grandmother’s house and all other family occasions we celebrated at my grandmother’s house.” Participant 4 also mentioned food as a culture share. Participant 4 said, “For us, food is a huge thing; it plays a huge role in the festivities, like Dia de Los Reyes [Day of the Kings] and the Rosca de Los Reyes [Thread of the Kings].”

On the other hand, Participants 3 and 7 mentioned religion as their family shared their culture with them. Participant 3 said, “Of course, food is a way culture was shared, but religion was also a big part of our culture growing up.” Participant 7 stated, “Something that we have in us, our Hispanic culture that is strong, is religion.” The only participant that did not share any Hispanic/Latino culture was Participant 6. Participant 6 recalled, “I did not know any of my culture growing up because of racism. It was not until my adulthood that I began to become more aware of my culture.”

Subtheme 1.4: Primary Language

Participants mentioned language as part of their background growing up. Participants 1, 3, and 7 spoke only Spanish at home and school. Participant 1 said, “Of course, there were no bilingual classes, everything was in English, and that was not my first language. My first language was Spanish because that is all my parents knew.” Participant 3 stated, “I was born in Mexico and lived there for a while. At first, all I knew was Spanish because my parents only spoke Spanish.”

Similarly, Participants 2, 4, and 5 had parents who spoke Spanish at home. Participant 2 said, “As far as speaking Spanish in the household, my father and my mother both did that actively.” Participant 4 said, “My parents only spoke Spanish to me growing up.” Participant 5

said, “Since we lived with my mom, she spoke mostly Spanish to us.” Participant 6 was the only participant for whom English was the primary and only language growing up. Participant 6 recalled, “I knew nothing about my culture. I did not learn any Spanish. I was not allowed to talk Spanish because they did not want us to be discriminated against.” Language can be an important part of a person's life, or it can become a challenge.

Theme 2: Challenges

All participants were asked about challenges they may or may not have had in a college setting. Some described challenges that stemmed from their childhood, while others talked about college challenges. Participant 1 said a change she faced while in college was when she encountered “a stall in my education because I became pregnant and got married right after. I had to take care of my newborn baby, and school was too much at the time.” This challenge, along with other challenges encountered by the participants, are discussed in the following subthemes.

Subtheme 2.1: Family Obligations

Participants 1, 2, and 6 had similar family obligations that became challenging while attending community college. Participant 1 mentioned, “I became pregnant and thought I could not finish college because of that.” Participant 2 said, “Going into the second semester, I ended up getting pregnant. I sat out the following fall session so that I could have my baby.” Participant 6 said, “I became a young mother at an early age and needed to provide for my son, so I had to stop attending community college for a while.”

Similarly, Participant 7 recalled, “You know, at that time I had met my wife, she got pregnant, and we had a family, so I had to support the family by working more. I did not go back

to school until later on in my life.” Family obligations were important to all participants in this study. Financial obligations were also discussed as a challenge.

Subtheme 2.2: Financial

Participants encountered pregnancy, parental financial insecurities, and securing scholarships to continue their education. Participant 1 said, “When I got pregnant, money became tight because we had to save to buy stuff for the baby.” Participants 3 and 7 mentioned needing scholarships to continue their education. Participant 3 recalled, “We started looking into scholarships because we did not have enough money to go to university, and we were already struggling.” Participant 7 said, “I needed help paying for my school, so I looked for scholarships I qualified for.” Participants 2 and 5 also mentioned the use of the student financial resources. Participant 2 said, “I was going through a rough patch during the Spring of 2017 because my parents, unfortunately, were in the financial burden [*sic*] where they were in the position to lose their home. I had to take out student loans to help my family.” Participant 5 said, “I was able to pay for my classes and books using financial aid. Overall, finances are one of the many challenges the participants faced; language was also another challenge for some participants.

Subtheme 2.3: Language

Most participants mentioned that not understanding English very well was a struggle for them during their college education because their primary language was Spanish. Participant 7 mentioned, “I lived in El Salvador until I was ten years old and only spoke Spanish. Even now, I have a hard time with English reading and writing it.” Participant 1 said, “My first language was Spanish, and it was hard for me to understand things in school because everything was in English.” Participant 2 also stated, “Both of my parents only spoke Spanish, and that was my first language, but I had to learn English in school.” Participant 3 stated, “I lived in Mexico for

several years and only knew how to speak Spanish,” Participant 4 said, “I was born in Mexico, and my first language was Spanish that is all we spoke in my house.” Participant 5, “My mom spoke mostly Spanish, and that is what we spoke also. That is all my grandmother knew was Spanish,” Participant 6 did not mention speaking Spanish at all. Participant 7 said, “English is my second language, and I'm not really good at it, you know, speaking it or writing it. I'm still learning how to improve my English skills.” Some participants said that using or understanding different languages can be an excellent resource for many.

Theme 3: Attending College

Participants were asked about their community college experience. Some participants talked about the challenges, while others talked about the advantages of college. Participant 3 mentioned, “My teacher told me to apply for community college because it was cheaper and because of the Rising Star Program that helped pay for classes.” Organized by subthemes, all seven participants explained what college was like for them.

Subtheme 3.1: Intimidated

Some participants expressed how the community college setting was a bit overwhelming and intimidating. Participants 1 and 2 mentioned that they felt intimidated during their first week of college. Participant 1 said, “I still remember my first week, and I was shocked. I was sitting there in the classroom with people from different cultures.” Participant 2 said, “I was feeling overwhelmed with how big the college was.” Participant 5 mentioned not being ready after a couple of classes. Participant 5 said, “I did the first couple of classes and then withdrew from the class because I just wasn't ready. Other than doing my basics, I wasn't prepared for that amount of coursework that it took.” Intimidation can cause one to stall from going forward in some things, but having resources can help overcome intimidation.

Subtheme 3.2: Motivated

Despite the challenges, participants also expressed enthusiasm for being a college student. Participants 3 and 7 recalled the excitement of starting college. Participant 3 stated, “I was excited to be entering that new phase of my life, but at the same time, I was kind of feeling lost, and I wasn't entirely aware of what to expect.” Participant 7 said, “My mom was a single mother, and she was my inspiration for going to college.” Similarly, Participant 4 recalled, “I always imagined it, like, in a university, like how people are in a university, I'm going to meet new people, I'm gonna have a lot of friends, but it was not like that. I didn't really have a lot of friends in college.”

Theme 4: Resources and Support

All participants were asked about the types of support they had while growing up or in a college setting. Some participants stated they received guidance from their professors, family, and counselors on overcoming some challenges and how to use campus resources. For example, participant 1 said, “My dad supported my sisters and I to get an education. He always said he wanted better for us and to be successful in life.” All seven participants mentioned that they had different support systems in place for them to become successful in college. In particular, participants mentioned tutoring and family support as helpful in their effort to succeed in college.

Participants were asked about their knowledge and use of campus resources and additional resources that should be implemented. Most participants stated not being aware of the campus resources at first. Participant 5 said, “The college can do better at getting the word out about all the resources they offer and how to get those resources.” Participant 3 stated, “I knew about some resources, but I didn't really know how to get them. I learned that there was a note-taker person that would take notes for you in class, and I always found that interesting, but I

didn't know how do people get one.” Resources can be helpful to those who need extra assistance, if students are made aware of them. Unmet needs were for (a) advisory assistance in their primary language, (b) mentors and role models, and (c) increased FGHC students’ awareness of all the resources available and how to access them. Such notifications were needed very early in the college process as well as during their college career.

Subtheme 4.1: Cultural and Language Assistance

Cultural assistance was mentioned by some participants as a resource that would have helped them while attending college. Participants 3 and 7 expressed possibly having more bilingual staff on hand would be helpful. Participant 3 said, “ Having more orientations in English and Spanish would be good.” Participant 7 said, “I had some friends that did not know much English, and I think it would help them if there was a translator or someone that could help them.” Similarly, Participant 2 stated having, “An academic advisor that speaks their language, because sometimes when you translate things in Spanish, and you translate English, and it doesn't mean the same thing.” Participants 4, 5, and 6 expressed similar cultural assistance that could help first-generation Hispanic students. Participant 4 said, “ It would have been nice to have more information out there specifically for undocumented students.”

Participant 6 “I think building more organizations that are geared toward Hispanic students or programs that talk about low-income minority students who are Hispanic so other students can be culturally aware of the struggles Hispanic students face as opposed to other non-Hispanic students.” Being aware of cultural assistance is a way to help support those in need. Other types of support are discussed in the sections below.

Subtheme 4.2: Tutoring and the Learning Center Resource

The participants expressed tutoring as a type of support that either helped them or they could have used if available. Participant 3 recalled using the tutoring services offered at the campus. Participant 3 said, “Yes, tutoring was a really good resource from the school that really helped me with my courses.” Participants 4 and 7 found resources on their own that helped them succeed. Participant 4 recalled, “Everything that I learned, like the library database, the Learning Center, and all of those things that the college offered to help their students, I learned all of those things through their online page.” Participant 7 mentioned, “I was having trouble with my math, and I found the learning center, and they helped me with all my classes.”

Participants 1 and 2 remembered their professors giving them advice on-campus resources. Participant 1 said, “I was really happy with that with the professor's taking their time in the beginning, just letting us know the resources and then the academic advisors letting us know too and then always telling me the doors are always open.” Participant 2 said, “My human development teacher helped me understand the adult resource programs.” Participants 5 and 6 learned of campus resources only through working at the college. Participant 5 recalled, “Honestly, it was just with me working, developing these relationships with my co-workers. They helped me contact the right people for the resources I needed to get where I am not.” Participant 6 said, “I had a great advantage of being able to work at the community college that I learned all the different resources that were offered.”

Subtheme 4.3: Family Support

Many leaned on family for social support while others were not able to. Participants 1, 2, and 3 mentioned getting motivational support from their father. Participant 1 stated, “My dad always told my sisters and I that we needed to focus on school and finish.” Participant 2 also

mentioned, “My parents always wanted me to succeed in school even though they were not able to.” Participant 3 said, “My father, he always told me that he wanted me to go to school because he wanted something better for me.” Similarly, Participants 4 and 7 had parental support in school. Participant 4 recalled, “I would say that they were pretty involved; they would go to all my parent-teacher conferences. They went to all of them all the way to high school.” Participant 7 said, “It was the main thing for my family; we always had to try to get the best education.” Overall, family and college resource support like tutoring and advice from professors were helpful to all that took advantage of them. Unfortunately, in most, if not all cases, having a role model was a form of support participants lacked.

Theme 5: Lack of Role Models

Another finding that came across was that not one participant had a role model they looked up to. Participants’ parents encouraged them to get an education because it would be beneficial but could not show them how beneficial college was. Participant 2 said, “My father was very adamant about me completing college and getting a degree; he always wanted me to succeed, even though he wasn't able to. He only was able to complete an elementary-level education.” Participants 3, 6, and 7, did not have anyone to guide them through the college experience, which became a challenge for them. Participant 3 said, “My mom and dad barely made it [through] elementary school.” Participant 6 also mentioned, “My family was very split; many family members don’t believe you need a college degree.” Participant 7 said, “Well, my parents never suggested me to go to college; I took the decision. That's one of the reasons I ended up in the community college was because, for universities, you have to apply six months before to get financial aid.” Participants 4 and 5 did not mention having a mentor to guide them. Even the research literature is sparse concerning how role models effect FGHC students.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand any challenges first-generation Hispanic college students faced in a community college setting, like knowledge of campus resources and how and when to use them. Participants for this study were seven first-generation Hispanic students, five female and two male, who received a degree or certificate from a community college. Overall, there were some similarities in the participant's interviews. One similarity was that either one parent or both valued education and encouraged them to get an education, but the parents did not have the background experience to guide them in navigating a college setting, as evident in the theme of background. Four participants were born in the United States; two in Mexico. Other themes that emerged were challenges; many students stated they had financial obstacles on attending a community college. College itself became a theme; some students stated that at first, the college setting was intimidating. Lack of awareness of the availability of resources and support were themes mentioned by most of the participants in this study. While attending college, some participants used the library or tutoring services offered by the college and were guided and supported by either an advisor or an instructor. All participants were able to overcome challenges even with the lack of a role model. The following chapter concludes this study and contains discussions of the findings relative to the literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In the first decade of the century, the Hispanic population in the U.S. grew from 35.3 to 50.5 million, but only 37% of Hispanic high school completers enrolled in college, compared to 40% of Black Americans and 49% of White Americans. To address the reasons the Hispanic population lacks similar levels of college enrollment or completion, I examined literature and theories that gave insight into some possibilities. To close the knowledge gap and better understand first-generation Hispanic college (FGHC) students' experiences with institutional resources, I studied literature of different challenges FGHC students have faced while using Nora's 2003 and Nora et al.'s 2006 student engagement model theory. This qualitative study used the one-to-one interview approach to understand (FGHC) students' experiences with campus resources. The following section contains discussions of the findings as they relate to the research questions and literature.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences FGHC students faced using campus resources and what was or was not helpful. Participants who met the recruitment criteria were interviewed individually in a virtual setting. The interview questions focused on the background of FGHC students and the experiences they encountered growing up and in college. No member checking process was conducted for this study. Each transcript was imported into Atlas.ti for coding, organization, and interpretation of the interviews. Five themes emerged from the coding process: background, challenges, college, resources and support, and lack of role models. In the next section, findings from the three research questions that reinforced this study are addressed. The findings align with the literature in this study, and some recommendations are presented for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

I applied the student/institution engagement model (Nora, 2003; Nora et al., 2006), to answer the first research question, “How do first-generation Hispanic graduates describe their use of campus resources throughout their community college experience”? I analyzed how FGHC students navigated through college. The model suggests that social or academic experiences play a role in the outcome of a student’s success in college. The information analyzed in this study supported the literature findings. The following section discusses these findings derived from the analysis.

Theme 1: Background

Concerning the theme of background, participants were asked to describe how they grew up and what influences affected their education. Previous research has shown that students entering higher education bring several pre-college characteristics that can be influenced by environmental factors, high school experiences, financial circumstances, and psychological factors that can be developed in a home or school setting (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Gandara (2001) recognized five factors that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to face while in school: poverty, one parent in the household, primary language other than English, a parent with less than a H.S. diploma, or an unmarried mother at the time of birth.

Poverty/Instability. Such conditions were reflected in the current study. Two participants mentioned that their childhood was not stable. Participant 6 recalled, “My childhood we kind of bounced around everywhere. My grandparents pretty much raised all of us, my mom, her five siblings, most of their children, and we just all lived in one house.” Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned, “I grew up with my mom and brother; my parents were not together. They divorced

when I was nine years old, and it was just my brother and I living with my mom.” For these two participants, their difficult childhood impacted their view on college. In contrast, Participant 2 had a stable childhood. They explained, “My house was very traditional growing up, my dad was the male lead and provided for the family, and my mom stayed home and took care of the house needs.” Despite a stable childhood, the student’s parents did not have college experience and could not provide guidance; that affected the student’s views on college.

A Second Language. Some participants whose primary language was Spanish explained that learning English influenced how they used the college resources that impacted their college experience. Several factors can hinder FGHC students' education, including age, culture, language, and family support (Schneider et al., 2016). Previous research revealed that Hispanic students who are not native United States citizens tend to learn their native language first and may experience difficulties trying to master the English language (Dias, 2017). Learning English after their native language may impact how FGHC use the college resources that influence their college experience (Dias, 2017). Navigating entrance into higher education can be challenging for first-generation college students and parents because they lack language skills and knowledge and experience with the educational culture and terminology (Banks-Santilli, 2015). Participant 1 said, “My first language was Spanish, and it was hard for me to understand things in school because everything was in English.” Participant 3 stated, “I was born in Mexico and lived there for a while. At first, all I knew was Spanish because my parents only spoke Spanish.” Participant 7 also mentioned, “I lived in El Salvador until I was ten years old and only spoke Spanish. Even now, I have a hard time with English; reading and writing it.” Most participants mentioned that not having English as their primary language hindered their college experience because they had a difficult time understanding English.

Theme 2: Challenges

Participants were asked if they encountered challenges before or during college that may have impacted their ability to use college resources. Most participants mentioned that challenges like pregnancy before or during college, and adversity encountered in their childhood, affected their college experience. Nora et al. (2006) included social skills and pre-college factors, including financial capability in their student/institution engagement model of first-generation FGHC college students.

Family Obligations. Previous research showed that Hispanics often have limited access to higher education; this is primarily due to significant stressors, including family obligations, childcare, higher education costs, and balancing work and school (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Other research has indicated that first-generation Hispanic students arrive on campus with less academic preparation, fewer social skills, and more fiscal challenges (Lascher, 2018; Nora et al., 2006). Some participants mentioned challenges experienced during childhood and later in life impacted their college education. Participant 1 shared the challenge of becoming pregnant and getting married while in college that caused “a stall in my education because . . . I had to take care of my newborn baby, and school was too much at the time.”

Lack of Finances. Participants were asked how financial obligations may have impacted their ability to use college resources. Most participants mentioned that financial obligations hindered their college success, which is a factor cited in the student/institution engagement theory (Nora 2003; Nora et al., 2006). Previous research has also suggested Hispanic immigrants encounter greater significant economic hardships than the average U.S. citizen encounters (Barbosa, 2012). Non-academic factors like confusion regarding financial aid, registration, culture shock, and other transitional factors can hinder a student’s success (Romero, 2017).

Many FGHC students delay their college enrollment after high school due to family responsibilities or financial concerns. Participant 2 said, “I was going through a rough patch during the Spring of 2017, because my parents, unfortunately, . . . were in the position to lose their home. I had to take out a student loan to help my family.” Participants 3 and 7 mentioned needing scholarships to continue their education. Participant 3 recalled, “We started looking into scholarships because we did not have enough money to go to university, and we were already struggling.”

Feeling Intimidated. Participants felt intimidated while attending college. Smedley et al. (2001), showed that being underprepared for college can mean the student academically is not ready because he/she has previously attended schools with fewer resources. Researchers have identified that many students feel significantly underprepared socially and academically for college life and study (Harris, 2010). Participant 2 said, “I was feeling overwhelmed with how big the college was.” Participant 3 stated, “I was excited to be entering that new phase of my life, but at the same time, I was kind of feeling lost, and I was not entirely aware of what to expect.” Participant 5 mentioned not being ready after a couple of classes. Participant 5 said, “I did the first couple of classes and then just withdrew from the class because I just was not ready. Other than doing my basics, I was not prepared for that amount of coursework that it took.” Participants can become intimidated for many reasons, but FGHC students feel intimidated because they have not been exposed to or prepared for the college life.

Research Question 2

The second question for this study “What campus resource(s) did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their college experience and or college success?” was examined by asking participants, “What experiences or resources contributed to their success in obtaining a degree or

certificate?” The student/institution engagement model suggests that students who take advantage of the particular campus resources that cater to them are more likely to become successful. The findings of this study partially supported the student engagement theory and other research discussed in the literature review. Students began with pre-characteristics and did not know how to use campus resources but eventually learned of some campus resources and how to use them to be successful in obtaining a degree or certificate.

Theme 3: Attending College

Participants’ descriptions of their experiences in a college setting reflected findings of earlier research and principles of the student/institutional engagement model. Earlier research stated that low-income and underprepared students, specifically Hispanics attending community colleges, can benefit from greater access to knowledge about their college’s academic, social, and cultural intervention and support services (McClain, 2019). Improving Hispanic students’ financial situation is important because they encounter more significant economic hardships than the average U.S. citizen (Barbosa, 2012).

Research also shows that Hispanic students whose parents had some college education felt that school personnel’s support would be available to them, unlike Hispanic students whose parents had no college experience, and thus knew nothing about campus resources (C. Hernandez, 2014). Campus involvement can contribute to student learning, support for educational and personal goals, retention, and success (Komives, 2019). Participant 3 mentioned, “My teacher told me to apply for community college because it was cheaper and because of the Rising Star Program that helped pay for classes.” Participant 1 said, “My dad supported my sisters and I to get an education. He always said he wanted better for us and to be successful in life.” Most participants mentioned that family and teachers encouraged them to attend college.

Theme 4: Resources and Social Support

Social Support. Participants 5 and 6 learned of campus resources only through working at the college. Previous literature suggests that social support networks can play an essential part in helping FGHC students feel a sense of belonging in a college setting (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012). Campus resources, including financial aid, diversity centers, and counseling centers, are essential for first-generation students, who often need them to help ease their college transition (Falcon, 2015).

Practical and Administrative Support. Research has shown that students who learn about how to navigate the first year of college are more successful, as such knowledge prepares students to manage essential aspects of their college life (Yan & Sendall, 2016). Participant 5 recalled, “Honestly, it was just with me working, developing these relationships with my co-workers. They helped me contact the right people for the resources I needed to get where I am not.” Participant 3 stated, “I know about some resources, but I did not know how to get them.” For these participants, networking helped them learn more about college resources they were previously unaware of.

Culture encompasses the beliefs, morals, customs, art, law, and other habits acquired by humans (Jokilehto, 2005). Even though participants from this study did not find campus resources helpful until after a semester or two of attending college they all were able to complete a degree or certificate. Several factors can hinder FGHC students’ education, including age, culture, language, and family support (Schneider et al., 2016). Participants stated that although they did not physically have the support from their family to attend college it was verbally told to them that completing college would be of great benefit and important if they wanted to be successful. Participant 1 stated, “My dad always told my sisters and I that we needed to focus on

school and finish.” Participant 2 also mentioned, “My parents always wanted me to succeed in school even though they were not able to.” Although some participants did have both parents in the household growing up, they still lacked a role model that could guide them through college. For this study the particular household dynamic did not matter; all participants had willpower and were successful with the limited resources they had while attending college.

Research Question 3

The last question for this study was “What social/cultural support on campus did the FGHC graduates find valuable to their college experience and or program completion?” The student/institution engagement model shows that although students start college with pre-college attributes, the actual experiences students face in a college setting can assist or undermine the success of the student. The findings supported some of the research discussed in the literature review.

Theme 5: Lack of Role Models

It was apparent that some participants lacked personal guidance growing up and in college. Although some participants had vocal support from their families, the student did not have physical and financial support. Previous research shows that the lack of parental support due to parents having limited schooling and the inability to afford to pay for exceptional tutors or educational programs can be a challenge for FGHC students (C. Hernandez, 2014). Hispanic students whose parents had some college education felt that school personnel's support would be available to them, unlike Hispanic students whose parents had no college education who knew nothing about the campus resources (C. Hernandez, 2014). Participant 2 said, “My father was very adamant about me completing college and getting a degree; he always wanted me to succeed, even though he was not able to. He only was able to complete an elementary-level

education.” Other participants like participant 3 stated, “My mom and dad barely made it [through] elementary school.” Participant 6 also mentioned, “My family was very split; many family members do not believe you need a college degree.” Participants who lack role models mentioned that they had a difficult time during college.

Salis Reyes & Nora (2012) suggested that social support networks can play an essential part in helping FGHC students feel a sense of belonging in a college setting. McClain (2019) stated that low-income and underprepared students, specifically Hispanic community college students, can benefit from more access to knowledge about institutional academic, social, and cultural interventions and support services. However, participants for this study stated that they did not at first find any social or cultural support valuable when attending college. Participant 5 said, “The college can do better at getting the word out about all the resources they offer and how to get those resources.” Participant 3 stated, “I knew about some resources, but I didn't really know how to get them. I learned that there was a note-taker person that would take notes for you in class, and I always found that interesting, but I didn't know how do people get one.”

Participants mentioned that if they would have had bilingual advisors or cultural events that catered to them it would have made them feel more comfortable and they would have wanted to participate in campus social events. Participant 7 said, “I had some friends that did not know much English, and I think it would help them if there was a translator or someone that could help them.” Similarly, Participant 2 stated, “[Having] an academic advisor that speaks their language, [would help], because sometimes when you translate things in Spanish, and you translate English, it doesn't mean the same thing.” Hispanic students whose parents had some college education felt that support from school personnel would be available to them, unlike Hispanic students whose parents had no college education and knew nothing about campus

resources (C. Hernandez, 2014). First-generation Hispanic students arrive on campus with less academic preparation, fewer social skills, and more fiscal challenges (Lascher, 2018). Campus involvement can contribute to student learning, support for educational and personal goals, retention, and success (Komives, 2019). Despite the challenges and the fact that the participants did not know of resources available to them at first, they were able to still be successful. Their recommendations of cultural resources should be taken into consideration by administrators.

Implications

This study used the conceptual framework of academic engagement (Tinto, 1996). Nora's (2003; 2006) student engagement theory shows that students can have pre-college characteristics that can affect their social, academic, and overall goals for success in a college setting. Although each participant faced some type of challenge, it is significant that they eventually earned their degree or certificate from a community college. The results from this study may influence institutions to analyze the student population and build programs to serve them better.

Cultural and Language Assistance

Participants mentioned that it would have helped them to have had specific bilingual tutors, a bilingual advisor, and college-sponsored cultural events to feel comfortable in the new and unfamiliar college setting. Previous research shows that instead of changing their cultural orientation, institutions must find ways to help students maintain their identity and, more importantly, help them develop their unique strengths to contribute to their success in a college setting (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012). Research also indicates that many Hispanic students start college without economic and social resources, and colleges are often not prepared to recognize and help solve challenges arising from these disparities (Schneider et al., 2006).

Community partnership in colleges sets the stage for a lifetime of learning, reaching out, and building connections that bridge barriers to increase cultural understanding and communication (Scholastica, 2017). Participant 3 said, “Having more orientations in English and Spanish would be good.” Participant 7 said, “I had some friends that did not know much English, and I think it would help them if there was a translator or someone that could help them.” Participant 2 stated “An academic advisor that speaks their language [is necessary], because sometimes when you translate things in Spanish, and you translate English, and it does not mean the same thing.” Most participants mentioned that having a translator during orientation or when talking with an advisor would have created a more positive college experience.

In the student engagement theory, Nora (2003) and Nora et al. (2006) explained that cultural student success has not been tested extensively to prove that catering to the FGHC students with campus resources makes a difference. What is explained with the theory is that having resources available to meet the specific needs of these students can help them overcome the challenges with which they start college. Having financial aid workshops can help FGHC students; offering tutoring in their primary language can make them feel comfortable enough to seek and use assistance.

Lessons from Participants’ Experience

The descriptions of experience I gathered from the participants suggests that, in accord with the student/institution engagement theory (Nora, 2003; Nora et al., 2006), FGHC students who begin college with characteristics like language barriers, feeling intimidated, and lack of role models, are more likely to have a difficult time earning a degree or certificate. Hispanic first-generation students who enroll in a community college face challenges, including financial

barriers, insufficient family support, low self-esteem, difficulty adjusting to college life, and lack of academic readiness (Falcon, 2015).

Another implication obtained from this study and the student/institution engagement theory is that students lack access to cultural resources. Participants stated that if bilingual tutors and advisors were available when they attended college, they would have felt more comfortable asking for assistance. The experiences of these participants from this study may assist administrators and educators in understanding why FGHC students do not use college resources and how the institution can overcome this problem.

Recommendations for Action

The findings from this study suggest that first-generation Hispanic college students need more guidance when starting college. A study by Tinto (1996) that Karp et al. (2008) discussed, suggested that students are more likely to remain enrolled in institutions if they become acclimated to the institution's social and academic life. Educational programs like summer bridge programs and other pre-college pathway programs have helped FGHC students feel more comfortable and help address cultural, social, or physical concerns (Martinez, 2018). The students need to be more connected to the resources that are offered. Participant 3 stated, "I knew about some resources, but I didn't really know how to get them. Participant 7 said, "I had some friends that did not know much English, and I think it would [have] help[ed] them if there was a translator or someone that could help them." A proper and detailed orientation of the *need to know* in a college setting can be beneficial for Hispanics completing their certificate or degree. As Participant 3 said, "Having more orientations in English and Spanish would be good." Building cultural programs that cater to FGHC students can help them feel more comfortable.

The student engagement theory suggests that some FGHC students begin college with pre-characteristics detrimental to college success (Nora, 2003; Nora et al., 2006). It is not always by choice that FGHC students lack role models or are intimidated by the college culture. Those characteristics can stem from the student's cultural background and the environment they were raised in. The participants in this study expressed their challenges and lack of supports, but never blamed their family or how they were raised; those situations were normal for them. This study should serve as an example to community college leaders in understanding the importance of building culturally appropriate resources for different populations to help members of those groups to be successful in college.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for further research are based on the results of this study:

- The study was conducted with students from one state. Future research should include students from other states.
- This study was limited to interviews with seven participants. Future research should include more than seven participants.
- The questions asked in this study could be grouped in some cases. Future research should evaluate the questions asked to participants to group them appropriately.

Conclusion

The results from this study suggested that there are five themes related to factors that FGHC students face in a college setting: (a) background, (b) challenges, (c) attending college, (d) resources and support, and (e) lack of role models. For the theme of background, participants talked about the type of environment they grew up in and if and how that affected their attitude

toward education. The challenges theme contributed an insight into what some FGHC students face before and while attending college. The theme of attending college showed how the participants experienced college. In the theme resources and support, participants talked about the types of resources they had in and outside of college and how those supports influenced their success. Participants also discussed what supports would have been helpful to them in college. The fifth theme, the lack of role models, hindered participants' preparation for college and, when in college, their adjustment to college life.

Overall students can benefit from culturally relevant programs and services offered in whichever language is most comfortable for them. The programs and the personnel providing the services must be culturally aware of the needs of the population being targeted. This study and previous studies showed that although students enter college with precharacteristics that can hinder college success, if the institution is prepared to properly serve these diverse populations with relevant and responsive programming, first generation Hispanic college students will benefit in their efforts to earn a postsecondary degree.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thanks for agreeing to meet with me today, the focus of the study is to get a better understanding of some of the challenges FGHC students might face in a college setting and how to overcome those challenges.

1. Give me some background about your childhood and family support you had growing up?
2. Can you give me an example of conversations in your immediate family that sheds light on their beliefs of post-secondary education?
3. How did your family members share their Hispanic/Latino culture?
4. Was school important in your household growing up? Did that ever change? Can you give me an example of how your family members found schooling experiences?
5. What grade did your parents complete in school? Where? US or previous country?
6. What CC did you attend? What made you decide to attend a community college?
7. What aspects of college are/were important to your learning? What experiences? Resources contributed to your success in obtaining your degree or certificate?
8. How was the college experience for you when you first started? Can you recall the first few weeks/months of attendance?
9. Have you faced any challenges in college? Maybe challenges or opportunities when you were planning to go, after enrollment? If so, what were they? What helped prepare you for cc, and what do you wish you had known before you started?

10. What do you know about the resources your college has to offer? How did you find out about them?
11. Do you feel the college can offer more resources to help Hispanic students? If so, what type of other resources?