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UPWARD MOBILITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE HISPANIC STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT

By

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A DISSERTATION

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UPWARD MOBILITY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE HISPANIC STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT

ABSTRACT

Dual enrollment continues to experience rapid growth throughout the United States and is viewed as one of the best ways to prepare students for college. Hispanics represent the largest and fastest growing minority ethnic population in the nation, but they are underrepresented in most dual enrollment programs. Although previous research has demonstrated that dual enrollment programs produce positive outcomes concerning academic achievement and college completion, few studies have captured the experiences of Hispanic students in dual enrollment. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college perceive how their experiences in dual enrollment in high school prepared them for college. Two research questions guided this study: (1) How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes? (2) How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants who took dual credit courses at six different high schools. Data analysis followed Moustakas’ (1994) three-step process: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. Six themes emerged from this study: (1) significance of education to the Hispanic family and community; (2) encouragement and support; (3) high school dual enrollment as a positive transition to college; (4) social integration; (5) skills acquired from dual enrollment participation; and (6) obstacles to participation in dual enrollment.
in high school. Results revealed that participation in the dual enrollment program in high school exposed students to the academic rigor of college and helped them understand norms and acquire skills and behaviors to integrate into college and persist successfully. Findings also showed that Hispanic students face obstacles to dual enrollment participation. Policymakers and educators can encourage dual enrollment participation by implementing policies and procedures that minimize barriers to enrollment.

Key words: Dual Enrollment, Persistence, Academic and Social Integration, Transcendental Phenomenology, Community College
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Maricopa Community Colleges
DEDICATION

To my husband, Gene
Thank you for your constant love, encouragement, and support throughout this journey.

To my children, Domenica, Franchesca, and Vince
Sons-in-law, Jeremy and Spencer
And my grandchildren, Dante and Cyrus
Thank you for inspiring me to be a better mom and grandmother and to achieve more than I could have ever imagined. I love you forever.

To my mom, Rommy
Your love, determination and hard work have always been an inspiration to me.

In Memory of
My father, Fadel and brother, Samir (Sam)
Thank you for serving as excellent role models devoted to your family and those around you.
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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, New King James Version).
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The number of jobs requiring a college education are on the rise, and the completion of a college degree has become increasingly significant because of changes in technology and the growing demand for skilled employees (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Nearly six million jobs in the United States were unfilled at the end of July 2016 because businesses could not find enough skilled employees (Halbert, 2016). According to the chancellor of Tarrant County College, in the next 10 years, there will be an additional 12 million jobs added to the economy, which will require skilled workers (E. Giovannini, personal communication, August 16, 2017). Sixty-five percent of all jobs will necessitate a college education by 2020 (Kolodner, 2016). The Hispanic population is rapidly growing nationwide—more than any other ethnic group—yet Hispanics still have the lowest college attainment rate among ethnic groups (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). By 2050, approximately 30% of the nation’s population will be Hispanic, which suggests there is a need for educational leaders to improve all aspects of their education (Crisp & Nora, 2010).

Many scholars consider a postsecondary credential essential in improving the lives of individuals, their families, and society as a whole. Berger & Fisher (2013) noted that expanding access to postsecondary education was expected to increase economic opportunity for individuals and strengthen the overall economy. The creation of opportunities by societal leaders in which people can obtain employment that provides sufficient income to support and improve the economic well-being of families leads to cyclical economic growth, as working individuals can purchase more services and goods, thus boosting local businesses and the local economy.
(Berger & Fisher, 2013). They stated that the advantages of a more educated society benefit not only the more skilled individual workers but coming generations and the entire nation (Berger & Fisher, 2013). The children of higher wage employees are also less apt to live in poverty and rely on public assistance as they grow into adulthood and are more likely to be educated and well-paid (Berger & Fisher, 2013). Individual postsecondary educational attainment strongly correlates with earnings. For instance, in 2014 Hispanics who had achieved only a high school diploma earned $30,329 annually, compared with $39,130 for those who attained an associate degree and $58,493 for those who had completed a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). With an open door access policy and affordable tuition, community colleges play a vital role in providing educational opportunities to diverse students and increasing their college and career readiness and success.

**Community Colleges**

Community colleges flourished since 1960 as the result of a growing population of college-age students, the appeal and need for an educated workforce, and mounting demands placed on educational institutions to resolve social and personal concerns (Kasper, 2003). Community colleges began in 1901 as an expansion to high schools with Joliet Junior College in Illinois (Kasper, 2003). In the 1920s, the few operational colleges offered general liberal arts curriculum and enrollments were small (Kasper, 2003). Community colleges instituted job training programs to help alleviate unemployment during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which started growth in colleges. As baby boomers began reaching college age, enrollment growth climbed during the 1960s with many community colleges constructed throughout the decade (Kasper, 2003). By 1980, 4.3 million students attended community colleges (Kasper,
2003), and in fall 2016, about 5.9 million students enrolled in public two-year institutions (Community College Research Center, 2018).

Kasper (2003) further found that growth in community colleges occurred as the baby boomers generation attained college age. Many parents of baby boomers wanted their children to pursue higher education, and some individuals wanted to avoid the military (Kasper, 2003). Cohen and Brawer (2003) suggested that growing demands on postsecondary schools were the main reason for the development of community colleges. Schools were further expected to solve social or personal problems such as racial integration and unemployment (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Laws enacted to reduce discrimination have forced schools to combine students from different ethnic backgrounds in their programs while preparing students for various professions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

In addition to an increased population of college-age students and the growth in jobs requiring higher education, easy access and reasonable tuition costs made community colleges a viable option for students wanting to pursue postsecondary studies. Most community colleges do not have stringent entrance requirements and cost less than 4-year institutions. Traditionally, community colleges presented educational opportunities for numerous young individuals who were otherwise denied access to postsecondary education (Kasper, 2003). While the majority of baccalaureate colleges require that students achieve a minimum score on a college entrance test, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Test (ACT), to gain admittance to their institutions (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009), community colleges are open to students with varied academic abilities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges also serve as an option for students who cannot afford the rising costs of attending 4-year institutions. Public colleges and universities have significantly increased tuition since the Great Recession in 2008 to offset
increasing costs and declining state funding (Mitchell & Leachman, 2015). Since 2008, the state of Arizona saw the highest tuition increases in its 4-year public institutions with tuition climbing 83.6%, or $4,734 per student (Mitchell & Leachman, 2015). The average tuition for attending a public baccalaureate college in Arizona is $10,398 per year (Mitchell & Leachman, 2015). The rising costs of attending 4-year universities may explain why more students in Arizona chose to get a jump start on their college education through community colleges rather than 4-year public universities (Milem, Salazar, & Bryan, 2016). Since most Arizona high school students begin their postsecondary education through 2-year public institutions, this study focuses on students attending a community college.

Another factor in community college growth is debt. Since 1993, the number of students taking on debt has grown by 55% (Chen, 2016). One way for students to minimize college debt and tuition costs is to start their postsecondary education through a community college. Kasper (2003) noted that community colleges offer associate degrees at a low price, which students often use as a gateway to academic programs through baccalaureate institutions. As admittance to baccalaureate institutions becomes more competitive, and the expenses of attaining a college education skyrocket, many students are looking for opportunities to obtain higher education credentials at manageable costs.

**Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment programs offered through community colleges represent one option for students to get a jumpstart on their college education and gain job readiness skills without incurring significant debt. Educators, policymakers, and researchers commonly define dual enrollment as college-level courses taken by high school students with credits earned upon successful completion (Hofmann, 2012). Students participating in dual enrollment programs can
either receive college credit through courses taken in a college environment, online, or in their high school classes. The term *dual enrollment* varies across states and educational settings and does not have a similar meaning in every situation (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). Other names, such as *dual credit, concurrent enrollment, and postsecondary enrollment options* are occasionally used in place of dual enrollment (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015).

Dual enrollment is one of the best ways to prepare students for college success and provide them with the opportunity to experience college coursework (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Unlike Advanced Placement courses which are typically offered to high achieving students, dual enrollment programs provide both academic and vocational courses to students who are high-, middle-, and low-achieving, including those pursuing career and technical education studies (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2003; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008).

Barnett and Hughes (2010) viewed dual enrollment as an effective partnership between high schools and community colleges that bolsters preparation for college, fosters college enrollment, and increases postsecondary persistence and completion. Studies revealed that students who took dual credit classes while in high school tend to have higher college persistence and completion rates than non-dual participants (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth 2014). Zinth (2015) stated that students who participated in dual enrollment before college have higher retention rates, four- to six-year completion rates, and a shorter time to bachelor’s degree completion. Dual enrollment students also tend to have higher grade point averages than non-dual enrollment students (Karp et al., 2008; Zinth, 2014, 2015). Similarly, the Institutional Research Analyst at Desert Sky Community College (DSCC), found
that dual enrollment participants had higher grade point averages than non-participants (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Dual enrollment programs in the United States underwent considerable growth with student enrollments growing from 1.2 million in 2002–2003 to more than two million in less than one decade (ACT, 2015; An & Taylor, 2015; Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). The design of dual enrollment programs are frequently based on local and state policies and legislation and therefore may differ significantly from state to state (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have statewide policies that regulate dual enrollment, and Alaska, New Hampshire, and New York have local policies or agreements that guide their program enrollment decisions (Zinth, 2014). Policies regarding factors such as access, finance, ensuring course quality, and transferability of credit, impact who and how many students can earn dual credit (Zinth, 2014). Because state and local policies control dual enrollment programs regarding their administration, which students are eligible to participate, who can teach the courses, the location of classes, and the means for course financing (Bloom & Chambers, 2009), student experience with dual enrollment varies.

**Hispanic Students in Higher Education**

Educators and policymakers may emphasize enacting policies and procedures aimed at benefiting Hispanic students to increase the number of college graduates in the United States. Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, and Terry (2010) and Tinto (1993) highlighted a trend in which schools and societies were growing more diverse regarding race, ethnicity, gender, age, income level, and experiences. Per Camacho-Liu (2011), Núñez et al. (2011), and Schneider et al. (2006), Hispanics were the largest and fastest growing minority ethnic population in the nation and had the lowest educational completion rate of any other group. The percentage of
white and Hispanic students attending college is on the rise (Kolodner, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Though numbers of students obtaining higher education degrees continue to increase, the gap between white and minority students’ degree attainment has widened (Kolodner, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). The number of African-American and Hispanic students completing a college education has risen, but the percentage of white students attaining a degree has grown more dramatically (Kolodner, 2016). In 2007, 28% of African-American adults had at least a 2-year college degree, and that grew to 33% in 2015 (Kolodner, 2016). For Hispanics, that amount increased from 19% to 23%, while for whites it rose from 41% to 47% (Kolodner, 2016). While the college graduation gap between white and minority students continues to widen, states have cut assistance in general to public institutions by 21% since 2008 (Kolodner, 2016). Low-income students, which in many states are disproportionately African-American and Hispanic, found it difficult to attain a degree because college attendance is becoming more costly (Kolodner, 2016). The diversity of students in postsecondary institutions is critical not only for improving the educational and financial opportunities for minority students, but also for the academic, social, and community advantages that diversity bestows for all students and societies (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a).

Hispanic students are more likely to attend community colleges than 4-year public institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a), and rely on federal assistance and employment to cover their educational expenses. Approximately 61% of Hispanic students attend college immediately after high school (Taylor, 2015), with the majority of these students (58%) enrolling in community colleges (Crisp & Nora, 2010). In 2015, the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in public 4-year universities was 16%, while Hispanics represented 24% of students attending 2-year public colleges (National Center for Education Statistics,
In 2011–2012, about 80% of full-time Hispanic undergraduate students received some form of a grant (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). More than 60% of Hispanic students obtain assistance only from Pell grants (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2011). In addition to relying on financial aid to pay for tuition, many Hispanic students also work to pay for college. About 41% of Hispanic students who attend college full-time and 80% enrolled in college part-time are employed (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). This information highlights an opportunity for educators and policymakers to focus their attention on Hispanic students to meet the national demands for an educated population.

**Problem Statement**

Hispanic students face barriers that may hinder their enrollment in college, persistence, and degree attainment. In comparison to their white peers, Hispanic students are less academically prepared, have less access to advanced courses in high school, and are more likely to be placed in remedial courses when entering college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). The level and number of math classes students take in high school directly align with whether students enroll in college, and studies reveal that Hispanic students are 20% less likely than white students to take advanced level math classes in high school (Schneider et al., 2006).

In addition to insufficient academic preparation, Hispanic students face financial obstacles that hamper their college success. The percentage of Hispanics living in poverty is three times greater than that of Caucasians (Do & Mancillas, 2004) with about 62% of Hispanic children living in low-income households (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2016). Moreover, in comparison to other groups, Hispanics are much more likely to be first-generation college-goers (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011). Additionally, Hispanics often have less access to
cultural capital concerning the college-going experience and therefore rely more on other Hispanics in their social systems to collect information about higher education options (Núñez et al., 2011). Cultural capital is the accrual of behaviors, skills, and knowledge that establishes individual cultural competence, and therefore one’s social standing in society (Cole, 2017).

Hispanic women are more likely to consider their caregiving role as an expansion of their usual role and feel more obligated to care for family members, a belief learned early in life (Friedemann & Buckwalter, 2014). Family obligations and working limits students’ completing social and academic integration to college and directly impacts their decisions to stay enrolled (Arbona & Nora, 2007). The obstacles Hispanic students encounter may reduce their chances of transitioning to college and completing postsecondary studies.

Even though the number of white students attending high schools declined, and the number of Hispanics rose between fall 2002 and fall 2012 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), there was disparity between non-minorities and minorities participating in dual enrollment (Appleby et al., 2012; Becerra, 2010; Taylor, 2015; Zinth, 2014). Zinth stated that except Massachusetts, minority students participating in dual enrollment are underrepresented in every state. These circumstances reveal an opportunity for educators and policymakers to encourage and help Hispanic students take advantage of dual enrollment programs. Many studies demonstrated that dual enrollment programs increase students’ chances of attending a postsecondary institution and completing a degree (An, 2013a; Karp et al., 2008; Zinth 2014; 2015). However, there is limited research on the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school. Educators and policymakers who understand the lived experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment students will be positioned to best design and implement dual enrollment strategies that help these students transition to college and increase their completion rates. To assist in
developing this understanding, a transcendental phenomenological study was used to explore the perceptions of Hispanic community college students in Arizona who participated in dual enrollment while in high school.

**Arizona Research Site**

In Arizona, the majority of elementary and secondary education students are Hispanic, representing the largest ethnic group in K–12 schools (Milem et al., 2016). Community colleges offer the majority of dual credit courses. In 2014, approximately 57% of dual enrollment participants were white, and 21% were Hispanic (Milem et al., 2016). Furthermore, 72% of all Arizona dual enrollees took dual credit classes through Maricopa County Community College District, one of the largest in the state (Milem et al., 2016).

The research site selected for this study is a multicampus community college located in the Phoenix metropolitan area of Arizona and is part of the Maricopa County Community College District. For this study, the institution is referred to as Desert Sky Community College (DSCC). DSCC served almost 20,000 students in the 2015–2016 academic year (Fact Book, 2016). The college student ethnicity demographics for fall 2015 were 50.3% white, 22.2% Hispanic, 13.3% unknown, 5.4% Asian, 3.6% black, 2.6% multiple races, and 1.5% American Indian (Fact Book, 2016). The college offers a variety of academic and career and technical education dual credit courses for high school students at approximately 20 public, charter, and private high schools in its surrounding community. From fall 2005 to fall 2015, the college dual enrollment headcount grew by 231.8%, and in fall 2015, the number of students participating in dual enrollment was approximately 3,900, representing over a quarter of the college enrollment (Fact Book, 2016). According to C. Jones, Institutional Research Analyst, about 17% of dual enrollment participants in fall 2015 were Hispanic (personal communication, May 18, 2017).
Purpose

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college perceive how their experiences with dual enrollment at their high school prepared them for college. Although previous research has demonstrated that dual enrollment programs produce positive outcomes concerning academic achievement and college completion, limited research exists as to how Hispanic students describe their experience with dual enrollment classes and how they perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success. Although some researchers undertook studies that explored the perceptions of students who participated in dual enrollment programs, the majority examined the views of participants who took dual credit classes at a community college (Garcia, 2014; Green, 2007; Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Medvide & Blustein, 2010).

Studies involving the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high schools are scarce. Lile, Ottusch, Jones, and Richards (2017) explored the experiences of dual enrollment participants from ten high schools and one community college in the Northwest. The majority of the students in the study by Lile et al. (2017) took dual credit courses at the community college, and only a few took dual enrollment classes at their high school. Karp (2007) explored the views of New York City dual enrollment students in their first semester taking dual credit at their high school, and examined their understanding of the role of a college student. Students participating in a dual enrollment program were interviewed in the beginning, middle, and end of their semester. This transcendental phenomenological study differed from those of Karp (2007), Lile et al. (2017), and other qualitative studies in that it investigated how current Hispanic students in an Arizona community college who completed dual credit coursework while in high school described their experience with dual enrollment
classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in their academic success. Educators and policymakers who understand the lived experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment participants have an opportunity to design programs and implement policies that encourage and support Hispanic students to participate in dual enrollment.

Research Questions

Studies revealed that participation in dual enrollment programs positively impacts college enrollment, persistence, and completion (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth, 2014). However, limited studies exist that explore how Hispanic students in a community college conceptualize their experiences in dual enrollment while in high school. To better understand Hispanic students’ experiences with the dual enrollment program offered at their high schools, the following research questions guided this study:

1) How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes?

2) How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success?

Conceptual Framework

Minority students tend to have difficulty transitioning to college and have lower persistence rates than their peers (Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010; Tinto, 1993; White, 2005). However, minority students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school were more inclined to persist and attain degrees than non-dual participants (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth, 2014). Much of the existing literature focuses on the positive outcomes of dual enrollment, but research that explains how and why minority students benefit from dual enrollment programs is sparse. Tinto’s theory of
integration (1975) and the socialization theories of anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory frameworks were used to understand why and how minority students, particularly Hispanics, who earned dual credits acclimate to college and persist.

Tinto (1975) developed an integration model and theorized that persistence correlates with how well students academically and socially integrate to college. Academic integration occurs when students adjust to intellectual demands of college, and social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside the classroom (Tinto, 1975). Many students, even those who are academically competent and socially mature, experience challenges adapting to college, and without academic and social integration, students do not successfully transition or persist in college (Tinto, 1993). Karp (2007) stated that students who participate in dual enrollment effectively shift into college life and persist because taking dual credit classes gives students demanding coursework and may familiarize them with the behaviors and norms required of college students.

This study used socialization theories: anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory, to understand why and how Hispanic dual enrollment participants adapt to their role as college students and succeed. Socialization is vital to students’ success in college (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Dual enrollment is a form of socialization that can help students understand norms and acquire the behaviors and skills to thrive in college (An, 2015). Many students come to college with preconceived ideas of what being a college student involves and that dual enrollment helps students gain the knowledge, skills, and behaviors required of them to succeed in college (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Most students shift into their roles as college students through anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal. Anticipatory socialization allows students to learn about the norms and customs required of college students, but it does not provide
students with the opportunity to practice a new role (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). “Socializing organizations, such as dual enrollment programs, may serve as a way to correct for inaccurate perceptions individuals developed during the anticipatory socialization process” (An, 2015, p. 102). Role rehearsal allows students to actively practice the part of being a college student (Karp, 2012). Students who participate in dual enrollment engage in role rehearsal and are performing the role of a college student, thereby learning the practical demands of how to perform college-level work (Karp, 2012).

How students acquire the roles expected of them can be understood through the lens of role theory (Biddle, 1979). Role theory explains the way students are expected to act in particular social positions or the way in which they promote specific forms of behavior when they occupy such positions (Biddle, 1979; McCarthy & Edwards, 2010). The main principle of role theory is that individuals’ perceptions of identity and their behavior are formed by their social position (McCarthy & Edwards, 2010). A social position is an identity that labels a commonly recognized set of people and can be viewed through the expectations that society sets for behavior norms (Biddle, 1979). Students participating in dual enrollment occupy the social position of college students and are expected to act like other college students when conversing with instructors, following instructions, and completing their work assignments. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews conducted with participants by using Tinto’s integration model (1975) and socialization theories: anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory frameworks to understand how Hispanic students describe their experiences with dual enrollment and the role of dual enrollment in their academic success.
Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Several assumptions and limitations existed in this phenomenological study. One assumption was that participants have honestly self-identified as Hispanic and that they responded to interview questions truthfully and thoroughly. To foster authenticity, participants were informed that pseudonyms will be used in place of their real names and that their interview responses would remain confidential. Another assumption was that dual enrollment participation serves as a form of anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal that increases students’ motivation to matriculate to college and attain a degree. However, other factors (demographic, environmental, socioeconomic, and sociocultural), regardless of dual enrollment participation, may explain why students transition to college and graduate. For example, students with college-educated parents may attend college and graduate irrespective of whether they participated in dual enrollment. Moreover, high schools that offer dual credit and feed students into the community college may vary regarding student socioeconomic status.

This study was limited in that it did not take into consideration the socioeconomic status of participants and how that may influence students’ integration into their role as college students and persistence. Karp (2007) stated that the impact of dual enrollment on college-related learning might vary based on the socioeconomic background of students. For instance, students who come from more well-off families may have other opportunities, outside of dual enrollment participation to learn about the role of college students and to successfully integrate into college (Karp, 2007).

Since this qualitative study included a small number of Hispanic students attending a single community college in Arizona, the findings may not necessarily be generalized to the broad range of dual enrollment participants. Students who come from different ethnic
backgrounds, live in urban or rural communities, attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions, or who participate in dual enrollment online or at a college campus, all may have different perspectives of dual enrollment. Also, because state and local policies govern most dual enrollment programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), Hispanic students outside of Arizona may have different perceptions regarding their experiences with dual enrollment.

**Significance**

This research was timely because dual enrollment programs are experiencing rapid growth (An & Taylor, 2015; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016), and studies revealed that dual enrollment participants are more likely to attend college, persist, perform well academically, and attain college degrees than nonparticipants (Zinth, 2014; 2015). However, Hispanic students remain underrepresented in most dual enrollment programs (Zinth, 2014). In one study in Texas, Appleby et al. (2011) found that while white students represented 35% of the student population and Hispanic students represented 47% of the student population, white students made up over 50% of the dual enrollees while about 38% Hispanics participated in dual credit.

This study was also opportune and relevant because Hispanics, although being among the fastest growing minority ethnic populations in the nation, still lag behind other groups with regard to college completion rates (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). Hispanics represent only about 17% of postsecondary enrollments (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Ramos & Taylor, 2017), and only about 20% of Hispanic college enrollees earn a 2-year degree or higher (Ramos & Taylor, 2017). While the population of Hispanics is rising and their degree attainment is low (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006), the job market is demanding skilled employees (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). These
conditions demonstrate the importance in assisting Hispanic students with acquiring college and career skills.

While dual enrollment programs are seen and encouraged as strategies for achieving college success for a diverse range of individuals, limited studies investigate students’ perspectives on the program (Karp, 2007). In particular, little qualitative research exists that explores how minority students in a community college conceptualize their experiences in dual enrollment while in high school. Although some studies explored the perceptions of dual enrollment participants, most of these studies focused on exploring the views of students who took dual credit classes in a community college or Early College High School setting (Garcia, 2014; Green, 2007; Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Medvide & Blustein, 2010). This research differs from other student perception studies in that it explores the perceptions of currently enrolled community college Hispanic students who previously participated in dual enrollment classes at their high school. Understanding the perspectives of Hispanic students is significant in creating dual enrollment programs and processes that can inspire Hispanics to achieve higher education. Exploring students’ perceptions regarding their experiences in a dual enrollment program in a high school setting also allows educators and policy-makers to reflect on their dual enrollment policies and practices and to consider ways to increase Hispanic participation in dual enrollment, in order to assist these students with transitioning to college and attaining degrees. Knowledge gained from this study also helps dual enrollment instructors devise their curriculum and classroom setting to meet the learning needs of their dual enrollment students. An educated workforce benefits the well-being of individuals, their families, and society as a whole.
**Definition of Terms**

*Community college:* A community college is defined as “any not-for-profit institution regionally accredited to award the associate of arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014, p. 5).

*Dual enrollment:* Dual enrollment is an opportunity for students to get a jumpstart on their college education. It allows students to earn both high school and college credit concurrently at their high school during regular school hours (Maricopa Community Colleges, n.d.).

*Dual credit:* Dual credit “refers to courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit.” (Higher Learning Commission, 2014, p. 1). It also refers to college credit a high school student earns while participating in a dual enrollment program. Dual credit is sometimes used synonymously with the term dual enrollment in the literature (Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016).

*Early college high schools:* Predominantly situated on college campuses, “early college high schools are a new and rapidly spreading model that merges the high school and college experiences and that is designed to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and enroll and succeed in postsecondary education” (Edmunds et al., 2012, p. 136).

*Ethnicity:* This term “derives from both an internal sense of distinctiveness and an external perception of difference. The category exists to classify various groups of people based on specific social and cultural characteristics, with the most typical identifier being ancestry” (Skop & Li, 2010, p. 1017).
**Minority student:** A minority student is defined as “a student who is an Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Black (African-American), Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander” (Legal Information Institute, 1992a, para. 21).

**Non-minorities:** students who do not qualify as minority students as described above.

**Persistence:** Persistence refers to “continuous enrollment” in college “without interruption” (Habley, Bloom, Robbins, & Gore, 2012, p. 4).

**Retention:** “Retention is usually expressed as a rate or percentage of students who return from one enrollment period to another” (Habley et al., 2012, p. 8).

**Socioeconomic status:** Socioeconomic status refers to “the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2017, para. 1).

**Underrepresented:** Underrepresented individuals are “women and minorities who traditionally are underrepresented in areas of national need as designated by the Secretary of Education” (Legal Information Institute, 1992b, para. 24).

**Conclusion**

A well-educated workforce boosts the economy and the well-being of individuals (Berger & Fisher, 2013). In the United States, Hispanic student populations are proliferating in schools and the workforce, but they are the least likely to persist and complete a college degree (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Many studies exist which demonstrate that dual enrollment programs significantly increase students’ persistence and college completion rates (Appleby et al., 2011; An, 2013a; Karp et al., 2008; Sturhl & Vargas, 2012); however, few qualitative studies explore experiences of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high schools and matriculated to a community college. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to
investigate how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college perceive how their experiences in dual enrollment in high school prepared them for college. Educators and policymakers who understand the lived experiences of Hispanic students may reflect on their current policies and explore ways to implement new policies that encourage participation in dual enrollment and enhance their programs.

Chapter Two will probe further into scholarly literature about dual enrollment and Hispanic students in higher education. Chapter Three will delve into the methodology of this study, which includes a description of the participants, the location of the study, research design, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four will present the research findings, and Chapter Five will include a summary of results, discussion, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

To best discover the literature pertaining to the perceptions and experiences of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, this integrative literature review procedure followed Callahan’s (2014) six literature review components identified as “W’s: Who, When, Where, How, What, and Why” (p. 273). The researcher examined peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, current handbooks/guides, books, dissertations, and government agencies to establish an academic foundation for the study. Articles and books were identified in the search process using key words such as dual enrollment, Hispanic, and Latino, or a combination of words as recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012). The predominant databases and websites utilized to access literature included ProQuest; The Community College Research Center; Teachers College, Columbia University; and Google Scholar. Additional articles were obtained by reviewing the list of references at the end of each document.

This literature review begins with the conceptual framework that includes Tinto’s Theory of Integration (1975) and socialization theories: anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory. The conceptual framework is followed by an examination of the literature that includes general information about dual enrollment, the success of dual enrollment participants, accessibility, Hispanic students in higher education, and barriers to college success of Hispanic students. Chapter two concludes with a review of studies involving dual enrollment student perceptions.

Dual enrollment is one of many programs, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate (IB), Tech Prep, and middle college high schools that allow students to earn college credits while in high school (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Programs such as dual enrollment
are traditionally offered to high performing students; however, they have gained attention as a pathway to enable and ease college access and success for low socioeconomic and first-generation students (Lile, Ottusch, Jones, & Richards, 2017) as well as for lower and middle-achieving students (Bailey et al., 2003; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Karp et al., 2008). As a result, understanding the views and experiences of dual enrollment participants may assist policymakers and educators in enacting policies and designing programs that encourage dual enrollment participation and help students best achieve college success.

Hispanics are the fastest growing and largest minority ethnic population in the nation, and yet have the lowest educational completion rate of any minority group (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). Hispanic students are more likely to attend 2-year public institutions than 4-year colleges (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2009), less likely to persist in college (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2010), and less apt to participate in dual enrollment (Becerra, 2010). Minority students face many obstacles when attending college (Carter, 2006; White, 2005), often have a difficult time transitioning to college, and have higher attrition rates than their peers (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993; White, 2005). Barriers such as poor academic preparation, shortage of funding, family background and responsibilities, and the lack of know-how about college processes and paperwork hinder students’ chances at college success.

Schneider, Martinez, and Owens (2006) stated that “it is critical that academic interventions for Hispanic youth become a national priority” (p. 215). Dual enrollment is one intervention that may increase college success among all students, including Hispanics. Studies found that dual enrollment participation positively impacts college success (Appleby et al., 2011; An, 2013a; 2013b; Karp, 2007; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Taylor, 2015). Minority and low-income students who take dual credit courses especially benefit from the
program (An, 2013a; Barnett, Macluskey, & Wagonlander, 2015; Karp et al., 2008, Speroni, 2011; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Hispanic students who participate in dual enrollment enroll in colleges at higher rates (Hoffman, 2005) and have higher grade point averages and completion rates than non-dual participants (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Educators and policymakers who are aware of the lived experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment participants may be better informed to help students achieve college success. Ganzert (2014) stated that “in order for dual enrollment to serve its mission of increasing college success, it is more necessary than ever to investigate how these programs affect learners and what goals they meet for these students” (p. 784). Studies exploring perceptions of Hispanic community college students who took dual credit courses at their high school are limited. This study helped shed light on what factors in Hispanic students’ experiences in dual enrollment programs affected their college enrollment and persistence. Educators and policymakers who understand the lived experiences of Hispanic students in dual enrollment may recognize what facets of the program, if any, helped students feel encouraged to enroll and persist in college.

**Conceptual Framework**

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined a conceptual framework as “an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous” (p. 5). Three key elements: personal interests and experience, topical research, and theoretical frameworks, form the argument or conceptual framework of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). This researcher’s personal experience managing a comprehensive dual enrollment program, along with literature reviewed, influenced the decision to pursue an investigation of how Hispanic students currently enrolled in an Arizona community
college perceive that their experience in dual enrollment while in high school prepared them for college.

Persistence at community colleges is low, with many students leaving school without completing a degree or certificate (Karp et al., 2010). Six years after matriculation, less than 50% of community college students receive a degree or certificate or transfer to a baccalaureate institution (Karp et al., 2010; Sandoval-Lucero, Mae, & Klingsmith, 2014). About half of all minority students in the United States attend community colleges (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Furthermore, minority students face many additional obstacles when attending college (Carter, 2006; White, 2005). Minorities often have a difficult time transitioning to college and have higher attrition rates than their peers (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993; White, 2005). The gap between minority students and nonminority students is an indicator of how the effects of harmful factors such as poverty can impact individuals’ long-term social progress (Carter, 2006).

Dual enrollment programs offered through community colleges are one approach educators can use to promote college enrollment and reduce attrition rates. Students who take dual credit classes while in high school tend to have higher college persistence and completion rates than non-dual participants (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth, 2014). Low-income and minority students who take dual enrollment courses in particular benefit from the program (An, 2013a; Barnett et al., 2015; Karp et al., 2008; Speroni, 2011; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). While research demonstrated that dual enrollment participation positively impacts educational outcomes regarding academic performance, persistence, and completion, few studies, particularly those involving Hispanic students, have considered what or how these college outcomes happen.
Tinto’s Theory of Integration

The reason Hispanic students who participate in dual enrollment tend to persist, earn higher grades, and attain postsecondary degrees as compared to nonparticipants can be understood through several theoretical frameworks. Some scholars stated that dual enrollment students’ experiences allow them to integrate into the college environment (Karp, 2007; Karp et al., 2010). Tinto (1975) developed an integration model that suggested that persistence was related to how well students integrated into college academically and socially. Tinto argued that students who integrated and felt more appreciated were more likely to persist. Academic integration happens when students become connected to the intellectual aspects of the institution, while social integration occurs when students form relationships and associations beyond the classroom (Karp et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993). These two notions, though logically separate, are interrelated and add to one another (Karp et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993). Although students must be integrated into the college along both dimensions to boost their probability of persistence, they do not need to be evenly academically and socially integrated (Karp et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993).

Persistence in college requires students to adjust socially and academically to a new college world environment (Tinto, 1993). Most individuals, even those who are intellectually capable and socially mature, experience difficulty, to varying degrees, in adjusting to college (Tinto, 1993). Tinto argued that lack of a successful transition to and persistence in college may be the result of two separate sources: the inability of students to separate themselves from past types of associations (usually representative of the high school and its peer groups), and from difficulty adjusting to the more stringent intellectual and social requirements of being a college student. Dual enrollment programs may assist with transitioning students academically and
socially to postsecondary institutions by providing students with rigorous college coursework and introducing them to skills, norms, and behaviors expected of college students.

Socialization Theories

Socialization theories provide a second logical explanation of why dual enrollment students succeed in postsecondary institutions. Socialization is essential to students’ success in college (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). In broad terms, socialization is defined as a learning process through which a person becomes a part of society, and that learning process allows individuals to gain values, norms, traditions, and skills (Anastasiu, 2011). More specifically, socialization refers to the means through which a person obtains skills, knowledge, and behaviors to adapt to the role required for assimilating into a group (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Theories of socialization aid in understanding the means through which people learn about and arrive at performing normative role-based actions and expectations (Karp, 2007). Socialization theories including anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory served as the framework for this study.

Socialization is an essential part of how students successfully shift into their roles as college students. An (2015) and Karp (2007, 2012) proposed that transition to college involves more than academic preparation and that even students who are academically proficient may fail to persist in college. Although taking college preparatory courses in high school and possessing strong critical and analytical thinking skills are important academic indicators of college readiness, these cognitive factors, considered individually, are not enough to achieve college success (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Students may leave college or fail to graduate because their preconceived ideas of what being a college student entails may not align with reality (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Students must be able to understand the college processes and the
college culture (Karp, 2012). Pupils who effectively transition to college possess solid time-management skills and goals, take the initiative to get help for themselves, and understand college structures and practices (Karp, 2007). Karp stated that:

New college students must learn to navigate a complex system of bureaucratic requirements, learn new study habits and time-management strategies, and engage in new kinds of social relationships. Students who do not have this knowledge are unlikely to be successful in college, even if they have the required academic skills. (p. 22)

Dual enrollment programs can serve as socialization mechanisms that may help correct students’ misconceptions about what being a college student involves (An, 2015). Socialization theory can be used to explain how dual enrollment students evolve into learning the norms, behaviors, and roles of what it means to be college students (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Several processes help enable the learning of norms, mindsets, and behaviors of a new role (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, Karp, 2012). Shifting into a new role is facilitated through two means: anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal.

**Anticipatory socialization.** Anticipatory socialization is a process by which prospective role participants learn about the beliefs, viewpoints, and behaviors of those who inhabit the role they are pursuing (Karp, 2007). Karp (2012) stated that “anticipatory socialization happens in many ways, from daydreaming about the new role to watching others who already embody it, but it does not always provide the opportunity to practice a role” (p. 23). Although anticipatory socialization does not give individuals an opportunity to exercise their new role, it helps them learn about the new behaviors, standards, and mindsets of those who occupy the role they seek (An, 2015; Karp, 2012).
Role rehearsal and role theory. Role rehearsal is a form of socialization that allows individuals to actively practice the part of playing a new role (Karp, 2012). Through actions such as participating in college-level classes, internships, and apprenticeships, students learn a new role (Karp, 2012). Participating in dual enrollment programs allows students to learn about the role of being a college student and practice the role of a college student. When students take dual credit classes, they engage in role rehearsal, thereby learning the practical demands of how to perform college-level work (Karp, 2012). Learning the expectations of a role and what role individuals choose to take on may be understood through the examination of role theory (Biddle, 1979).

Role theory focuses on behaviors that are typical of individuals in a specific context (Biddle, 1979). As stated by Biddle, role theory is a science involving the study of actions that are characteristic of individuals within settings and with various processes that seemingly produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors. Role theory attempts to clarify the way individuals are expected to behave in particular social positions, or the manner in which they foster specific forms of behavior when they inhabit such positions (Biddle, 1979; McCarthy & Edwards, 2010). The central principle of role theory is that an individual’s view of identity and his or her behavior are formed by their social position (McCarthy & Edwards, 2010). The most common concept in role theory is that roles are linked to social positions (Biddle, 1979). Role theory postulates that members of the same social position assume a common role (Biddle, 1979). Roles are a set of expectations presumed by others about what individuals are supposed to do when they are in a given social position (Biddle, 1979). A social position is an identity that labels a commonly recognized set of people and can be viewed through the expectations that society sets for behavior norms, including how those in public service, public office and other
positions in society are perceived (Biddle, 1979). For instance, when high school students participate in dual enrollment, they inhabit the social position of college students. Since dual enrollment students take on the status of college students, they are expected by society to assume roles or act in the same manner that other college students play in a learning environment. As such, in a classroom, society expects students to pay attention, communicate with their instructor, follow instructions, and complete their assignments. Dual enrollment students engage in role rehearsal, where they learn the role of being a college student through active participation in the program (An, 2015).

**Understanding Dual Enrollment**

The term *dual enrollment* varies across states and educational settings and does not have a similar meaning in every situation (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). Most educators, policymakers, and researchers define dual enrollment as college-level courses high school students take, for which they earn college credit upon successful course completion (Hofmann, 2012). Tobolosky and Allen (2016) define dual enrollment as college courses high school students take and earn both college and high school credit simultaneously without having to take a standardized exam to receive credit. Dual enrollment and dual credit are used interchangeably often in literature (Tobilowsky & Allen, 2016). Researchers and educators sometimes use alternative terms, such as *dual credit, concurrent enrollment, and postsecondary enrollment options* in place of “dual enrollment” (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015).

Dual enrollment programs are designed by state legislatures and therefore may vary significantly from state to state (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Programs can differ in how they are administered regarding which students are eligible to participate, who can teach the courses, where classes are held, and how courses are financed (Bloom & Chambers, 2009).
credit courses in Arizona are generally limited to students in grades 11 and 12 (Education Commission of the States, 2016). However, a community college may offer dual credit courses at a high school for 9th and 10th graders as long as they do not exceed 25% of the high school’s total dual enrollment participants, and the college has written standards for waiving requirements for each course (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Dual credit courses can be taught either by college instructors or high school teachers who meet the hiring qualifications required of community college faculty.

Students participating in dual enrollment programs can earn college credit through courses taken in a college environment, online, or in their high school classes. In Arizona, parents and students are primarily responsible for tuition for courses offered at postsecondary colleges (Education Commission of the States, 2016). For community college dual credit courses offered at high schools, the agreement or contract between the school district/charter school and community college district must stipulate student tuition and tuition assistance policies if students receive scholarships (Education Commission of the States, 2016).

Dual enrollment differs from Advanced Placement (AP) courses in several ways. AP courses are typically reserved for academically gifted students (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012). Dual enrollment programs offer more varied courses and serve high, middle, and low achieving students, including those pursuing career and technical education studies (Bailey et al., 2003; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Karp et al., 2008). About two-thirds of community college dual enrollment participants are from low or middle-income families, which is around the same ratio of students who enroll in community college after high school (Fink, Jenkins, & Yanagiura, 2017). Students in AP classes are taught using a college level regimented curriculum, and students can receive college credit only by taking an optional test at the end of the course.
Conversly, dual enrollment students take a course either at their high school or a postsecondary institution using a college syllabus, and students obtain college credit upon passing the class (Speroni, 2011).

**History of Dual Enrollment**

Early dual enrollment programs and classes were for academically gifted students (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). Although dual enrollment is considered a relatively recent innovation, educators began discussing the significance of creating a tighter connection between high schools and postsecondary institutions to help facilitate students’ transition from high school to college as early as the 1920s (Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Structural challenges between the two educational segments at that time weakened educators’ efforts. However, dual enrollment reemerged in 1973 with Syracuse University’s Project Advance when the college began offering dual credit courses to high-achieving high school students (Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). College and high school instructors worked together to adjust one-semester college courses into yearlong classes. High school instructors taught dual credit courses after participating in a summer training program provided by the University (Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Although Syracuse University was the first postsecondary institution to offer dual credit courses, Minnesota was the first state to create a statewide dual enrollment program, which it called the Postsecondary Enrollment Options program (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The program was established in 1985 by the Minnesota Legislature to encourage rigorous course taking and improve student transitions to postsecondary institutions (Minnesota State, 2017). Before 1985, colleges regarded dual enrollment as a means to recruit and keep the smartest students in the area. Starting with Minnesota, states began viewing dual enrollment as a way to prepare students
of all levels of abilities to enter academic or career and technical education programs (Kronholz, 2011).

**Legislation.** The inception and advancement of federal Perkins legislation helped prepare students to enter the workforce and stimulated the growth of dual enrollment for a broad range of students. The 1990 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act (Perkins II) was authorized so that more vocational opportunities may be offered to disadvantaged students and to assist states and schools with teaching students the skills and competencies required for employment in a contemporary technologically complex society (Career and Technical Education, 2017). Perkins II provided money for the integration of academic and vocational education and Tech Prep programs. The 1990 act was revised in 1998 to The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins III), which provided states and schools more flexibility to create career and technical education programs but made legislators and educators more accountable for student achievement (Career and Technical Education, 2017). In 2006, Perkins III was reauthorized and named Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV) (Dortch, 2012). This act was crucial to dual enrollment in that it increased and reinforced connections between high schools and colleges through the implementation of dual enrollment, programs of study, and the authorization of Tech Prep (Dortch, 2012). Tech Prep was a nationwide movement that provided high school students with a program of study that incorporated academic and career and technical education courses articulated between high schools and postsecondary institutions leading to a certificate or an associate’s degree (Dortch, 2012). The enactment of federal Perkins legislation, which incorporated Tech Prep, as well as state policies, reinforced and increased dual enrollment participation.
The Growth of Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment continues to experience rapid growth throughout the United States (An & Taylor, 2015; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). The number of high school students who enroll in college courses while still in high school has grown from 1.2 million to more than 2 million in less than 10 years (ACT, 2015; An & Taylor; 2015; Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). Approximately 82% of public high schools had students who took dual credit courses in 2010 (An & Taylor; 2015; Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). Most of the growth in dual enrollment occurred in community colleges. From 1995 to 2015, fall enrollments of dual enrollment participants aged 17 years or younger at community colleges grew from 163,000 to 745,000 (Fink et al., 2017). Key factors driving the growth in dual enrollment are the need for an educated workforce and to improve college graduation rates (Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016).

One factor that has contributed to the growth of dual enrollment is relaxed policy restrictions that govern dual enrollment by making the program accessible to more students. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have statewide policies that regulate dual enrollment, and Alaska, New Hampshire, and New York have local policies or agreements that manage the program (Zinth, 2014). Policies around such factors as access, finance, ensuring course quality, and transferability of credit can have a bearing on who and how many students can earn dual credit (Zinth, 2014). Texas is an example of one state that experienced a significant increase in dual enrollment after legislatures removed high school students’ levels of grade eligibility restrictions and the number of college credit hours students may earn. Between fall 2000 and fall 2016, the number of Texas students participating in dual enrollment grew by 752% with the most substantial increases in fall 2015 and fall 2016 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017). The dramatic growth in dual enrollment was probably the result of
the House Bill (HB) 505 (84th Texas Legislature), which increased student access by relaxing policy constraints that used to limit dual credit courses to 11th and 12th graders and the number of dual credit courses a student can take while in high school (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017).

Although state legislatures took the lead on establishing policies that regulate dual enrollment programs, federal policy is promoting dual enrollment as a strategy for educational and career readiness and achievement (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2017a). Policymakers are touting the significance that dual enrollment programs play in having a college-educated workforce and are introducing bills that would bolster dual enrollment. To help prepare students for college and success in the 21st century, United States Senators Michael Bennet from Colorado and Orrin Hatch from Utah introduced The Workforce Advance Act in 2016 (U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, 2016). The bipartisan bill would permit schools to use a share of the funding they receive through the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act for tuition and fees for Career and Technical Education (CTE) college courses. It would also allow school districts to use money to support prospective dual enrollment teachers who need further education for teaching dual credit courses, and helps eliminate a barrier to providing access to college credit. Finally, the bill would authorize the Department of Education to use national CTE activities to help identify successful methods and best practices for providing dual or concurrent enrollment programs and early college high school career and technical education courses.

Bennet stated, “at a time when higher education is more important for success in the 21st century economy than ever before, we need to help create opportunities for students in high school to prepare for college and their future careers” (U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, 2016, para. 2). The proposed law provides students with a quick and affordable way to secure the credentials
required to compete in the job market and help individuals with career prospects (U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, 2016). In addition to legislators initiating bills that support dual enrollment programs, United States Cabinet members in 2016 started to underscore the significance of dual enrollment programs.

Current United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos highlighted the importance of dual enrollment programs in her speeches (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2017b.). DeVos’s first visit to a postsecondary institution as Secretary was to Valencia College in Orlando, Florida where she emphasized programs that provide high school students with pathways to college degrees. DeVos also conducted roundtable discussions with students who were currently taking dual credit courses or previously enrolled in the dual enrollment program. In a speech Secretary DeVos made to community college leaders, she spoke of dual enrollment programs as “visionary” and stated that “you’re helping high school students earn college credit and degrees through approaches that are accessible, faster and more affordable than ever” (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2017b, para. 3).

Further, in 2017, United States Senators Gary Peters, Bill Cassidy, John Boozman, and Al Franken and U.S. Representatives Jared Polis and Tom Reed reintroduced the bipartisan Making Education Affordable and Accessible Act (MEAA) to expand opportunities for high school students to take college courses. If passed, the MEAA would give grants to postsecondary institutions to establish and grow innovative dual and concurrent enrollment and early college programs (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2017b.).

Other factors contributing to the growth in dual enrollment are the push by educators to increase college enrollment numbers and the number of students graduating with a degree or certificate. A few administrators view dual enrollment as a way to recoup college enrollments
lost as a result of the 2008 recession (Smith, 2017). While some educators view dual enrollment as an opportunity to boost college enrollment numbers to make up for declining enrollment on college campuses, others see dual enrollment as a way to prepare students to enter the workforce (Smith, 2017). Most college administrators indicate that the aim of dual enrollment is not to increase enrollment numbers, but to establish a college-going culture and assist students with getting a head-start on their careers (Smith, 2017).

While educators and policymakers might see dual enrollment as a way to channel more students into college and the labor market, parents and students view dual enrollment as a way to save time and money by getting an early start on tuition-free or low-cost college education. Kronholz (2011) stated that dual enrollment programs might be viewed as a way to hurry youth through college and into the workforce, reducing college costs for parents and taxpayers. Funding for dual credit courses can differ by school district, college, or state (Smith, 2017). Some colleges offer dual credit courses at reduced tuition. A few states, such as Georgia, fund tuition for dual enrollment classes at a negotiated amount. Students in Florida and Ohio can begin earning college credit at little or no cost because school districts pay colleges for students’ tuition. Reduced tuition or no expense to students may increase accessibility and the demand for dual credit courses for students who cannot otherwise afford tuition. However, some policymakers question whether such models are sustainable given funding cuts in education (Smith, 2017). Arizona experienced significant reductions in financial support for both K–12 and postsecondary education. In the late 1980s, Arizona funded its K–12 students at above the national average, but currently, Arizona ranks 49th in per-pupil funding (Center for Student Achievement, 2017). In 2015, the Arizona Legislature completely removed all funding from two of its largest community college districts in the state (A. Smith, 2015). Postsecondary institutions
primarily depend on tuition to cover costs because of state funding cuts (Smith, 2017). Although policymakers promote dual enrollment programs because they are economical for students and their parents, states must advocate for dual enrollment in a way that improves access to students while providing colleges with an approach that is fiscally workable (Smith, 2017).

Contemporary policymakers view dual enrollment as offering academic supplementation for honors students who are in accelerated classes at their high schools, a preview of college rigor for lower achieving students, and a head start on a career for those who enroll in career and technical education programs (Kronholz, 2011). However, in their haste to get high schoolers into college, some policymakers may leave some parents and students frustrated (Kronholz, 2011). Many states have not supplied funds to pay college tuition, which leaves students and their parents to pay for educational expenses, or colleges and high schools to cover costs (Kronholz, 2011). A bipartisan bill was recently introduced in the U.S. Senate that would make Pell grants available and provide low-income high school students with opportunities to earn dual credits while in high school (Fain, 2017). However, under the current federal law, individuals who do not have a high school diploma are not eligible to apply for grants, scholarships, and student loans (Kronholz, 2011). That means Hispanic students, who tend to come from low-income families (Becerra, 2010), are less likely than their affluent peers to have the financial means to participate in dual enrollment programs.

Dual enrollment programs are one approach that schools use to prepare students to enter college (Appleby et al., 2011). Dual enrollment is available in every state in the United States, including the District of Columbia (Zinth, 2014). One way to advance the nation’s college completion agenda is to increase dual enrollment opportunities so that students can get a jumpstart on their college education. The college completion agenda has moved from access to
completion with the goal of increasing the number of adults who hold a certificate or degree to 55% by 2025 (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014), and dual enrollment is a plan that, if adequately leveraged, may help meet the nation’s higher education completion targets (Karp, 2015).

**Dual Enrollment and College Success**

Many studies show that dual enrollment participation positively impacts college success (Appleby et al., 2011; An, 2013a; 2013b; Karp, 2007; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Taylor, 2015). In comparison to their peers, students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely to be college ready (An, 2013b; An & Taylor, 2015; Ganzert, 2014; Zinth, 2015), and research shows that students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely to go to college, persist, and attain a college degree (An, 2013a; Karp et al., 2008). Dual enrollment participants are also more likely to begin college soon after high school graduation and less likely to be placed into remedial classes (Zinth, 2015). Barnett and Hughes (2010) view dual enrollment as an effective partnership between high schools and community colleges that bolsters preparation for college, fosters college enrollment, and increases postsecondary persistence and completion. Zinth (2015) stated that previously enrolled dual students have higher first-year GPAs, retention rates, four and six-year completion rates, and a shorter time to bachelor’s degree completion. Additionally, Appleby et al. (2011) found that students profited from taking an increased number of credit hours. Students who took a large number of dual credit hours had better persistence rates than students who took less dual credit hours (Appleby et al., 2011). Since dual enrollment participation positively influences academic performance, persistence, and degree completion, making the program accessible to a diverse group of individuals is essential.
Access

Consistent with its open-access mission, community colleges offer the most dual enrollment courses with 98% of public 2-year institutions participating in the program (Taylor, Borden, & Park, 2015). Also, more dual enrollment participants attended community colleges after graduating high school than those who went directly to universities (Fink et al., 2017). Fink et al. tracked more than 200,000 high school students who first enrolled in a dual credit course in fall 2010 through summer 2016 (five years following high school). They found that nationally, 47% of dual enrollment participants matriculated to community college following high school, 41% enrolled in universities, and 12% did not go immediately to college (Fink et al., 2017). The number of Arizona dual enrollment participants going directly to community college after high school was slightly higher than the national average, with 50% of dual enrollment participants matriculating to 2-year public institutions and 41% attending universities (Fink et al., 2017).

Dual enrollment programs provided through community colleges are particularly important because of their ability to reach diverse individuals. For instance, Hispanic students are more likely to attend 2-year institutions than 4-year colleges (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2009). Approximately 30% of community college students nationwide are African-American or Hispanic as compared to 20% of the student population in 4-year higher education institutions (Karp et al., 2010). Nearly a fourth of community college students nationwide come from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and they are more likely to take remedial courses than their peers at 4-year institutions (Karp et al., 2010). Only 45% of students nationwide who enroll in community colleges earn a degree or certificate or transfer to a university within six years after enrolling (Karp et al., 2010). Many students who enter community colleges fail to persist (Karp et al., 2010). However, dual enrollment is a program
that can help students feel connected to college, increase their likelihood of persistence by approximately 4.5% from the first semester of college to the second, and raise their probability of pursuing bachelor’s degrees by 9.7% as compared to their peers (Karp et al., 2008).

Karp et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of increasing outreach efforts and reduced restrictive eligibility requirements so that a diverse group of students can participate in dual enrollment. Karp et al. also highlighted the significance of providing free tuition for low-income students, and expanding career and technical education (CTE) dual enrollment offerings and incorporate them into CTE degree pathways. Dual enrollment can serve as a strategy for fostering college degree and certificate completion of underrepresented students (Hoffman, 2005). In 2015, Texas enacted new legislation that increased accessibility to dual enrollment programs by relaxing eligibility requirements so that more students can take advantage of dual enrollment (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017). The previous legislation prohibited 9th- and 10th-grade students from participating in dual enrollment and limited the number of dual credit hours students can earn. House Bill (HB) 505 removed these restrictions, allowing high school students at all grade levels the opportunity to partake in dual enrollment and earn as many college credits as they would like (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017). As a result, dual enrollment participation in Texas grew by more than 39,000 students from fall 2014 to fall 2016 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017).

In some states, such as Florida, tuition for dual credit courses is covered by high schools, increasing accessibility for students who may not otherwise have the means to participate in dual enrollment (Hoffman, 2005; Smith, 2017). In Florida, African-American and Hispanic students who took one or more dual enrollment courses while in high school enrolled in higher education institutions at higher rates than students who did not participate in dual enrollment (Hoffman,
2005). For African-American students, 70% enrolled in college compared to 45% of non-dual enrollment participants, and 69% of Hispanic dual enrollment participants enrolled in college after high school as opposed to 54% of non-dual enrollees (Hoffman, 2005). State legislators nationwide may want to review their policies to determine whether their regulations support equitable access to dual enrollment programs.

**Equity and Policy**

Equitable access to education is vital because education directly aligns with significant social and financial consequences such as economic achievement, family stability, health, and social relations (Hout, 2012). Nationwide, between fall 2003 and fall 2013, the percentage of white students attending public schools decreased from 59 to 50% while the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 19 to 25% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). By 2025, the percentage of white students is expected to decrease to 49% of students enrolled in public schools, while the percentage of Hispanics is expected to continue to increase to 29% of total enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). However, studies demonstrated that access to college still favored nonminority students over underrepresented students and that college educational opportunities for diverse groups of students in the United States historically were and continued to be inequitable (Taylor, 2015).

The percentage of high school students who attend college directly after high school varies by race-ethnicity and income. In 2015, the percentage of black students who entered postsecondary institutions immediately after high school was 55.6%, and the enrollment rate for Hispanics was 68.9%. The rate of college attendance for Asian students was 83.2%, and 71.3% for white students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). The percentage of low-income students who attended college saw a significant drop from 2008 to 2013 (Jaschik, 2015).
In 2008, the percentage of high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions was 55.9% for low-income, 65.2% for middle-income, and 81.9% for high-income students (Jaschik, 2015). In 2013, the percentages of high school graduates attending college were 45.5% for low-income, 63.8% for middle-income, and 78.5% for high-income (Jaschik, 2015). Comparable inequities exist when it comes to college completion. Data from 2013 showed that 53% of first-time undergraduate Hispanic students who started attending a 4-year institution in fall 2007 finished their degree within six years (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Conversely, the graduation rate within six years for white students who started going to a 4-year institution in fall 2007 was 63% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Although some legislators and educators emphasize increasing participation in dual enrollment programs nationwide, inequity in dual enrollment participation among students of differing socioeconomic statuses and between minority and nonminority students exists (Appleby et al., 2011; An, 2013a; Taylor, 2015). Minority and low-income students are underrepresented in dual enrollment programs in all states except Massachusetts (Zinth, 2014). Appleby et al. (2011) discovered that schools with higher percentages of minorities had smaller participation in dual enrollment than schools with predominately white students. In Texas, although white students represented 35% of the student population and Hispanic students represented 47% of the student population, white students made up more than 50% of the dual enrollees while about 38% Hispanics participated in dual credit (Appleby et al., 2011). Lower participation in dual enrollment among minority and low-income students compared to white students may prompt policymakers and educators to consider whether current state and local policies have a positive effect on minority and low-income students. Policies should increase the
probability that underserved students will participate in dual enrollment (American College Testing, 2015).

Taylor (2015) proposed that current state and community dual credit policies are not equally beneficial to students. A quantitative study by Taylor discovered that dual enrollment helped all students, including those historically underrepresented. Dual enrollment students overall were 34% more likely to attend college and 22% more likely to graduate than non-dual credit students. However, findings demonstrated that college enrollment and attainment for the entire sample of participants was higher than the sub-samples of low-income and minority students. Compared to non-dual credit minority students, dual credit students of color were 26% more likely to go to college and 14% more like to graduate college. Likewise, low-income students were 30% more likely to attend college and 16% more likely to graduate than non-dual credit students. Taylor (2015) noted

The evidence from this study suggests that policymakers should reassess state dual credit policies and consider how they can better meet the objectives of the DCQA of providing greater opportunities for underserved students. This extends to many other states with dual credit policies whose community colleges deliver college courses to high school students with minimal support, few resources, and an absence of an equity focus. (p. 374)

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) also recommended that policymakers should reconsider their dual enrollment policies and pinpointed 13 state policy components that affect access to dual enrollment programs and influence the number of students who enroll in dual credit courses (Zinth, 2014). The following section describes these elements.
Thirteen ECS Model State Level Components

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) began recording state dual enrollment policy efforts around the year 2000, and in the 2002–2003 academic year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provided the first national assessment of the number of students participating in dual enrollment. Less than one decade later, in 2010–2011, NCES reported that dual enrollment participation grew 66% (Taylor & Pretlow, 2015). State policies may impact access to dual enrollment, which has a bearing on the number of students who take dual credit courses. Zinth (2014) stated that, excluding Massachusetts, low-income and minority students are underrepresented in statewide dual enrollment programs. Education Commission of the States (ECS) identified 13 model state policy components that may foster student involvement and success in dual enrollment programs (Zinth, 2014). These 13 components fall into four groups: access, finance, ensuring course quality, and transferability of credit, and help boost participation of underrepresented students in dual enrollment (Zinth, 2014).

Access

The first six policy components that states should consider to increase the likelihood that underserved students participate in dual enrollment programs fall under the category of access (Zinth, 2014). Component number one is that policies should state that all eligible students have opportunities to participate in dual enrollment programs. The first component also includes expanding access by ensuring all high school districts offer dual credit courses and permitting both 2-year and 4-year colleges to take part in dual enrollment programs (Zinth, 2014). The second component is that eligibility for dual enrollment participation should focus on academic abilities or plan of study and not bureaucratic processes. Zinth (2014) contended that eligibility prerequisites should reflect the same standards required of college students who are not in high
school and must center on rational, measurable, and consistent indicators. A third component entails minimizing restraints on the number of courses students may accomplish. According to Zinth, caps on the number of dual credits students earn should not be excessively restrictive. Component four comprises creating policies which allow students to receive both high school and college credit for courses. Zinth noted that only 24 states have policies that stipulate students must receive both high school and college credit for dual enrollment classes. The fifth component consists of providing students and parents with program information. Parents of minority and low-income students are less likely to know about dual enrollment opportunities than more connected parents who tend to be educated and well-off. Component six includes making counseling accessible to students and parents prior to and during program participation. Currently, only 19 states have policies that require counseling about the program to potential and current dual enrollment students (Zinth, 2014).

**Finance**

The next components ECS recommends help diminish financial obstacles to dual enrollment participation for middle or low-income students (Zinth, 2014). The seventh component suggests that the burden of dual enrollment costs should be shifted away from students and their parents. Costs could be transferred to school districts or state agencies so that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, can participate in dual enrollment. Component number eight advocates that districts and colleges are entirely funded or compensated for participating students (Zinth, 2014).

**Course Quality**

Zinth (2014) stated that “the most accessible, financially-viable dual enrollment programs will ultimately fail if academic integrity is compromised” (p. 10). Thirty-seven states had
policies that address course and instructor qualities, and ECS suggested that states implement policies that provide for uniform academic rigor throughout all course delivery manners (Zinth, 2014). Components nine through twelve represent elements regarding academic rigor that all states should include in their dual enrollment policies. Component nine specifies that irrespective of where dual credit classes are held and who teaches them, all courses must consist of the same content and rigor (Zinth, 2014). Dual enrollment courses should incorporate the same standards, textbooks, syllabi, assessments, and learning outcomes as courses taught on the main college campus (Zinth, 2014). The tenth component requires that instructors who teach dual enrollment courses meet the same hiring credentials and readiness as faculty who teach traditional college courses and that dual enrollment instructors must receive appropriate support and evaluation (Zinth, 2014).

Component number eleven indicates that districts and postsecondary institutions should provide data on dual enrollment participation and outcomes (Zinth, 2014). Only 30 states and the District of Columbia require an entity such as a high school, college, department of education, or college governing board to provide data on dual enrollment participation (Zinth, 2014). Zinth argued that gathering and reporting data on student participation and outcomes is essential to evaluating whether diverse students are successful in their courses, graduating high school, enrolling in college, persisting, and attaining college degrees in a suitable timeframe. The twelfth component proposes that dual enrollment programs undertake internal or external evaluation based on obtainable data (Zinth, 2014).

Transferability of Dual Credit

The thirteenth component recommends that postsecondary institutions accept and use credit earned through dual enrollment as normal transfer credit (Zinth, 2014). Twenty-two states
have policies that require public institutions to give transfer dual credits the same considerations as credits earned at the receiving college or include dual credit courses in a statewide transfer list that are guaranteed to be accepted by both 2-year and 4-year public colleges. Implementing these transfer policies helps lessen postsecondary institutions’ fears that dual credit courses do not reflect quality college coursework (Zinth, 2014).

Zinth (2014) suggested that state governments consider incorporating all 13 elements into their policies to expand dual enrollment participation to diverse students. Zinth also provided several examples of states in which Hispanic students are underrepresented in dual enrollment. The next section examines the characteristics of Hispanic students in postsecondary education.

**Hispanic Students in Higher Education**

Several considerations prompt Hispanic students to pursue postsecondary education. Fermin and Pope (2003) examined by ethnic groups what factors influenced students’ decisions to attend college, and found that Hispanic students’ primary reasons for attending college were to achieve personal and career goals and college education. Additionally, support from parents, teachers, and high school counselors had a significant role in students’ decisions to attend college (Fermin & Pope, 2003).

Of the Hispanic students who enter postsecondary institutions, the majority attend public 2-year colleges and rely on employment and federal aid to pay for tuition. In 2009, the percentage of Hispanic students who attended college immediately after high school was 61.6% (Taylor, 2015), with the bulk of these students (58%) enrolling in community colleges (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The majority of Hispanic students enter community colleges with the intent to transfer to a 4-year institution, but only about 25% succeed (Schneider et al., 2006). About 50% of white students who attend 4-year colleges attain a bachelor’s degree or higher, but only 24%
of Hispanic students achieve the same (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Most Hispanic students use federal assistance such as grants, loans, and work-study to cover their educational expenses (Braxton et al., 2011). In 2011–2012, about 80% of full-time Hispanic undergraduate students received any form of a grant (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). More than 60% of Hispanic students obtained assistance only from Pell grants (Braxton et al., 2011).

Many Hispanic students also work full-time and part-time to pay for tuition. Forty-one percent of Hispanic students enrolled full-time in college also work, while 80% who attend college part-time are employed (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). Working while going to college serves as an obstacle to college success and draws students away from achieving their educational goals (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The more hours students work, the less time they have to focus on their studies. If enough financial aid is not available to cover their educational costs, Hispanic students may come to rely on employment to help meet their college expenses (Crisp & Nora). Students who can financially attend community college full-time are much more apt to persist than part-time students (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Dependence on a job for educational and living expenses while attending college negatively impacts persistence and completion (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The higher the number of hours worked weekly, the less likely the student will remain in college and transfer to a 4-year institution (Crisp & Nora; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

In 2013, Hispanics were the second largest racial/ethnic group enrolled in higher education behind whites (Ramos & Taylor, 2017). Hispanic students represent about 17% of postsecondary enrollment, nearly tripling from 6% in 1990 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Ramos & Taylor, 2017). As Hispanic enrollment in postsecondary education rises, more colleges are becoming Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Schneider et al., 2006). Institutions that include
25% or more of undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment are HSIs, and at least 50% of Hispanic students who attend HSIs come from low-income families (Schneider et al., 2006). Despite the rise in their college enrollment, Hispanics have the lowest college completion rate of all ethnic groups, with only about 20% earning a 2-year degree or higher (Ramos & Taylor, 2017). Because the Hispanic population is growing and there is increasing significance of a college education for even entry-level jobs, the barriers Hispanics encounter in realizing their educational goals are a significant policy concern for society (Schneider et al., 2006).

**Barriers to College Success of Hispanic Students**

Hispanics are the fastest growing and largest minority ethnic population in the United States, and yet have the least educational attainment level of any other group (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). By 2050, about 30% of the nation’s population will be Hispanic, which implies the need to prepare for their education (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The growing number of individuals who attain postsecondary education to correspond with the increased amount of jobs demanding college degrees will decide the economic strength of the country (Camacho-Liu, 2011).

Notwithstanding the fact that Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority ethnic population in the United States, their college completion rates are not improving, and they continue to lag behind their non-Hispanic peers (Camacho-Liu, 2011). In his address to Congress on February 24, 2009, President Barack Obama called on Americans to complete higher education beyond a high school diploma, with a goal of attaining the highest percentage of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Obama, 2009). By 2020, 13.4 million more adults need to earn degrees for the United States to have the highest percentage of college graduates in the world, which means nearly a quarter of these extra degrees need to be earned by Hispanic
students (Camacho-Liu, 2011). By 2020, approximately 3.3 million more Hispanics need to earn a college degree to meet the completion agenda (Camacho-Liu, 2011). Increasing postsecondary graduation rates of Hispanic students is crucial to achieving this goal (Núñez et al., 2011) and to the economy as a whole (Camacho-Liu, 2011). E. Giovannini, Chancellor, Tarrant County College, stated:

The unemployment rate nationwide is 4.3%, yet there are still 6.2 million jobs available in the country that go unfilled because there are not enough skilled workers to fill them. In the next 10 years, there will be an additional 12 million jobs added to the economy, which will require skilled workers (personal communication, August 16, 2017).

An educated workforce strengthens the economic prospects for individuals and ensures the vitality of the economy as a whole (Camacho-Lu, 2011). Increasing the percentage of college graduates requires eliminating achievement gaps and increasing completion by reducing barriers to success (Camacho-Liu, 2011).

According to Schneider et al. (2006), many Hispanic students begin their formal schooling without the social and economic means that other ethnic groups have, and schools have inadequate resources to counterbalance for differences that may occur from parents’ socioeconomic status and their lack of sufficient information about the United States school system. Schneider et al. (2006) declared:

As Hispanic students proceed through the schooling system, inadequate school resources and their weak relationships with their teachers continue to undermine their academic success. Initial disadvantages continue to accumulate, resulting in Hispanics having the lowest rates of high school and college degree attainment, which hinders their chances for
stable employment. The situation of Hispanic educational attainment is cause for national concern. (p. 179)

Hispanic students encounter multiple obstacles to achieving a college education. Insufficient academic preparation, financial difficulties, lack of family support and knowledge about college, and family obligations represent some of the barriers to college persistence and degree attainment.

**Academic Preparation**

According to Arbona and Nora (2007), the quality and rigor of Hispanic students’ high school curriculum are one of the most compelling predictors of degree completion. Zarate and Burciaga (2010) reported that compared to white students, Hispanics have inferior high school experiences due to de facto segregation. Racial segregation in schools may occur by fact rather than by law when a concentration of Hispanics in certain neighborhoods results in area schools that are mainly Hispanic. High schools with disproportionately high numbers of Hispanic students are more likely to have inadequate facilities, insufficient supplies, and less academically prepared teachers (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Hispanic students are more likely than white students to have teachers with bigger classroom sizes, be taught by inexperienced teachers, attend schools with higher teacher absences and turnover and are less likely to be taught by math teachers who have majored or minored in mathematics (Barton & Coley, 2009). Also, Hispanic students have less access to instructional technology in their classrooms (Barton & Coley, 2009; Zambrana, 2011). Consequently, Hispanic students are at a disadvantage regarding academic preparation for postsecondary studies. Schools with high proportions of Hispanic students have less access to Advanced Placement (AP) and gifted programs that offer more upper-level courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). As a result, Hispanics are less
likely than white students to take college preparatory classes in high school (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010) and more likely to be placed in remedial courses (29% compared with 20%) when entering college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Lower levels of academic groundwork and enrolling in remedial courses in college can make it challenging for students to graduate promptly and impacts degree completion rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a).

The academic preparation of Hispanic students regarding the level of mathematics courses students take while in high school impacts the likelihood that students attend a postsecondary institution, attain a college degree, and transfer to a university. Crisp and Nora (2010) examined the demographic, pre-college, environmental, sociocultural, and academic experiences that influence college success—such as persistence, degree completion, and transfer to a 4-year institution—and discovered that the academic preparation of students in high school mathematics correlates with student persistence and completion. Hispanic high school students are approximately 20% less likely than white students to enroll in high-level math courses (Schneider et al., 2006). The smaller amounts of Hispanic students enrolling in advanced math classes is troubling because the level of math courses taken, more than any other discipline, has the highest connection to whether students matriculate to 2-year or 4-year institutions (Schneider et al., 2006). In addition to the advanced level of high school mathematics courses studied, the number of math classes taken in high school and the enrollment of math courses early in the college program play a role in effective student transfer (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2006).

**Financial Obstacles**

The increasing costs of 4-year degrees have contributed to reduced retention and transfer rates for Hispanic students who go to community college and cannot afford the costs of attending
a university (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). “One of the most powerful factors related to school performance is socioeconomic status” (Do & Mancillas, 2004, p. 199). Hispanic students tend to come from lower socioeconomic families (Becerra, 2010), and the percentages of Hispanics living in poverty nationwide is three times greater than for Caucasians (Do & Mancillas, 2004). About 62% of Hispanic children live in low-income households (Jiang et al., 2016). Limited financial resources can be a barrier for under-resourced Hispanic students who desire a college education and negatively impacts persistence (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

**Family Support and Knowledge**

Parental level of education, as a form of sociocultural capital, positively affects retention and transfer to a 4-year institution for Hispanic students (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Baum and Flores (2011) noted that “parental education is a strong predictor of children’s educational attainment” (p. 174). Hispanics are much more likely to be first-generation college-goers in comparison to other groups (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011). Approximately 50% of Hispanic undergraduates’ parents never enrolled in or finished college (Baum & Flores, 2011). Students who come from families that do not understand college processes and procedures may find it challenging to fully engage in college life, which can lead them to leave school without completing a degree (Camacho-Lui, 2011). Núñez et al. (2011) stated that Hispanic students whose parents did not attend college have less access to cultural capital concerning the college-going experience and therefore count more on other Hispanics in their social systems to collect information about higher education options. Crisp & Nora (2010) noted that a higher degree of educational achievement on the part of parents puts positive pressure on students to stay dedicated to the goal of degree completion.
Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2011) stated that financial pressure and insufficient information about financial aid and the application process negatively impacts Hispanic students’ decisions whether to remain in college. The complication of applying for college and unfamiliarity with the higher education system can be challenging for students, especially for students whose parents are not proficient in English (Baum & Flores, 2011). Nationwide, there are not enough counselors in high schools trained in all the financial aid options or grants available for Hispanic students (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). Moreover, parents do not know what questions to ask about applying to college and often do not know how to complete paperwork, where they can get forms, and that there may be tuition assistance opportunities available to their students (Bohon et al., 2005).

Hispanic community college students who do not apply for financial assistance, even when they are likely to be qualified, are much less likely to persist from the first semester to the second (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Furthermore, the act of applying for financial aid has a positive influence on retention irrespective whether students are attending college full-time or part-time (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Hispanic students who do not receive any form of financial assistance are less likely to persist, earn credit hours, or attain a degree or certificate (Crisp & Nora, 2010).

**Family Responsibilities**

Family obligations and working off-campus take students away from complete social and academic integration to college and directly impact their decisions to stay enrolled (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Friedemann and Buckwalter (2014) found that Hispanic women do more caregiving than Hispanic men. Hispanic women view their caregiving role as an expansion of their regular role and feel more obligated to follow learned values regarding the importance of caring for
family (Friedemann & Buckwalter, 2014). According to Zambrana (2011), “a persistent trend among Mexican American girls is leaving school earlier than black and white girls to assist their families economically with the care of siblings or due to early marriage and motherhood” (p. 93). Arbona and Nora (2007) found that Hispanic women who were responsible for caring for a family member were 83% more likely to leave college than their peers without such obligations. Inadequate academic preparation, financial struggles, lack of family support and knowledge about college, and family responsibilities represent some of the barriers to the college success of Hispanic students.

**College Success of Hispanic Students in Arizona**

Hispanic students became the majority in Arizona K–12 schools in 2004 with the numbers of Hispanic students continuing to climb at all grade levels (Milem et al., 2016). However, findings revealed that Hispanics face barriers and achievement gaps that may hinder college success (Milem et al., 2016). More Hispanic students live in poverty than white students. In 2014, approximately 66% of Hispanic students in comparison to 42% of white students received free or reduced lunch (Milem et al., 2016). Furthermore, Hispanic students were less likely to finish high school and be college ready than white students. Approximately 83% of white students and 69% Hispanic students entering high school graduated in four years (Milem et al.). Only 47% of Arizona high school graduates met eligibility requirements for entrance to one of the state’s selective admission public postsecondary institutions (Milem et al., 2016). Hispanic students demonstrated considerably lower rates of admissibility than white students. Only 9 in 100 Hispanic students met College Readiness Benchmark Scores instituted by the ACT in all four subject areas of Math, Science, Reading, and English, while 35 in 100 white students met all four subject area Benchmarks (Milem et al., 2016). Milem et al. (2016) declared that “minority
students, now the majority of students in Arizona schools, are crucial to the ongoing economic prosperity of our state because of the critical human capital that they provide” (p. 67). Although they represent the largest ethnic group in Arizona K–12 schools, the obstacles Hispanic students encounter and their low achievement scores impede their college and career readiness and success.

The percentage of Hispanic students attending postsecondary institutions is low. Hispanic enrollments spanned from 12% at private colleges to 28% at public 2-year institutions (Milem et al., 2016). Most of the bachelor degrees in Arizona are awarded by the state’s three public universities, with 67% of the degrees bestowed on white students and only 17% given to Hispanic students (Milem et al., 2016). In 2012, states and districts began exploring strategies that would increase college readiness, enrollment, and degree attainment (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). One approach that may improve Hispanic students’ chances at college success is to provide students with the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs while in high school (Ganzert, 2014; Karp, 2012; Struhl & Vargas, 2012).

The Impact of Dual Enrollment in Arizona

In Arizona, 22,888 high school students participated in dual enrollment in 2014 with the majority of dual credit courses offered through community colleges (Milem et al., 2016). Approximately 57% of the participants were white, and 21% were Hispanic (Milem et al.). Nearly 76% of dual enrollment participants completed an academic course while 24% took a vocational course (Milem et al.). The number of students by race who took occupational and academic courses was similar to the overall distribution of dual enrollment classes with a marginally higher depiction of white students taking academic versus vocational courses. Milem et al. (2016) cited two factors that may have caused the racial division between the types of
courses students took: students are required to pay for their dual credit courses before taking them, and classes take place in the high school. Milem et al. posited that “both of these may be underlying factors because data showing the top high schools participating in dual enrollment suggest that access to (including an understanding of) dual enrollment is strongly related to socioeconomic status” (p. 40). Participants in dual enrollment programs in Arizona tend to be predominately white and come from more affluent families (Milem et al., 2016). However, Hispanic students who take dual credit classes experience significant educational gains.

Hispanic students mainly benefit from dual enrollment participation. C. Jones, Institutional Research Analyst, reported that in 2015, at one Arizona community college, 26% of Hispanic high school seniors who participated in dual enrollment while in high school matriculated to the college (personal communication, May 18, 2017). Seventy-two percent of all students who entered the college, and previously took dual enrollment classes, graduated with a college degree or certificate within three years (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017). However, only 61% of the college’s students who did not take dual credit earned a degree or certificate within three years (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017). When examining the degree attainment figures by race, the data revealed that Hispanic students especially benefit from dual enrollment participation. Specifically, 75% of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school completed a degree or certificate within three years of matriculation, while 58% of Hispanic non-dual participants graduated with a degree or certificate (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017). Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school as compared to Hispanic non-dual enrollment participants attained college degrees at higher rates than the overall population of students who took dual credit versus non-dual participants.
The data reported by C. Jones also revealed that the difference in cumulative grade point average (GPA) between Hispanic dual enrollment participants and non-dual enrollees was slightly higher than the difference in GPA of white dual enrollment and non-dual enrollment participants (personal communication, May 18, 2017). The GPA of non-Hispanic students attending the college between the terms of fall 2012 and spring 2016 was 3.20 for students who previously took dual credit courses while in high school and 2.74 for college students who did not participate in dual enrollment (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017). The GPA of Hispanic students attending the institution during the same period was 3.05 for those who took dual credit courses before college and 2.50 for non-dual enrollment participants (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

**Grit**

Standardized test scores and high school grades are predictors of students’ first-year college GPA (Akos & Kretchmar, 2017). However, the two variables explain just 25% of the difference in a student’s GPA. That leaves most of the difference in college success unexplained. Additionally, there is criticism that standardized tests are culturally and ethnically biased, and that regulated assessments and grades underestimate the probability of student success. As a result, there is increasing interest in exploring non-cognitive predictors of college success (Akos & Kretchmar, 2017).

Angela Duckworth, a psychology professor, came up with the idea that grit was significant in explaining why some students persist and achieve more than others (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Grit, a non-cognitive trait, means perseverance and passion for long-term goals and forecasts academic achievement outcomes beyond assessments such as standardized tests and IQ (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Akos & Kretchmar, 2017). Individuals
who demonstrate high grit set long-term goals and do not diverge from them regardless of challenges they may face (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Grit attempts to explain why individuals of equal ability can split between high and low achievement (Akos & Kretchmar, 2017).

Duckworth et al. (2007) tested the significance of grit. Findings revealed that grit was related to degree attainment. Educated individuals exhibited higher grit than less schooled people. Duckworth et al. (2007) also found that college students who received higher scores in grit earned better GPAs than their peers, despite having lower standardized achievement scores.

**Dual Enrollment Student Perception Studies**

While much research involving dual enrollment participants has focused on college performance and completion, limited studies consider why these outcomes occur based on student perceptions. An (2015) examined whether academic motivation and engagement explain the relationship between dual enrollment and academic performance and found that students who participated in dual enrollment had higher GPAs and were more academically motivated and engaged than non-dual enrollees. L. Smith (2015) investigated dual enrollment students’ perceptions of academic preparation and college student role preparation at a Mississippi community college using a survey created by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnership (NACEP). The majority of participants surveyed found the overall dual enrollment experience favorable. Participants felt that the program better prepared them for college, provided a more realistic expectation of college, enhanced their time management and study skills, and increased their confidence level (L. Smith, 2015).

Several studies investigated the views of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment in either a high school setting or in a college environment (Thanawala, 2016; Turner, 2010). Thanawala (2016) conducted a mixed methods study to understand the factors that led to
the successful participation of inner-city Hispanic students in STEM dual enrollment. While the quantitative portion of Thanawala’s study included students who took dual credit at a high school and a community college, only participants who took dual credit classes at a community college participated in the qualitative aspect of the investigation. Parental encouragement and support, taking courses with peers, and free tuition were among the factors that influenced students’ decisions to participate in STEM dual enrollment programs (Thanawala, 2016). Turner (2010) performed a qualitative study to investigate which aspects of dual/concurrent models specifically prepared first-generation Latina(o) students to gain access to and succeed in 4-year colleges and universities. Participants in Turner’s study included students who completed their dual credit courses either at their high school or an Early College High School and were either attending or planning on attending a university. Findings showed that participation in dual enrollment helped students acquire the academic skills and knowledge they needed to be successful at a 4-year college (Turner, 2010). Also, the majority of the participants felt that exposure to the institutional structure of a 2-year college helped them learn how to navigate their way through a 4-year institution (Turner, 2010).

**Online Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment programs are offered through various modalities, one of which is through online distance learning. Although taking online dual credit courses allows students to get an early start on their college education, students who participate in distance learning dual enrollment classes may not successfully matriculate and adjust to the academic rigors of a college. Formen (2015) explored the views of Ohio students at a university who took dual credit courses online while in high school. The study revealed that online dual enrollment courses did not prepare students to transition to college and for the academic rigors that come with it.
Participants reported that they did not anticipate the different expectations, demanding and more challenging workload, finding balance and prioritizing in a vaster environment, the need to be self-reliant, the costs associated with college, and the importance of adhering to a syllabus (Formen, 2015). Findings from this study suggested that online dual enrollment programs may not be effective in fostering student college readiness and success.

**Dual Enrollment in the Community Colleges**

Several studies have examined the perceptions of dual enrollment students who only took dual credit classes at a community college (Garcia, 2014; Green, 2007; Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Medvide & Blustein, 2010). Garcia examined how participation in dual enrollment influenced first-generation, low-to middle-achieving Hispanic male students’ decisions to matriculate and persist in college. The participants indicated that taking dual credit courses at the community college influenced their decision to matriculate to the institution and helped them learn academic and social norms and behaviors required of college students (Garcia, 2014). Green (2007) explored the factors that influenced participation in dual enrollment at one specific college. Participants cited getting an early start on their college education and saving money as some of the primary reasons for participating in dual enrollment. Students also mentioned that a lack of information, college course placement procedures, and academic unpreparedness or perceived academic unpreparedness were obstacles to participation in dual enrollment programs (Green, 2007). Hudson (2016) investigated the perceptions of high achieving African-American male students who attended a community college as part of the Texas State Community College Consortium. Participants acknowledged the academic rigor of their dual credit class, the support and encouragement from family, dual-enrolled peers, and faculty and administration, and the impact of dual enrollment on academic and college readiness (Hudson, 2016). Kanny (2015)
explored Latina(o) students’ perceptions regarding the benefits and disadvantages of participating in dual enrollment. Findings revealed that participants viewed dual enrollment as beneficial in exposing students to the college academic environment, increasing awareness of the inherent skills and practices expected of college students, and providing more educational independence. Furthermore, Kanny discovered that participants perceived issues with credits and grades earned, negative interactions with students and faculty due to their nontraditional enrollment status, and limited support systems as drawbacks to dual enrollment, and stated that “students tended to report negative interactions with others at City College that had detrimental effects on their feelings of comfort on campus and course performance” (p. 66). Although taking dual credit classes at a community college helped students learn the skills and norms to succeed in college, high school students may feel uncomfortable sitting in classrooms with traditional students.

Medvide and Blustein (2010) examined the educational and career plans of a sample of urban minority high school students who voluntarily participated in a dual enrollment program at a private, technology-based community college. Students expressed future goals related to furthering their education beyond high school. Participants also stated that exposure to a college atmosphere helped them to develop a better sense of the expectations of instructors in postsecondary education, including a belief held by several participants that responsible students are individuals who succeed academically (Medvide & Blustein, 2010).

**Dual Enrollment at Both a Community College and a High School**

A mixed methods study conducted by Lile et al. (2017) explored the experiences of current dual enrollment participants taking dual credit courses in a high school setting or on a community college campus in the Northwestern United States. Lile et al. found that dual
enrollment participation allowed students to learn the role of a college student and to gain a deeper understanding of the demands of that role. Students developed a better grasp of college courses including valuable note-taking, individual responsibility for work completion, and mastering time management and study skills. Lile et al. also discovered that the location of dual credit course influences dual enrollment students’ experiences and individual growth. Students who took dual credit classes only at a community college described experiencing more significant personal growth, understanding of the college construct, and connection with the college-student role, than students who took dual credit classes at both their high school and college site (Lile et al., 2017).

**Dual Enrollment at a High School**

Karp (2007) performed a study of dual enrollment students, in their first semester enrolled in dual credit at their high school, and examined their understanding of the role of a college student. Students partaking in a dual enrollment program, called College Now, were interviewed at the beginning, middle, and end of their semester. Findings demonstrated that students’ role conceptions increased from the time they started their dual credit course until course completion. Karp concluded that students’ experiences in dual enrollment and the quality of students’ dual credit courses powerfully connected to students’ learning about the roles of college students.

The environment, the modality of dual credit courses offered, and race/ethnicity are several factors that may explain why students’ experiences with dual enrollment vary. Scholars have explored perceptions of students who took dual credit courses online (Formen, 2015), in-person at a college (Garcia, 2014; Green, 2007; Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Medvide & Blustein, 2010), and in a high school setting (Karp, 2007). However, the majority of the studies
examined the views of students who participated in dual enrollment in a college environment. Studies involving the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high schools are scarce. This transcendental phenomenological study at hand varies from other qualitative studies in that it investigates how current Hispanic students in an Arizona community college, who completed dual credit coursework while in high school, described their experience with dual enrollment classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in their academic success. Knowledge of the lived experiences of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school may help educators and policymakers design programs and implement policies that encourage and support Hispanic students participating in dual enrollment.

**Conclusion**

Hispanics are the fastest and largest growing minority ethnic population in the United States, and yet have the least educational attainment level of any other group (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011). By 2020, 65% of all jobs will necessitate a college education (Kolodner, 2016), and by 2050, approximately 30% of the nation’s population will be Hispanic which suggests the need to prepare for their education (Crisp & Nora, 2010). An educated workforce strengthens the economic prospects for individuals and ensures the vitality of the economy as a whole (Camacho-Lu, 2011). Dual enrollment participation has proved effective in the college success of all students, particularly in minorities. Although some studies examining the perceptions of dual enrollment students exist, research exploring the views of Hispanic community college students who participated in dual enrollment at their high schools are scarce. Interviews conducted with Hispanic community college students who previously took dual credit at their high schools may help policymakers and educators understand what makes students
acclimate to the college environment and persist. Student descriptions can also provide educators and policymakers with useful information on how they can design dual enrollment programs and implement policies that will encourage and support college enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment.

This chapter examined literature pertinent to this study. Chapter Three will delve into the methodology which includes a description of the participants, the location of the study, research design, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Four will present the research findings, and Chapter Five will include a summary of results, discussion, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Dual enrollment continues to experience significant growth throughout the nation and is viewed by policymakers and educators as one approach that can help increase college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates. Students who integrate academically and socially into the college environment demonstrate greater persistence (Tinto, 1993). Dual enrollment programs can provide students with rigorous college coursework and socialization skills to help them successfully transition into their roles as college students (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012).

Hispanic students in particular stand to benefit from dual enrollment participation. Hispanics represent the largest and fastest growing minority ethnic population in the nation and have the lowest educational completion rate of any other group (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). However, Hispanic students who participate in dual enrollment attend postsecondary institutions at higher rates (Hoffman, 2005). C. Jones, Institutional Research Analyst, reported that Hispanic community college students also have higher grade point averages and attainment rates than non-dual participants (personal communication, May 18, 2017). Although policymakers and educators view dual enrollment as a strategy for achieving college success for a diverse range of individuals, Hispanics are underrepresented in most statewide dual enrollment programs (Zinth, 2014). While there are studies that demonstrated dual enrollment positively influences college success for a diverse range of individuals, limited studies investigated students’ perspectives on the program. In particular, little qualitative research exists that explores how Hispanic students in a community college conceptualize their experience in dual enrollment at their high school.
The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college perceive how their experiences with dual enrollment at their high school prepared them for college. To understand Hispanic students’ experiences with dual enrollment programs offered at their high schools and their perceptions about the transition to the role of a college student, the following research questions guided this study:

1) How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes?

2) How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success?

Research Design

Research contributes to current information about current issues, provides educators with new ideas and suggestions to improve practice, and informs policymakers when they investigate and debate educational matters (Creswell, 2012). Investigations can be undertaken through a quantitative study or a qualitative study depending on the problem being explored (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative studies are appropriate when the researcher identifies a problem based on trends or when there is a need to examine the relationship among variables. Qualitative studies are suitable in tackling a research problem when variables are unknown and there is a need to explore a full understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). There are a number of reasons why an investigator would use qualitative methods in a study, including when quantitative methods do not align with the problem, and when the researcher wants to write in a way that conveys stories to understand the circumstances or setting in which the participants in the investigation address the question (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative studies are also beneficial in gaining a multifaceted, full understanding of the problem as they empower participants to share
their stories and provide opportunities for collaboration during data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2007).

A phenomenological qualitative study was selected as the design for the study because this investigation sought to explore wide-ranging experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment students. Phenomenology presents the prospect of understanding lived experience in a manner that other methodologies may not (Wilson, 2015). A phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of several people with the emphasis on explaining what the individuals have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Wilson (2015) stated that a phenomenological study “explicates the deeper human aspects of a situation, attending to mood, sensations, and emotions, seeking to find out what the actual experience is, what it means to individuals and what the personal implications are” (p. 40). There are two central approaches to phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive (Creswell, 2007). For the purposes of this study, a transcendental (also known as psychological) phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994) was used. This study focused on a description of the experiences of participants rather than on the interpretations of the investigator (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) draws from German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s concept Epoche, known as bracketing, in which the investigator puts aside any opinions, beliefs, or judgments about the phenomenon which may influence the study but instead concentrates on the essence of the experience.

In this investigation, a transcendental phenomenological study provided the essence and lived experience of Hispanic dual enrollment participants. Each student described what they experienced and how they experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Gaining a deep understanding of Hispanic students’ experiences with dual enrollment may help educators and
policymakers develop and implement policies and procedures that encourage and support Hispanic participation in dual enrollment programs, which may ultimately lead to college success.

**Setting**

The research site selected for this study was a multi-campus community college located in the Phoenix metropolitan area of Arizona and is part of the Maricopa County Community College District. For this study, the institution is referred to as Desert Sky Community College (DSCC). DSCC served almost 20,000 students in the 2015–2016 academic year (Fact Book, 2016). The overall college student ethnicity for fall 2015 was 50.3% white, 22.2% Hispanic, 13.3% unknown, 5.4% Asian, 3.6% black, 2.6% multiple races, and 1.5% American Indian (Fact Book, 2016). The college offers a variety of academic and career and technical education dual credit courses for high school students at approximately 20 public, charter, and private high schools in its surrounding community. From fall 2005 to fall 2015, college dual enrollment grew by 231.8%, and in fall 2015, the number of students participating in dual enrollment was approximately 3,900, representing over a quarter of the college headcount (Fact Book, 2016). About 17% of dual enrollment participants in fall 2015 were Hispanic (C. Jones, personal communication, May 18, 2017). Because DSCC serves a sizeable dual enrollment population, and the institution is moving toward becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), which includes 25% or more of undergraduate full-time equivalent Hispanic enrollment (Schneider et al., 2006), this setting is appropriate for the research topic.

DSCC was also chosen as the research site because the researcher is a former employee of the institution and had the support of college administration to conduct the study. Additionally, the Interim College President agreed to serve as an affiliate member on the
researcher’s dissertation committee. Insight into the experiences of Hispanic students in dual enrollment will allow the college to examine its current policies and practices and explore ways to encourage Hispanic participation in dual enrollment and to inspire and support Hispanic students in transitioning to college and achieving success.

**Participants/Sample**

Criterion-based sampling was used in the selection of participants because this type of sampling is suitable when individuals have experienced the same phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Criterion-based sampling is purposeful and “is grounded on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Participants selected for this study were currently enrolled Hispanic community college students who finished at least one dual credit course while in high school, and who completed a minimum of one semester of coursework after matriculating to college. The completion of one or more dual credit courses connects with a successful transition to college, persistence, and positively impacts GPA (Ganzert, 2014). The reason for selecting individuals who were beyond their first semester of college was that they have gained some insight and experience to help them describe their academic performance and how well they adapted to college processes and culture. To persist in college, students must integrate socially and academically into their new college environment (Tinto, 1993). Successful transition involves students learning the norms, behaviors, and roles of what it means to be college students (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012).

An email was sent to the Dean of Student Development at the research site requesting assistance in identifying participants for the study (Appendix A). However, shortly after contact occurred with the Dean of Student Development, he left the college. This researcher then sought
the assistance of the college president, who serves as this researcher’s Affiliate Committee Member, for further assistance. The college president contacted the Application Development Manager who provided this researcher with a list of approximately 230 current college students who may fit the study criteria.

This researcher emailed each past Hispanic dual enrollment student currently attending DSCC (Appendix B). The email seeking potential volunteers contained the criteria for inclusion in the study and the researcher’s University of New England email address so that students could contact the investigator directly to answer any questions they may have and to schedule an interview. To be eligible to participate, students must be Hispanic, at least 18 years of age, have completed a minimum of one dual credit course while in high school, and be beyond their first semester of college after matriculating to the institution.

Sample sizes for phenomenological investigations are small. The sample size for phenomenological studies does not need to be large and can have as few as one participant (Dukes, 1984; Wilson, 2015). A sample size anywhere from six to 20 participants is most common (Wilson, 2015). Merriam (2009) suggested that sampling occurs until attaining redundancy or saturation and triangulation. Saturation happened when no additional information further contributed to the study. To achieve saturation, the process of triangulation allowed the researcher to examine data from multiple sources. According to Merriam (2009) triangulation happens when several samples are used to yield an understanding. Ten participants were selected for this study to attain data saturation and triangulation.

**Data**

Phenomenological investigations typically include an informal, collaborative data collection method and use open-ended questions and comments (Moustakas, 1994).
Phenomenological interviews are mainly used to collect data in order to capture the essence or the fundamental meaning of individuals’ experiences (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002 as cited by Merriam, 2009) described the purpose of conducting interviews in phenomenological studies “is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 88). A semistructured interview protocol was used to conduct the interviews to discover and interpret participants’ thoughts and meanings. This type of conversation allowed the investigator to ask both structured questions and open questions with most of the interview guided by topics to be explored (Merriam, 2009). An open-ended form of questioning gave the investigator the flexibility to reword, modify, or add follow-up questions to obtain thorough responses which are most suitable for the topics explored (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher performed a pilot test before commencing with data collection to validate interview questions. An academic dean overseeing the dual enrollment program at DSCC was provided with the interview questions and offered feedback before data collection. According to Merriam (2009), pilot interviews are essential for testing research questions, and allow the researcher to ascertain whether questions are unclear, need revising, or yield useless information. Respondents may also suggest questions to include in the study that the researcher may not have considered (Merriam, 2009).

Descriptive data was gathered in the first part of the interviews. Participants were asked demographic information such as their age, gender, full-time/part-time student status, and whether they received tuition assistance for their dual credit courses, the predominant language spoken at home, and whether they are first-generation college students. This type of information is useful in explaining what may be causing a participant’s perceptions, as well as the differences and similarities in viewpoints among individuals (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Participants were
also asked the name of the high school they attended, how many semesters they completed in college, their current college GPA, how many dual credit courses they finished while in high school, and what degree or certificate they are currently working on through the community college. In the second part of the interviews (Appendix D), participants were asked to describe their experience with the dual enrollment program and how they understood the role of dual enrollment in their academic success and social assimilation. Participants provided information regarding their experience with academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993) and the socialization process of shifting into their roles as college students (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012) because they have persisted in college one or more semesters.

The researcher performed semistructured interviews during early spring 2018. In-person interviews were conducted with all 10 participants in a conference room at the community college campus. All interviews were audio recorded to effectively capture data (Jamshed, 2014). The voice recorders on the researcher’s password-protected laptop and the iPhone was used to record the interviews. Two different voice recorders were used in case one recorder failed. Interviews were transcribed word for word by both the researcher and a transcription technology platform.

The researcher asked participants to bring an artifact to their interview that symbolizes their journey and growth in dual enrollment. Examples of artifacts include objects such as memorabilia, photographs, toys, and gifts as well as writings such as diaries, documents, letters, and journals (Given, 2008). Artifacts are representations of a society or culture and are used to augment a study and provide data not available from interviews (Given, 2008). The researcher asked participants to describe the artifact and how that object related to their participation in dual enrollment. Artifacts can offer historical, personal, and demographic information about
individuals or their culture (Given, 2008). The researcher used participants’ descriptions of their artifacts to gain an understanding of their opinions, assumptions, and experiences with dual enrollment participation (Given, 2008).

The researcher reviewed transcripts and sent a copy to participants via email for member checking to confirm data was correct. Creswell (2007) described member checking as a technique that “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (p. 224). Participants were given the opportunity to comment or make changes to transcripts through telephone or video call, email, or through an in-person interview. All participants opted to respond via email.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Moustakas’ (1994) three-step process: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. In the first step, Epoche, the investigator noted personal experiences with the phenomenon in an attempt to set aside her own biases, assumptions, and understandings of the phenomenon to best realize the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam; 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) expressed Epoche as looking at situations “as if for the first time [. . .] an opportunity for a fresh start, a new beginning, not being hampered by voices of the past that tell us the way things are or voices of the present that direct our thinking” (p. 85). After going through the Epoche procedure, the researcher revisited the research questions to concentrate and ponder on them while performing the data analysis. To promote impartiality, the researcher used analytic memo writing during the entire data analysis process to record thoughts associated with the study and reflections of interviews (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña defined an analytic memo as similar to a journal entry that
involves the researcher writing thoughts about the phenomenon, participants, the process of gathering data, and what concepts and patterns may emerge from the data.

To achieve Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, the second step in data analysis, the researcher began by both manually transcribing each interview verbatim and using a transcription technology platform. The researcher then carefully read each transcript to understand participants’ experiences with dual enrollment and the situations or contexts that shaped their experiences with the phenomenon. This process of reading a transcript and giving each statement the same consideration during initial data analysis is known as horizontalization (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

After data was meticulously examined line by line, coding began. Saldaña (2013) referred to coding as “a transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (p. 5). Coding was performed manually soon after each interview was conducted and transcribed. Manipulating qualitative information and coding with a writing instrument on paper gave the researcher more command over and possession of the work (Saldaña, 2013). Coding is the process of categorizing and organizing data focusing on meaningful comments (Creswell, 2007). The data cleansing process involved eliminating repetitive, overlapping, and irrelevant statements. (Moustakas, 1994). The important statements were then used to develop clusters of meaning into similar themes leaving only textural descriptions, expressing what Hispanic dual enrollment students experienced, and structural descriptions, depicting how participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

The last step of data analysis is Imaginative Variation. The purpose of Imaginative Variation is to understand the structural essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described the intent of Imaginative Variation:
To arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and participating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the “how” that speaks to the conditions that illuminate the “what” of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is? (p. 98)

By using Imaginative Variation, the researcher looked at the phenomenon through different angles for possible meanings. The researcher did this by reflecting on the lived experience of participants throughout data collection and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, Imaginative Variation involved synthesizing the textural and structuring descriptions to portray the meaning and essence of experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment students (Moustakas, 1994).

**Participant Rights**

Multiple safeguards were used to protect participants’ rights. Before the interview, participants were provided an informed consent form to sign (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The Consent for Participation in Research form is attached in Appendix D. The consent process informed participants about the type of study being conducted, the study’s methodology, and the time commitment involved in participating in the study. The process addressed participant rights, including the option to opt-out of the study entirely or to abstain from responding to questions as they choose (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). After the interviews, transcripts were sent to the email address provided by participants for member checking (Creswell, 2007). Member checking gave participants the opportunity to assess the data for accuracy and reliability before data analysis was performed (Creswell, 2007). Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they found imprecise data during member checking.

To ensure confidentiality, the study employed several privacy tactics (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). These tactics included the assignment of pseudonyms to participants, careful
storage (in a locked cabinet) of transcripts, paperwork, and the voice recorder, and the application of passwords to all electronic files. The researcher deleted all recorded transcripts on completion of the study.

**Limitations**

Limitations are inherent in all studies: in qualitative studies, data collection and data analysis are time-consuming; qualitative data is subjective, and the researcher can influence findings. Because data are gathered from a few participants, results may not be generalizable to larger populations (Anderson, 2010). A limitation of this study was that only participants from a single community college were used to describe the lived experience of Hispanic dual enrollment students. Hispanic dual enrollment students who matriculate to different institutions, such as private or public universities may have different experiences. Also, because the sample size was small, the results may not be characteristic of all Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment. Student experiences can vary regarding the number of dual credits earned and whether they matriculate to college as full-time or part-time students. These wide-ranging experiences may not be entirely captured when using a small sample. Consequently, participants’ perceptions and experiences may differ based on the number of dual credits earned. Furthermore, students who attend college full-time are much more apt to persist than part-time students (Crisp & Nora, 2010), and therefore students may have different perceptions of the role of dual enrollment in their academic success depending on their enrollment status.

Another limitation of the study was that it may not capture the experiences of less successful dual enrollment students. It was assumed that individuals who have succeeded the most in the dual enrollment program volunteered to participate in this investigation because volunteers are generally individuals who were fully engaged in the program. As a result, students
who did not receive passing grades in their dual enrollment courses may be less apt to participate in this study. Other limitations of the study included the ability of participants to adequately express themselves and their level of engagement in the research. Participants may experience difficulties articulating their feelings, or they may refrain from responding to questions due to embarrassment or other circumstances. Also, participants may not take the time to fully answer questions or perform member checking thoroughly due to competing factors such as school, work, family, and social obligations.

Additionally, this study was limited by the ability of the researcher to achieve Epoche, which means to refrain from judgment. A transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to look at a phenomenon in a new way as if perceiving situations for the very first time (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) acknowledged that this condition is rarely wholly achieved. However, the researcher addressed this bias by reflecting on her own experience with the phenomenon and bracketing out her perceptions before collecting data (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

**Conclusion**

Many studies exist that reveal participation in dual enrollment produces positive outcomes for students. However, little exists about how students, specifically Hispanics, perceive their experience with dual enrollment at their high school prepared them for college. A transcendental phenomenological research design was selected for the study because it presented the prospect of understanding the essence and lived experience of Hispanic dual enrollment participants. This chapter described the setting, participants, data collection procedures, and Moustakas’ (1994) three-step method: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation process for data analysis. Chapter Four will present the data analysis.
and the findings of the study. Chapter Five will express interpretations of the results, implications of the study, and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Dual enrollment programs serve as an opportunity for students to jumpstart their college education and gain job readiness skills without incurring significant debt. Students participating in dual enrollment programs can either earn college credit through courses taken in a college environment, online, or in their high school classes. Struhl and Vargas (2012) argued that dual enrollment was one of the best ways to prepare students for college success and provide them with the opportunity to experience college work. Studies discovered that students who took dual credit classes while in high school tend to have higher college persistence and completion rates than non-dual participants (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth 2014).

The majority of dual enrollment programs are accessible through public 2-year institutions with 98% of community colleges in the United States participating in the program (Taylor et al., 2015). As a result, students of nearly all ethnic groups have opportunities to earn dual credit through 2-year postsecondary institutions. Hispanic students are more likely to attend community colleges than 4-year public universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Although the number of white students attending high schools declined, and the number of Hispanics increased between fall 2002 and fall 2012 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), there was disparity between the number of non-minorities and minorities participating in dual enrollment (Appleby et al., 2012; Becerra, 2010; Taylor, 2015; Zinth, 2014). Many studies demonstrated that dual enrollment programs increase students’ chances of attending a postsecondary institution and completing a degree (An, 2013a; Karp et al., 2008; Zinth 2014; 2015). However, limited research has examined the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment.
while in high school, particularly students who took dual credit courses in a high school environment.

Because few studies were found that depict the lived experiences of Hispanic dual enrollment participants, this transcendental phenomenological study sought to explore how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college perceived their experiences with dual enrollment at their high school prepared them for college. The following research question guided this study:

1) How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes?

2) How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success?

This chapter is divided into three parts. First is an overview of the data collection and analysis. Second, the demographics of the participants are presented followed by a brief description of each participant. The gathering of demographic information and narrative for each participant allowed the researcher to acquire a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences. The third section explores the themes and subthemes that emerged from participants’ stories.

**Data Collection and Analysis Overview**

Data collection began after permission was obtained from the University of New England and Desert Sky Community College (DSCC) Institutional Review Boards. In early spring 2018, DSCC’s Application Development Manager provided the researcher with a list of approximately 230 current college students who might fit the study criteria. The researcher then sent an email to all 230 students in search of volunteers for the study. The email contained the requirements for inclusion in the study and the contact information so that students could communicate with the
investigator directly to answer any questions they may have and to schedule an interview. Seventeen students responded to the email seeking participants. Three of the students did not fit the criteria for the study, one was unable to schedule an interview due to an illness, and three students had family obligations or other time commitment issues that made arranging a meeting difficult. Interviews were scheduled with the remaining 10 students.

In-person, semistructured interviews were conducted with 10 participants individually in a conference room at the community college campus. The use of a semistructured protocol allowed the investigator to ask a mixture of structured and open-ended questions with most of the interviews guided by topics to be explored (Merriam, 2009). The first part of the interviews consisted of gathering descriptive data. In the second part of the interviews, participants were asked to describe their experience with the dual enrollment program and how they understood the role of dual enrollment in their academic success and social assimilation. Interviews were audio recorded to effectively capture data (Jamshed, 2014). The researcher manually transcribed interviews and utilized the Rev transcription technology platform. The researcher reviewed the transcripts and sent a copy to participants via email for member checking to confirm data was accurate (Creswell, 2007). Four participants verified the transcripts were correct, four participants returned the transcripts with a few minor edits, and two participants did not respond to the email. Data collection persisted until achieving data saturation and triangulation. Triangulation occurred when several samples were used to yield an understanding, and saturation transpired when sampling more data did not lead to additional information related to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Data saturation and triangulation happened by the 10th interview when knowledge acquired became redundant (Merriam, 2009). The researcher assigned pseudonyms to participants to protect their privacy.
The researcher used analytic memo writing during the entire data analysis process to record thoughts associated with the study and reflections of interviews to achieve objectivity (Saldaña, 2013). An analytic memo is similar to a journal entry that involves the researcher writing thoughts about the phenomenon, participants, the process of gathering data, and what concepts and patterns may emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2013).

Data analysis followed Moustakas (1994) three-step process: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. These steps were used to curtail researcher personal experiences or views in order to best realize the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam; 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Coding was completed by hand. The researcher read through each transcript a minimum of three times and started the pre-coding process by underlining significant statements (Saldaña, 2013). After data was methodically examined line by line, coding began. The researcher categorized and organized data focusing on significant statements (Creswell, 2007) and disregarded repetitive and immaterial statements (Moustakas, 1994). The important statements were then used to narrow the data into themes (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The gathering of demographic information and narrative for each participant played a significant role in data analysis by providing information that helped the researcher acquire a greater understanding of participants’ experiences.

**Participants**

Ten participants currently attending DSCC, who were involved in dual enrollment while in high school, were interviewed. Two males and eight females comprised the sample population. The participants came to DSCC from six high schools and took anywhere from one to seven different dual credit courses in high school. Eight participants took English, three participants took mathematics, two participants studied history, one participant took humanities,
one participant studied literature, and one participant took music theory courses for dual credit. Six of the participants interviewed were pursuing health-related majors including nursing, dental hygiene, veterinary medicine, and health sciences. One participant was double majoring in geology and criminology, one was double majoring in journalism and Latino studies, another was studying business, and finally, one was majoring in chemical engineering. All participants planned on attending a university after community college, and six participants expressed interest in pursuing masters or doctoral degrees.

Four participants were in their 2nd semester at DSCC, three were in their 4th semester, two were in their 5th semester, and one was in their 6th semester at the community college. Eight participants attended college full-time, and two were enrolled at the institution part-time. Their college grade point averages (GPA) ranged from 2.7 to 3.9 with nine of the participants maintaining a 3.0 GPA or higher. Nine participants were employed while attending college. Eight of the nine participants held part-time jobs, and one participant worked full-time.

According to Núñez et al. (2011), Hispanic students are more likely to be first generation college-going students than any other ethnic group. Approximately 68% of Hispanic college students are considered first-generation college-going (Núñez et al., 2011). There is disagreement regarding the definition of a first-generation college-going student (Toutkoushian, Stollberg & Slaton, 2015). A first-generation college-going student can be a student for whom neither parent attended college, neither parent graduated from any postsecondary institution, or neither parent completed a 4-year degree (Toutkoushian et al., 2015). For this study, first-generation college-going students were considered students whose parents did not obtain any postsecondary degree. Seven students in this study were first-generation college-going students.
Six participants spoke predominately English in their household, while four participants mostly spoke Spanish at home. Table 1 displays participant demographic data.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Participant Demographic Data</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Eddy</td>
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<td>Lena</td>
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<td>Maria</td>
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<td>Maya</td>
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<td>Sarina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sierra</td>
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<td>Sophie</td>
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Note: Status is full-time (FT) enrolled in 12 or more credit hours or part-time (PT) enrolled in less than 12 credit hours.

Eddy

Although Eddy described himself as an introvert, he shared useful stories of his experiences with dual enrollment. Eddy was an 18-year old part-time student who was in his second semester of college at the time of the interview. While in high school, Eddy took seven dual credit courses including English, math, and history classes. His current college grade point average (GPA) is 2.7. He was employed part-time but indicated that he was seeking full-time employment.

Both of Eddy’s parents were born in the United States and have college degrees. Eddy’s father served as a pastor, and his mother taught at a junior high school. His siblings included a twin brother, a younger sister, and an older brother. The predominant language spoken in his
home was English. When asked why Eddy opted to participate in dual enrollment, he replied, “My mother is Hispanic, so she strongly advised both of us to go into it because she had to put herself through college, and she didn’t want us to have to do the same.” Eddy decided to attend community college after high school instead of transitioning immediately to a university to cut down on his costs of attending college. He stated, “Why spend more money to take the exact same classes that you can take at a university?” Eddy’s goals included transferring to a university and double majoring in geology and criminology. He hopes to achieve a bachelor’s and possibly a master’s degree in either of those fields. Eddy indicated that he would like to have a steady job and be able to support a family someday.

Eddy believed that a successful student is someone who has a good work ethic, strong communications skills, asks questions of instructors and peers, completes assignments on time, and is easy-going. He described his participation in dual enrollment as preparing him for the academic challenges of college by forcing him to think critically, manage his time better, and work harder because the course load in his dual credit classes were more demanding than his non-dual enrollment classes. However, the academic rigor of his courses varied depending on the teacher. He stated that his dual enrollment class in his junior year of high school was less rigorous than the dual credit classes he took in his senior year.

Throughout his high school years, Eddy was involved in the marching band and jazz band. However, in college he did not join an organization. Eddy kept to himself at DSCC, and he believed that taking dual enrollment courses in high school did not necessarily prepare him to assimilate socially to the community college. However, Eddy acknowledged that there was some collaboration with peers in his dual enrollment coursework when research projects were assigned, which helped him become college ready. Eddy stated that he would highly recommend
the dual enrollment program to Hispanic high school students. He believed that the program is financially advantageous for students while allowing them to gain college credit.

**Grace**

Grace was a 20-year old full-time student who worked part-time while attending college. She was in her 5th semester at the community college and held a GPA of 3.6. Grace was majoring in nursing, and her goals included obtaining a master’s degree and becoming a nurse practitioner. Her mother came to the United States from Mexico and obtained a bachelor’s degree in finance. Grace commented that “to my mom at least it is very important to get your education and go through that.” Grace took four English classes for dual credit in her high school and decided to transition to the community college after high school. Grace revealed the reason why she chose attending community college over a university after high school.

My parents and high school staff had mentioned that a community college is smaller and it’s cheaper as far as tuition and those kinds of things. I sat down, and I had to weigh out what my options were, and I didn’t necessarily want to move out and all that, because it’s quite a big change after high school.

Grace opted to enroll in community college after high school to cut down on her educational expenses, and because she felt that was not prepared to transition to a university.

Although Grace initially found transitioning from high school to community college challenging, she felt that participating in the dual enrollment program helped her adjust to the academic demands of college. Grace described her dual enrollment courses as “medium” in academic difficulty in comparison to her non-dual credit high school classes and on-campus community college courses. Though Grace found her community college classes were more
challenging than her dual enrollment courses, her high school dual credit classes were more demanding than her non-dual credit courses. She reflected on her dual enrollment courses.

I do remember having more difficult projects and papers and things like that than I had before. But I would say, even thinking back to my friends that didn’t take dual enrollment; I had more difficult assignments and things like that. Maybe spent a little bit more time on my assignments.

Grace shared a story about a particular project in her English dual enrollment class that she believed was a positive experience.

We made these masks that you were supposed to portray your face and what you show to people, but then on the other side of the mask, you were supposed to put the things you don’t show all the time. So we shared that with the class, and that was a very good experience . . . . It just let you share things that maybe you wouldn’t always or didn’t always have the chance to tell people.

Grace thought that participating in the dual enrollment helped ease her transition to college and allowed her to jumpstart her college education. She would “100%” recommend the program to high school students.

Lena

Lena was 18 years old and in her second semester at the community college. She was majoring in nursing and planned to transfer to a university after completing her associate’s degree. Lena was able to participate in the dual enrollment program because she received financial assistance from what she called an “outside source.” Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico, and the predominant language spoken in her household was Spanish.
Lena learned about the dual enrollment program through her teachers at school. She shared a story regarding her immigration status that nearly prevented her from participating in dual enrollment.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I was given the opportunity to take a dual enrollment credit for Spanish. I was in AP Spanish, so it would transfer over as a credit. Unfortunately, I was not able to, regarding my immigration status. I am from Mexico, and I’m a DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] student. As you know, the whole issue regarding DACA right now, I’m kind of in danger. I didn’t have a social security number, and I didn’t have any way of actually being a student here. My professor would tell me, “Why aren’t you doing it? You could easily receive credits.” I couldn’t tell him. But in my head I was thinking, “I’m sorry, I don’t have a social security number that I could give so that I could actually take dual enrollment classes.” That’s when I learned that being an immigrant came with many downsides. That’s when I learned the hard truth. I was not able to have opportunities like everyone else. Once I was able to apply for DACA, and I got my social security number, I was ecstatic about being able to take dual enrollment classes. I was really grateful for DACA and for dual enrollment.

After Lena obtained her DACA status, she took English and literature classes for dual credit as a way to cut down on her educational costs and get an early start on her college education.

Lena acknowledged that in her dual enrollment classes she had a lot more reading and writing than her other courses, but she did not take school seriously until she arrived on the college campus. She stated, “I actually turned myself around once I hit college, and I told myself, ‘This is really when the path starts to your career,’ and that’s when I really started to work really
Although Lena was not involved in any clubs at the community college, she found it easy to acclimate to the college environment. She noted, “My GPA is way higher than it was in high school.” When asked if she would like to share additional thoughts about dual enrollment, Lena said, “It puts you on the right path to your future.” Lena was pleased that she had the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment and would highly recommend the program to other students.

Makala

Makala was a full-time student in her second semester at the college. She was working toward an associate’s degree in science with the goal of obtaining a doctorate in veterinary medicine. At the time of the study, Makala was receiving financial assistance and worked approximately 24 hours per week to help support herself. She had three siblings, and she and her siblings were raised by their grandparents.

Makala’s English teacher recommended that Makala consider taking the placement test for dual enrollment during her junior year in high school. Makala said, “It took me quite a while to build up that courage to test into it.” After taking the test and scoring well on it, Makala enrolled in English composition for dual credit as a way to cut down on her educational expenses.

She opted to enroll in DSCC after high school as she already took her dual credit coursework through that institution. When asked to describe her transition from high school to college, Makala replied, “I feel like there wasn’t much of a transition. I feel like I got a taste of exactly how college was going to be in my dual enrollment class. I had a wonderful instructor.” Makala attributed her dual enrollment class to helping her improve her writing and speaking skills, and learn how to refer to her class syllabus. She remarked:
As far as my dual enrollment class, it was just you had to read off of a syllabus, which was so different to me being in high school . . . . It really prepared me for that, reading the syllabus constantly, making sure you’re looking at the due dates for things because the teachers in high school tell you those, “Hey, make sure to read this chapter by tomorrow” but, in the syllabus, it was all stated, and the teacher would never remind you, so it was definitely the same transitioning over here.

When reflecting on her dual enrollment class Makala said, “The level of assignments was harder, but it was helpful in the long run because I’m now here, and that’s exactly what I’m doing here.” Although Makala found that her English dual enrollment class was academically challenging, she credited her experiences with the program with helping her adjust to her role as a college student.

Maria

Maria was in her 4th semester at the college and was majoring in journalism and Latino studies. She attended a predominantly white high school where she was not socially engaged. Unlike her white peers who had lenient parents, Maria had parents who were firm.

I think one of the things about my high school was that I had to put my culture on the back burner because it kind of made people uncomfortable. When I say that I mean that not a lot of people can relate to having the same family responsibilities that I have that like my Latino friends can relate to. In our culture, it’s well known that parents are strict. So in high school a lot of people, a lot of my own friends, made me feel like the odd one out because their parents weren’t like mine.

Thinking back to her high school years, she further stated:
Due to being surrounded by mostly white students, I also wasn’t able to have peers to explore aspects of my culture with, like language . . . . To make my friends in high school, I feel like I had to put a part of my identity on the backburner.

Maria enrolled in history courses for dual credit. After probing Maria as to what factors influenced her decision to participate in dual enrollment, she replied,

For them [parents], my college education was the most important thing that I could achieve . . . . This is definitely is something from the Hispanic culture, because, for my parents, the access to education has more so been a struggle for them, and being able to achieve it to pursue it, it’s been an uphill battle.

Maria did not do well in her first semester in dual credit. She learned to prioritize, organize, and manage her time wisely, and as a result, improved her grades dramatically in the second semester. Maria carried these skills with her to DSCC and attributed lessons learned in dual enrollment with helping her succeed in college.

When Maria began attending DSCC she immediately joined the Hispanic Student Organization. She commented,

To me that was just so amazing. It felt so good to have a place where there would be students who were like me and who faced similar challenges throughout high school and who would be able to come together and speak to those challenges and offer support for one another, and create our own community.

When asked about her future goals, she responded, “I guess the broadest answer I can give you is that I want to be a voice for my community.” Maria would like to serve as a mentor and inspire other Hispanics to pursue their educational studies and achieve their goals.
Maya

Maya was in her 4th semester of college working on an associate’s degree. Her long-term goal was to become a physician. Her parents were from Mexico where, according to Maya, “Schooling for them stopped at primary level.” Maya learned about the dual enrollment program from her high school counselors. She took English courses for dual credit and discovered the classes were rigorous and taught her skills such as time management. Maya felt that her dual enrollment courses were beneficial in her transition to college, but taking college classes in a high school environment differed from classes on a community college campus. The community college classroom was much more diverse regarding background and ages of students than a high school classroom.

Maya admitted that she would have either put off going to college or not attended college at all after high school if she had not participated in dual enrollment. She revealed,

I always stressed about what it was going to be like. Always as a sophomore or junior, I’d always hear everyone already applying to college and doing all these college-related things. It stressed me out so much. I was scared for it, to be honest, but as soon as you actually experience what it’s going to be like it makes it so much easier. It just makes the transition so much better.

Taking dual credit courses helped Maya get a sense of what postsecondary education may be like and feel less anxious about college. Maya added, “I would love to see more and more Hispanic students get more involved in this, in dual enrollment, and prove their potential.” Furthermore, Maya thought that schools need to make students aware of dual enrollment opportunities, and that dual credit courses are not just for high achieving students.
Omar

Omar was a 20-year-old ambitious business student who attended college full-time and worked full-time. In addition to completing an associate’s degree in business, Omar wanted to start a “YouTube channel and an online business by the end of this semester.” His long-term goals included creating an educational enterprise and purchasing homes for himself and his disabled uncle.

Neither of his parents received college degrees, but Omar attributed his success and drive to his mother’s strong “work ethic and determination” and his father’s “persistence and perseverance.” Omar stated, “I learned from a young age that opportunity is everything.” Omar’s initial plan was to attend the United States Air Force Academy after high school graduation. He “received a nomination from Senator Flake.” However, because of “injuries and other circumstances,” he was not able to attend the academy. Omar opted to go to community college, which he described as “not only cheaper, but a smarter route; it’s an amazing transition to get into the university.” Though Omar’s original plan was not to pursue postsecondary education, he was glad that he enrolled in the community college immediately after high school.

Omar took both math and English dual credit classes while in high school. He portrayed his dual enrollment courses as “demanding” and “more rigorous in that nature, and they really pushed the students to become better.” He attributed dual enrollment participation to helping him integrate academically and socially to school.

What really did help me was going to dual enrollment. I knew I had to become better, do better, do more, because it was an ambition aspect, pushing yourself, and so I carry that into clubs, into organizations, so I became the president of the NHS, the National Honors
Society at my high school, and I did that because I took a dual enrollment class before that, and I realized I can do more, I can be more.

Although Omar did not do well in one of his dual credit classes, he learned skills such as how to study and manage his time. When inquiring about what Omar would tell other students who may be contemplating whether to participate in dual enrollment, Omar responded, “Absolutely do dual enrollment. As a Hispanic, as a Latino, how I think of myself, the college degree is extremely important.” Omar felt that participating in dual enrollment helped him acquire new skills and believed that all students, especially Hispanics, would benefit from the program.

**Sarina**

Sarina had a 3.8 GPA and was in her 5th semester of college. She was enrolled in the nursing program and hoped to become a nurse practitioner. Sarina was a part-time student and was employed part-time. Her parents were born in Mexico, and neither parent completed high school education. Sarina found out about the dual enrollment program in her senior year of high school from her friend. As a result, she enrolled in dual credit English classes. After high school, Sarina opted to attend DSCC because she completed her dual credit courses through the college, and the institution was close to her home.

Although Sarina acknowledged that her dual credit courses gave her a head start on her college education, she did not notice any differences regarding academic rigor between her dual and non-dual classes. Sarina felt that her classes at the community college were more difficult than her dual enrollment courses. However, she believed that some aspects of the dual enrollment classroom were similar to her community college classrooms. She reported,

The size is pretty much the same. The seating chart was the same. We would be sitting in groups. We do group work and socialize, collaborate in both of them. I can’t think of
anything that would be different besides the fact that it’s more challenging in college than in high school.

Despite the fact that her dual enrollment classes were less demanding than her on-campus college classes, Sarina still felt that dual enrollment was beneficial in helping students transition to college.

**Sierra**

Sierra was 19 years old and in her 4th semester as a full-time college student. She was studying dental hygiene and wanted to become an orthodontist. She had one younger brother and parents who were born and raised in Mexico. Spanish was the predominant language spoken in her household.

Sierra learned about the dual enrollment program from her high school teachers and counselor. She decided to enroll in dual credit courses to get a jumpstart on college. She stated, “I think it’s a good way to expose yourself to college and get ahead.” Sierra believed that dual enrollment helped her adapt to the academic demands of college because her dual enrollment teacher expected more out of students and the workload was heavier than her other classes. She realized that she had to take responsibility for her schoolwork. Sierra commented, “Instead of me depending on my professors to give me every single step, I learned there to take an initiative on things and find my way on my own a little bit.” Participating in dual enrollment allowed Sarina to earn college credits and prepared her to academically assimilate to college.

Her recommendation to high school students who were considering whether to enroll in the dual enrollment program was

Take it. I would tell them make sure that if you are going to take it that you will have the commitment to the class where you will strive to get a really high grade because it will
affect you in college if you want to get into med school or any graduate school, where
they really look at your grades.

Although the high school environment was different from the college campus setting, Sierra felt
that dual enrollment prepared her to succeed in college.

**Sophie**

Sophie was in her 2nd semester at the college and was majoring in chemical engineering.

She discovered the dual enrollment program by reading a poster that hung on a wall at her high
school. After mentioning the dual enrollment program to her parents, Sophie decided to enroll in
a precalculus dual credit course to help prepare her for college. However, Sophie did not feel like
her dual enrollment class was taught any differently than her non-dual courses. She
acknowledged that taking college classes in a high school setting did not provide the same
ambiance of a college campus.

Initially, Sophie thought about taking a break from her educational studies after high
school instead of attending college. However, her mother encouraged her to go directly to
college. Sophie chose to enroll in DSCC because it was close to her home and would save
money. At first, Sophie’s transition to college was “a little rough.” She described why she had
difficulty assimilating to college.

. . . because the dual enrollment teacher I had was the same teacher I had for one of my
math classes the previous year. I was really used to his teaching, and I knew exactly when
I could be lazy and how long I could wait to turn something in.

When Sophie arrived on the college campus, she realized that she had to adjust to different
teaching styles, and she discovered that instruction moved more rapidly than in high school.

Sophie acknowledged, “I had to learn how to manage my time better, and to know that even
though I could be drawing or daydreaming right now, I should be working on assignments and work that I have to do.” In addition to acquiring time management skills, Sophie realized that she needed to procrastinate less, turn in assignments regardless if they were late, and put more effort into her work.

Despite the fact that taking dual credit courses in high school did not allow Sophie to experience the college environment fully, she advocated for the dual enrollment program. Her advice to high school students was

If you know that your high school to college transition is going to be rough, then it’s a good idea to take some of those credits while you’re still in high school because you know high school and you know how high school works academically, and it’s something familiar to you.

Additionally, Sophie mentioned that students participating in dual enrollment were able to simultaneously earn high school and college credits while saving money on tuition.

**Emergent Themes**

The researcher highlighted emergent themes to understand Hispanic students’ experiences with dual enrollment programs offered at their high schools and what makes them transition to the role of a college student and persist. Initially, eighteen themes emerged from data analysis with each participant telling their stories of how he or she academically and socially assimilated to college. The eighteen themes encompassed:

- high aspirations
- regard for family and role model
- parental influence and support
- dual enrollment teacher influence and support
• high school counselor and peers
• easier transition, preparation, and exposure to college
• higher expectations and the ability to manage a heavier workload
• motivation, work ethic, effort, and independence
• similar classroom, collaboration, and convenience of a high school setting
• save money, time, and earn college credits
• social integration
• time management and organizational skills
• research and study skills
• reading, writing, and critical thinking
• help-seeking and communication skills
• missing out on the college experience
• lack of knowledge, information and financial assistance
• family obligations and lack of role models

The researcher then grouped the 18 themes into central themes based on their similarities. Because the theme of social integration could not be arranged with the other themes, it became a stand-alone central theme. The result was six overarching themes with 17 subthemes. Not all participants experienced each subtheme, but the occurrence of the same subthemes and themes supported triangulation for the investigation. The researcher achieved triangulation by looking for patterns or inconsistencies in the data from multiple participants, which were used to yield an understanding (Merriam, 2009). Table 2 below shows the six emergent themes and 17 subthemes ascertained from data analysis.
### Table 2

*Hispanic Students’ Experiences with Dual Enrollment: Themes and Subthemes*

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<td>Family obligations and lack of role models</td>
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**Theme 1: Significance of Education to the Hispanic Family and Community**

This theme was selected because all 10 participants had high ambitions and stressed the importance of achieving a college education for themselves, their families, or the Hispanic
community. Many of these participants were first-generation college-going students. Some participants’ parents emigrated from countries where secondary and postsecondary education was unaffordable and not easily attainable. Participants stressed the importance of going to college because their parents did not have an opportunity to attend a postsecondary institution. Participants viewed college as a means to get a head start on their careers and as a path to attaining financial security for themselves and their families. They also regarded their college education as a way to help their communities and inspire other Hispanics to pursue higher education. Maria summed it up by stating, “Getting that degree is the peak of achievement that I could bring to my household, and that I can bring home to my family as a whole . . . . I want to be a voice for my community.” Two subthemes: (a) high aspirations and (b) regard for family and role model are described below.

**High aspirations.** Each of the 10 participants had educational goals that went beyond achieving an associate degree or certificate. Three participants indicated that they planned to attend their local university after completing their 2-year degrees. Lena remarked, “My future goals are to receive my associate’s in nursing, and then transfer over to ASU to receive my bachelor’s.” Sophie hoped to study chemical engineering, and Maria wanted to pursue dual degrees in journalism and Latino studies. Two students, Eddy and Grace, had their ambitions set on obtaining master’s degrees. Grace stated, “I would eventually like to go back and get my master’s in nursing and be a nurse practitioner someday.” Makala, Maya, and Sierra aspired to become doctors. Sierra commented, “I eventually want to become an orthodontist,” and Maya’s goal was to “. . . go to medical school.” In addition to obtaining a business degree, Omar’s long-term plan is to “have an educational business. All participants had high aspirations, and most of them wanted to achieve their college education out of respect for their families.
Regard for family and role model. Seven participants mentioned that they wanted to pursue college studies for their parents or to serve as role models for other Hispanics. Some students opted to participate in dual enrollment and go to community college because they wanted to be the first in their family to go to college. Sierra stated, “... college was always important to me as a first-generation student ... College was really important to us.” Lena remarked, “They’ve [parents] always told me to keep reaching my goals and motivating me to go to college because they didn’t have the chance.” Maria said, “I think before anything that I’ve ever done for myself, it is something that I do for my parents.” She further noted,

All of this praise and pride and accomplishment and success come from this institution, and you’re going to be the first one on both sides of the family. To me, this is a big deal. ... I know that I am a role model for others who look like me.

Omar expressed, “As a Hispanic, as a Latino, how I think of myself, the college degree is extremely important.” Pursuing postsecondary studies was essential for each participant. Without the encouragement and support of others, Hispanic students may choose not to partake in dual enrollment programs. In the next theme, participants described the persons who urged and aided them in their enrollment of dual credit courses.

Theme 2: Encouragement and Support

Various individuals played a role in prompting participants to enroll in the dual enrollment program. Parents, dual enrollment teachers, counselors, and peers persuaded and supported them in their pursuit of a college education. Sarina learned about the dual enrollment program from a peer who previously took dual credit courses. After obtaining more information about dual enrollment opportunities, Sarina explained the program to her parents. Sarina stated,
I found out about dual enrollment in my senior year of high school. . . . I started looking into it, and then the class that I was supposed to take as a senior, it was an English class, they had an option of non-dual enrollment and then dual enrollment. Then, that’s when I was like, my family’s like, “You should do dual enrollment,” like I’ve done it. I was like, “Okay. I’ll look into it.”

The majority of the participants felt encouraged and supported by their parents and their high school dual enrollment teachers. Half of the participants learned about dual enrollment opportunities through their high school counselors or their Hispanic peers.

**Parental influence and support.** Seven participants mentioned that their parents were influential and supportive of their education. Eddy stated, “Both my parents advised me to be part of the dual enrollment program.” Grace described how her mother, who is from Mexico, had to work hard to obtain a college degree. She did not want Grace to experience the same struggles as she. Referring to her mother, Grace stated, “She pushed me to do that [dual enrollment], for sure.” Grace’s mother highly valued a college education. Sarina’s parents also wanted her to take advantage of earning college credits through the dual enrollment program. Sarina said, “I talked to my parents. They’re like, ‘Yes, let’s do it.’” Although neither of Maria’s parents obtained a postsecondary degree, they introduced Maria to college at an early age. Maria commented,

My parents were active in bringing me to ASU when I was younger and getting me acquainted with that type of academic scene . . . . I believe that my parents influenced my perception of college as this institution where I can go in and learn. My parents, growing up, have always instilled that I am going to be a continuous learner; that every day of my life there will always be something new to learn.
Lena’s parents also did not attend college, but they have been supportive of her education. Lena stated, “They’ve [parents] helped me throughout my college process. They’ve helped me financially, and also in education wise.” Although parents may sway and assist their children with college enrollment, teachers can also influence students’ decisions to enroll in college.

**Dual enrollment teacher influence and support.** Most participants cited their dual enrollment teachers as the motive for why they opted to take their high school course for dual credit. Grace said, “The reason that [dual enrollment] even came to my attention was because one of my teachers had brought it up to the class, she sold it pretty well.” Lena echoed, “Teachers would actually announce it. They would say, ‘Hey, my class is available for dual enrollment if you’d like to take it,’ so I was able to have the opportunity to dually take classes.” Makala reflected on how her teacher encouraged her to participate in dual enrollment.

> My English teacher my junior year really recommended me to test for the dual enrollment. He said I was very smart. I was one of the best writers in the class, and he said that I would easily get in, knowing me and how I work as a student. He recommended for me to test into it. It took me quite a while to build up that courage to test into it, and I eventually did, and I actually tested into honors.

In addition to influencing students to take dual credit courses, teachers can have a significant hand in the success of their students. When describing his dual enrollment instructors, Eddy commented, “The teachers really wanted to prepare us for college.” Maria mentioned, “My teacher had been able to guide us through some of those unfamiliar territories that we had never really explored before or outside of the dual class.” Sierra made similar remarks:
The teacher gave us more freedom in choosing what books we wanted to read or assignments that we wanted to do, and she kind of gave us, she pretty much gave us an idea of what the college classroom would be once you got to college. The students felt that their dual enrollment teachers exposed them to the academic demands of college and provided them with individual attention.

Participants believed that their high school dual enrollment teachers were more helpful and accommodating than their instructors on the college campus. Makala remarked, “I wanted to do dual enrollment just so I could get more one-on-one with a teacher, and I know that typically, in college, you don’t get that one-on-one with an instructor.” Grace concurred, stating, “I think the high school teachers helped me out a little bit more, just because I think that’s how it is in college, you know the teachers don’t help as much unless you go seeking for it.” Sophie said, “The way the teacher taught, it was helping me get better to know what helps me learn what type of teaching helps me learn best.” Omar suggested that teachers should continue to encourage Hispanic students to take college courses. He stated, “A lot of students may be discouraged of taking a college class. If they had support from their teachers, especially encouraging Latino students, it really helps.” Developing meaningful relationships with their dual credit teachers was important to students. Participants received individual attention from their instructors, and as a result, felt a sense of belonging and were motivated to excel and succeed. These statements reveal the significant role teachers can play in whether students pursue a college education and persist.

**High school counselors and peers.** Five participants reported that either their high school counselors or Hispanic friends persuaded them and supported them in their quest to take dual credit courses. Sierra explained, “I went to my advisors a lot, and my school counselor
mentioned that taking 101 would really benefit me.” Grace also sought assistance from her high school counselors. She stated, “High school there’s counselors, they’re always helping you out.” Additionally, some participants took advice from their Hispanic peers. Sarina said, “I know that I have a friend that has dual enrollment in the past, and she’s like, ‘Oh, why don’t you do dual enrollment?’” Maria expressed, “I talked to friends who are also Hispanics in our college, and there’s always this sense of, ‘Well, you’re going to be the first one.’” Parents, dual enrollment teachers, high school counselors and peers played a role in encouraging and supporting students in their pursuit of college classes. In addition to describing the individuals who impacted their decision to engage in dual credit classes, the participants recounted their experiences with participating in the dual enrollment program. The following theme provides stories of participants’ experiences with their high school dual enrollment courses and how those experiences served as a beneficial transition to college.

**Theme 3: High School Dual Enrollment as a Positive Transition to College**

According to Tinto (1993), students who academically integrate to college are more likely to persist. Dual enrollment programs can provide students with rigorous college coursework and exposure to college to help them successfully transition into their roles as college students (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). All 10 participants felt that taking dual credit classes smoothed their transition to the community college. As compared to her regular high school classes and current community college classes, Grace described her dual enrollment classes as a “good transition, and it’s not such a shock. You’re not thrown into this college atmosphere all of a sudden. You kind of get eased into it.” Sophie depicted her experience with dual enrollment as:
dual enrollment is just a small piece of college, just taste of college while you’re still in high school . . . now you have kind of like a sample of where you’re going instead of all you know about college is what the teachers tell you.

Next are five subthemes that were grouped to form this central theme. They include easier transition, preparation, and exposure to college; higher expectations and the ability to manage a heavier workload; motivation, work ethic, effort, and independence; similar classroom, collaboration, and convenience of a high school setting; and save money, time, and earn college credits.

**Easier transition, preparation, and exposure to college.** Participants thought that dual enrollment gave them some exposure to college, which aided with their assimilation to college. Omar stated, “It helped me have the mindset prepared instead of going the first day of college and just being faced with or being exposed to something I hadn’t been exposed to before.” Maya said, “It [dual enrollment] opens up your mind to what college will be like and makes you a little bit less anxious, especially for Hispanic students.” Dual enrollment pushed participants to learn about and use on-campus college resources. Makala revealed,

I have used the tutoring center quite a bit for all of my, mostly, math, and I have used them before when I was in dual enrollment to help me with my writing skills, so it helped me prepare for college. I use the writing center here, and I use the math services.

Maria also visited the community college campus during the period she took dual credit courses at her high school. She met with college advisors to map out a plan for taking college classes that fit into her career plans. Maria reflected on how the enrollment process prepared her for college.

Through taking dual enrollment courses, I had to come to the college to ask questions about credits, what taking these courses would be going towards. I believe that’s when I
first became familiar with the layout towards receiving a degree. So being exposed to that really helped when I became a freshman on the campus, because I knew which services in the office I needed. I knew where to go as far as entering the building and asking for an appointment here.

Participants found that participating in the dual enrollment program gave students a glimpse of what being a college student is like and helped them in their transition to college. In the subsequent subtheme, participants describe the higher expectations placed on them and the challenges of managing a demanding workload in their dual enrollment courses.

**Higher expectations and the ability to manage a heavier workload.** Since dual enrollment classes are college courses, one would expect that they would be more challenging and taught at a higher level than non-dual enrollment classes. Nine participants expressed that more work was involved in their dual credit classes as compared to their non-dual courses. Maya stated, “It [dual enrollment] was different because, well, for one it would be more of a workload.” Sierra agreed, “. . . it was a lot more work. It was more; it was obviously tougher material. . . .” Makala remarked, “There was a lot of things you had to do as far as workload. There was a lot of work, but it wasn’t busy work.” Most students realized that their dual enrollment teachers wanted to prepare them for college. Eddy reflected on something his dual enrollment instructors said, “They [dual enrollment teachers] stated in the beginning of the course and towards the end that this was a college course. It was supposed to make you work, so they wanted to get us ready for the college experience.” For some students, it took some time to adjust to the high level of work expected of them. Maria recalled a time when she realized that she needed to step up to the academic demands that dual enrollment participation required of her or risk failing her course utterly.
That first semester [in the dual credit course] I got a D. I never expected the amount of work that was going to be involved in participating in a dual enrollment class. I think by the second semester, I had gotten a B. It took a period of adjustment, and it took me having to, in my eyes, fail to be able to see what I needed to work on and to understand that was what was expected of me.

Other students like Lena did not fully understand how the higher expectations of dual enrollment would aid her until after graduating high school. Lena acknowledged,

The expectations were a bit higher, but I also kind of, in the back of my head, was like, “Oh, this is a college class.” I just never knew how it [dual enrollment] would actually benefit me in the end. That’s when I realized that I was so glad I did that [dual enrollment].

Although most students confirmed that their dual enrollment courses were more demanding than their non-dual coursework, one participant, Sarina, stated that the workload for her dual credit class was no different than her other high school classes. “It [dual enrollment class] felt like a regular high school class.” To manage the heavier workload and expectations placed on students, participants recognized that to be successful in their roles as college students, they needed to demonstrate drive, independence, and a good work ethic.

**Motivation, work ethic, effort, and independence.** Motivation, work ethic, effort, and independence refer to the willingness on the part of students to take responsibility and the initiative to ensure their success in college and beyond. Eddy described how in his senior year of high school he had to change his way of doing things to be triumphant in his dual credit classes and other college courses.
I had to change how I approached my assignments, because previously, even in my junior year with my other dual enrollment classes, I didn’t really need to put in too much effort to the work. I would still be able to breeze by with an A or a B, and that would be fine with me. However, going into my senior year when things really became more difficult, I had to change my work ethic to where it could match that of the course of what it required. . . . I forced myself to step up to that challenge, to make myself a better academic learner, as well as a harder worker when it came to not just academics, but to overall life in general.

Multiple participants described a successful student as someone who is motivated. Sierra used the term “self-motivated,” and Makala commented, “I feel like that’s super important to have that motivation and just do it for yourself and as far as you just have to work really hard to do what you want to do.” Maria described a successful college student as “. . . someone who is passionate about what they are studying. Someone who is driven.” Others mentioned that being successful means being in control of your success. Lena stated that being “independent” is a trait of a good student, while Sarina said, “It’s a good strategy to just start getting responsible for yourself.” Omar further pointed out that “Once they [students] leave that four-year university or any college or institution, they’re on their own, working, getting their life together.” In the two following subthemes, participants describe the aspects of taking dual credit courses in a high school setting that were beneficial to participants. First, students liked the convenience of taking dual credit classes in their high schools and how the high school classroom mirrored the community college environment.

**Similar classroom, collaboration, and convenience of a high school setting.** Nine participants revealed that taking dual enrollment classes at their high schools was advantageous
in terms of accessibility, similarity to the community college environment, and the opportunity to collaborate with peers. Lack of transportation can serve as an obstacle for students who may not have the means to drive to a college campus to take classes. Lena liked the fact that her dual enrollment classes took place at her high school. She stated, “I’m actually glad they were offered at the high school because some people can’t drive over here, so it gives them more opportunities to be able to receive dual enrollment credit without having to come here.” Likewise, Makala said, “I liked having it at my high school. It would be less driving, I guess, but it was just helpful.” In addition to convenience, some students found the community college environment comparable to their high school classrooms. Sierra noted that “. . . going to high school to a community college, the setting, it’s not a huge college. I feel like it’s kind of the same.” Grace believed that the classroom environment in her dual credit classes was structured similarly to her classes at the community college campus regarding size and the way the teacher taught. She stated, “I would think that’s pretty similar. The same type of structure academically.” Equally, Lena said, “I would say the community college classes are not that much different from any high school class. They’re the same size classes. Classes even remind me of high school classes.” Participants enjoyed the convenience of taking dual enrollment courses at their high schools and felt that the classroom setting in high school was similar to college classrooms.

Participants also found that the collaboration that occurred in their dual enrollment schoolrooms was favorable in their transition to the community college campus. Although Maya thought that there were some differences between taking college-level classes in a high school environment and on a college campus, she acknowledged that there were some parallels. Maya noted:
In college, a lot of the stuff we do is in group work. That's one of the things we would do for dual. It was a lot of group work stuff. We would sit in groups, participate in groups. That’s a lot of what we do here, so I feel like it helped with the social aspect.

Eddy concurred, “There was some collaboration such as a research project in groups that we were doing in the high school that I think really did help, I would say, to get ready for college.”

In addition to providing accounts of accessibility, classroom structure, and collaborative opportunities, participants told stories of how participating in dual enrollment helped them save money and get a jumpstart on their college education.

**Save money, time, and earn college credits.** Nearly all the participants viewed dual enrollment as a way to receive college credits and get a head start on their college education without incurring significant debt. Eddy took advantage of every dual credit course that was available to him in his junior and senior year of high school so that he could save money and time.

It just seemed like a better financial option. . . . Those are classes that I don’t need to spend any money on, that I don’t need to worry about books that I don’t need to spend money to get. . . . I could get college credits for high school classes that would aid both towards my financial situation, as well as not needing to retake the classes in college . . . . I was able to get, I believe, 30 or so credits out of the way throughout high school, so those are all credits that I don’t need to take any more.

Both Grace and Lena chose to participate in dual enrollment as a way to cut down on their educational costs and complete their prerequisite coursework required to get into the nursing program. Grace shared her thoughts on dual enrollment.
Why not pay for it [dual enrollment] and then get the college credits, so you don’t have to do that again in college. . . . I was kind of in a hurry to get, let’s say to nursing school. There’s all these prerequisite courses you have to take before you get there, and it helped me a lot as far as time. I had already gotten my English done. I had already gotten math and even a humanities. So, that helped me an entire semester. If I hadn’t done the dual enrollment, I would have probably still been working on the classes for the prerequisites and then waiting for nursing school. It helped me get ahead.

Lena echoed Grace’s remarks.

You save so much more money. . . . I just wanted to get it out of the way, so I had more time to go into nursing, so I could do it quicker. . . . My humanities courses were completed, which is what I need in nursing, and my English 101 and 102 classes were already done, so I didn’t have to take those classes anymore, and I was already a step ahead of the game.

Other participants saw dual enrollment as a cheaper option to the community college or university. Makala commented,

. . . because my family isn’t very extremely wealthy so, as far as I know, it’s a lot cheaper to do it in dual enrollment than it is doing it at the community college. . . . I wanted to do it in high school, and I wanted to get out of community college in a timely manner so I wouldn’t have to spend as much money putting it into a community college, so I could save as much money to go to a university.

Omar and Sierra expressed similar views as Makala. Omar felt that dual enrollment was a good financial option, “. . . especially for families of Arizona, they maybe can’t afford to send them out to another university.” He also perceived dual enrollment as “a good stepping stone into the
college.” Likewise, Sierra stated, “I didn’t want to go straight into university and get into a lot of debt. . . . It was just to get ahead.” The majority of participants viewed dual enrollment as a way to jumpstart their postsecondary education by earning college credits at little cost.

In addition to academic integration, social integration is necessary in order for students to successfully transition to college and persist (Tinto, 1993). Participants in the following theme provided information regarding their experiences with social integration.

**Theme 4: Social Integration**

Social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside the classroom (Tinto, 1975). All but one participant stated that they were able to socially assimilate to college. Maya felt that participating in dual enrollment “helped with the social aspect” of transitioning to college. Grace also easily adapted to college because she had “friends that moved to the same college” with her. Omar, Maria, and Sarina became actively involved in clubs when they arrived at the community college. Sarina revealed, “Socially, I got more involved. Clubs, watching for events on campus, trying out or getting interviewed to become peer mentor on campus . . . volunteering on campus, being active.” Maria saw successful students as those who are “super involved on their campus.” She stated,

I got here, and I was involved, and that’s how I began to know a lot more students outside of that club, because we’d interact with others. And so, it was just really, really nice. I have made amazing friends through that. . . . Coming to this campus and being able to be so involved, and already having clubs here that celebrate not only Hispanic or Latino culture, but diversity and inclusion and community; I think that was amazing. Omar even “started a club at the college.” For others, the social transition to college was easy because of their outgoing personalities. Lena stated, “I was able to adapt. That’s partly because
I’m more of an extrovert.” Makala said that she speaks “more with students” in college than she did in high school. Sierra and Sophie also made an effort to connect with other students. Sierra commented, “I was social, it was just working with different types of people. . . . I tried to be more like get to know people around me.” Sophie was happy that she took the initiative to form friendships in her college classes because “college is a great place for networking.”

Eddy was the only student who did not believe that participating in dual enrollment in his high school helped him adjust socially to college. He said,

In high school, I was in the band. I was on the high school jazz band, marching band, so on and so forth, and I stuck with the same group of people for four years. However, now transferring over to college, I’m not part of the band program here, so I don’t really have anybody that I seem to be able to relate to, so I just mostly keep to myself. . . . I’m not a very outgoing person.

The student accounts in this theme reinforced the studies by An (2015) and Karp (2007, 2012) who discovered that dual enrollment aided students with their social assimilation to college. In addition to helping students socially integrate into college, An (2015) and Karp (2007, 2012) found that dual enrollment helped students acquire skills required of them to succeed in college. The next theme provides an account of the skills participants gained from their participation in dual enrollment.

**Theme 5: Skills Acquired from Dual Enrollment Participation**

Participants mentioned that dual enrollment helped them develop the necessary skills to achieve academic success in college. Participants described various skills they gained from participating in the dual enrollment program. When asked what kind of skills, if any, students acquired from taking dual credit classes, Eddy responded,
I gained a better understanding of how to manage my time, not to leave an assignment until the last second, but to rather space it out over the series of weeks beforehand, before it was due. I also learned how to critically research, especially for big projects, and not to rely on either my former experience or the first article on Wikipedia that I came across. I was forced to be able to critically think about . . . in class, especially. It forced me to critically think about the discussions we would have, and understand that these were the type of conversation that could be possibly brought up in my future. I was forced to change how I communicated in class and communicated out of class as well.

Data analysis initially revealed four themes relating to the skills participants gained from dual enrollment participation. The four similar themes became subthemes after they were grouped to form the overarching theme, skills acquired from dual enrollment participation. The subthemes include time management and organizational skills; research and study skills; reading, writing, and critical thinking; and help-seeking and communication skills.

**Time management and organizational skills.** According to Karp (2007), pupils who effectively transition to college possess solid time-management skills. All participants expressed that to succeed in their dual enrollment and on-campus community college classes, they learned how to manage their time and develop their organizational skills. Eddy stated that dual enrollment helped him improve his time management skills. Likewise, Maya reflected on her experience in dual enrollment.

It [dual enrollment] helped me. How do I say it? Work on my time management skills. I feel like that really improved for me because before that, during my first beginning years of high school, I had no idea of how to manage my time. Then, when I started taking a
dual enrollment class, I kind of figured out a way to set time aside for this, and then it was, like, set aside time for each subject.

Lena, Makala, Maria, Sierra, and Sophie felt that they had to learn to manage their time well, and also how to better organize their days. Sierra articulated, “I had to make sure I had a time of the day where I could just study and dedicate it to studying . . . and organize how I was going do things.” Makala noted that “As far as study time, I feel like I just have to go home and get started on it . . . I make sure everything’s organized, everything’s laid out. I have a planner. All my organization really helps me to succeed here.” Similarly, Maria said, “It [dual enrollment] did help me prepare how I manage my time . . . I had to suddenly learn an organizational system that was going to work for me.” While acquiring organizational and time management skills are necessary, students also need study and literacy skills to thrive in college.

**Research and study skills.** Participants learned research and study skills as well as time management and organizational skills. Eddy discovered in his dual enrollment English classes how to perform research. “I also learned how to critically research, especially for big projects, and not to rely on either my former experience or the first article on Wikipedia that I came across.” In addition to realizing how to conduct research, a recurring subtheme among participants was learning how to study. Omar stated, “I had to learn the hard way during dual enrollment how to study.” Maria commented, “I really did have to learn how to adjust my work . . . my study habits.” Grace believed that in college “you study differently.” Sarina also changed her study habits when she started taking college classes. She stated that she had to “put more effort into studying” to maintain good grades in her classes. Besides learning how to research and study, participants developed their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.
**Reading, writing, and critical thinking.** Learning to read, write, and think critically are essential skills in order to be successful in school, work, and life in general. Critical thinking and literacy skills are particularly significant as more jobs in the United States are requiring skilled workers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Participants in this study felt that dual enrollment participation helped them enhance their literacy skills. Grace reflected on her experience with a dual enrollment course she took at her high school.

The projects maybe were a little more advanced or the papers we were writing. I remember writing a lot of papers for some reason. I think that was a little bit different than what I had done before in high school . . . That teacher taught us a lot about writing papers and things like that. That helped me a lot when I got to college.

Lena described her workload in dual credit classes as “a lot more writing,” and “a lot more reading,” and Eddy recalled how dual enrollment “forced” him “to critically think about the discussions” that took place in his courses. Omar commented that to be successful, he “took the initiative of reading books . . . challenging critically, thinking how to question everything.”

Makala saved an artifact from her time as a dual enrollment student in an English composition class which she often refers to for writing assistance in all her college courses.

She [dual enrollment instructor] had given us this paper that would help us edit our essays and prompts and any sort of writing, and it would just kind of perfect that paper, and I still use that to this day for all of my papers that I use for all of my classes.

While literacy is fundamental to student achievement, other skills such as seeking assistance and initiating communication with instructors and peers were equally vital among participants.

**Help-seeking and communication skills.** Most participants acknowledged that communicating with their instructors and peers and reaching out to them for assistance was
necessary to ensure their success in college. Eddy believed that participating in dual enrollment helped him improve his communication skills. He said, “I was forced to change how I communicated in class and communicated out of class as well.” Success included “… good communication skills, being able to talk to the professors, being able to talk to peers, ask questions, to be able to fully understand the content of the courses.” Likewise, Omar remarked, “… to know communication is big. Talking is big.” He “asked more questions” and received “help and inspiration from teachers.”

When Makala had questions about a particular assignment, she sought answers from her instructor or classmates.

When I was confused about something, I would email the teacher, or I would send a message to someone that was in the class, asking them to review what we went over or to review the assignment if I was having any trouble or anything like that. . . . I swap numbers so I can have someone to reflect off of, like, “Did you understand what the instructor said today in class?”

Once Grace arrived at the community college, she immediately formed a study group. She found that reviewing course material with her peers advantageous.

When I got to college, I made a study group. I had a few friends there to study with. That helped me a lot because I was able to speak with and quiz each other or whatever, speak with the friends I had. Just learn a different perspective, not everybody looks at things that same.

Sarina said that the “biggest change” she made when beginning college is that she “started going more for” a “growth mindset” like asking for help when she needed it.
Although participants felt that participation in dual enrollment helped them acquire new skills, they voiced their concerns and obstacles they and their peers faced regarding dual enrollment in their high schools.

**Theme 6: Obstacles to Participation in Dual Enrollment in High School**

Hispanic students encounter multiple obstacles to achieving a college education. Insufficient academic preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010), financial difficulties (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014), lack of family support and knowledge about college (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Núñez et al. (2011), and family obligations (Arbona & Nora, 2007) represent a few of the barriers to college persistence and degree attainment. Although participants felt that dual enrollment participation helped them adjust to the academic challenges of college, they expressed drawbacks to taking dual credit courses in a high school setting. Participants thought that participating in dual enrollment did not give them the full college experience. They described differences between their dual enrollment and college classrooms experiences. Sierra stated,

> There was still a difference in a sense that because we were still in high school, our teachers still kind of had more control of how they wanted us to do things, or I feel like in college, or now, they give you more of the option of doing things your own way.

A major challenge to taking dual credit classes in high school was that participants did not get to completely experience being part of a college environment.

Participants overwhelming believed that high schools and colleges should do more to provide students and their parents information about the dual enrollment program. Most of the participants had parents who did not attend college. Hence, the participants have less access to cultural capital concerning the college-going experience and therefore count more on other
individuals such as school personnel and Hispanics in their social systems to collect information about higher education options (Núñez et al., 2011). When asked what recommendations he has to improve the dual enrollment program, Omar commented, “If [high school and college employees] would elaborate a lot more the communication would be better, a lot more students would have done it, and I recommend to a lot of students to do dual enrollment.” Along with a shortage of information about the dual enrollment program, participants expressed that family obligations and lack of role models hinder Hispanic student participation in dual enrollment programs. Female participants revealed that they had more significant responsibilities at home than their white female peers and that they would like to see Hispanic students who previously participated in dual enrollment mentor current dual enrollment students. Maria suggested,

I think having some sort of student ambassador who has gone through the process, be able to go to these high schools and almost be a mentor. Like a dual enrollment mentor. Someone who can . . . who is familiar with it, and who can relate to you, and can also encourage you.

The lack of information regarding the accessibility of dual enrollment, what is involved in the program, the absence of role models, and family responsibilities served as barriers to students’ taking dual credit courses.

**Missing out on the college experience.** Although participants felt that participation in dual enrollment helped them academically and socially integrate into college, they also believed that they did not fully experience being a college student by taking dual credit courses at their high school. Lena reflected on her experience with dual enrollment in her school:

You’re not able to actually experience college. You’re just taking another class in high school while gaining credit. If I had to come to the community college to actually take it
[dual enrollment], then I would be able to . . . I don’t know, just experience college more, but since you’re taking it at a high school, you just feel like you’re in high school. When speaking about her dual enrollment class, Sarina stated, “It just felt like a regular high school class. It’s just still in a high school, taught in a high school classroom. I think you have to be on campus to experience that college experience.” Sophie spoke of how her high school dual enrollment classroom differed from her on-campus community college classrooms.

. . . the moment you step onto a college campus during college hours, it feels completely different from high school. . . . In my high school dual enrollment class, we were all at desks. They were the ones where the table connects to the chair, and you had your assigned seat.

Because credentialed high school teachers taught dual enrollment classes during regular high school hours, students who participated in dual enrollment courses at their school received more classroom instruction time than they would have if they took classes on the community college campus.

Participants stated that differences existed between the work assigned by their high school and college instructors. Eddy said,

Even with the same credentials, the high school classroom and the college classroom is a little bit different. . . . I feel like as opposed to my dual enrollment classes in high school, the college classes here definitely have more structure to them. There aren’t so many filler assignments just to be thrown at the students just to get them done.

Maya indicated that by taking college classes in her high school, she was not exposed to the diverse individuals she experienced in her community college campus classrooms. “. . . in college you’ll have people of different ages, different experiences, and different grade levels . . .
For high school, it’s just all the same like-minded people. College, more diverse.” When asked whether she preferred to take dual credit courses at her high school or on the community college campus, Maria commented,

> I was aware that the college environment was a lot different than our high school environment. I think I still would’ve taken my dual enrollment class in high school, but if the option were available to me, I would’ve taken it here just so I can better acclimate myself to the college campus that I was at.

Students thought that their high school classroom experiences did not necessarily provide them with the same experiences that they received in their courses on the college campus.

In addition to missing out on the college experience, another barrier to participation in dual enrollment is the lack of information about the dual enrollment program including the absence of information regarding financial assistance for students.

**Lack of knowledge, information, and financial assistance.** When asked what suggestions they would make to encourage more Hispanic students to participate and to improve the dual enrollment programs offered at high schools, the majority of participants cited that high schools and colleges should do more to relay information about dual enrollment to students and parents. The majority of the participants had parents who never attended college, so they did not understand college processes and procedures. Makala said, “My family never went to college, or a lot of my culture, they don’t really do anything as far as college.” Because Makala’s parents did not go to college, Makala had less access to cultural capital concerning the college-going experience, and therefore she had to rely on others to learn about the college system. Lena shared similar sentiments.
I wasn’t really sure what college would be like. My parents have never gone to college. They couldn’t tell me what to expect. . . . I think they should relay more information to parents, especially Hispanic parents, because my parents didn’t really understand what dual enrollment really was, so I had to explain to them. They didn’t really understand it, so it would be great to have someone who could inform Hispanic parents on the benefits of dual enrollment.

Other participants told stories of how they did not learn about the dual enrollment program until their senior year in high school, so they missed opportunities to take dual credit courses earlier in high school. Grace stated, “I didn’t know until my senior year. I think I could have started even earlier than that. So I think they should inform people more about it.” Sarina articulated the same views, “I didn’t find out until my senior year about dual enrollment, so I feel like I wish I would have known earlier about this, so I would have taken more classes.” Participants recommended that high schools and colleges should begin communicating with parents and students about the dual enrollment program when students first enter high school.

Before registering for dual credit classes, Maya had misconceptions that the dual enrollment program was reserved only for high achieving students. This mistaken belief nearly prevented her from enrolling in dual credit courses. She disclosed, “When I was in high school I’d always think, like, college, doing dual enrollment or honors was just for the smart kids. Definitely, they should make people more aware. Everyone should try them. It’s not just for a certain people.” She felt that schools should do more to provide students of all academic backgrounds and their parents’ information about the program.

Even after students registered for dual credit classes, they were not necessarily aware of what dual enrollment meant. Omar suggested that schools do more “to tell students what they’re
in for.” Often, students did not realize how the grade they earn in their high school dual enrollment class impacts their college grade point average. Sierra stated, “I was never told in high school like, if you got a B in this class or even a B or a C can really affect you once you move to college.” Participants also lacked information regarding tuition assistance opportunities as well as general awareness about dual enrollment. Sierra was not aware that she could have applied for tuition assistance. Otherwise she could have potentially taken more dual credit courses. Maya was told that no financial aid was available to her. Although Lena’s family was able to come up with enough money to fund her dual enrollment courses, some of her peers were less fortunate.

I know a few people that weren’t able to continue their courses [dual enrollment] because it was just too much money. One of my friends was Hispanic that was not able to pay for her classes [dual enrollment]. Now she has to take that class [in college], even though she did in high school, technically, but couldn’t afford it.

Though most participants perceived lack of information and financial resources as significant obstacles to dual enrollment participation, several female participants voiced that family obligations and lack of role models in the Hispanic community served as barriers to college.

**Family obligations and lack of role models.** Several female participants expressed that they had family obligations at home that their white female peers did not have. Makala commented that “The [Hispanic] women kind of just stay home and take care of their husbands.” Likewise, Maria stated, “I had responsibilities at home that were expected of me.” Maria described the parents of her white peers as “permissive,” and her parents as “strict.” As a result, in high school, Maria found it difficult to relate to her white peers, and she did not encounter other Hispanics who enrolled in dual credit coursework. She declared, “I think that there needs to
be more representation of students who look like me.” Reflecting on her school years, Maria said,

I think that growing up, you never really saw Hispanic students in the college scene, in television or in movies, and even within my own family. I’m the first one to attend college and earn my degree. I never saw that within my own family. I never saw people like me participating in this institution.

Maria would like to see current Hispanic college students, who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, serve as role models and mentors for other high school Hispanic students who are contemplating whether to enroll in dual credit courses and who are currently in the program.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate how current Hispanic students in an Arizona community college, who completed dual credit coursework while in high school, described their experience with dual enrollment classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in their academic success. Ten participants were interviewed and told stories about their participation in dual enrollment. The participants came to the community college from six high schools and took a variety of dual credit courses. Originally eighteen themes emerged from data analysis. The themes were then organized based on their similarities into six overarching themes: significance of education to the Hispanic family and community, encouragement and support, high school dual enrollment as a positive transition to college, social integration, skills acquired from dual enrollment participation, and obstacles to participation in dual enrollment in high school.
Many of the participants were first-generation college-going students with high aspirations. Achieving a college education was essential to them because their parents did not have the same opportunities to attend a postsecondary institution. Participants viewed dual enrollment as a way to get a jump start on their college education, save money, and serve as role models for their community.

Participants’ parents, dual credit teachers, high school counselors, and peers influenced their decision to enroll in dual credit courses. The majority of the participants told of receiving encouragement and support from their parents and dual credit instructors. Participants received individual attention from their instructors and developed relationships with them. The students felt that their teachers prepared them for the academic demands of college, and the participants learned to take responsibility for their educational success. The students also gained skills in managing their time, organizing their day, conducting research, studying, and improving their literacy and communication skills. As a result, participants were able to successfully integrate into college.

In addition to academic assimilation to college, participants indicated that they socially integrated to college. Participants actively engaged in their college classrooms and half were involved in clubs and activities outside their classes. Although participants acknowledged that dual enrollment helped them assimilate to college, they cited several obstacles to dual enrollment participation. Participants mentioned that while they enjoyed the convenience of taking dual credit classes at their high schools, they felt that they were missing out on the full college experience. The students also cited that high schools and colleges should do more to relay information about dual enrollment opportunities to students and parents. Additionally, several female participants expressed that family obligations and the lack of role models served as
obstacles to participating in dual enrollment. The next chapter will provide an explanation of the findings, their significance, and suggestions of how the results can be useful to stakeholders.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Policymakers and educators view dual enrollment as one of the best ways to prepare students for college success and provide them with the opportunity to experience college coursework (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Hispanic students in particular stand to benefit from dual enrollment participation (Hoffman, 2005; Struhl & Vargas, 2012), and although they represent the largest and fastest growing minority ethnic population in the nation, Hispanics have the lowest educational completion rate of any other group (Camacho-Liu, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). However, Hispanic students who participate in dual enrollment attend postsecondary institutions at higher rates than non-dual participants (Hoffman, 2005). C. Jones, Institutional Research Analyst, reported that Hispanic dual enrollment community college students also have higher grade point averages and attainment rates than non-dual participants (personal communication, May 18, 2017). Although policymakers and educators view dual enrollment as a strategy for achieving college success for a diverse range of individuals, Hispanics are underrepresented in most dual enrollment programs nationwide (Zinth, 2014). While there are studies that demonstrate dual enrollment positively influences college success for varied individuals, limited studies investigated students’ perspectives on the program. In particular, little qualitative research exists that explores how Hispanic students in a community college conceptualize their experience in dual enrollment at their high school. Two research questions were investigated to understand Hispanic students’ experiences with dual enrollment programs offered at their high schools and what makes students transition to the role of a college student and persist:
1) How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes?

2) How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success?

Tinto’s theory of integration (1975) and socialization theories, anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory frameworks were used to understand why and how Hispanic dual enrollment participants acclimate to college and persist. Tinto (1975) theorized that persistence correlates with how well students academically and socially integrate to college. Academic integration occurs when students adjust to intellectual demands of college, and social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside the classroom (Tinto, 1975). Without academic and social assimilation, students do not successfully transition or persist in college (Tinto, 1993).

This study also used the socialization theories of anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory to understand why and how Hispanic dual enrollment participants adapt to their role as college students and succeed. Broadly defined, socialization is a learning process that allows individuals to discover the skills, customs, and norms to become part of society (Anastasiu, 2011). Many students come to college with preconceived ideas of the characteristics essential to achieving college success, and that dual enrollment helps students gain the knowledge, skills, and behaviors required of them to succeed in college (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). Most students shift into their roles as college students through anticipatory socialization and role rehearsal. Anticipatory socialization allows students to learn about the norms and customs required of college students, but it does not provide students with the opportunity to practice a new role (An, 2015; Karp, 2007, 2012). However, “Socializing organizations, such as
dual enrollment programs, may serve as a way to correct for inaccurate perceptions individuals developed during the anticipatory socialization process” (An, 2015, p. 102). Role rehearsal allows students to actively practice the part of being a college student (Karp, 2012). Students who participate in dual enrollment engage in role rehearsal and perform the role of a college student, thereby learning the practical demands of how to successfully manage college-level work (Karp, 2012). Qualitative data was gathered through interviews conducted with participants to understand how Hispanic students describe their experiences with dual enrollment and the role of dual enrollment in their academic success. Data were analyzed through the lens of Tinto’s integration model (1975) and socialization theories: anticipatory socialization, role rehearsal, and role theory frameworks.

A transcendental phenomenological methodology was used to obtain the perceptions of 10 community college students through in-person semi-structured interviews. Participants interviewed attended six high schools and took anywhere from one to seven dual credit courses at their respective high schools. Eight participants took English, three participants took mathematics, two participants studied history, one participant took humanities, one participant studied literature, and one participant took music theory courses for dual credit. They were currently enrolled at the college and completed anywhere from one to five semesters of coursework after matriculation to the community college.

After interviews were transcribed, they were sent to participants for member checking. Data analysis followed Moustakas (1994) three-step process: Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation. These steps were used to minimize researcher personal experiences or biases to best realize the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam; 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Initially, 18 potential themes emerged from
the first round of data analysis, and they were arranged into six overarching themes, with subthemes throughout all but one overarching theme. They included: (1) significance of education to the Hispanic family and community; (2) encouragement and support; (3) high school dual enrollment as a positive transition to college; (4) social integration; (5) skills acquired from dual enrollment participation; and (6) obstacles to participation in dual enrollment in high school. This chapter includes an interpretation of the data as it portrays the six emergent themes. The chapter also discusses implications and offers recommendations for action and further study.

**Interpretation of Findings**

Participants viewed their experiences with dual enrollment as mostly positive. Participation in the dual enrollment program allowed students to obtain an early start on their postsecondary studies at minimal cost. All participants found that dual enrollment aided them in their transition and success in college. The majority of participants cited that taking dual credit courses in high school exposed them to the academic rigor and necessary skills to succeed in college. Participation in dual enrollment helped students academically and socially integrate into college. Although participation in dual enrollment was primarily advantageous, participants cited some concerns about taking dual credit classes at their high schools. They felt that by taking dual credit courses at their high schools, they missed out on the full college experience. Participants also mentioned that the lack of information about the dual enrollment program, the absence of financial assistance opportunities, family obligations, and lack of role models served as barriers for Hispanic participation in dual enrollment. Despite these barriers, participants were able to take advantage of the dual enrollment program, and they all described their experience with their
dual credit classes as favorable. The following two subsections describe the interpretation of findings as they relate to the research questions.

**How do Hispanic community college students understand and describe their experience with dual enrollment classes?**

Participants described their experiences with dual enrollment as mostly positive. Dual enrollment allowed students to get a jumpstart on their college education without incurring significant debt. Participants expressed that dual enrollment participation helped smooth their transition to college and exposed them to college processes and procedures. Additionally, participants told of developing meaningful relationships with their dual credit instructors. Furthermore, participants described their experience with their dual credit classes as convenient and similar to the college environment.

Although participants’ experiences with their dual credit classes were predominately advantageous, participants mentioned drawbacks with their involvements in dual enrollment. Participants felt that they missed out on the full college experience, lacked information about the availability of the dual credit courses and what participating in the dual enrollment program involved, and some believed that family obligations and lack of role models negatively impacted their experiences or participation in the program.

*Jumpstart college education at low cost.* The majority of the participants were first-generation college-going students, and they wanted to pursue college studies to honor their parents who had not had opportunities to obtain a high school or postsecondary diploma. Participants noted aspirations of obtaining bachelor’s and graduate degrees. They perceived dual enrollment as a means to gain an early start on their postsecondary education. Participants
wanted a financially secure future for themselves and their families, and they viewed their participation in dual enrollment as a way to earn college credits at a low cost.

**Easier transition and exposure to college.** All participants believed that their experiences in dual enrollment aided them with their transition to college and exposed them to college processes and procedures. The majority of students described their dual credit courses as more rigorous than their non-dual classes, and that their experience with their dual credit courses helped them acquire the skills they needed to transition and succeed in their on-campus community college classes. Only one participant felt that there were no differences in academic rigor between her dual credit class and her other non-dual courses. However, that participant acknowledged that her dual credit class was unlike her other high school courses but similar to her other college classes in that it required more collaboration with peers in and outside of the classroom.

Moreover, participants described dual enrollment as providing students a glimpse of what being a college student entails. Participants found taking dual credit classes exposed them to college processes and resources. Enrolling in dual credit courses allowed students to familiarize themselves with the college registration process, payment procedures, and the college student information system. Several participants also visited the college campus and used college resources during their time as dual enrollment students. One participant indicated that she met with academic advisors on the college campus to devise a list of college classes that fit in with her career goals. Another participant used the tutoring center for math and writing assistance. Participants disclosed that because dual enrollment gave them a preview of college expectations and processes, they were less anxious about transitioning to a postsecondary institution.
Connections with dual enrollment instructors. In addition to describing dual enrollment as a good transition and exposure to college, participants expressed receiving support and encouragement from their parents, peers, high school counselors, and especially their dual enrollment instructors. Once enrolled in their dual credit classes, most participants developed meaningful relationships with their dual enrollment teachers. Many participants thought that their dual enrollment teachers were more approachable, forgiving, flexible, and more helpful than their community college instructors. Participants described their dual enrollment teachers as being helpful, uplifting, and reassuring. Because participants received more individual attention from their dual credit teachers, they developed more meaningful bonds with them than they did with their community college instructors. Fostering connections with their dual credit teachers was essential to students.

Accessible and similar to college. Participants described their experience with dual enrollment at their high school as accessible and similar to the community college environment. The students enjoyed the idea of taking dual credit classes at their high school during their regular school hours because they earned college credits without the added extra hours of attending college. Additionally, because participants took dual credit courses at their high school they did not have to worry about driving elsewhere to take college classes. Participants stated that lack of transportation could serve as an obstacle for students who may not have the means to drive to a college campus to take classes. Participants also enjoyed taking dual enrollment classes in a familiar environment and with students they already knew.

Moreover, participants felt that their dual enrollment high school classrooms were similar to the community college environment. Participants expressed that their dual credit classes and on-campus college classes were structured alike regarding size and the way the teacher taught.
The students also acknowledged that their high school classrooms were similar to on-campus college classes in that both settings gave participants the opportunity to work in groups and collaborate with their peers.

**Missed the full college experience.** Although participants expressed that participating in dual enrollment at their high school was accessible and similar to the community college environment, some believed that they missed out on the full college experience. Even though the workload was demanding, they still were convening in a high school classroom surrounded by other high school students, some of whom they had known since grade school. Participants were not exposed to the diverse student population and varied viewpoints that a community college offers by taking college classes at their high schools. Additionally, several participants felt they received more assignments in their dual credit classes than they would have in their on-campus college classes because dual enrollment courses in high school meet more often and for longer periods of instruction than classes at the community college.

**Limited information about dual enrollment.** Besides missing out on the college experience, participants voiced that communication about the dual enrollment program and financial assistance opportunities for Hispanic students and their families was inadequate. The majority of the participants had parents who never attended college, and consequently did not understand college processes and procedures. Because their parents did not go to college, participants had less access to cultural capital concerning the college-going experience, and therefore had to rely on others to learn about the college system. Participants were fortunate enough to learn about the program from teachers, counselors, and their peers. Camacho-Lui (2011) stated that students who come from families that do not understand college processes and procedures might find it challenging to fully engage in college life, which can lead them to leave
school without completing a degree. Although most of the participants in this study came from families who had limited or no understanding of the college-going experience, the information and support they received from their dual credit instructors, counselors, and peers helped participants assimilate and succeed in college.

Participants stated that they learned about the dual enrollment program only in their senior year of high school, and as a result, missed out on opportunities to earn more college credits earlier in high school. Sarina stated, “I didn’t find out until my senior year about dual enrollment, so I feel like I wish I would have known earlier about this, so I would have taken more classes.” Even after students learned about the availability of dual enrollment programs, some students had misconceptions that the dual enrollment program was reserved only for honors and Advanced Placement (AP) students. Unlike AP courses, which are typically offered to high achieving students, dual enrollment programs provide both academic and vocational courses to students who are high, middle, and low achieving, including those pursuing career and technical education studies (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2003; Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2000; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2008). The mistaken belief that dual enrollment is reserved for high achieving pupils can inhibit students from enrolling in dual credit courses who may otherwise be eligible for the program. Furthermore, participants described the lack of information about tuition assistance opportunities and the absence of funding prevented their Hispanic peers from participating in the dual enrollment program.

**Family obligations and lack of role models.** Some participants cited family obligations, and the lack of role models impacts students’ experiences with dual enrollment and can hinder students’ participation in the program. Several students stated that in high school they had difficulty connecting with their white peers. Participants felt that they had more family
responsibilities and that their parents were stricter than the parents of their white peers who were more lenient. Also, participants voiced that they would like to see current Hispanic college students, who participated in dual enrollment while in high school, serve as role models and mentors for other high school Hispanic students who are contemplating whether to enroll in dual credit courses and who are currently in the program.

**How do Hispanic community college students perceive and relate the role of dual enrollment in their academic success?**

Participants cited several aspects of their experiences in dual enrollment that impacted their academic success. The extra classroom instruction time and individual attention they received from their dual enrollment instructors helped them succeed in their classes. Participants viewed dual enrollment as assisting them to academically integrate to college by exposing them to academic rigor and providing students with the necessary skills to succeed in college. Additionally, dual enrollment participation helped students socially assimilate to college both inside and outside the classroom.

**Role of the dual enrollment instructor in academic success.** Dual enrollment instructors influenced participants’ academic achievements. Participants in this study took dual credit courses during their regular high school hours which gave them longer classroom instruction time than the classes on the college campus. Participants described their dual credit teachers as providing more one-on-one instruction to students than their college instructors. Dual enrollment teachers were supportive and accommodating when students needed assistance. Participants also expressed that their dual enrollment instructors taught in a way that made it easier to understand the material. The additional time spent with their high school instructors
gave participants an opportunity to develop a greater bond between students and their teachers and aided in their academic success.

**Exposure to the academic demands of college.** Participants perceived that dual enrollment helped them successfully assimilate to college and found that their dual credit courses were academically challenging. They described the workload in their dual credit courses as more rigorous and required more outside of class homework than their other high school classes. Participants also stated that their dual credit instructors expected more from them than their other high school teachers. To manage the heavier workload and expectations placed on students, participants recognized that success in college required more effort, initiative, independence, and a good work ethic. They acknowledged that the higher expectations placed on them drove them to change their work ethic, exert more effort and to take responsibility for their work. As a result, participants felt that these essential traits improved academic achievement in college. However, the recognition of a rigorous curriculum was not unanimous, as one participant believed that her dual credit class was no more rigorous than her other high school classes.

**Gained skills.** Because participants’ dual credit classes were rigorous, participants learned new skills that helped them succeed in their dual enrollment classes and in courses they took at the community college. Participants acknowledged that as a result of participation in dual enrollment, they learned how to manage their time and develop organizational techniques that worked well for them. Developing these skills was crucial since nearly all participants held jobs while attending college. Also, participants learned how to properly conduct research, improve their study habits, and think critically. Participants voiced that the demanding reading and writing assignment loads in their dual credit courses helped them develop their literacy skills. Additionally, participants believed that dual enrollment enhanced their communication skills and
taught them to seek assistance from their peers and instructors. The skills participants acquired from dual enrollment participation helped them understand the role of a college student, which in turn helped participants achieve academic success.

**Social integration.** In addition to helping students academically integrate into college, participants believed that dual enrollment facilitated their social assimilation to college. Many of these participants were actively involved in clubs or other activities on campus, or they felt comfortable initiating relationships with other students in their classrooms. However, one participant believed that participating in dual enrollment in high school did not help him socially assimilate to college. He attributed his introverted personality for failure to connect with other students effectively. Although this participant did not interact with students outside the college classroom, he collaborated with peers in his dual credit classes which he acknowledged helped him assimilate to college. Participants expressed that dual enrollment participation was beneficial in assisting them to acquire both social and academic skills needed to succeed in college.

**Implications**

This study revealed that participation in the dual enrollment program in high school exposed students to the academic rigor of college and helped them understand the norms, and acquire skills and behaviors to successfully integrate into college and persist. The results of this study aligned with studies by An (2015), Garcia (2014), Hudson (2016), Kanny (2015), Karp (2007), Lile et al. (2017), Medvide and Bluestein (2010), and Thanawala (2016). The study at hand corroborated findings of Hudson (2016) and Kanny (2015) that dual enrollment exposes students to the college academic environment and increases their awareness of the inherent skills and practices expected of college students. Similarly, the results of this study substantiated Garcia’s (2014) findings that dual enrollment helps students learn academic and social norms
and behaviors required of college students. Findings of this study were also consistent with Thanawala (2016), who discovered that parental encouragement and support and cost were among the factors that influenced students’ decisions to participate in dual enrollment. Moreover, the results of this study supported Green’s (2007) findings, in which participants divulged that obtaining an early start on their college education and saving money were among the primary reasons for participating in dual enrollment. Furthermore, similar to participants in the study by Medvide and Bluestein (2010), participants in this study demonstrated clear goals. They had high educational aspirations and an average GPA of 3.4 at the time of this study, and participants were motivated to perform well. However, unlike Garcia (2014), Green, (2007), Hudson (2016), Kanny (2015), Medvide and Blustein (2010), and Thanawala (2016), who gathered the perceptions of participants who took dual credit at a community college, this study explored the views of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high school. Although this study was not comparative, these results also supported An’s (2015) findings that all students who participated in dual enrollment had higher GPAs and were more academically motivated and engaged than non-dual enrollees.

Findings of this study aligned with Karp (2007) who found that pupils who effectively transitioned to college possessed solid time-management skills and goals, took the initiative to get help for themselves, and understood college structures and practices. Karp (2007) stated that students who participate in dual enrollment effectively shift into college life and persist because taking dual credit classes gives students demanding coursework and may familiarize them with the behaviors and norms required of college students. Participants in this study occupied the social position of a college student when they started acquiring the skills and standards expected of college students. They behaved like other college students when conversing with instructors,
followed instructions, and completed their work assignments. Participants learned the role of a college student by adjusting to the academic demands of college through the establishment of a strong work ethic, putting extra effort into their work, and taking responsibility for their education. However, the participants in this study differed from Karp (2007) who interviewed participants during their first dual credit course in high school. Participants in this study had already transitioned and persisted one or more semesters in college after completing dual credit courses in high school. Three implications are presented below based on the findings of this study.

**Implication #1**

Policymakers and educators should consider whether the benefits of taking college classes in high school outweigh the benefits of enrolling in classes on a college campus, particularly for Hispanic students. When implementing dual enrollment programs, legislators and educators may want to reflect on how Hispanic students profit from dual credit courses offered at their high schools. The convenience of participating in dual credit courses during high school hours, without having to worry about taking additional classes that may compete with work or family obligations or transportation to another location, are factors that policymakers and educators should take into account. Also, some participants remarked that spending more time with their dual credit teachers than their on-campus college instructors allowed students to develop meaningful relationships with their instructors. Participants were less afraid to seek assistance when they had questions, and they felt more valued, engaged, and confident in their ability to succeed in college. Hence, legislators and educators may want to think about whether the extra classroom instruction time and one-on-one lessons students have with their dual
enrollment instructors in high school are more valuable to students’ transition and success in college than taking dual credit classes with college instructors on a community college campus.

Additionally, policymakers and educators should contemplate whether students who take dual enrollment courses on a college campus master additional skills, use more campus resources, and develop greater social and academic integration to college and whether that increased understanding prevails over offering dual credit classes in high school. Participants in this study were exposed to the academic rigor of college and acquired skills such as time management, better study habits, critical thinking, improved literacy, and how to conduct research. However, policymakers and educators may consider if dual credit classes were offered on a college campus whether these skills would be even more amplified. Moreover, only a few participants in this study used campus resources such as academic advisement and tutoring, but all participants were able to socially integrate to college even though not every student was involved in clubs and activities. Although Tinto (1975) stated that social integration happens when students create relationships and connections outside the classroom, Deil-Amen (2011) noted that academic and social connectedness could occur both inside and outside the classroom. Also, students who are not involved in social activities and clubs outside the school can still feel engaged in college (Deil-Amen, 2011). The group work and collaboration that occurred in their dual credit classes allowed participants to bond with their peers. Because dual enrollment taught students how to cooperate with others, participants were more comfortable in teaming up with peers both inside and outside the classroom when they arrived at the college campus.

Though all participants acknowledged that dual participation helped them successfully adapt to the college environment, several participants stated that they initially found transition from a high school to college challenging. Participants also expressed that by taking dual
enrollment in high school, they missed the full college experience. There are advantages to participating in dual credit courses at a community college, such as learning about and becoming familiar with the college environment, which helps students feel less anxious and more comfortable when they enter any college (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2010). Lile et al. (2017) discovered that students who took dual credit classes in a college setting benefited more than students who participated in dual enrollment at their high school. Students who earned dual credit in high school experienced less personal growth, understanding of the college construct, and connection with the college-student role than students who took dual credit classes at a community college (Lile et al., 2017). Hence, policymakers and educators must weigh whether offering dual credit courses at a high school or a college campus most benefits Hispanic students.

**Implication #2**

Policymakers and educators should explore ways to minimize barriers to dual enrollment participation by considering the needs of Hispanic students when evaluating and implementing policies that impact the dual enrollment program. Participants were not asked about obstacles to dual enrollment participation as this study involved capturing only the experiences of students who took dual credit courses. However, an unanticipated finding was that all participants voiced one or more obstacles to dual enrollment participation encountered by them or their Hispanic peers. Most of the participants had parents who did not attend college. Because participants had less access to cultural capital concerning the college-going experience and counted on school officials and other Hispanics to gather information about higher education options (Núñez et al., 2011), legislators and educators should think about how, when, and what type of communication precisely reaches Hispanic students and their families. For instance, some participants had the false impression that dual enrollment was reserved only for high achieving students, and other
participants did not learn about dual enrollment until after they started their senior year in high school. They also pointed out that some of their peers were unaware about the program until it was too late to register for dual credit, or they did not have the financial means to register for dual credit courses. This lack of knowledge implies that colleges may not be communicating information about dual enrollment in a manner that promotes and supports Hispanic student participation in the program. Additionally, one participant mentioned that her immigration status nearly prevented her from enrolling in college classes, and another participant articulated that lack of role models hinders students from participating in dual enrollment. Because some participants expressed the desire to have mentors and to see Hispanics pursue college studies, educators may think about using Hispanic community college students, who previously took dual credit, to convey information the dual enrollment program to high school Hispanic students.

Policymakers and educators could reduce the interference of work and family obligations with students’ postsecondary studies by making dual credit courses available during students’ regular high school hours. Participants expressed that they all held jobs and had more family obligations compared to their non-Hispanic peers. Hispanic women view their caregiving role as an expansion of their usual role and feel more obligated to follow learned values regarding the importance of caring for family (Friedemann & Buckwalter, 2014). Hispanic women who were responsible for caring for a family member were 83% more likely to leave college than their peers without such obligations (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Family obligations and working off-campus can take students away from complete social and academic integration to college and directly impact their decisions to stay enrolled in college (Arbona & Nora, 2007).

Participants also mentioned that transportation and financial needs impact students’ participation in dual enrollment programs. Participants cited that lack of transportation can
impede their ability to take college classes, particularly outside their regular high school day when bus transportation may be unavailable. Students’ concerns regarding transportation imply that legislators and educators should offer dual credit classes in a high school environment where buses are already available for students or explore avenues to pay for and provide transportation for students who need to come to the college campus.

Moreover, because participants stated that inadequate funds prevented their Hispanic peers from entirely taking advantage of dual enrollment opportunities, policymakers and educators should investigate ways to minimize costs for students and their families. Limited financial resources can be a barrier for under-resourced Hispanic students who desire a college education and negatively impacts persistence (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Family obligations, employment, the lack of cultural capital concerning the college-going experience, transportation, and funding can prevent students from participating in dual enrollment. Legislators and educators need to find approaches that reduce obstacles to dual enrollment participation.

**Implication #3**

Students’ immersion into the college culture can differ for each, but the common theme is that students taking dual credit courses at a high school do not fully experience college. Although participants felt that participation in dual enrollment helped them academically and socially integrate into college, they believed that they did not completely experience being a college student by participating in dual credit courses at their high school. Participants expressed that their dual enrollment classes felt like their other high school classes. Because participants’ dual credit classes were more structured and had longer meeting times than their on-campus college classrooms, participants thought they missed out on a complete college experience. Participants
also expressed that they were given extra assignments and more individualized teacher attention in their dual credit classes, which differed from their experience with instructors in college who provided less one-on-one instruction time with students. Additionally, by taking college classes in high school, participants were not exposed to the same level of diversity that a community college offers. Participants thought that their high school classroom experiences did not provide them with the same experiences they had with their courses on the college campus, and as a result, they missed out on entirely engaging in college life. Built on the implications are three recommendations for action described in the next section.

**Recommendations for Action**

This study sought to understand Hispanic students’ experiences with dual enrollment and the role of dual enrollment in their academic success. The results of this study revealed that although students who took dual enrollment in a high school setting did not fully participate in the college experience, participants attributed their experiences in dual enrollment with helping them successfully integrate and persist in college. The findings from this study may suggest that dual enrollment programs can serve as a valuable tool in increasing the number of Hispanic college graduates in the United States. If educators and policymakers want to increase Hispanic participation in dual enrollment, they must explore ways to minimize barriers. It is recommended that educators and policymakers consider expanding outreach efforts, establishing a student ambassador and mentorship program, and shifting college costs away from students and their families to diminish obstacles facing Hispanic students and to increase accessibility.

**Recommendation #1—Expand Outreach Efforts**

According to Camacho-Liu (2011), to expand Hispanic college access and success, educators should provide better customer information aimed at Hispanic students and their
families. Educators could expand outreach efforts to Hispanic students and their families, which includes making contact with them starting at the end of middle school and continuing communication throughout their high school years. Information can be provided to students and their families using various modes of communication multiple times throughout each year of students’ schooling. Pamphlets and registration materials, written in both English and Spanish, describing the dual enrollment program can be sent home with students and mailed to their parents. Educators can host parent information sessions at the high schools. They can also speak directly with students at their secondary schools by visiting classrooms and attending clubs that may have a significant membership of Hispanic students. Also, educators can set up information booths at community centers, churches, and events frequented by Hispanic families.

**Recommendation #2—Establish a Student Ambassador and Mentorship Program**

Another recommendation is to institute a student ambassador and mentorship program in conjunction with outreach activities. Trained peer leaders can provide assistance and support to dual enrollment students. Students who interact with knowledgeable and thoroughly trained peers may acquire a greater sense of community, more social and academic integration, and a strong network of referral and resource representatives committed to their success (Shook & Keup, 2012). Participants in this study voiced that there was a lack of role models in the Hispanic community and insufficient representation of Hispanics participating in dual enrollment programs. The researcher proposes that colleges consider training Hispanic students, who previously participated in dual enrollment, as ambassadors and mentors in their communications with Hispanic high school students. Hispanic students who completed dual credit courses can be featured in written material and included in presentations and other informational sessions to recruit prospective dual enrollment students. Once students enroll in dual credit courses, a
student mentor can be assigned to each new dual enrollment student to help him or her navigate through the complexities of a college system. Because students are more likely to relate to peers who share similar cultural backgrounds (Castleman & Page, 2015), ambassadors and mentors can serve as valuable tools in connecting high school students to college.

**Recommendation #3 – Shift Costs away from Students and Their Families**

Finally, educators and policymakers should explore ways to shift the burden of dual enrollment costs away from students and their families without financially overtaxing the educational system (Zinth, 2014). A bipartisan bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate in April 2017, which would make Pell grants available and provide low-income high school students with opportunities to earn dual credits while in high school (Fain, 2017). Since fall 2016, 44 postsecondary institutions—of which 80% are community colleges—in the United States are participating in a federal experiment that provides Pell grants for dual enrollment participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). However, under the current federal law, individuals who do not have a high school diploma are not eligible to apply for grants (Kronholz, 2011).

Until the federal government enacts legislation making Pell funds available to dual enrollment students, costs could be transferred to school districts or state agencies so that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, can participate in dual enrollment (Zinth, 2014). High school districts and colleges can examine their current budgets to determine if some funds can be shifted from obsolete services and allocated to the dual enrollment program. To minimize college costs, Hispanic students who qualify for work-study programs can serve as ambassadors and mentors. Also, foundational scholarships can be set up explicitly for Hispanic dual enrollment students. Additionally, policymakers could consider providing institutions with more grant monies aimed at benefiting the Hispanic students. If educators and policymakers want to
increase the number of Hispanic students participating in dual enrollment programs, then they
must discover and implement ways to decrease barriers to their success. The researcher suggests
that policymakers and educators should increase outreach efforts, establish a student ambassador
and mentorship program, and shift the costs away from Hispanic students and their families. In
the next section, the researcher provides recommendations for further study.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study supplemented existing literature on dual enrollment by focusing on Hispanic
participants in one Arizona community college. However, additional research could be valuable
for policymakers and educators in understanding the experiences of Hispanic students. Below are
eight recommendations for further study.

**Recommendation #1—Expand Study to Include Non-Arizona Students**

Since this study employed a small sample size, the findings may not necessarily be
generalized to the broad range of dual enrollment participants. Non-Arizona resident Hispanic
students may have different perceptions regarding their experiences with dual enrollment
because state and local policies govern most dual enrollment programs (U.S. Department of
Education, 2007). As a result, the researcher recommends that this study be expanded or
duplicated to include other Hispanic students’ experiences.

**Recommendation #2—Comparison Study between Dual Enrollment Hispanic Students in a
High School Setting with Hispanic Participants in a College Environment**

Another recommendation is to conduct a study that compares the experiences of Hispanic
students who take dual credit classes in a high school setting with Hispanic students who
participate in dual enrollment at a college. Existing studies have revealed that students who took
dual credit classes while in high school tend to have higher college persistence and completion
rates than non-dual participants (An, 2013a; Appleby et al., 2012; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Zinth, 2014). Dual enrollment students also are likely to have higher grade point averages than non-dual students (Karp et al., 2008; Zinth, 2014, 2015). The study at hand added to the body of literature by focusing on the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high school. However, limited studies exist that compare the experiences of Hispanic students who took dual credit at a high school with students who participated in dual enrollment at a community college. This type of study could help educators and policymakers determine which instructional venue best serves the needs of Hispanic students and yields more successful college-going students.

**Recommendation #3—Explore the Perceptions of Hispanic Students who Qualified for Dual Enrollment but Chose not to Participate in the Program**

This study brought to the forefront some obstacles to dual enrollment participation faced by Hispanic students. Limited financial resources can be a barrier for under-resourced Hispanic students who desire a college education and negatively impacts persistence (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Hispanics are much more likely to be first-generation college-goers and come from families who do not understand college processes and procedures in comparison to other ethnic groups (Camacho-Lui, 2011; Núñez et al., 2011). Also, family obligations and off-campus work take students away from complete social and academic integration to college and directly impact their decisions to stay enrolled (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Further research involving the perceptions of Hispanic students who qualified for dual enrollment but did not enroll in the program is recommended. Exploring the views of Hispanic students who opted not to participate in dual enrollment would provide researchers, policymakers, and educators with a greater understanding of the barriers these students face. This
awareness could help in the creation and implementation of dual enrollment programs geared
toward increasing the number of Hispanic students taking dual credit courses.

**Recommendation #4—Narrow the Study to Exploring Perceptions of First Generation or Low Socioeconomic Status Hispanic Students**

This study could also be narrowed to exploring the perceptions of first-generation college-going or low socioeconomic status Hispanic students. Participants in this study included both first-generation college-going students and participants who had at least one parent attend college. Further studies limited to investigating the experiences of only first-generation college-going Hispanic students may yield different findings. Also, the study at hand did not consider the socioeconomic status of participants. Hispanic students tend to come from lower socioeconomic families (Becerra, 2010), and the percentages of Hispanics living in poverty nationwide is three times greater than for Caucasians (Do & Mancillas, 2004). Programs such as dual enrollment serve as a pathway to enable and ease college access and success for low socioeconomic and first-generation students (Lile et al., 2017). The impact of dual enrollment on college-related learning may vary based on the socioeconomic background of students (Karp, 2007). Perhaps future studies could examine how socioeconomic status influences students’ integration into their role as college students and their persistence.

**Recommendation #5—Identify Factors Contributing to the Under-representation of Hispanic Males in Dual Enrollment as well as Factors that may Contribute to the Success of Hispanic Males Integrating into Community Colleges Relative to Hispanic Females**

Further research can also focus on understanding the experiences of Hispanic students based on gender. The study at hand included eight female participants and only two male participants. Young, Slate, Moore, and Barnes (2013) found that higher percentages of females
enrolled in dual credit classes while in high school than males. Additional research may discover aspects contributing to the under-representation of Hispanic men in dual enrollment as well as factors that may contribute to the success of Hispanic males in integrating into community college relative to Hispanic females. Understanding the issues causing the under-representation of Hispanic men in dual enrollment and circumstances that may promote their college success may assist policymakers and educators in enacting policies and designing programs that encourage more male participation in dual enrollment programs.

Recommendation #6—Identify the Extent to which Dual Enrollment Students who Take College Classes in High School Have Access to College Student Support Services

Several participants in this study mentioned that while they were taking dual credit courses in high school, they visited the community college campus to use student support services. One participant met with an academic advisor on the college campus to come up with a plan of study that fits in with her career goals. Another participant visited the college tutoring center for math and writing assistance. Further research may ascertain the degree to which dual enrollment students in high school have access to student support services customarily found on college campuses. This research would help policymakers and educators determine whether more access to services such as library research, tutoring, academic advisement, and career counseling increase the likelihood of dual enrollment students’ integration into postsecondary institutions and college success.
Recommendation #7—Identify Factors Present in High School Dual Credit Classrooms that may Contribute to Students’ Ability and Willingness to Create Connections with College Faculty, Students, and Organizations after Transitioning to Community Colleges

Findings of this study revealed that multiple participants developed meaningful relationships with their dual enrollment teachers. Participants described their dual credit teachers as approachable, helpful, and providing individualized instruction. Because participants received particular attention from their dual credit teachers, they developed meaningful bonds with them. Also, participants were assigned group projects and assignments in their dual credit classes that required collaboration with peers inside and outside the classroom. As a result, participants felt comfortable interacting with peers and seeking assistance from them and their college instructors when they transitioned to the community college. Therefore, a further study is recommended to identify factors present in high school dual enrollment classrooms that may contribute to students’ ability and willingness to create relationships with college faculty, students, and organizations once they transition to community college. Understanding these factors may help dual credit teachers design their curriculum in a way that promotes greater student connection and integration to college.

Recommendation #8—Identify the Extent to which Underrepresented Student Populations Receive and Act upon Information about the Benefits of Dual Enrollment Compared to White Students

Participants felt that they or their peers missed out on taking dual credit classes because they did not find out about the program soon enough. The existing study identified opportunities to present the benefits of dual enrollment to Hispanic students sooner than their senior year.
Further research may determine the extent to which underrepresented student populations receive and act upon information about the benefits of dual enrollment compared to White students.

**Conclusion**

Many existing studies demonstrated how dual enrollment participation positively impacts college success (Appleby, et al., 2011; An, 2013a; 2013b; Karp, 2007; Karp et al., 2008; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Taylor, 2015). While there is an increasing body of literature that explored the perceptions of dual enrollment participants (Garcia, 2014; Green, 2007; Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Medvide & Blustein, 2010), the majority of the studies examined the views of students who participated in dual enrollment in a college environment. The study at hand is significant because studies involving the perceptions of Hispanic students who participated in dual enrollment at their high schools are scarce. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate how Hispanic students in an Arizona community college described their experience with dual enrollment classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in their academic success. Results revealed that participation in the dual enrollment program in high school exposed students to the academic rigor of college and helped them understand the norms and acquire skills and behaviors to successfully integrate into college and to persist. Participants learned the role of college student by adjusting to the academic demands of college. Also, participants acquired abilities that helped them socially assimilate to college.

Although participants’ experiences with dual enrollment were mostly positive, this study revealed some the barriers to participation faced by Hispanic students. Policymakers and educators need to explore ways to minimize obstacles and improve participation in dual enrollment programs. Addressing these barriers may help increase the number of Hispanic students who take dual credit courses and ultimately further their education. The advantages of a
more educated society benefit not only the more skilled individual workers but coming
generations and the entire civilization (Berger & Fisher, 2013). This study demonstrated that
dual enrollment could serve as a valuable strategy in helping more Hispanic students transition
to college and persist to graduation.
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Subject: Marina Giovannini: Research Study Participant Search

Dear Dean ____________,

I am writing this email to request your assistance in obtaining research participants for my doctoral study “Upward Mobility: A Phenomenological Study of the Hispanic Student Experience in Dual Enrollment.” The purpose of the phenomenological study is to collect information on how current Hispanic students in an Arizona community college who completed dual credit coursework while in high school describe their experience with dual enrollment classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in preparing them for college.

For this study, I would like to conduct interviews with eight to ten Hispanic participants. These participants must be:

- Current students at the community college
- Completed a minimum of one semester of college after matriculation to the community college
- Completed one or more dual enrollment classes while in high school
- Eighteen years of age or older

I will keep the names of the participants and the college anonymous. Will you please send the following email (see attachment B) to all past dual enrollment students currently attending Desert Sky Community College (DSCC) so that I can gather participants? Students should communicate with me directly at mgiovannini@une.edu if they want more information about the study or would like to schedule an interview. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Marina Giovannini
APPENDIX B
EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Research Study Participant Search

Dear DSCC Student,

I am a former Dual Enrollment Coordinator of Desert Sky Community College (DSCC) and presently a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am working on my dissertation, “Upward Mobility: A Phenomenological Study of the Hispanic Student Experience in Dual Enrollment.” I am looking for eight to ten volunteers to interview. The criterion to participate in this study include:

- Current Hispanic DSCC student
- Completed a minimum of one semester of college after matriculation to DSCC
- Completed one or more dual enrollment classes while in high school
- Eighteen years of age or older

Interviews will be conducted either in-person or through an online communication platform such as Skype and are expected to last approximately 30 to 90 minutes. The researcher will discuss and review a consent form at the beginning of the interview, at which time volunteers will be asked to sign the form. For online interviews, an electronic signature and emailed consent form will be accepted. Also, volunteers will have an opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and compiled data to ensure that information was accurately captured. The identity and privacy of all participants will be protected.

I’d very much appreciate your help, and your input will benefit other students in the future. If you would like more information about this study or would like to schedule an interview, please contact me at mgiovannini@une.edu.

Thank you,

Marina Giovannini
APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
   a. Age     b. Gender     c. Full-time/Part-time status     d. College semesters completed
   e. Major    f. Goals    g. High school attended     h. College GPA
   i. Number of dual credit courses taken     j. Tuition assistance received for dual credit courses
   k. Employment hours per week

2. Can you tell me about your family?

The next set of questions is about your experiences with dual enrollment.

3. Describe the factors that influenced your decision to participate in dual enrollment.
   Probe: What aspects of your Hispanic culture influenced your decision to enroll in dual credit courses?

4. How did you decide to enroll at Desert Sky Community College (DSCC) after high school?

5. Describe your perceptions of college prior to participating in a college dual enrollment class at your high school.
   Probe: What specific experiences influenced your initial perceptions of college?
   Probe: What characteristics of a successful college student stood out to you?
   Probe: Describe your feelings about being a successful college student.
   Probe: What made you feel that way?

6. Describe your transition from taking college dual enrollment at your high school to college classes at DSCC.

7. Can you describe how participating in dual enrollment contributed to your preparation for taking college classes on a college campus?
   Probe: Using that experience, can you describe any skills you gained from participating in dual enrollment?
   Probe: How did you feel based on that experience?
8. Describe any changes you made to prepare for the academic demands of college during your first year of college on a college campus.

Probe: Do you believe participating in dual enrollment helped you adapt to the academic demands?
Probe: Describe the course expectations required of your dual credit classes and your study habits, and were they different than non-dual credit classes

9. Describe any changes you made to prepare for the social demands of college during your first year of college on a college campus.

Probe: Do you believe participating in dual enrollment helped you adjust to the social demands?

10. How would you describe the differences between your current college courses at DSCC and the college dual enrollment courses you completed in high school, if any?

Probe: Describe differences and similarities in the classroom environment and structure of your dual credit classes and your college classes at DSCC.

11. Tell me about the artifact you have brought with you, and it’s meaning to you as you have completed your dual enrollment courses.

12. Reflecting on your experiences in dual enrollment at your high school, what are your perceptions of dual enrollment now that you are taking classes on a college campus?

13. What suggestions would you make to improve dual enrollment offered at your high school and the transition to DSCC?

14. If you had a chance to speak with Hispanic high school students who are contemplating whether to participate in dual enrollment, what would you tell them?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Upward Mobility: A phenomenological study of the Hispanic Experience in dual enrollment

Principal Investigator: Marina A. Giovannini, Graduate Student, University of New England
Email: mgiovannini@une.edu Phone: (480) 586-7687
Dr. Brianna Parsons, Faculty Advisor, University of New England
Email: bparsons4@une.edu Phone: (207) 221-4860

Introduction:
- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Purpose of the study:
This study seeks to collect information on how current Hispanic students in an Arizona community college, who completed dual credit coursework while in high school, describe their experience with dual enrollment classes and their understanding of the role dual enrollment played in preparing them for college.

Who will be selected for the study?
To be selected the participant must meet the following requirements:
- Current Hispanic student at the community college
- Completed a minimum of one semester of college after matriculation to the community college
- Completed one or more dual enrollment classes while in high school
- Eighteen years of age or older

What will I be asked to do?
- The researcher will discuss and review the consent form at the beginning of the interview, at which time the participant will be asked to sign the form. For online interviews, an electronic signature and emailed consent form will be accepted.
• Participate in an in-person or online communication platform interview (30 to 90 minutes).
• Review the typed transcript of the interview (30 to 60 minutes), and comment or make changes to transcripts via telephone, video call, email, or through an in-person interview.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**
• There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
• You may skip or refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**
• Although it is not expected that the participant receives any benefit from participation, the participant may acquire an understanding of the positive effect of participation in dual enrollment on academic and social interactions.
• Your participation may also help policymakers and educators understand what makes students acclimate to the college environment and persist so that they can design dual enrollment programs and implement policies that will encourage and support college enrollment, persistence, and degree completion.

**What will it cost me?**
• There are no associated costs. In-person interviews will be conducted at a location that is local and convenient for the participant, and if this is not possible, online interviews will take place through a free communication platform.

**How will my privacy be protected and data be kept confidential?**
• Pseudonyms will be assigned to both the college and all participants
• Paper documents including the consent forms and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only the investigator has access to. Documents will be maintained by the investigator for five years after the study is completed; after which they will be destroyed.
• Electronic documents will be stored on the password protected personal laptop of the investigator.
• Audio recordings of the interviews will remain with the principal investigator and erased after completion of the study.
• Transcripts will be sent to participants for review and information may be shared with the faculty advisor.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**
• Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future interactions with the college.
• You may skip or refuse to answer any interview question for any reason.
• You may withdraw from the study at any time.
• The principal investigator may terminate your participation in the study at any time for any reason, with or without notice to you.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

• The researcher conducting this study is Marina A. Giovannini. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at mgiovannini@une.edu or via phone at (480) 586-7685.
• The faculty advisor, Brianna Parsons, Ed.D. may be contacted at bparsons4@une.edu or via phone at (207) 221-4860.
• If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you contact Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

• You will be given a copy of this consent form.

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**Participant’s Statement**

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

____________________________________________________________________________

Participant’s signature or Legally authorized representative Date

Printed name

**Researcher’s Statement**

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

____________________________________________________________________________

Researcher’s signature Date

Printed name