

Latino Youth in Four- Year Postsecondary Institution: Who Can Make it?

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ABSTRACT

A college education is, now more than ever, critical for economic and social mobility. The high school dropout rate has declined and enrollment in post-secondary institutions has increased among Latino* students over the years in the United States. Yet, enrollment in post-secondary institutions rarely result in completion of a bachelor's degree. Given the importance of the ecological context to youth development, this report focuses on previous researches to identify both the pre-college and college factors that promote retention and completion for Latino students in four- year postsecondary institutions. Analysis showed the presence of various pre-college and college factors affecting Latino students' retention and completion. Additional research examining the gender differences in pre-college and college factors would be vital for further knowledge and encourage Latino students' success in higher education.

Keywords: academic achievement, Latinos, Hispanic students, higher education;

INTRODUCTION

United States has been experiencing the huge influx of immigrants from a variety of countries and regions. Immigrants from Mexico and other Central American countries are among the fastest increasing populations. In 2014, more than 11.7 million Mexican* immigrants resided in the United States, accounting for 28 percent of the 42.4 million foreign-born population—by far the largest immigrant origin group in the country (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The Pew Research Center estimates that by 2050, Latinos will make up nearly one-third of the U.S. population and that non- Latino whites will become a minority constituting 47 percent of the U.S. population (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Most immigrants from Mexico settled in California (37 percent), Texas

(21 percent), and Illinois (6 percent) (Zong & Batalova, 2016). However, recently, more immigrants are likely to stay in other nontraditional states and rural impoverished areas. The remarkable growth of the Latino population, and the movement of this population into diverse geographic areas of the United States, is illustrated by the fact that between 2000 and 2007, the number of Latinos grew in all but 150 of the 3,141 U.S. counties (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). That is, 2,991 U.S. counties reported an increase in the Latino population between 2000 and 2007 (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). These trends are even more prominent among Latino children and adolescents. Youth population is increasing exponentially. For all children under 18 years, 44 percent had minority status and 22 percent were Hispanic/Latino (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Moreover, the Hispanic/ Latino population is much younger than the population as a whole, with a median age of 27.7 years in 2008, compared with 36.8 years for the total U.S. population (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). 34 percent of the Hispanic/Latino population was younger than 18 years and 6 percent age 65 or older, as compared to 24 percent and 13 percent, respectively, for the total population (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011).

Today, the high school completion and enrollment in postsecondary institution

for Latino students has increased dramatically in recent years. In 2013, 79% of Hispanic 18 to 24 year-olds had completed high school compared with 60% who did so in 2000 and 18% of them enrolled at college, up from 12% as recently as 2009 (Fry, 2014). However, enrollment in post-secondary institutions does not always translate into the completion of a bachelor's degree. Many of Hispanic students attend community college. Less than half of all Hispanic high school students in this country currently qualify to enroll in four- year institutions (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Of those, only between 30% and 40 % (depending on geographic region) are enrolling in college immediately following graduation (U.S. President's Advisory Commission, 2002). According to California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), of every 100 Hispanic students who graduate from California high schools only 40 enroll at a postsecondary institution (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Of these 40 students, 30 begin at one of the state's community colleges, three are admitted and enroll at the University of California, and seven at California States University system campuses (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). Hispanic/ Latino youth are still the least likely to complete a Bachelor's program. In 2012, Hispanics accounted for just 9% of young adults (ages 25 to 29) with bachelor's degrees

(Fry & Krogstad, 2014). By contrast, in 2012, whites accounted for 58% of college-aged students, but 69% of young adults with bachelor's degrees (Fry & Krogstad, 2014).

Graduates with high school diplomas who were once on the path to lucrative careers are now relegated to low-paying jobs within manufacturing and service sectors as a college education is required in order to successfully compete for high-paying jobs in today's "knowledge economy" (Bregman, 2010). Unfortunately, a bachelor's degree does not promise all people to get hired and paid well. In today's economy, where 59 percent of the people have at least some college, even some of the most highly educated have lost their jobs and many college graduates are scrambling for the reduced pool of jobs available to them (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Unemployment rates at all educational levels have been climbing and have reached five percent for workers with Bachelor's or graduate degrees (Carnevale, et al., 2010). Yet, as more companies are demanding highly skilled workers, having a Bachelor's degree has become a minimum requirement and is important for all, but especially for Latino American youth who have relatively low or without economic and social resources to escape poverty, and obtain stable and meaningful work. With median earnings of \$56,700 (\$27.26 per hour), or \$2.3 million

over a lifetime, Bachelor's degree holders earn 31 percent more than workers with an Associate's degree and 74 percent more than those with just a high school diploma (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Considering rapid growth of young age of Latino youth population, and increasing societal expectation and demanding for youth with at least a bachelor's degree, the importance of investing and assisting Latino youth complete the Bachelor's degree is evident as they become the backbone and driving force of the American's economic progress.

Investing in better educating and preparing Latino youth must be considered not as a favor to them, but as an investment in the U.S. economy. Robles (2009) noted that obtaining a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree results in economic and social benefits for Latinos, their families, and society and estimated that increasing the number of Latinos who graduate from college will generate an additional \$7 billion in new federal tax revenue and \$480 million in additional tax revenue to Social Security per ten-year cohort of students. Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015) pointed out that the better-educated are more likely to vote and more likely to have access to fair wages and health care.

With that said, understanding both pre-college and college factors of Latino college student who currently enroll in

four year postsecondary institutions is needed. More specifically, understanding protective factors associated with Latino students' retention and completion of four-year postsecondary institutions is urgent.

1. Pre-college factors

Most parents and their children believe that a college degree is necessary for obtaining stable and meaningful work (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) and view that education as the primary vehicle for social and economic mobility (Ceballo, 2004). Latino students have high aspiration to pursue higher education and be successful as everyone else. Many researchers have continuously found the pre-college factors that influence Latino students' retention and completion of four-year postsecondary institutions. Lee and Frank (1990) found the important pre-college characteristics of students who transferred to four-year institutions. They completed a rigorous academic curriculum, demonstrated high academic achievement, had high aspiration to complete a bachelor's degree, and had parental support as those who directly enrolled in a four year postsecondary institutions.

Ceja, Casparis, and Rhodes (2002) examined factors that influence Hispanic students' decisions to attend and persist in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and found that familial support and

encouragement as well as a motivation to "not repeat" or "not be other family members" that did not attend college were primary influences on students' college-going decisions. Arbona and Nora (2007) found the important pre-college factors in their extensive research that predict Latino students' attaining a bachelor's degree. For Latino students initially attending a two- year college, early tenth- grade expectations of earning a bachelor's degree and having completed a rigorous academic curriculum in high school increased their probability of attaining the bachelor's degree. For Latino students enrolled in a four-year college, tenth-grade students whose parents expected them to go to college and obtain a college degree and whose peers planned to attend college were 40% more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree. The level of education attained by parents and their expectations and encouragement regarding degree attainment for their sons and daughters are also related to degree completion (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1998, 2001).

2. College factors

Factors that influence Latino students' success in postsecondary institutions are as important as those in pre-college stage. Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) studied Hispanic college student and found that commitment to obtain a degree

and the extent to which they engage in academic discussions and activities on- and off- campus influence their decisions to stay in college. Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that students' cumulative grade point average at the end of their freshman year in college was three times more important in college persistence for Hispanic and African American students than it was for their White counterparts. Arellano and Padilla (1996) also examined the personal stories of 30 Stanford University students of Mexican descent. The students reported in the interview that, although their parents had little formal education, they supported them in alternate ways such as talking to them about school, modeling and encouraging literary activities at home, and setting rules to complete homework and making personal sacrifices so that their children did not have to work but, rather, use the time to focus on academics. Jones, Castellanos, and Cole (2002) interviewed 35 college students who are currently enrolled at predominantly White institutions. They found that a lack of multicultural programs, events and organizations, support for diversity in campus, and of faculty members of colors influence Latino students' college experience and concluded that it is critical to recognize the vital function of having role models, tutoring, and deliver culturally relevant education

for ethnic minority students. Ceballo's qualitative study (2004) interviewed ten first generation, US-born, Latino students attending Yale University. The study identified four family background characteristics that contributed to their educational achievement. The four themes were a strong parental commitment to the importance of education, parental facilitation of their child's autonomy, an array of non-verbal, parental expressions of support for educational goals and tasks, and the presence of supportive faculty mentors and role models in the students' lives. Huber and Malagon (2007) also reported that strong family ties, positive campus climate, and role modeling and mentorship programs are related to Latino youth's success in undergraduate education. Latino students face unique challenges and obstacles in accessing and completing their education, therefore, they require specific and intentional support to reach their academic goals. Gonzales and Ting (2008) surveyed 109 Hispanic students about their adjustment at the predominately White institution with approximately 2% to 3% Hispanic enrollment. The findings indicated that family support and campus integration were factors contributing to the adjustment of Hispanic students at the university (Gonzales & Ting, 2008). Arbona and Nora (2007) found the important college factors that predict

Latino students' attaining a bachelor's degree. Community college students who started college right after their high school and who were continuously enrolled for the first three years were more likely to have earned a bachelor's degree. Those students who enrolled in a four-year college reported that enrolling in college full-time, completing many hours, taking classes without break, and performing academically better during their first year in college increased their chances of graduation.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this report was to provide empirical evidence found in the published literature thought to influence or contribute to Latino students' retention and completion of a bachelor's degree.

Pre- college Level

At the precollege level, rigorous academic curriculum, aspirations, directly enroll in a four-year college, motivated peers, and parental support are found as the important factors that predict Latino students' enrollment, retention, and completion of four- year postsecondary institutions. Latino students often fail to receive intensive academic curriculum including advanced mathematics and science and take high quality extracurricular programs that are

available in middle- and upper- income class communities, where typically offer the advantages of greater support at home, better schools, stronger academic preparation, and cultural expectations of college attendance. A number of studies have found mathematics to be the primary gatekeeper to postsecondary entry (Pelavin & Kane, 1990; Adelman, 1999), and those students who stay at the rudimentary levels of mathematics are far less likely to participate and excel at the postsecondary level (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). In fact, Latino students are much more likely to complete their public education with lower-math level courses than other students. Over 58 % of Latino students finished with standard geometry and never proceeded any further along the mathematics track (Swail et al., 2004). Horn and Nunez (2000) found that taking advanced math courses in high school more than doubles the chances that first-generation students will enroll in a four-year college, which narrows, although does not eliminate, the gap in college attendance with peers whose parents went to college.

In terms of direct enrollment in four-year college, delayed enrollment and enrollment at the two- year level college is much common among Latino male and Latina female students. This is partially due to several financial factors. For

example, many Latino/a students may choose to work full-time for a year or two before enrolling in college to gain financial stability, whereas others may enroll in college part-time while they work, or they may decide to delay their enrollment based on their economic situation or familial responsibilities (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009). Another factor that hinders them from directly enrolling in four-year college is because of poor academic preparation and lack of access to information about the college-going process. Among racial and ethnic minorities, support provided by teachers and other adults at school is essential in increasing the likelihood of academic achievement particularly because such support is considered difficult to obtain (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

School teachers have the responsibility to provide adequate and appropriate academic curriculum that help Hispanic students directly apply for four-year postsecondary institutions. As well, the wisdom of Castellanos and Gloria suggests that Latino high school students need frequent instructive feedback regarding studying and turning assignments in on time to achieve course completion and promotion to the next grade level (Murphy & Murphy, 2017). School counselors and other professionals also must be knowledgeable about higher education

in general, administrative requirements, financial aids and grants and culture-competent. Collaborating with others who may have a more comprehensive understanding of the students' families and communities such as school social workers and Latino community-based organizations as well as with those with knowledge of the higher education system such as university recruiters and Latino college graduates may also allow high schools to better understand the needs of the students, families, and communities to disseminate the appropriate information to a greater number of students and parents in the language and format that best suits their needs (Becerra, 2010).

The first step in the ladder toward postsecondary education is an aspiration toward that goal (Swail et al., 2004). Students' aspirations, that is, their hopes and expectations about what they will achieve in the future play an important role in determining their future outcomes (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wyman, Cowan, Work, & Kerley, 1993). Adolescents' academic aspirations in particular have been found to be influential to their future educational and occupational success (Abu-Hilal, 2000; Beal & Crockett, 2010; Ensminger & Susarcick, 1992; Ou & Reynolds, 2008). As Cooper (2009), in her article on aspirations among high school age minority groups, states, "Educational

aspirations are critical to educational attainment because people cannot achieve what they do not dream” (p. 616). The Pew Hispanic Center conducted a national survey of 2,012 Latinos age 16 to 25 and found that 89% say that a college education is important in life, yet only 48% say that they themselves plan to attain a college degree (Lopez, 2009). Latino students' aspiration is strengthened by their parents, teachers, and counselors' support and encouragement. The Latino parents interviewed by Auerbach (2006) provide rich examples of the ways in which they supported their children's college aspirations. These parents constantly emphasized the importance of hard work, encouraged their children when they struggled, and used cultural values of education to prepare their children for the social demands of school. Many teachers and counselors also support the academic achievement and college aspirations of Latino youth (Calaff, 2008; Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004).

With respect to having friends with college plans, Horn and Chen (1998) concluded that the odds of enrolling were four times higher for those reporting that most or all of their high school friends planned to enroll in a four- year college, compared to students who reported having no friends with college plans. The major finding of

Sokatch (2006)'s study was that friends' plans are the single most important factor in low SES, urban, minority high school graduates' decision of whether or not to enroll at least half-time in a four-year college or university.

These friends encourage each other and share information and helpful resources about the college admissions process. Identifying and exploiting peer-group programs in school and community may allow Latino students to build positive peer relationships and develop aspirations to apply to four- year postsecondary institutions. It is of vital for teachers and other school staff to provide students opportunity to talk about their concerns and/or questions and to give constant encouragement. In each high school, the values, beliefs, and impressions communicated to students about academic success and postsecondary attendance play a fundamental role in molding student perceptions and actions regarding college (Martinez & Deil- Amen, 2015).

College level

At the college level, commitment, participation in academic and cultural activities on and off-campus, positive campus climate, and having role models and tutors are found to be important for Hispanic students to persist to graduation. Nettles (1988) and Allen (1991) reported that students of color experience lower

levels of integration and higher levels of alienation and discrimination at predominantly White campuses. Jones, Castelanos, and Cole (2002) explored the college experience of ethnic minorities in an institution of higher education and found that many of the participants reported a lack of support for diversity on campus and a sense of alienation and facing discrimination. Student perceptions of prejudice and discrimination on campus, inside as well as outside of the classroom, were extremely harmful to the goal of attaining an undergraduate degree (Nora & Crisp, 2009).

There is a need for higher education representatives to acknowledge the resources that contribute to the undergraduate experience and retention, specifically for ethnic minority student population because the successful integration of minority students into the college environment is a crucial element of raising retention rates. Administrators must recognize the role of cultural centers, student organizations, and clubs for the students of color. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2010) reported that students' campus engagement is a major factor associated with students' college persistence and degree completion. Some research found that Latino/a students who are actively and consistently engaged in cocurricular activities enhanced their

collegiate experiences and increased their commitment to completing a college degree (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nuñez, 2009). Active participation in those activities can also serve as important stimuli for Latino students to find their niche in college and to strengthen their cultural and ethnic beliefs that they hold in high regard. Student affairs administrators should consider the multiple social experiences and their respective gains in the implementation of mentoring programs, retention of faculty of color, diversity education and co-educational assistance services (Rendon & Hope, 1996).

Mentoring is one resource that Latino students endorse as valuable and influential in promoting their educational attainment and success (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Nesman, Barobs-Gahr, & Medrano, 2001; Suarez, 2003; Ceballo, 2004). The mentoring process may allow Latino students to become more familiar with the academic environment and learn how to cope with the everyday pressures that arise in educational settings (Szelenyi, 2001) as well as learn the necessary information to access and stay in college (Moreno, 2002). Recruiting and retaining faculty of color in four-year postsecondary institutions is important. The majority of the 2.3 percent of Hispanic faculty found in colleges and universities are at two

year institutions (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Zapata (1998) argues that minority teachers are critical because they may be better equipped to meet the learning and mentoring needs of an increasing proportion of the school population than teachers from other background. Hispanic faculty are probably better able to give Hispanic students the support and encouragement they need, dispel mistrust of the surrounding majority culture, and motivate students to attain higher levels of education. Diverse perspectives can enhance and improve learning of all students including Hispanic students, too.

Strong family ties and familial support both at pre-college and college level were reported. The importance of the family (La Familia) as well as of the parent involvement in Latino students' education has been identified repeatedly as a crucial factor contributing to school success in a general way (Delgado- Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1996; Santiago- Rivera, arredondo, & Gallardo- Cooper, 20002). For example, Flores (1992) established that Latino/Latina students whose mothers and fathers provided continuous encouragement to attend college and remain in college increased the likelihood that Hispanic students would persist.

Although family and parental continuous encouragement and support is utmost important, they often lack knowledge and resources needed to navigate college process and help their children' persevere and succeed in school. Fann, Jarsky, and McDonough (2009) wrote that one of the greatest challenges in improving college attendance is getting parents involved in their students' college preparation. They recommended that school cultures must be changed to include families as partners in higher education attainment. Many of the parents in the study were not aware that college planning information was available at the schools, or that they could make appointments with counselors to discuss their children's college plans. In their longitudinal study of 81 Latino children and their immigrant parents, Goldenberg, Gallimore, and Garnier (2001) found that many Latino parents simply do not understand the U. S. educational system. However, these parents are not necessarily an impediment to their children's educational success. They may just need additional information and help. Professionals such as high school teachers, college recruiters, and admissions officers should develop strategies as partners that enhance parents' abilities to promote success for their children. For example, they can include Latino students' parents in college -related events and workshops. In those events and workshops, they can

reach out to parents with information and assistance in a culturally- relevant way in order to better support their children's higher education attainment. Moreover, schools can provide opportunities for families to meet with other families, college students, alumni, and educators to exchange useful college information and resources such as community support networks necessary to negotiate their academic preparation and college options, and to share their concerns and challenges both in Spanish and English.

Latinos have long-term educational and professional goals that may impact their families, as well as their institutions of higher education, and their communities at large (Segovia, Parker, & Bennett, 2015). Therefore, it is a national priority that we as educators, researchers, and administrators need to be better equipped to understand the needs and aspirations of Latino students and to assist their academic success in higher education. Students who do not have access to high quality and volumes of social capital and assets early in their academic careers are often neglected in the college planning process and ultimately discriminate from society. It is not only a matter of equity and of living up to the "American dream" but it is a matter of the well- being of the nation's economy and its society as well.

The future research exploring the gender differences in pre- college and college protective factors is essential because the majority of studies on academic success have focused on samples of African American and White American (Garcia-Reid, Redi, & Peterson, 2005) and most preceding studies of Latino males used a deficit perspective and limited their focus to their adjustment difficulties (Fischer, 2007), social stratification (Rivas-Drake, 2011; Rivas-Drake & Mooney, 2009), racialized educational inequities (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Stearns, Potochnick, Moller, & Southworth, 2010), lack of academic preparation (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Irizarry, 2012), and their experiences at the community college level (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010).

In fact, Latino males are more likely to drop out of high school, to join the workforce rather than attend college, and to leave college before graduating (Solorzano et al., 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Earlier studies have revealed that many Latino males primarily enroll in two- year institutions instead of four-year institutions due to the lack of information about attending, actual cost of attendance, and financial aid (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Nuñez & Kim, 2012). Barajas and Pierce

(2001) interviewed 30 successful Hispanic high school and college students at a large U.S. research university and found that factors that influence their school success were having White athletic coaches as mentors and participation in athletic activities. Latino males may also benefit from participation in male-focused student organizations to help improve their college engagement and other outcomes (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). Bowman, Park, and Denson (2015) found that participation in racial/ethnic student organizations is positively related to several civic engagement outcomes. Although there are a few researches paying attention to Latino male students' educational pathways into higher education and college success, most of what we know about Latino males in college is indirectly ascertained from the important scholarship that examines the Latina educational condition in postsecondary education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). If the United States wants to remain competitive in the global economy, and if it increasingly depends on this growing segment of this human capital, extensive research identifying factors that contribute to success of Latino male students in higher education is needed.

NOTE

*The term "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this report to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent: they may be of any race. The term Chicana/o and Mexican American are generally used to indicate individuals of Mexican heritage.

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