A CASE STUDY COMPARISON OF SELF-PERCEPTION OF LATINO
FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS AND LATINO
SECOND YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the self-perceptions of Latino students at an institution of higher education in Eastern Pennsylvania. Specifically, first and second year Latino student’s self-perceptions of campus assimilation and involvement in campus activities were studied. Latino assimilation into Western culture has been tumultuous. Although statistics report Latino college enrollment to be the second highest in the nation, second only to Asian enrollment, degree completion rates continue to be the lowest in the nation. Subsequently, a rise in Latino population is dramatically influencing the higher education classroom, and educators are confronted with meeting the educational needs of the Latino population. Furthermore, the assimilation process of the college Latino student is arduous, and the research on self-perceptions of Latino student academic and social integration on the college campus is sparse. The voice of 10 volunteer Latino students on a non-Hispanic serving college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania revealed three unique themes that influence belongingness, academic, and social integration on the college campus. The desire to provide better opportunities for themselves and others is the drive behind academic success. Tinto’s interactionalist theory serves as the foundation for exploration of the Latino student’s individual experiences of academic and social integration on the college campus. Triangulation is supported by individual interviews, student journaling, and use of the cultural congruity scale. Additionally, field journaling of researcher notes are used to provide further value. Finally, recommendations for future research based on Latino student voice are explored.

Keywords: Latino self-perception, Latino assimilation, acculturation, cultural socialization, cultural diversity, Latino serving institution
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List of Abbreviations

Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)

Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Nursing Students’ Perceptions of Instructor Caring (NSPIC)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that by the year 2050, educational classrooms would be comprised of 60% minority students (U. S. Department of Commerce, 2012). This rapid increase in culturally diverse students has been a topic of interest for more than two decades. For any student to thrive in a multicultural world, he or she must cross many boundaries and barriers to succeed. As of 2012, approximately 1 in 10 U.S. counties reported a population of more than 50% minority (Jiandani, 2012). In 2000, there were 1,426,000 Latino students enrolled in higher education, and in 2009 this number rose to 2,434,000, representing a 70.7% increase (Census Bureau, 2012). According to the Pew Hispanic Center, college enrollment of Latino students rose by 349,000 between 2009 and 2010, compared to an 88,000 rise in Black student enrollment, a 43,000 rise in Asian student enrollment, and a decline of 320,000 in White student enrollment (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012). Additionally, in just one year, between 2009 and 2010, Latino enrollment in college increased from 13% to 27% (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012). Despite this dramatic increase in Latino enrollment in higher education, the graduation rate remains low (Ramirez, 2012). Ramirez reported a 9% degree completion rate in 2010 of college enrolled Latinos. Moreover, as of 2012, The Center for American Progress reported that only one in six employed Latinos over the age of 25 held a college degree (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012).

The phenomenon of educational acculturation, social acculturation, and the relation of self-efficacy level to academic success of Latinos in higher education have been widely discussed in the literature (Cano et al., 2012; Guinn, Vincent, Wang, & Villa, 2011; Locks, Hutado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Nevertheless, the Latino
student graduation rate continues to demonstrate a gap between this admission phenomenon and successful college completion. Moreover, there is a lack of research portraying the influence of college acculturation strategies from the students’ perspective.

The lack of student voice paired with the caliber of student interactions and students’ sense of belonging significantly impacts the Latino students’ campus experience. In a qualitative study designed to comprehend the cultural aspects of college student interactions at a large, rural, public research university, Museus and Quaye (2009) identified a void of student voice representing intercultural perspective. Similarly, in a quantitative study measuring the quality of interactions and sense of belonging of ethnic minority students on four different university campuses in the Netherlands, Meeuwisse, Severiens, and Born (2010) found that students who participated in multiple educational campus activities resulted in increased collaboration with peers, and strengthened teacher/peer relationships beget an increased sense of belonging. However, a sense of belonging did not appear to influence student progression, and the authors of the study proposed that sense of belonging might be a more complex issue than originally thought (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Consequently, a qualitative study analyzing the sense of belonging concept and how it relates to minority student retention may add valuable information to the literature (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Likewise, further research giving endorsement to the voice of the cultural student as a means to evaluate the connection between the student and the college campus will provide valuable information (Gloria, Catellanos, Segura-Herrera, & Mayorga, 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

This case study explored and reported the Latino college student voice as it relates to their individual experiences of acculturation on a college campus located in Eastern Pennsylvania. Exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the Latino college student was
expected to result in a greater appreciation and knowledge of the importance of Latino college student self-perception regarding college campus acculturation. Additionally, the awareness of Latino student voice may serve to ignite cultural acculturation discussions on college campuses, possibly enhancing student success and improving graduation rates. Finally, implications for higher education and suggestions for further research are presented.

**Background**

Students have been immersed in cultural instruction for more than 20 years; however, the influence on student perceived self-efficacy has not been widely studied (Cano et al., 2012; Kim, Sax, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2010). Prior research focused on educators’ rationale of cultural diversity and student acculturation on the college campus. However, a gap in the extant literature related to the perceptions of Latino students regarding the importance of college acculturation and the implications derived from said perceptions exists. Literature supports the idea that students who develop both a social and academic support network are most successful (Romero, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008).

Iturbide, Raffaelli, and Carlo (2009) found that Latino students experiencing the high-stress environment of a college campus might not feel comfortable engaging in activities that are unfamiliar to their individual culture if the campus does not support ethnic expression. R.G. Gonzalez (2013) conducted research at a Latino serving institution of higher education and found that Latino students tended to migrate to student groups that represented their own country of origin; however, the extant literature does not reflect the multifarious interests and activities of Latino students on non-Hispanic serving community college campuses. Additionally, Meeuwisse et al. (2010) found minority students had greater difficulty assimilating into unknown cultures and generally felt out of place. Thus, some researchers believe that exploring the
relationships between Latino students and individual college campuses will add valuable information to the body of research on this topic (Gloria et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009). This lack of representation of the culturally diverse student’s acculturation and assimilation process into the college experience was the impetus for this study.

Historically, perceived self-efficacy, or one’s perception regarding their ability to achieve a task or goal successfully, has been recognized to influence student behaviors and academic achievement. Student retention is frequently based on the ability to integrate previously acquired skills in an unfamiliar environment (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, a students’ ability to achieve a suitable level of comfort in a new environment is vital to his or her academic progression. In fact, Strayhorn (2008) found that sense of belonging was the single most influential factor on Latino student retention. Likewise, Guinn et al. (2011) questioned 481 border Latino adults in South Texas and found a positive association between effective immersion into a culture and the desire for educational advancement. Moreover, ethnic minority students attained increased college success when campus environments cultivate student interactions and emphasize achievement (Museus & Quaye, 2009). The frequency and quality of interactions with others bears a critical influence on students’ sense of belonging and drive to persist on the college campus (Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, Meeuwisse et al. (2010) found that ethnic minority students who had no prior experience in higher education found the environment baffling and were apt to withdraw prior to graduation. Hence, knowledge of ethnic minority student sense of belonging as it relates to campus life and academic achievement is critical to the success of this student group. Montgomery and Haemmerlie (1986) recommended future studies to assess individual (student) needs and then to develop plans to meet those identified needs. Therefore, this study was designed to explore Latino students’ self-perceptions of how their
ethnic identity influences their sense of belongingness on an Eastern Pennsylvania college campus and give voice to their challenge.

**Situation to Self**

My motivation for conducting this qualitative study was to investigate the Latino college student’s perception of social and academic integration experiences on the college campus. The Latino student’s sense of belonging as influenced by life’s circumstances was evaluated. My ultimate goal in conducting the study was to give voice to the college Latino student and to communicate the Latino student voice to the educational arena. A non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania was the study site. I was employed as an Assistant Professor of Nursing on one of the college campuses. I did not teach any classes on the campus where the study took place. None of the study participants were in any of my classes on the campus where I did teach. As a nursing instructor and health care team member, I recognize the advantage of having Latino health care team members. Therefore, I was interested in investigating some of the underlying issues surrounding Latino college student attrition. I believe this case study adds valuable information to the educational literature regarding the challenges faced by today’s Latino college population. The sense of belonging on the college campus is multifaceted and intricately woven into the Latino students’ life experiences. If I want to learn more about the details of the Latino student’s self-perceptions regarding academic and social integration on the college campus, I must ask the individual student. Hence, this case study was intended to dig beneath the surface and expose the particulars of the Latino students’ self-perception.

I am specifically interested in the Latino population because this people group has experienced challenges in completing higher education degrees. Personally, I have observed an
increase in the Latino population in society and in my workplace. The statistics for the Eastern Pennsylvania region where the study took place report a 42.8% Latino population compared to a 5.7% Latino population in the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge the complexity of the Latino student and to evaluate the academic progression of Latino students in this Eastern Pennsylvania region.

This study reports the multiple realities of the Latino population based on an ontological philosophical assumption as it relates to individual perspectives and experiences. Individual Latino student quotes and themes are used to give depth and meaning to the Latino students’ interpretation of reality (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I sought to expose the complexity of the Latino student view as it relates to academic and social integration on the college campus. These ideations are based on a social constructivism worldview; they are subjective, and they are developed over time through interaction with a people group (Creswell, 20017).

**Problem Statement**

It was not known how Latino college students perceived their ethnic identity and how it influenced their sense of belonging and social and academic integration at a small community college in Eastern Pennsylvania. The problem of acculturation, or sense of belonging, in higher education is challenging for the Latino student (R.G. Gonzalez, 2013; Iturbide et al., 2009; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Many Latino college students feel out of place on the campus environment (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Additionally, when the college campus does not encourage ethnic interaction, the Latino student is often uncomfortable engaging with unfamiliar ethnic groups (Iturbide et al., 2009).

Strayhorn (2008) noted, “Students’ level of involvement in the formal and informal academic and social systems of college life accounts for his or her decision to stay in college or
leave” (p. 305). Thus, developing an appreciation of the Latino students’ perception of sense of belonging may dramatically affect their academic outcomes (Strayhorn, 2008). According to Tinto’s (1993) model of student retention, whether or not a student succeeds in higher education is highly dependent on academic and social integration. Given the expected commanding increase in Latino students on college campuses across the nation, it would behoove educators of higher academia to become familiar with the needs of this student population. According to Valdivia and Flores (2011), the last 20 years has demonstrated a rise in the rural Latino population as Latino families have migrated out of urban areas to more rural areas. Acculturation will be an important factor for leaders in institutions of higher education to explore and understand (L.M. González & Ting, 2008). One adult population reported that educational advancement would be affable if a sense of belonging existed in the educational environment, (Guinn et al., 2011). Moreover, Gonzalez and Ting (2008) iterated that factors related to culture, such as belonging to Latino student organizations and attending Latino cultural events needed further exploration, especially with regard to the Latino students’ perceived sense of academic and social connectedness to their college experience. As a result, L. M. González and Ting (2008) concluded that factors related to culture need further exploration, especially with regard to the Latino students’ perceived sense of academic and social connectedness to their college experience.

R.G. Gonzalez (2013) noted that research studies on the ethnic identity of Latino students was lacking. A study conducted by R.G. Gonzalez at a Latino serving institution of higher education found that Latino students withheld information about their ethnic background from non-Latino students, but were more open with other Latino students (R.G. Gonzalez, 2013). Additionally, this same study found that students experienced discrimination and expressed
assimilation difficulties (R.G. Gonzalez, 2013). The R.G. Gonzalez study was conducted on a Hispanic-serving higher education campus and is therefore limited in its generalization. Assessment of Latino student perceptions on a non-Hispanic serving higher education campus will strengthen the educational literature. Additionally, as Latino students master assimilation on the college campus, the greater the potential for a positive college experience and outcome. Romero (2009) asserted that “the more defined and interconnected identities are, the more resilient the student will be in the academic setting” (p. 79). Moreover, research demonstrates that the Latino student’s ability to integrate into the college campus appears to be pivotal to the retention and graduation of the Latino population. The problem is the self-perceptions of the Latino student regarding college acceptance and social and academic integration have not been studied.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to explore Latino student perceptions of their ethnic identity and how it influenced their sense of belongingness and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. Specifically, this case study disclosed the Latino students’ self-perceptions of belongingness and gave voice to the challenges of the Latino students attending the selected institution of higher education as they work to integrate into the larger campus culture. Factors and activities that may potentially aid the Latino student in developing a sense of campus belonging were explored and perceptions of family involvement in the Latino student’s education were studied. The Latino student’s self-avocation for ethnic presence on the college campus were explored, and the evolution of critical elements of campus belongingness identified as consistent threads throughout the study were promulgated.
A case study focuses on the revelation of real life phenomenon while retaining the significance of events (Yin, 2009). Additionally, a case study uniquely portrays the decisions of the studied entity (Yin, 2009). The case study design works particularly well when “within a community, individual consumers or users of services are the unit of analysis” (Yin, 2009, p. 12). For the purposes of this study, Latino students’ decisions to acclimate within the university setting was explored. Therefore, the discernment of the Latino students’ self-perceptions of belonging on the college campus may foster further understanding of the Latino student’s campus experience. According to Moran (2000), behavior is consistently a response to stimuli based on perception, learned experiences, and interpretation by each individual. Therefore, exploring the Latino students’ self-perception of campus belongingness may demonstrate the students’ response to the campus environment based on previous learned behaviors. In summary, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Latino students describe and explain the experiences of social interaction at a community college in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory was used to explore the adjustment of Latino college students on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory is formulated by expounding on individual experiences. According to Tinto, individuals go through four phases when establishing an interactional environment. When a student is exposed to a college campus, there is an immediate adjustment phase (Tinto, 1993). The adjustment phase, or phase one of Tinto’s interactionalist theory, requires both a social and academic resolve. The purpose of this study was to determine Latino students’ ability to establish social and academic belonging on a college campus, thereby initiating phase one of Tinto’s interactionalist theory.
Significance of the Study

Statistics indicate that by the year 2050, educational arenas will be comprised of 60% minority students (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). Statistics also indicate that Latino student enrollment is the fastest growing minority group in the nation (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012). However, college graduation rates for Latino students remain unacceptably low (Ramirez, 2012). The voice of the Latino student has not been heard and may be revealed through this study. Additionally, this study may provide insight into the challenges and needs experienced by the Latino student on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus. Analysis of the perceptions and experiences of the Latino student regarding the factors that influence their sense of belongingness on the college campus will generate an original contribution to the educational literature.

As Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory suggests, students experience a period of adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation during their first exposure to the college campus environment. This initial acclimation phase on the college campus embodies both a social and an intellectual component (Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), some students will find the college campus threatening or too difficult to navigate and ultimately quit. Incongruence and isolation are the two themes being investigated in this study. Incongruence is based on the fit between the individual student and the college campus (Tinto, 1993). This study will investigate the Latino student’s perception of their needs, interests, and preferences related to their college campus experience. Isolation has been found to dramatically affect college retention (Tinto, 1993). Isolated college students are in jeopardy of lacking relationship and run the risk of social and academic struggle. This study will give voice to Latino students’
perception of relationship and its impact on college success. This study will bridge the gap between college campus success and ethnic complexity for the Latino college student.

Prior studies recognized that Latino students who were actively involved in ethnic programs and projects on their college campuses were more successful academically and had higher graduation rates (Guinn et al., 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). However, there may be a gap between college campus Latino program offerings and actual Latino student involvement (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Similarly, prior studies supported the disassociation and assimilation difficulties experienced on college campuses by ethnic students (Iturbide et al., 2009; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). The results of this study may give insight into the Latino college students’ self-perceptions of the factors that influence belongingness and the hindrances to successful assimilation on the college campus.

Moreover, the study will support Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory by demonstrating the value of social and academic adjustment on the college campus. The Latino student voice provided insight into the significance of social and academic integration. The study aligns with Tinto’s interactionalist theory that claims social and academic adjustment as a means to achieving academic success on the college campus.

**Research Questions**

Latino student interaction and sense of belonging on the college campus has the ability to greatly impact academic success. Additionally, literature is void of Latino student voice regarding self-perceptions of social and academic belonging on the college campus. This study will attempt to impact the literature and provide insight into Latino student thoughts on Latino social and academic belonging on the college campus. The overarching research question for this study was: How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity, and how do past
experiences influence their sense of belonging, their ability to adjust, and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania? Individual interviews, the Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996), and electronic journals were used to gather data in order to answer the following sub questions:

(1) How do Latino students describe their academic integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

Rotter’s (1960) social learning theory reports that individuals who develop a will or expectation to succeed traditionally fare better. Additionally, self-perception is dependent on an individual’s environment and history of learning and experience (Rotter, 1960). Students who are academically supported and encouraged tend to have better academic success (Cole, 2008). Furthermore, tutoring programs for Latino students have improved academic assimilation and academic performance (Sánchez, Esparza, & Colón, 2008; Torres Campos et al., 2009).

(2) How do Latino students describe their social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

Behaviors, reactions, and attitudes are acquired as individuals study the actions of other people (McGregor, 2009). Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory suggests that individuals learn new information by observing other people. Therefore, social integration may potentially aid the Latino student in academic advancement based on the establishment of new learning behaviors and attitudes exemplified by other Latino students. It is documented that students who explore and embrace their ethnic identity are better equipped to navigate the stressors of life (Iturbide et al., 2009). Guinn et al. (2011) also reported a link between successful socialization based on a positive self-perception and educational success.
(3) How do the perceptions regarding academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania of first-year Latino students compare to those of second-year students who have had the opportunity to observe peer interactions on the college campus?

Researchers have found that college freshman learning experiences are different than college senior learning experiences. One study found that the development of better help-seeking skills was a learned process unique to upper classmen (Gloria et al., 2010). One study found that freshman Latino students who were mentored through their freshman year were more motivated and identified less stress in future college years (Phinney, Torres Campos, Padilla Kallemeyn, & Kim, 2011). A study by Glass and Westmont (2014) found that sense of belonging had a direct correlation to academic success and that senior college students reported greater engagement in college activities, but they did not identify a greater level of belonging compared to freshman college students. Therefore, examining first-year college student perceptions of belonging compared to second-year college student perceptions will add valuable information to the education literature.

**Summary**

The influence and perception of Latino college student identity is not well documented in the educational literature. The sense of belonging and its impact on academic and social integration on the college campus has not been studied. Literature demonstrates that Latino students experience difficulty with academic and social engagement on the college campus (Iturbide et al., 2009). This qualitative study gives voice to the Latino college students’ perception of academic and social belonging on the college campus. The gap between college campus success and Latino ethnic complexity is revealed in the Latino college student voice. A
sense of academic and social belonging as evidenced by formal and informal campus involvement has been identified as a major factor in the Latino students’ decision to persevere in academia (Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993). The high Latino college student enrollment rate coupled with the low Latino college student graduation rate is cause for concern and subject for educational research. Latino student voice may give insight into the elements of college campus belongingness that enable the Latino college student to be successful in the academic arena.

This study incorporated a qualitative research method with a case study design. Qualitative research is preferred for the observation of participant behavior and analysis of verbatim responses (Creswell, 2007). The intent of this study was not to quantify specific dependent and independent variables, but rather to reveal layers of meaning and explore Latino college student sense of belonging. Hence, the case study design, which focuses on revealing a real life phenomenon through the examination of non-manipulated contemporary events as they apply to specific individuals was utilized (Yin, 2009). The case study utilizes multiple types of evidence, which was illustrated in this study through the use of interviews, electronic journals and a survey (Yin, 2009). The case study is an empirical inquiry that reflects an in depth study of a real life phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Accordingly, this case study exposed the intricate details of the Latino college students’ academic and social integration experiences, and provided clarity and distinction of the concept of campus belongingness.

This qualitative case study was conducted on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. The 10 participants were purposefully selected based on enrollment status, year in college, and ethnic origin. Semistructured open-ended interviews, participant electronic journals, and the Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) were used to collect information regarding student self-perceptions and to empower the students’ voice (Creswell,
Additionally, field journaling was used to keep researcher notes during the interviews. The common experience of the phenomenon was explored, the lived encounter was interpreted, and the essence of the study was presented (Creswell, 2007).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Latino student perceptions of their ethnic identity and how it influences their sense of belongingness and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. Additionally, the study gives voice to the challenges of the Latino student attending a non-Hispanic serving community college. Activities that may potentially aid the Latino student in developing campus self-advocacy and the critical elements of sense of campus belonging were identified.

Literature for this review was primarily from Academic Search Complete, including EBSCOhost and ProQuest peer-reviewed research databases retrieved via electronic portal with permission from Liberty University. Additional government reports, public writings, organization reports, and theoretical histories were retrieved from various public Internet search engines. One self-reported case study was also used in the literature review.

The review of literature demonstrated a lack of Latino student voice illustrating the stressors related to college campus belongingness (Cano et al., 2012; Del Pilar, 2009; Gloria et al., 2010; Iturbide et al., 2009; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Suinn, 2010). Moreover, a connection between successful acculturation, or sense of belonging, and academic achievement was identified in the literature (Colón & Sánchez, 2010; Guinn et al., 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). The purpose of the literature review was to investigate the current understanding of Latino college student perceptions of belongingness on the college campus and its potential impact on college success. The review of literature began with a broad search of Latino college student acculturation and sense of belonging. This search revealed 1,914
prospective articles on acculturation and 193 prospective articles on sense of belonging. Of these, 464 were relevant to the topic of Latino college student acculturation and 24 were relevant to the topic of Latino student sense of belonging. Of the 464 articles on Latino college student acculturation, 91 were found to be somewhat related to the topic of this study, and 23 were used in this literature review. All 24 articles on sense of belongingness were reviewed and nine were used in this literature review.

Chapter Two includes an overview of Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory, which is the foundation of this study. According to Tinto (1993), a student’s perception of sense of belonging is directly related to retention on the college campus. Chapter Two also includes an overview of Rotter’s (1960) social learning theory and Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory. These two theories were used to acknowledge the impact of the development of ones social and academic drive and the influence of past experiences on achievements. The impact of assimilation in the learning environment is evident in all three theories and is discussed in this chapter. The literature review is subdivided into four themes, reflecting the common threads identified in the literature. The four themes include: individuality, acculturation, intercultural campus climate, and assimilation and academic progression.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Tinto’s Interactionalist Theory**

Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory of student retention served as a foundation for this study. The theory encompasses four forms of individual experience including adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation (Tinto, 1993). From the very first moment a student is exposed to the college campus, there is a season of adjustment that begins (Tinto, 1993). This adjustment phase, the first form of individual experience, encompasses both a social and an
intellectual realm, and most students experience at least some difficulty with assimilation (Tinto, 1993). Most students will adjust without compromise; however, some will find the adjustment too difficult and quit (Tinto, 1993). The second form of individual experience is difficulty. Simply adjusting to the college environment does not guarantee academic success. Tinto (1993) noted that there are academic performance standards that must be maintained to assure success on the college campus. Moreover, individuals that are less prepared academically normally experience academic difficulty, which may lead to academic failure (Tinto, 1993). The third form of individual experience is incongruence. Incongruence is the term used when there is a poor fit between the individual and the institution (Tinto, 1993). The needs, interests, and preferences of the individual will dictate the level of congruence (Tinto, 1993). As Tinto (1993) stated, “However discerned, what matters is the view of the student. Whether there are objective grounds for mismatch is not necessarily of direct importance to the issue of individual departure” (p. 51). Finally, isolation dramatically effects college retention. Isolated students fail to establish significant personal campus relationships (Tinto, 1993). Student persistence hinges on the amount and quality of personal interactions on the college campus (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) further explained, an individual’s past social experiences coupled with an unfamiliar environment and lack of social group congruency often creates an atmosphere of isolation for the student. “Isolation is not merely the outcome of individual personality. It may mirror the character of the person’s past social experiences and the absence of familiar social groups with which to make contact” (Tinto, 1993, p. 58). These multivariate attributes frequently impact a student’s college success; nevertheless, dedication and valiant expectations will promote persistence in very difficult circumstances (Tinto, 1993). The development of these fundamental experiences often arises after the college experience begins; however, they may also reflect life
experiences that occurred prior to college enrollment (Tinto, 1993). A student’s myriad of life experiences, combined with the new college life experiences, may pose either complications or opportunities for the individual. Moreover, when a student is removed from their comfort zone and expected to thrive in a foreign environment, both social and intellectual resources along with persistence are required for a student to succeed on the academic campus (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory asserts that the four basic attributes are impacted by one’s life experiences. Specifically, the life experiences control the student’s ability to integrate successfully on the college campus (Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the student who perseveres to graduation identifies an increase in satisfying college experiences (Tinto, 1993). Life experiences have the ability to enhance a students’ college experience or abate a student’s college career. It is the educator’s responsibility to advocate for student welfare, both academically and socially (Tinto, 1993). Students are challenged with applying learned intellectual skills to the foreign college campus (Tinto, 1993).

Student retention is frequently based on the ability to integrate previously acquired skills in an unfamiliar environment (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) claimed that a student’s perception is the most important factor affecting college retention. A student who feels ostracized may assume a poor self-perception and subsequently withdraw from an institution (Tinto, 1993). A sense of belonging on the college campus is vital to the students’ academic progression. In fact, Strayhorn (2008) found that sense of belongingness was the single most influential factor on Latino student retention. Additionally, research corroborated that the frequency and quality of interactions with others has a critical influence on students’ sense of belonging and drive to persist on the college campus (Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993).
Based on Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory and the four core attributes, the successful college student will quickly and easily adjust to the new college environment, progress with minimal academic difficulty, establish a solid institutional fit, and maintain varied social interactions on the college campus. To the unknowing individual, this methodology for success may seem overwhelming; however, research supports the sense of belonging on the college campus as a means to achieve college retention. A positive sense of belonging, coupled with realistic goals and a strong commitment to academic progression will empower the college student (Tinto, 1993).

This qualitative case study specifically focused on advancing Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory that drives the college student’s integration philosophy. This study gave voice to the Latino student’s perception of academic and social integration experiences on the college campus, thereby supporting Tinto’s claim that adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation greatly impact the success of the college student. Additionally, this study examined how first and second-year college student perceptions of academic and social integration differ. The expectation was that second-year students would have successfully begun the four-step integration process defined by Tinto and would verbalize a greater level of sense of belonging, thus potentially promoting a greater level of retention.

Rotter’s Social Learning Theory

Self-perception is dependent on an individual’s environment and history of learning and experience. Each individual represents a multitude of internal and external experiences. The fabrics that are woven together to produce a person or a people group are unique and valuable. Rotter (1960) developed the social learning theory in the early 1950s. Rotter understood the value of lived experiences and the environments where experiences are acquired. Additionally,
Rotter recognized the value of will and expectation on any given outcome. This may develop at any stage of life and students who develop a will or expectation to succeed traditionally fare better (Rotter, 1960). Rotter did not believe personality is set at any given point in the lifespan. Rather, Rotter believed people are perpetuated by their goals, continually seeking to enhance their lived experiences as a means to achieving their desires. Therefore, self-perception is dependent on an individual’s environment and history of learning and experience. Social learning theory implies past experiences influence present behaviors by providing cues for the reactions (Rotter, 1960). Furthermore, knowledge of these situational variations would be greatly valuable to understanding the diverse results (Rotter, 1960). Therefore, identifying the self-perceptions of Latino college students’ socialization and academic preferences may potentially add critical information regarding Latino college student assimilation to the literature. Additionally, Rotter (1960) believed that educational advancement is dependent on the evaluation and knowledge of individual psychological reaction to situations.

This case study was designed to evaluate the Latino college student’s self-perceived socialization and academic preferences, thereby revealing the effectiveness of Latino inclusion on a non-Latino serving community college in Eastern Pennsylvania. Rotter (1960) further defined this type of research as goal directed behavior testing, or predicting behavior from other behavior. In essence, behavior is forthright and directly influenced by individual will, stamina, and condition (Rotter, 1960). Social learning theory suggests that the relationship between the goal preference and the expected behavior can only be produced by considering the participants past history, then introducing the concept of expectancy will produce a satisfying outcome (Rotter, 1960).
Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1986) claimed that individuals learn new information by observing other people. Behavioral adaptation is greatly dependent of the individual’s social system (Bandura, 1999). One’s social environment may actually become a roadblock if structures for individual growth and development are not in place (Bandura, 1999). The college freshman student entering higher education for the first time is exposed to an environment that offers unprecedented opportunities. Based on Rotter’s (1960) philosophy, students maintain an inward resolve to reach their set goals. However, it is equally important to consider Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory when evaluating the environmental influences on college freshman. Bandura developed his social cognitive theory in the mid 1980’s after reanalyzing his theory on social learning. Bandura’s (1999) theory purports that individuals learn new information by observing other people. Hence, they learn what happens to others when they behave in certain ways. Furthermore, behaviors, reactions, and attitudes are acquired as individuals study the actions of other people (McGregor, 2009). Social cognitive theory explains psychological functioning in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1991, 1999).

Social cognitive theory recognizes that behavior is highly motivated by self-influence (Bandura, 1991). Individual values influence the identification of aspects of life that are important and those that are less important (Bandura, 1991). Furthermore, as individuals observe these life reactions, patterns tend to emerge that define significant features of social behavior (Bandura, 1991). According to Bandura (1991), individuals who are attuned to their own desires and goals will often succeed, even in the face of adversity. Achieving one’s goals is encouraging and tends to aid in the cycle of desired replication (Bandura, 1991). Moreover, the more
achievements affect individual welfare and self-esteem, the more likely the reaction will be elicited (Bandura, 1991).

Another important component of social cognitive theory is the role self-identified incentives play in the development of individual motivation. When the situational outcome leads to a desired effect, individuals will expend the energy necessary to achieve the outcome even if the action requires otherwise avoided behavior (Bandura, 1991). This element of social cognitive theory aligns with the desired outcome for the Latino college student who may achieve greater college success from expanded socialization and enhanced college assimilation. When faced with the difficulties of a new uncharted environment, individuals past experiences and strength will impact the choices they make, the goals they set, and their commitment to endure (Bandura, 1991). Furthermore, repeated success in difficult situations produces imperturbable endurance (Bandura, 1991).

Literature supports the potential benefit of Latino assimilation in the college environment (Strayhorn, 2008; Romero, 2009). However, in spite of the energies put forth to develop Latino-serving institutions, Latino attrition rates continue to increase (Ramirez, 2012). It was my desire to retrieve information on Latino self-perception of college campus belongingness, academic and social integration as a means to preserve and support Latino ethnic identity, and to affect positive change in behavior to enhance college success.

Related Literature

Individuality

The inner self innately recognizes the wonder of individuality. Psalm 139:13-14 says, “For You did form my inward parts; You did knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will
confess and praise You, for You are fearful and wonderful and for the awful wonder of my birth! Wonderful are Your works, and that my inner self knows right well” (AMP).

Sense of belonging on the college campus has not been well studied. However, research does elude to the idea that culture and campus climate are key factors in determination of a students sense of belonging on the college campus (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). The Latino student with extensive family ties and commitments may experience greater difficulty when stepping into the world of academia. The development of individuality on the college campus has the potential of being disrupted by family obligations. Living situation and family responsibility are just two of main variables that likely impact a student’s individuality or sense of belonging on the college campus (Museus et al., 2017). A national survey data analysis of more than 10,000 students representing 470 colleges found that students who lived off campus reported less interaction with college faculty and less involvement in campus activities than their campus dwelling peers (Nuñez, 2009a). Furthermore, both college faculty interaction and campus activity involvement have been linked to the development of individuality and sense of belonging on the college campus (Nuñez, 2009a). It can be surmised that campus environments have an enormous impact on the shaping of individuality on the college campus, and previous research is limited in its study of the scope of this relationship. As Museus et al. (2017) stated, “A comprehensive understanding of the elements of campus environments that affect sense of belonging among college students remains elusive. Therefore, further research that increases understandings of the relationship between campus environments and sense of belonging is warranted” (p. 191).

Moreover, the blossoming of individuality is influenced by life events and one’s day-to-day responsibilities. The understanding of individuality, that we are uniquely created, is what
sets man apart from the rest of creation. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined individuality as “the quality that makes one person or thing different from all others.” (para. 1). Furthermore, a person’s perception of self, regarding their individuality, is a window into personal motivation. A study exploring the self-perceptions of community college students recognized the importance of daily responsibilities and multiple student roles on self-perception development (Kim et al., 2010). This particular study examined the transfer and retention of urban community college students survey of 5,000 first year community college students on nine different Los Angeles campuses. The surveys reflected a five-year longitudinal study in Southern California. Surveys were originally distributed and collected in the classroom. Multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to detect differences based on student self-perceptions and differences based on student age. A total of 35 antecedent variables were identified which measured student characteristics, student activities, educational challenges, student goals, and student beliefs. The study concluded that using both student self-perception and student age was valuable to the study of community college student population. Additionally, community college students are all nontraditional in some aspect (Kim et al., 2010). Hence, accounting for student differences based on individual student self-perceptions will add more detailed information to the literature (Kim et al., 2010).

Research that expands the definition of nontraditional to include background characteristics or risk factors associated with student assimilation and progression may make important contributions to the educational literature. Similarly, “considerations of the students’ own perceptions of themselves (individuality) may further illuminate the distinguishing characteristics of community college students” (Kim et al., 2010, p. 406).
Acculturation

Acculturation is defined as a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Moreover, research has discovered that ethnic identity is imperative to the acculturation process (Cano et al., 2012). However, the increased internationalization emerging on college campuses across the country does not guarantee effective cultural assimilation. Although western culture is saturated with cultural variety in the classroom, it remains largely void of thorough understanding of individual cultural orientation (Bash, 2009). Western cultural diversity is not merely a one-dimensional portrait of ethnic blending. For an ethnic student to thrive in a multicultural world, he or she must cross many boundaries and barriers to succeed. A key aspect of the acculturation process is for students to feel comfortable in new social environments (Locks et al., 2008). All students, regardless of color, experience transition challenges when entering college; however, ethnically diverse students have an added burden of adjusting to an environment that may be perceived as a hostile racial climate (Locks et. al., 2008).

A study examining Latino college transition found Latino students who felt more engaged in the college environment were less likely to report feelings of hostility (Nuñez, 2009b). Nuñez (2009b) specifically analyzed the Latino students’ ability to navigate an ethnic environment and the ensuing sense of belonging on the college campus. The study was based on Tinto’s (1993) theoretical framework and sought to investigate reasons for student attrition. Data were collected from nine four-year public research institutions in various geographic locations. Surveys were distributed to first-year students during the 2000-2001 academic year and again during their second year in 2002. Surveys were part of a national longitudinal data set entitled Diverse Democracy Project Study that examined demographics, secondary school experiences,
and college expectations regarding social issues and envisioned behavior. Four thousand four hundred and three students completed the surveys of which 362 Latino respondents were deemed appropriate for use in the Nuñez (2009b) study. A good fit for the Latino sample was validated through a factor analysis on the Structural Equation Modeling program and a covariance of latent constructs. The Nuñez (2009b) study found that Latino students who were more actively involved on their college campus experienced an increased sense of belonging. Additionally, these students developed a healthy awareness of the dynamics of ethnic issues on the college campus.

Moreover, “students who have explored their ethnic identity, and developed a positive sense of what their ethnicity means to them, are better equipped to deal with culturally-related stressors” (Iturbide et al., 2009, p. 538). Therefore, the Latino students’ self-perception may be positively or negatively influenced by their sense of ethnic identity. Guinn et al. (2011) found a positive association between successful acculturation, educational success, and the development of a positive self-perception. The aim of the Guinn et al. (2011) study was to discover the variables associated with the acculturated Latino living in the United States-Mexican border region in south Texas. Questionnaires were distributed in four border-serving elementary schools. Study participants were parents and adult relatives of the elementary school’s children. A total of 438 returned surveys were identified as Latino surveys and used for this study. Investigated variables included self-esteem, health status, educational level, activity level, and acculturation. Results of the study demonstrated that Latinos with a greater level of acculturation reported greater educational attainment, greater self-esteem, and were married.

The challenges of a global society are both advantageous and laborious. The cultural opportunities available in the college classroom of the 21st century may not be reproducible in
any other environment. Latino students who have opportunity to positively interact with non-
Latino students may have improved psychological adjustment in low stress environments
(Iturbide et al., 2009). However, Latino students in high stress environments that do not support
ethic expression may not feel comfortable engaging in activities that are unfamiliar to their
individual culture (Iturbide et al., 2009). Iturbide et al. (2009) examined ethnic identity and how
it influenced acculturative stress and psychological adjustment in Mexican-American college
students. Acculturative stress is a level of maladaptation that results from cultural conflicts
experienced by the minority student, and this maladaptation may subsequently impact a student’s
ability to adjust to the campus environment (Iturbide et al., 2009). A prior data set was used to
extrapolate 148 samples from three large southwestern universities. Participants ranged in age
from 18-30 years old and were enrolled in a southwestern university. A variety of surveys were
used to measure acculturative stress, ethnic identity, depression, and self-esteem. Hierarchical
linear regression was used to determine whether ethnic identity influenced acculturative stress.
The study findings revealed that acculturative stress positively correlated with depression for
both men and women and negatively correlated with sense of belonging for women. However,
levels of sense of belonging were not affected by levels of acculturative stress for men.

Roche and Kuperminc (2012) found that the length of time a student was exposed to a
culture and the number of opportunities to participate in the culture had a direct effect on sense
of belonging. Roche and Kuperminc hypothesized that low school achievement would result
from decreased sense of belonging and increased acculturative stress. The Societal Attitudinal,
Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale and the Psychological Sense of School
Membership Scale were given to 199 metropolitan southeastern middle-school students. The
questionnaire assessed perceptions of school, family, neighborhood, peers, and level of
emotional functioning. A factor analysis for study replication and an analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate variable discrimination. The findings confirmed that acculturative stress could be subdivided into discrimination stress and immigration stress. The study further reported that immigration stress decreases in direct response to length of time spent in the United States. Finally, the study found an increase of sense of school belonging leads to a decrease in discrimination stress and an increase in grade point average.

Similarly, Buchanan and Smokowski (2011) found that conflict arising from the stressors of acculturation, language disparities, and perceived discrimination ultimately leads to poor choices in peer support systems. The study’s intent was to investigate the adjustment process for Latino adolescents and their families in the United States. Four two-hour, community based interviews spaced six months apart were conducted with 286 adolescents and their families in central North Carolina and Phoenix, Arizona. The average participant was a 15-year-old female immigrant from Mexico. Amos 7.0 Path analysis was used to evaluate the connection between family relationship and adolescent mental health on poor peer support association and subsequent acculturation stress. A risk chain that led from initial parent-child conflict that originated from acculturation conflict including language conflict and discrimination to externalization of problems including poor peer associations was identified. Buchanan and Smokowski suggested peer leadership opportunities as a possible option for developing positive peer support systems and decreasing acculturation stress. It is believed that consistent peer interaction would promote positive peer interaction, foster peer friendships, improve communication skills, and perhaps decrease acculturation stress (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2011).
Intercultural Campus Climate

The significance of intercultural interactions is more important today than ever before. If colleges desire to increase and maintain intercultural student attendance, the needs of the student must be closely evaluated (Bash, 2009). According to the 2009 U.S. Census Bureau, Latino students had a 13% baccalaureate graduation rate. Empowerment of the Latino student can be advantageous for all constituents. Empirical research demonstrates the importance of establishing campus connections with faculty and peers (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Nuñez (2009a) found that Latino students “actively engaged in the life of the college campus, contributing to academic discussions, and focusing on building community within and outside of the campus, had an increased sense of social cohesion” (p. 56). The Nuñez study reflected 4,403 diverse student responses obtained from nine purposefully selected public research universities across the United States with diversity initiatives. Interestingly, this study found a paradox in the sense of campus belonging outcomes (Nuñez, 2009a). Nuñez found that having positive intercultural interactions on the campus environment resulted in both an increased sense of campus belonging and a positive perception of campus hostility (Nuñez, 2009a). According to Nuñez (2009a), the Latino student who is active in campus community and negative ethnic issues, a seemingly paradoxical finding, may potentially be spurred onto development of critical socialization and learning qualities.

A study by Museus et al. (2017) looked at the association between the sense of belonging and a culturally engaging campus environment. The culturally engaging campus environments model based on Tinto’s (1993) theory of student integration was used to examine the relationship between access to a culturally saturated campus environment and the development of a sense of belonging, specifically with the thought that if the relationship were significantly positive it
would foster a greater level of success in higher education (Museus et al., 2017). This quantitative study examined 499 student surveys representing three college campuses. The three college campuses were in the United States. Study participants were dispersed among one east coast, urban four-year institution and two west coast, rural community colleges. The study found that Latino students immersed in a culturally-engaging campus environment demonstrated a stronger sense of belonging than Caucasian students (Museus et al., 2017). Additionally, women in general reported a greater sense of belonging than men (Museus et al., 2017). Other factors associated with a positive sense of belonging included level of academic preparation, financial aid awards, collectivist cultural orientation characterized by values of teamwork and mutual success, cultural validation, cultural familiarity, proactive philosophies, and holistic support, while tuition costs and cultural community service were negatively associated with sense of belonging (Museus et al., 2017). Research has demonstrated the importance of campus climate in regards to a students’ ability to develop a sense of belonging on the college campus.

According to Museus et al. (2017),

Campus environment assessments can also help post secondary educators increase their knowledge regarding how these environments are influencing students’ experiences and outcomes. By developing a better understanding of how campus environments are impacting student success, educators can be equipped with valuable information to initiate change, target areas of growth, and most importantly, improve student outcomes.

(p. 211)

Additionally, researchers have found that freshman socialization and learning experiences are different from senior experiences (Gloria et al., 2010). As Latino students spend more time in the college arena, they tend to perceive peer and faculty counseling as a viable option to meet
their personal needs (Gloria et al., 2010). A study by Gloria et al. (2010) of 121 Latino students attending a west coast research university found that the identification of positive help-seeking attitudes was a learned process and upper class-men traditionally displayed better help-seeking skills. Volunteer participants were solicited in Latino classes, clubs, and housing environments (Gloria et al., 2010). Four different survey instruments including the Cultural Congruity Scale, the University Environment Scale, the Acculturation Ratings Scale for Mexican Americans II, and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale Short Form were used to evaluate the factors influencing the help-seeking behaviors of Latino students on the college campus (Gloria et al., 2010). There was a statistically nonsignificant relationship between culture and help-seeking attitudes (Gloria et al., 2010). Therefore, a more detailed exploration of the Latino students’ perceptions of factors that influence help-seeking behaviors would be a valuable addition to the educational literature (Gloria et al., 2010). Hence, examining Latino student self-perceptions of belongingness and academic and social integration experiences rather than Latino student college campus socialization behaviors may provide a clearer picture of the Latino student’s college campus experiences. Gloria et al. (2010) reported, “a more detailed exploration of the cultural values and processes that influence the help seeking attitudes and behaviors of Latino students is warranted” (p. 136).

The combination of increased ethnic representation on college campuses and high tech communication exchange results in students being in constant social and academic communication contact. This meeting of cultures has generated an escalation of intercultural communication. While a large body of research exists to support the factors that affect Latino college student adjustment, there is a void of student voice representing the effects of these processes and identification of the key elements that encourage student persistence (Museus &
Rapid college campus diversification is predicted well into the future. Hence, it is imperative that future research focus on the impact college culture may have on student experience. “As colleges and universities experience rapid structural diversification, researchers should consider how campus culture will differentially shape the experiences of students from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds” (Museus & Quaye, 2009, p. 88). Additionally, future research exploring the constituents of connectedness between Latino students and individual college campuses will add valuable information to the literature (Gloria et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009). A qualitative study with similar goals for a Filipino student population found that students voiced a concern for increased Filipino specific courses, improved student service representation, and increased Filipino faculty presence (Maramba, 2008). The Maramba study was conducted at a public research university in southern California. The 143 volunteer participants were purposefully selected to give voice to the Filipino students’ feelings associated with being ethnically different than the predominantly white population on the university campus (Maramba, 2008). Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews with follow-up questions to ensure detail of responses to questions regarding campus environment, sense of belonging, and feelings of being a Filipino American student (Maramba, 2008). Of interest to this study is sense of belonging which demonstrated that these Filipino students did not report a sense of belonging on the university campus as a whole but did report a feeling of belonging to their individual ethnic group when participating in Filipino organizations or campus services (Maramba, 2008).

Additionally, it is well known that people have different learning styles, and learning theory experts continue to argue over identifying the best learning techniques (Wang, 2012). Further, research substantiates that successful student outcomes hinge on student campus
involvement. A study conducted on nine Los Angeles community colleges explored the academic and social issues faced by community college students (Kim et al., 2010). A multivariate analysis of variance was used to compare self-perception versus age of 5,000 thousand socioeconomically and ethnically diverse student surveys. Together the self-perception variable and the age variable were found to be statistically significant at the .01 level. Furthermore, analyzing these two variables independently would not capture the same significance (Kim et al., 2010). Moreover, it would be adventitious for research to look beyond these two variables and investigate the impact of other student differences (Kim et al., 2010).

Inclusive learning environments that promote student interaction with other students and faculty have proven to be successful on many college campuses (L.M. González & Ting, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). An individual learner’s behavior, attitude, and personality may be impacted when peer/faculty interaction is encouraged (Wang, 2012). When an individual student’s behaviors and attitudes are transformed, the entire experience is molded into the learner’s life (Wang, 2012). Building networks and providing social capital for Latino students is paramount to the academic achievement (Museus & Neville, 2012). Museus and Neville (2012) looked at the characteristics of college personnel and how these qualities impact ethnic student outcomes. Sixty students representing three ethnicities from four different predominantly White serving colleges were purposefully selected. The student group represented Asian American, Black, and Latino populations. Data were obtained through 60 to 90 minutes semi-structured, individual interviews with the selected students. NVivo qualitative research software was used to code the data, textural-structural descriptions of the data were developed, and open/axial-coding was used to establish data themes. The study concluded that there were four key characteristics of college personnel that aided student success on the college campus. These four key components
included having something in common such as race or experiences, receiving holistic support, showing genuine care, and incorporating proactive support. Additionally, it is important to recognize the significance of family to the Latino student (Page, 2013). It is imperative to consider the importance of family support for the Latino student; otherwise, Latino students will become distraught and isolate themselves from the college community (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Page, 2013).

Likewise, the value of multicultural experiences in the classroom was explored in a case study by Dotter (2009), who found that both students and faculty recognized the significance of student life experiences. Study participants represented two large urban universities in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Two faculty and three student participants volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews. Student data were obtained from an adapted version of the Nursing Students’ Perceptions of Instructor Caring (NSPIC) instrument and three short answer questions. Data analysis was conducted using the pattern matching and logic model: alternative configuration for an organizational level model and was based on Watson’s Transpersonal Caring Theory: Human-to-Human Transactions. The study reported that faculty appreciated the significance of student diversity and students confirmed that cultural recognition by educators and peers played an important role in their individual socialization and academic progression. One participant conveyed the importance of understanding the challenges that the minority college student faces (Dotter, 2009). Others stressed the importance of developing campus relationships. Furthermore, the study reinforced the merit of dynamic real life experiences. “Knowledge of life experience influence provides both direction and challenge for the educator: direction to apply value to student life experiences, and challenge to provide creative learning environments that effectively embrace these experiences” (Dotter, 2009, p. 16).
Assimilation and Academic Progression

Previous research has demonstrated that ethnic minority students have greater difficulty assimilating into unknown cultures and generally feel out of place (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). The purpose of the Meeuwisse et al. (2010) study was to investigate the connection between student success and the learning environment, including faculty and peer interactions and sense of campus belonging. A total of 523 participants completed an online questionnaire. The sample population consisted of both minority and majority first-year university students from four Netherlands universities. Linear structural modeling with chi-square analysis resulted in rejection of the hypothesis that learning environment impacted student success. However, when ethnic minority students were separated out, a statistically significant difference was identified. The more active and engaging the learning environment, the more ethnic minority students succeeded.

College culture is considered to be adaptable and responsive, and can therefore be manipulated to meet the needs of individual student populations (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Unequipped faculty will have difficulty handling the academic needs of culturally diverse students, and college success may be affected (Cole, 2008). Cole (2008) found that faculty support and encouragement positively impacted college student academic success. Cole examined the impact of faculty feedback on student grade point average and student academic satisfaction. Data for this study were randomly selected from first-year student information forms (1999) and fourth year surveys (2003) from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) in Los Angeles. The student sample consisted of 1,422 participants, 612 African-American students and 810 Hispanic students. Results indicated that students’ academic satisfaction and grade point average were significantly impacted by faculty feedback. In fact, the
supported and encouraged students even succeeded in the face of negative feedback if the student received support and encouragement from one faculty member.

Mentoring programs for Latino students have proven to be beneficial in improving assimilation and academic performance (Sánchez, Esparza, & Colón, 2008; Torres Campos et al., 2009). One study found that freshman Latino students who were mentored through their first year were more motivated and identified less depression and stress than their non-mentored classmates (Phinney et al., 2011). Phinney et al. (2011) conducted two longitudinal studies examining at-risk Latino students’ academic performance. The purpose of the study was to construct and evaluate an effective Latino mentoring program for at-risk Latino students at a predominantly minority-serving urban university. The first study compared 25 first-year, high-risk Latino students who participated in a mentor program at a predominantly minority, urban university with 29 first-year, high-risk Latino students who did not participate in a mentor program at a predominantly minority urban university. The second study compared 34 first-year, high-risk Latino students who participated in a trained mentor program at a predominantly minority urban university with 37 first-year high risk Latino students who did not participate in a mentor program at a predominantly minority, urban university with 62 first-year, high-risk Latino students who did not participate in a mentor program nor completed the follow-up second semester survey. The last identified group of 62 was used as a baseline group to monitor for selection bias. All students who participated in the study, except the baseline group, were given a survey in both the fall and spring semester of their first year to examine student academic motivation, sense of belonging, sense of depression, identification of obstacles, self-efficacy, stress, recognition of support, and university motivation. Though the results were moderate, mentored students showed improvement in the psychological factors that impact academic
Additionally, maintaining a strong mentor-mentee relationship positively influenced the mentee’s sense of belonging on the college campus.

Academic learning is cornerstone to the assimilation and application of knowledge; however, socialization is equally important to the development of holistic learning and college community involvement. According to Nguyen (2010), educators are charged with reducing as many cultural disadvantages as possible by providing students with both social and academic education. “Social learning builds up students’ consciousness of their citizenship and civic participation, and academic learning helps engage them in understanding and applying different kinds of knowledge critically and analytically” (Nguyen, 2010, p. 94). Moreover, even students with well-defined ethnic identities may choose to refrain from social expression in unfamiliar settings (L.M. González & Ting, 2008). In the L.M González and Ting (2008) study, the academic and social integration of Latino students on a southeastern university campus were reviewed. A survey developed was distributed via email to 447 undergraduate Latino students. Of the 447 surveys, 109 were returned. Factor analysis of the data revealed nine significant factors: active involvement in Latino student groups, academic honors and mentoring, attendance at campus Latino cultural events, connection with home and family, involvement with academic resources, ethnic identity attitudes, desire for administrative cultural support, needs for different types of support for Latino students, and use of academic advising and counseling. Of the nine identified factors, belonging to a Latino student organization had the most influence on academic and social integration on the college campus.

Preparing students for socialization in a global community is advantageous in higher education. According to Cord and Clements (2010), colleges must be aware of the challenges ethnic students face and provide opportunity for these students to be successful in the western
Becoming invested in Latino students’ future will require faculty to appreciate Latinos’ challenges and promote opportunity for the Latino student to forge employment skills (Cord & Clements, 2010). Cord and Clements sought to explore student learning and development as self-reported at the completion of an internship program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. They analyzed reflective student journals and conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 students. Communication skills, interpersonal skills, and personal insight emerged as the main themes. According to Cord and Clements (2010), learning environments saturated with support and encouragement foster academic and workplace success.

Moreover, Colón and Sánchez (2010) found Latinos who held onto their cultural heritage developed a greater sense of responsibility to succeed academically. The aim of the Colón and Sánchez study was to examine acculturation, economic value of education, and gender as it impacts the academic success of 143 low-income senior high school Latino students. Because senior high school students are a targeted population for entry into college, it is imperative that the academic achievement of this population not be ignored. Classroom administered surveys were available in both English and Spanish and were automatically read aloud in the classroom so as not to single out any reading impaired students. Data collection included demographic information, the Cultural Identity Scale for Latino Adolescents, the Benefits and Limitations of Education Scales, the Spanish Language Preference measurement, cumulative grade point average, and school attendance. Correlation and regression analysis demonstrated a relationship between acculturation, grade point average, and class attendance. Additionally, Pearson correlation supported a relationship between grade point average and sound ethnic identity. Therefore, “maintaining aspects of Latino culture, despite how one handles the host culture, serves as a protective factor in academic outcomes” (Colón and Sánchez, 2010, p. 268). Hence,
future research focused on understanding individual perception of the value of education to the Latino student may assist educators in the development of interventions supporting Latino academic success in both the secondary and higher education arenas (Cólon & Sánchez, 2010).

Similarly, it is important to recognize that the Latino household routinely follows a traditional, patriarchal structure where the Latino male is considered to be the head of and provider for the family (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009). Often, it is perceived that this position is abandoned when a male Latino enrolls in college. A study by Gloria et al. (2009) found that first-generation male Latino college students identified greater barriers to staying in college than second-generation male students. The Gloria et al. study’s intent was to examine the Latino male’s college experiences.

Specifically, the Gloria et al. study examined the coping responses and stress management skills of the male Latino college student. The study sample included 100 Latino male students between the ages of 18 and 35 attending a large west coast research college. Seven standardized scales were used to collect data. These included the: Collective Self-Esteem Scale, Perceptions of Barriers Scale, University Environment Scale, Cultural Congruity Scale, List of Coping Responses-Modified Scale, Student Coping Scale, and Psychological Well-Being Scale-Short. A five-step hierarchical regression was used to assess the predictors of psychological well-being. Coping responses, cultural fit, self-esteem, and perceived educational barriers were identified as the predictors of psychological well-being; however, cultural fit was identified as the most important predictor. Additionally, Latino male college students tended to first use a direct approach to dealing with conflict and second to draw on past experiences when contemplating a coping response. Interestingly, male Latino students were more likely to verbalize their struggles during their early years on campus, whereas male Latino students with
campus experience were more likely to base decisions on past experiences (Gloria et al., 2009). Moreover, the study found that cultural congruity was the strongest predictor of college retention (Gloria et al., 2009). Subsequently, it would be advantageous to conduct research that evaluates the coping skills of both male and female Latino college students (Gloria et al., 2009).

A study by Glass and Westmont (2014) using a resilience-based model evaluated the relationship of sense of belongingness and academic success. The Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) was administered to 18,628 international and domestic students at eight different research universities across the world. The GPI captures the student’s global perspective on his or her ability to reason, define a sense of self, and demonstrate the ability to relate to people from different origins (Glass & Westmont, 2014). Glass and Westmont (2014) reported no significant differences between international students’ and domestic students’ sense of belongingness. However, international students felt more ethnic-specific criticism and were more engaged in cross-cultural interactions (Glass & Westmont, 2014). Glass and Westmont (2014) claimed their findings demonstrate some of the strongest evidence to support the importance of campus belongingness and cross-cultural interaction among college students. The study found that ethnic discrimination experiences resulted in the development of a poor sense of campus belonging, and the level of sense of belongingness had a direct correlation on academic success. Additionally, student participation in on-campus activities had a positive effect on the sense of belongingness. Moreover, senior students did not identify a greater level of belongingness compared to freshman students, even though they reported feeling more engaged in campus activities. Further studies investigating the comparison of sense of belongingness between first-year college students and upper classmen were suggested (Glass & Westmont, 2014).
Similarly, Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, and Hawley (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to examine how perceptions of belonging, academic motivation, and campus engagement of 212 students attending a large, Midwestern university impacted their academic achievement. The study participants were 92% European-American, 3% Latino, 2% African-American, and 3% other. The study group unanimously indicated that a higher level of sense of belonging was directly related to positive peer relationships (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Conversely, the opposite was true for students with a low level of sense of belonging. Students with a low level of sense of belonging indicated that their belongingness was negatively impacted by their lack of positive peer relationships (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Additionally, students who reported a high sense of belonging felt supported by their peers, and students who reported a low sense of belonging reported less support by their peers (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). The study also reflected a correlation between sense of belonging and motivation to succeed academically. Students who were more motivated to succeed academically displayed a higher level of belongingness, interacted more with peers and participated more in class (Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

Research and statistics clearly demonstrate the need to further investigate the post-secondary challenges and resources available to the Latino college student. A study by Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, and Talavera-Bustillos (2017) used a mixed method approach to give voice to the perceived challenges and resources of 114 Latino college students at a Hispanic-serving institution in Southern California. Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) found students to be challenged by financial stability and academic knowledge skills. Conversely, academic aspiration, family, and navigational and social capital were identified as sources of support (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) recognized the complexity of family relationship obligations. This dual role can be identified as both a challenge and a source of
support for the Latino college student (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). “Further research is needed to determine the level of social support or conflict a family brings to bear on college success” (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, p. 71).

Summary

Latino assimilation into Western culture has been tumultuous. In addition, a rise in Latino population is dramatically influencing the higher education classroom. Educators have been charged with meeting the educational needs of the Latino population. The evolvement of a complex, cultural community on the college campus has produced a need for educators to become aware of the individual nuances specific to their college environment and to facilitate academic success for the ethnic student (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

L.M. González and Ting (2008) surveyed 109 Latino students at one southeastern college campus and found that the most influential factor associated with assimilation was belonging to Latino student organizations. Therefore, the connection between education and social adjustment is crucial to the educator addressing the educational disparities of the Latino student. “Thus, to better address educational disparities among Latinos, it is essential to develop an understanding of the association between psychocultural factors and educational expectations, and the mechanisms that may mediate their relationship” (Cano et al., 2012, p. 232).

For the first time since 1993, Latino college enrollment has surpassed both Caucasian and African-American enrollment numbers (Lopez & Fry, 2013). Despite this dramatic increase in college enrollment, degree completion for the Latino student remains lower than any other ethnic group (Lopez & Fry, 2013). Despite these alarming statistics, the Latino population continues to seek educational advancement. Therefore, it is imperative that today’s educators become familiar with the needs of the Latino population. A study by Espinoza (2103) found that Latino
students generally want to succeed in college. There is a deep desire to do well for themselves and for their families (Espinoza, 2013). Espinoza interviewed eight senior, first-generation Latino students at a large private research predominantly Caucasian college. The interviews were conducted on the college campus and consisted of both open-ended and semi-structured questions. Students expressed a commitment to academic persistence, a desire to avoid the challenges faced by their parents, and allegiance to peer and family relationships (Espinoza, 2013).

Likewise, in 2009, New Mexico State University held a conference to examine the perceptions of first-generation Latino students attending the university (Medina & Posadas, 2012). Topics of exploration included sense of campus environment, student accountability, and student retention (Medina & Posadas, 2012). Medina and Posadas (2012) recognized the importance of developing Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education. The facilitators of the symposium also noted that as Latino student enrollment continues to rise, it will become increasing imperative to retain and graduate this population as more and more states are demanding increased graduation rates (Medina & Posadas, 2012).

This qualitative, case study explored Latino students’ academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. The aim of the study was to explore the Latino students’ self-perceptions of belongingness and give voice to the challenges of the Latino student attending the selected institution of higher education. This case study adds valuable information to the educational literature regarding the challenges faced by today’s Latino college population. The sense of belonging on the college campus is multifaceted and intricately woven into the Latino students’ life experiences. For one to understand the delicate details of the Latino students’ self-perceptions, one must ask the
individual student. This case study was intended to dig beneath the surface and expose the particulars of the Latino students’ self-perception.

A sense of belonging has been identified as a crucial element in college campus survival (Cano et al., 2012; Locks et al., 2008; Maramba, 2008; Nuñez, 2009a; Page, 2013). Research has demonstrated that the sense of belonging on the college campus is complex and warrants further investigation (Kim et al., 2010; Locks et al., 2008; Maramba, 2008; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Nuñez, 2009a; Page, 2013). Additionally, research has recommended conducting studies of Latino student adaptation in various United States regions (L.M. Gonzalez & Ting, 2008). Experts believe that sense of belonging is foundational to academic success, and qualitative studies are an integral piece to the educational puzzle that will provide comprehensive insight into the Latino students’ perceptions (Cano et al., 2012; Gloria et al., 2009; Iturbide et al., 2009; Locks et al., 2008; Nuñez, 2009b; Page, 2013). Further, it is the educators’ responsibility to respond to the changing campus climate and seek the information necessary to promote academic success for all college students (Nguyen, 2010).

A study by Cerezo and McWhirter (2012) examined the impact of Northwest Pacific Latino student social awareness on college retention. The eight-week study began with 104 volunteer Latino students and ended with 26 volunteer students. The study compared one group of students that received intervention including peer support, mentoring, and social awareness instruction with a control group that received no intervention. Data from a demographic survey, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, the Critical Consciousness of Race in Higher Education Scale, and the Cultural Congruency Scale were evaluated. The assessment tools were incorporated over an eight-week period and administered in small group settings with 5-10 students per session. The intervention was
conducted during a one eight-hour session on one day. There were minimal differences between the control group and the intervention group reported. However, a student-led community emerged. Students began interacting with one another and encouraging fellow students to attend campus ethnic group activities. Hence, the sense of belonging to the campus community flourished, and retention may have been impacted.

There are many variables that impact college retention. Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory depicts four succinct elements of possible strain: college adjustment, academic difficulty, incongruence or poor fit, and isolation. These are just a few of the many unique challenges for the Latino college student. Moreover, there area additional challenges for the Latino student attending a rural community college. Rural community college students are faced with the added variable of navigating travel needs. Statistics report that living on campus increases a student’s likelihood of persistence to graduation by 4.5% (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). Additionally, the likelihood of persistence to graduation for the Latino student is 6.1% lower than other ethnic groups (Oseguera & Rhee, 2009). This grave picture of Latino college student success leads to this question: How do educators assist the Latino college student in traversing the obstacles set before them on the college campus? Without awareness of the Latino student perception of belonging on the college campus, any attempts to retain this valuable population are futile. Consequently, the gap in the literature that will be addressed in this case study is to determine the Latino college student’s perception of belonging on the college campus and assimilation into the Western college culture. Perhaps understanding the Latino college student’s perception of academic and socialization difficulties will impact college acculturation strategies and ultimately, college graduation rates among the Latino population.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to explore Latino student perceptions of their ethnic identity and how it influences their sense of belongingness and academic and social integration in a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. The research design, researcher’s role, participant/site selection, data collection methods and data analysis are presented in this chapter. I also reflect on my 15-plus years as a nurse educator and illustrate the significance of placing value on the Latino student voice.

Design

A case study design was used to conduct the study. According to Yin (2014), case studies focus on a contemporary situation and are particularly useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon under study and the context are not clearly delineated. Case studies focus on how and why questions, use multiple sources of evidence, and allow the researcher to glean detailed understanding of the situation (Yin, 2014). For the purposes of this study, I entered the field to explore the perceptions of Latino students regarding how their ethnic identity influences their sense of belongingness and integration into the community college culture in one campus located in Eastern Pennsylvania. Individuals were studied to promote understanding of Latino self-perception regarding college socialization; thus, the case study design is appropriate (Yin, 2009).

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity, and how do past experiences influence their sense of belonging, their ability to adjust, and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania? Individual interviews, the Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria &
Kurpius, 1996), and electronic journals were used to gather data in order to answer the following sub questions:

(1) How do Latino students describe their academic integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

(2) How do Latino students describe their social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college in Eastern Pennsylvania?

(3) How do the perceptions regarding academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania of first-year Latino students compare to those of second-year student who have had the opportunity to observe peer interactions on the college campus?

**Setting**

The study site was a small community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. The college was founded in 1966 and serves two counties in Eastern Pennsylvania. The college offers 40 career associate degree programs, 19 certificate programs, 12 transfer associate degree programs, and eight specialized credit diploma programs on four different campuses. One particular campus with the largest Latino student enrollment was used as the study site. I have no affiliation with this particular site or any of the students who attend this site.

A total of 6,785 credit seeking students attend the selected community college. The college maintains four campuses across two counties. Of the 6,785 credit-seeking students in the fall of 2014, 882 or 13% have self-identified themselves as being Hispanic. One site, the main campus, serves 11.3% of the 882, another site serves 2.1% of the 882, the third site serves 1.4% of the 882, and the fourth site serves 33.1% of the 882. I have only ever taught students at the first and second sites listed. I never visited the third or fourth sites. The fourth site that serves
33.1% of the total Hispanic population enrolled in credit courses, or a total of 292 students, was used as the data collection site.

**Participants**

Participants were purposefully selected Latino first-year and second-year college students. Purposeful sampling is best suited for this case study because individuals and sites will be selected based on the richness of the information that will be obtained (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The intent of purposeful sampling is to reveal an in-depth understanding of the selected participants, not an entire population (Gall et al., 2007). Specifically, purposeful criterion sampling will be used to select study participants. Purposeful criterion sampling is the selection of participants to meet preset standards (Gall et al., 2007). The preset criteria for this case study were Latino first- and second-year community college students. Additional criteria included: Latino first-year students were first time college students, Latino second-year students were first time college students who had maintained consistent and normal matriculation, no transfer students, and no second-degree students. Any Latino first-time college student attending the selected campus regardless of age was eligible for the study. All participants were required to speak and write English and have a computer and Internet access.

A total of 10 volunteer Latino students were selected. Selection was based on the identified criterion in the previous paragraph. There are no strict guidelines that justify sample size in qualitative case study research design (Gall et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2013). Qualitative research is more flexible with sample size, where the goal is data saturation (no new themes identified by participants) without analysis misrepresentation from insufficient representation of voluminous data (Gall et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2013).
Procedures

The first step in the study procedure was to submit Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Liberty University. After receiving IRB approval from Liberty University, an IRB application was submitted to Lehigh Carbon Community College. After receiving IRB approval from Lehigh Carbon Community College, selection of study participants began.

Potential Latino participants were identified through enrollment services at Lehigh Carbon Community College. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to potential participants attending the selected campus by myself via the participant’s school email address. Participants who responded to the initial email sent by myself with a desire to voluntarily participate in the study were emailed a participant checklist to verify eligibility based on the previously stated criteria. Participants were asked to return the completed checklist to me via a specifically-designated study email address. The participant checklist is included in Appendix A. After participant checklists were received and reviewed by myself, recruitment of participants began. Recruitment was conducted via email on my office or home computer in Eastern Pennsylvania. Recruitment of participants was conducted after IRB approval and approximately two to four weeks prior to beginning data collection.

There were three components to the data collection process. First, participants completed an electronic journal. The electronic journal questions were in a writable, Microsoft Word document format and were sent to the participant by myself. The electronic journal questions are included in Appendix D. Completed electronic journals were returned to a specifically-designated study email address prior to participant interviews, allowing the identification of potential student concerns. Identified student concerns were addressed by me during the individual interviews. Electronic journal questions and answers were offered in the participant’s
language of choice (English or Spanish). No Spanish electronic journals were requested. Electronic journals took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Second, participants met individually with myself for an interview. The interview questions are included in Appendix C. Interviews were semi-structured and allowed participants and myself the ability to ask more probing questions based on participant answers. Interviews were approximately one hour in length. Interviews were audiotaped using Livescribe recording technology, which allowed for verbatim transcription of participant responses, thereby ensuring accurate representation of participant responses. Livescribe smartpen technology allows all audio and written information to be synchronously recorded and transferred to the computer for easy access, transcription, and word search capability. A digital voice recorder was available and used in the event of Livescribe technology failure. Interviews were held in a public conference room on the designated study site.

Third, immediately after the interview, participants completed the Cultural Congruity Scale, a 13-question Likert-scale survey. The survey is included in Appendix E. The survey took approximately 15 minutes. The Cultural Congruity Scale measures the participant's perception of how congruent their individual, personal, and cultural values are with those of the institution they are attending.

**The Researcher’s Role**

The researcher is the human instrument for the study. I have been employed in nursing education for over 15 years. At the time of the study, I was employed as an assistant professor of nursing for a small community college in Eastern Pennsylvania. I have taught in diploma programs, associate degree programs, and baccalaureate programs. I have experienced cultural diversity in the student population in all three programs. Yet, I have minimal experience
teaching Latino students; therefore, I have negligible preconceived bias regarding Latino campus belonging perceptions. However, biases toward Latino perceptions of college campus belongingness may have developed through my extensive review of the literature. The literature suggests a deficiency of Latino voice in the elucidation of college campus assimilation (Gloria et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, credibility, dependability, and consistency of the research findings was assured through blind review of the research findings by a peer reviewer, the use of multiple data sources, and data triangulation.

I am specifically interested in the Latino population because I believe the statistics demonstrate a need to uncover the perceived challenges regarding higher education of this people group. Personally, I have observed an increase in the Latino population in society and in my workplace. Working in the health care field, and based on the current healthcare clientele in Eastern Pennsylvania, it has become evident that the expert nurse will require a basic understanding of Latino needs and Latino language. According to 2010 statistics for the Eastern Pennsylvania region where the study took place, there is a 42.8% Latino population compared to a 5.7% Latino population in the state of Pennsylvania as a whole. Additionally, 40.6% of the population in this Eastern Pennsylvania region indicates that a language other than English is primarily spoken in the home, compared to 10.3% in the overall Pennsylvania state statistics. Accordingly, there is a demand to recognize the complexity of the Latino student and to nurture their academic progression. I believe this case study adds valuable information to the literature regarding the self-perceptions of belonging on the college campus and how it impacts socialization and academic progression.

From a nurse educator perspective, my desire is to encourage and support any student that has a dream to become a nurse. During our faculty discussions, the topic of “calling”
frequently comes up. In the healthcare field, it is traditionally believed that to be a nurse, one must not only be dedicated, but called to the profession. Hence, my desire to learn more about the Latino students’ needs is two-fold. My hope is that this case study enables academia to reevaluate the services and programs available to the Latino student based on the Latino student voice, and second to potentially retain the much needed Latino nursing student and feed the ever-growing demand for Latino healthcare workers.

Data Collection

After Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and site authorization, three different sources of data were collected from the research site. Multiple sources of data collection will promote the exploration of a variety of issues or themes (Yin, 2009). The primary data source was individual interviews with research participants. Additional data sources included electronic journaling and the Cultural Congruity Scale (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Individual interviews provided data for the overarching research question: How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity and how do past experiences influence their sense of belonging, the ability to adjust, and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania? The three sub questions were also addressed by the individual interview questions. The three sub questions included: (1) How do Latino students describe their academic integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?, (2) How do Latino students describe their social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?, and (3) How do the perceptions regarding academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania of first-year Latino students compare to those of second-year students who have had the
opportunity to observe peer interactions on the college campus? Electronic journals provided data for the overarching research question and sub question number two. The Cultural Congruity Scale provided data for the overarching research question and sub questions numbers two and three.

Potential Latino participants were identified through enrollment services. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to potential participants attending the selected campus by myself via their school email address. Emailed invitations shared the purpose of the study, included a timeline of study events, and explained the details of informed consent including directions for voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study. Participants who responded to the initial email sent by myself with a desire to voluntarily participate in the study were emailed a participant checklist (see Appendix A) to verify eligibility based on the previously stated criteria. Ten participants, or approximately 4% of the total population, were randomly selected from both the first-year and the second-year eligible students. Approximately 4% of the total Hispanic population attending the selected campus were included in this case study, thereby ensuring replication logic for multiple case studies. “Upon uncovering a significant finding form a single experiment, an ensuing and pressing priority would be to replicate this finding by conducting a second, third, and even more experiments” (Yin, 2009, p. 54).

Informed consents were sent to the selected participants. A copy of the informed consent is included in Appendix B. Participants were asked to sign the informed consent and email it back to me. Once the informed consent was received, I emailed a copy of the electronic journal guidelines and a selection of interview dates/times to the participant. Participants were asked to complete the electronic journal and email it back to me by a specific date. Participants were
given one week to complete the electronic journal. The interview was scheduled for a date succeeding the submission of the electronic journal. Electronic journal information that may either add richness or require clarification was reviewed with the participant during the individual interview. At the completion of the interview, the participants were asked to complete the short thirteen question Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS). The CCS is specifically designed to capture a students’ perception of how congruent their individual personal and cultural values are with those of the university they are attending. The CCS was completed after the journaling and interview to allow participants the opportunity to share open responses before being asked to rate their individual feelings about specific college situations.

The defined data collection sequence allowed for corroboration of journal responses with interview responses and open-ended responses with structured responses. This hybrid strategy of combining interviews, journaling, and surveys allowed for a broader range of inquiry (Yin, 2009). Additionally, multiple sources of evidence that support the research phenomenon facilitated the process of triangulation, thereby building a convincing and accurate study (Yin, 2009).

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with participants provided opportunity for student voice to be monitored and to access both verbal and nonverbal communication (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured individual interview questions focused on participant feelings regarding campus belonging, how they feel accepted or not accepted on the campus, and what or who has influenced them in pursuing educational advancement. Exploring the relationships between Latino students and individual college campus factors adds valuable information to the body of educational literature (Gloria et al., 2010; Montgomery & Haemmerlie, 1986; Museus & Quaye,
The interview questions were based on Kuh and Love’s (2000) eight cultural propositions on college student persistence. The interview questions were designed to reflect the propositions on ethnic student persistence and potentially generate new cultural perspective. Likewise, the eight cultural propositions tested in a similar qualitative study by Museus and Quaye (2009) using similar interview questions found that a thorough understanding and appreciation of culture dramatically affects ethnic minority persistence on the college campus. The interview questions used in this study are discussed below.

**Proposition 1.** Minority (ethnic) students’ college experiences are shaped by their cultural meaning-making systems (Kuh & Love, 2000). Ethnic minority students who have no prior experience in higher education find the environment baffling and are apt to withdraw prior to graduation (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Therefore, ethnic minority students’ precollege experiences influence their college campus perceptions and was assessed with interview question number one, “How would you describe fitting-in on a college campus?” (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2011; Locks et al., 2008; Page, 2013).

**Proposition 2.** Minority students’ cultures of origin moderate the meanings that they attach to college attendance, engagement, and completion (Kuh & Love, 2000). It has been found to be imperative to consider the importance of family support for the Latino student; otherwise, Latino students will become distraught and isolate themselves from the college community (Berrios-Allsion, 2011). The interview questions that addressed the Latino students’ perception of intercultural engagement based on their culture of origin included numbers four, five, and six. “Tell me about a time your family encouraged you to learn something new. Who was involved in the process? What was the outcome?,” “How do you think this experience has influenced your achievements over the years?,” and “Tell me about your family’s involvement in
your decision to seek higher education,” respectively (Cólon & Sánchez, 2010; Iturbide et al., 2009; Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

**Proposition 3.** Knowledge of minority students’ cultures of origin and immersion are required to understand those students’ abilities to negotiate their respective campus cultural milieus (Kuh & Love, 2000). Meeuwisse et al. (2010) found that students who participated in multiple educational campus activities resulted in increased collaboration with peers and teachers. Knowledge of Latino student culture and opportunity to participate in ethnic campus events has been found to promote college success (Gloria et al., 2010; R.G. Gonzales, 2013). Interview question number three measured proposition three, “What is the difference between socializing with other Latino students and socializing with mixed cultural groups of students?”

**Proposition 4.** Cultural dissonance is inversely related to minority students’ persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Previous studies have found that ethnic minority students have greater difficulty assimilating into unknown cultures, generally feel out of place, and consider leaving the institution (R.G. Gonzalez, 2013; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009). The association between familial psychocultural influences and educational success is essential to identifying academic disparities among Latino college students (Cano et al., 2012). Interview question numbers seven and nine investigated the Latino students’ perception of family influence and campus belonging, “How has your family’s influence affected your current sense of belonging on the college campus?” and “Tell me about a time that you felt unaccepted and left out on the college campus.”

**Proposition 5.** Minority students who experience a substantial amount of cultural dissonance must acclimate to the dominant campus culture or establish sufficient connections with cultural agents at their institution to persist (Kuh & Love, 2000). Previous studies have
found that successful student outcomes are dependent on student campus involvement, and when campus involvement behaviors are transformed, the experience is molded into the learner’s life (Kim et al., 2010; Wang, 2012). Interview question number 10 was used to investigate the Latino students’ perception of campus acclimation, “What helps you to feel a sense of belonging on the college campus?”

**Proposition 6.** The degree to which campus cultural agents validate minority students’ cultures of origin is positively associated with reduced cultural dissonance and greater likelihood of persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Campus validation of ethnic origin and the presence of ethnic student service representation have been found to be more valuable than ethnic detachment (Guinn et al., 2011; Maramba, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Interview question number eight was used to assess proposition number six, “Tell me about a time that you felt accepted and encouraged on the college campus.”

**Proposition 7.** The quality and quantity of minority students’ connections with various cultural agents on their respective campuses is positively associated with their likelihood of persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Literature supports the idea that students who develop a social support network are most successful on the college campus (Romero, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). Building networks and maintaining cultural connections for the Latino student is paramount to academic achievement (Museus & Neville, 2012). Additionally, the frequency and quality of interactions with others bear a critical influence on students’ sense of belonging and drive to persist on the college campus (Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1993). L.M. Gonzalez and Ting (2008) found that belonging to Latino student organizations and attending Latino cultural events are directly related to the Latino students’ perception of social connectedness on their college
campus. Interview question number two addressed proposition seven, “From your experience, why do you socialize with other students?”

**Proposition 8.** Minority students are more likely to persist if the cultural agents to whom they are connected emphasize educational achievement, value educational attainment, and validate their traditional cultural heritages (Kuh & Love, 2000). Studies have found that the Latino students who are more actively involved in ethnic programs on their college campuses, who developed academic networks, and who identify a campus connection are more likely to be academically successful (Guinn et al., 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Romero, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). Further, empirical research demonstrates the importance of establishing campus connections with faculty and peers (L.M. González & Ting, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Interview question number eight evaluated proposition number eight, “Tell me about a time that you felt accepted and encouraged on the college campus.”

Semi-structured interviews began with a predetermined set of questions, then in response to the answers to these questions and electronic journal entries, I had the opportunity to ask more probing open-form questions to gain more insight (Gall et al., 2007). Thus, reasonably standard data across participants was achieved with the added advantage of greater depth of participant ideation (Gall et al., 2007). The interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Participants who responded to the initial email sent by me (as described in the previous section on data collection) were notified of selection via email by myself, and an agreed upon time and date for the interview was determined. All interviews were conducted in a public conference room on the designated study site. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were audiotaped using Livescribe recording technology. Interview participants were offered a
parking pass or bus fare to cover parking expenses on the day of the interview, and light refreshments were available during the interview.

**Electronic Journals**

All volunteer participants who agreed to participate in the study signed the electronic informed consent and were asked to respond to semi-structured, open-ended questions reflecting their individual feelings on campus belonging via electronic journaling format. Like the interview questions, the electronic journal questions were based on Kuh and Love’s (2000) eight cultural propositions on college student persistence. The electronic journal questions were also designed to reflect the propositions on ethnic student persistence and potentially generate new cultural perspective. This study’s electronic interview questions were intended to begin the data collection process and were not intended to reflect the propositions in their entirety. The electronic journal questions are discussed and linked to select propositions below. Please see above for proposition definitions.

**Proposition 1.** Ethnic minority students who have no prior college experience find it difficult to navigate the campus environment and are prone to quitting (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Electronic journal question number three reflected on Latino students’ perception of successful college campus assimilation, “In your opinion, what are the most critical needs of Latino students on the college campus?” (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2011; Locks et al., 2008).

**Proposition 2.** Ethnic students’ cultures of origin identify their individual unique qualities and are important to recognizing the significance they attach to college campus assimilation (Kuh & Love, 2000). The electronic journal additional comment section with the question, “Is there anything you would like to share about your experience as a Latino student on your college campus?” addressed proposition number two.
**Proposition 4.** Ethnic minority students are known to have greater difficulty assimilating into unknown cultures, they generally feel out of place, and they frequently consider leaving the institution (R.G. Gonzalez, 2013; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Electronic journal question number two assessed proposition number four, “Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel left out. What did this mean to you?”

**Proposition 5.** Successful student outcomes have been found to be dependent on student campus involvement, and when campus involvement behaviors are transformed, the experience is molded into the learner’s life (Kim et al., 2010; Wang, 2012). Electronic journal question number one assessed this proposition, “Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel like your were accepted. What did this mean to you?”

**Proposition 7.** Literature supports that idea that students who develop a social and academic support network and maintain cultural connections are most successful on the college campus (Museus & Neville, 2012; Romero, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). Additionally, L.M. Gonzalez and Ting (2008) found that belonging to Latino student organizations and attending Latino cultural events are directly related to the Latino students’ perception of social connectedness on their college campus. Electronic journal question number four was used to evaluate proposition number seven, “What are some ways you see yourself becoming an advocate for Latino students on your college campus?”

Electronic journaling questions were sent to the students in a writable word document allowing ease of completion. The electronic journaling questions are included in Appendix C. Completed documents were returned via email to me prior to the individual interview. Electronic journaling allowed students to voice their opinion in a relaxed atmosphere without
potential inhibition secondary to my presence, expound on individual feelings and thoughts, and express concerns in their individual language of choice. Additionally, electronic journaling provided me with insight into the participant’s perceptions and supported guided questioning during the individual interview to assess identified concerns. Spanish-written electronic journals were offered. No student participants requested Spanish-written electronic journals.

Journaling allows the researcher to evaluate the studied phenomenon from the students’ perspective (Rowland, 2008). Students in the Rowland study were given writing prompts and limited amounts of class time to journal their answer. I also presented writing prompts to the participants in this study; however, the writing was conducted independent of class time and did not have a time limit. Journaling also provides opportunity for students to be transparent and honest with issues reflecting the studied phenomenon (Rowland, 2008).

**Cultural Congruity Scale**

The Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) was used to ascertain the Latino students’ perception of individual social integration on the college campus. The instrument was administered at the conclusion of the individual interview and prior to the student leaving the meeting location to ensure survey completion. Gloria and Kurpius developed the CCS in 1996, and permission was granted for the use of the survey. The CCS validation was originally performed with Chicano and Latina subjects in a pilot study in 1996 and has been used with a variety of other ethnic groups in later studies. Cronbach alpha scores ranged from .81 to .89 with an internal consistency coefficient of .86 (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). The 13-item survey was created to measure a students’ perception of how congruent their individual personal and cultural values are with those of the university they are attending (Gloria et al., 2009). The CCS uses a Likert scale of
one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree) to ascertain a students’ perception of belonging among other students and within the college campus environment (Gloria et al., 2009). The 13 questions ask students to rate their perceptions regarding how their ethnic identity influences how they feel they have to work to fit in at school, if that identity is incompatible with that of students, how students interact with friends at school, and how family influences their school experience. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A complete copy of the scale is located in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The quantitative data obtained from the Cultural Congruity Scale were analyzed using descriptive statistics to assess each survey item. Surveys were coded and numbered to correlate with interviews and electronic journals. The qualitative data were analyzed using case coding. Coding is the assignment of a word or short phrase that reflects the interpretation of each participant’s verbal, visual, or written datum (Saldaña, 2013). Coding is ultimately used for categorizing datum and pattern detection (Saldaña, 2013). Case coding began with open coding of the data for the identification of major categories of information (Creswell, 2007). Based on the open coding results, axial coding promoted selection of the focus or core category (Creswell, 2007). Once the focus category was revealed, the raw data were reviewed a second time to generate categories around the focus category (Creswell, 2007). The focus categories consisted of aspects related to the core category, strategies or responses to the core category, identifications of factors influencing the strategies or responses, and outcomes related to the use of the strategies (Creswell, 2007). The coding of the data was reported as a visual model or axial coding paradigm (Creswell, 2007). Finally, selective coding was implemented to develop propositions
to report the interrelationship of the identified categories (Creswell, 2007). In essence, case description (open coding), theme analysis (axial coding), and assessment or generalization (selective coding) will be used to illustrate the details of the study data (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative data consisted of verbatim interview transcripts and electronic journal transcripts. Additionally, a peer reviewer conducted a blind review of the data to ensure appropriate identification of themes and categories. These multiple perspectives of data analysis were employed to ensure an accurate representation of student perceptions and to promote study validity through triangulation (Denzin, 1978).

Coding of qualitative data requires repetitive and tedious study, and allows the researcher the ability to examine individual data, which will lead to identification of patterns, categories, and themes (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) recommended two cycles of coding. Cycle one coding encompasses the initial assessment of collected participant data and researcher field notes, and normally involves several coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). The grammatical organizational rules of attribute coding, or basic descriptive data management, will be the foundation of the recorded information for this research (Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, initial coding with in vivo coding will acknowledge participant voice and explore similarities and differences of data; descriptive coding will be used to summarize the data; and values coding will capture participant perspectives (Saldaña, 2013). Finally, cycle two coding will be applied where cycle one coding is reevaluated for new discoveries and may result in the reordering of patterns, categories, and themes (Saldaña, 2013).
**Trustworthiness**

Throughout the study, a variety of steps were taken to adequately support the trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is based on the integrity of the data, the preservation of subjectivity, and the clear communication of findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Further, the framework for structuring the trustworthiness of a study is based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of the fundamental pillars of this framework will be defined below.

**Credibility**

Credibility captures the truthful essence of the research data (Polit & Beck, 2012). It is supported by clear interpretation and truthful representation and communication of participant views (Polit & Beck, 2012). Triangulation and member checking demonstrated the credibility of this study. Triangulation is the acquisition of multiple data sources with the purpose of supporting a common phenomenon (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). Individual participant interviews, electronic journaling, and the Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS) were my three sources for triangulation. Member checking is the verification of authenticity of recorded participant responses (Saldaña, 2013). Verbatim Livescribe transcription of student voice from audio taped interviews maintained integrity of the data, and participants in this study were invited to review portions of recorded data for accuracy at the completion of the study.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the stability or rigor of the data (Polit & Beck, 2012). Dependability of the study was maintained by securing an audit trail to document and support employed methodology and interpretation of data, thereby promoting awareness of
procedures and potential study replication (Gall et al., 2007). Additionally, memoing, a process where a researcher writes down ideas about emerging themes during the evaluation of data, was utilized to demonstrate dependability of the data (Creswell, 2007).

Confirmability is very similar to dependability and will be defined as the ability to validate that the findings represent participant responses (Polit & Beck, 2012). The audit trail demonstrated that findings are data driven. Moreover, integrity of the data was supported by the disclosure of similar themes and categories identified by a doctorally prepared peer reviewer. Written and electronic data is being stored in a locked, fire safe storage unit in my home for a period of three years to comply with federal requirements and Liberty University guidelines.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the ability to apply findings to another similar group or situation (Polit & Beck, 2012). Transferability was very limited, and perhaps even impossible, unless another community college has like enrollment and campus resources. The intent of this study was not be produce generalizations regarding the study phenomenon, but to extrapolate Latino perceptions on a specific study site. These perceptions were compiled and communicated as thick descriptive data, and the reader will determine the value or fit of the findings.

**Triangulation**

The results of this study identified three overarching themes. These themes demonstrate the Latino student’s perceptions of the meaning of college belongingness and are defined in the results section of Chapter Four. Similar to the Nuñez (2009a) study identifying a link between active involvement on the college campus and increased sense of belonging, this study revealed campus community for the Latino student as a critical factor to academic and social success on
the college campus. This study demonstrated triangulation through the similar themes found between the Cultural Congruency Scale, the personal interviews, and the electronic journals.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations to be addressed include representation of a single culture group with the potential of stereotyping, misrepresentation of the national Latino community, anonymity of participant identities, and security of the data. Participant informed consent was obtained prior to participation in the study and after the submission of the participant qualification checklist. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants was maintained by asking participants to supply a pseudonym for the purpose of reporting study results. Data collection and participant treatment was in alignment with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University, as well as the hosting community college guidelines. Application to IRB was submitted and approval was granted prior to data collection proceedings.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the study design has been identified, details of the data collection methods and participant selection have been reviewed, and the study questions have been outlined. A qualitative case study design was used to focus on the Latino students’ sense of belonging on the college campus phenomena. The qualitative case study design using multiple sources of data collection methods paired with how and why questions generates detailed information about a given phenomenon (Yin, 2014). After IRB approval and participant consent, individual interviews, electronic student journals, and the Cultural Congruity Scale survey were used as the multiple sources of data supplying the information regarding the Latino students’ sense of belonging on the college campus. The data analysis included descriptive statistics of each survey item and case coding of participant verbal and written responses on interviews and electronic
journals. Understanding of Latino student self-perceptions regarding academic and social integration on the college campus were filtered through previously studied propositions indicative of academic progression on the college campus. The statistics supporting the selected people group and the study locale were included. The integrity and truthful essence of the data, as well as ethical considerations protecting the study group have been considered. Latino student perceptions of their sense of belonging on a non-Hispanic serving college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania were explored and Latino student voice is represented in the study findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. The study on self-perceptions of Latino students at an institution of higher education in Eastern Pennsylvania will be presented. The sample included 10 Latino first- and second-year college students between the ages of 18 and 25. All student participants were identified through enrollment services or self-disclosure during open recruitment. Selection was based on self-identification of Latino status. All students maintained normal and consistent matriculation and spoke and wrote English fluently. Data collection included individual semi-structured interviews, an electronic journal, and the Cultural Congruity Scale. The findings of these data collection instruments, along with inductively developed themes will be presented in this chapter.

Participants

The sample of Latino college students who participated in this study were four students aged 18-38 who were first-year college students and six students aged 19-25 who were second-year college students. All student participants were identified either through enrollment services or during the study-revealing procedure held on the college campus. Participant selection was based on self-disclosure of Latino status. Participants maintained normal and consistent matriculation and spoke and wrote English fluently. Four first-year students were interviewed.

Dave

Dave is a 19-year-old student, was enrolled in premedical courses, participates in film club, and is a member of the National Guard.
Sam

Sam is a 19-year-old student, was enrolled in general education courses. Sam works two jobs, is a first-generation college student, and has a disabled father who she helps care for.

Alexa

Alexa is an 18-year-old student, enrolled in general education courses, and is being raised by a single mom.

Susan

Susan is a 38-year-old student and is enrolled in general education courses. She is a single mom who is raising two children, works, and is a first-generation college student.

Six second-year students were interviewed.

John

John is a 19-year-old student and is enrolled in general education courses. John is being raised by a single mom and is a first-generation college student.

Maria

Maria is a 19-year-old student, enrolled in general education courses; she works as well. Maria is a first-generation college student.

Sarah

Sarah is a 20-year-old business major who works.

Dean

Dean is a 20-year-old student and is enrolled in general education courses. Dean works and lives with his father.
Anaya

Anaya is a 21-year-old student who is enrolled in general education courses. Anaya was raised by a single mom, and is a first-generation college student. Anaya also works and is raising a baby.

Anna

Anna is a 25-year-old student who is enrolled in general education courses and works full-time.

Table 1 includes the participant demographics.
Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Year Students</th>
<th>2nd Year Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>1 male student premed</td>
<td>1 female student business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 female students gen ed</td>
<td>5 students gen ed (2M,3F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Courses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses in Major</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is single parent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised by single parent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works and goes to school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially supports family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in campus clubs/activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Descriptive Data**

All participants completed the Cultural Congruity Scale at the close of their individual personal interview. The majority, or 60%, felt that they did not need to change anything about themselves to feel as though they fit in on the college campus. They do not try to hide their ethnic identity. Their language and/or appearance did not interfere with their fitting in on the college campus. In fact, the individual interviews revealed that the Latino student participants were very proud of their heritage and eager to assist other Latino students. The Latino students
felt that they are well adjusted and that they are compatible with students of various ethnic
groups. Additionally, an overwhelming majority, or 90%, of students reported that they could
freely talk to their college peers about their family and their culture. And 100% either strongly
agreed or agreed that they could talk to their family about their college friends. Moreover, 90%
of the students surveyed feel they were not compromising their family values by attending
college. And an almost equal majority, or 80%, reported that they had no difficulty talking to
their family about their friends at school. A few outliers included one student who reported he
did not feel accepted at the college because of ethnicity, and two students who reported that they
could not talk to their family about their struggles and concerns at school. Table 2 displays
participant responses on the Cultural Congruity Scale.
Table 2

*Cultural Congruity Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try not to show the parts of me that are “ethnically” based</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often feel like a chameleon, having to change myself depending on the ethnicity of the person I am with at school</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my ethnicity is incompatible with other students</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am leaving my family values behind by going to college</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ethnic values are in conflict with what is expected at school</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk to my family about my friends from school</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my language and/or appearance make it hard for me to fit in with other students</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family and school values often conflict</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel accepted at school as an ethnic minority</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an ethnic minority, I feel as if I belong on this campus</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk to my family about my struggles and concerns at school</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**

Three sources of data were used to address the research question and three sub questions. The research question for this study was: How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity, and how do past experiences influence their sense of belonging, their ability to adjust, and
academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

The sub questions for this study were:

(1) How do Latino students describe their academic integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

(2) How do Latino students describe their social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

(3) How do the perceptions regarding academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania of first year students compare to those of second year students who have had the opportunity to observe peer interactions on the college campus?

The primary source of data included semi-structured interviews. Additionally, participants completed the Cultural Congruity Scale and reflective journals. The results of these three instruments are described in this section of the chapter. Three overarching themes defining the Latino student’s perception of ethnic identity and how past experiences have influenced their sense of belonging on the college campus, their ability to adjust to going to school, and social and academic integration on the college campus were defined through theming the data, coding the data, and finally summarizing the data.

**Theme Development**

**Theme 1: College for the Latino Student is a Means to Establish a Different Life Pattern**

The first theme that emerged from interviews and reflective journals was that the Latino students identified the establishment of a different life pattern to be one of the major rationales for establishing academic integration on the college campus. Interview question numbers four
and five were used to address this theme. Codes associated with this theme included academic success and commitment to education. One hundred percent of students reported academic integration as a means to the establishment of a better life for themselves and their families. Therefore, successful academic integration experiences provide the foundation for future changes in life pattern for this sample of Latino students.

**First-year student responses.** First-year students who were interviewed shared their commitment to academics. Interviewed students reported a deep sense of ethnic identity and family commitment and recognized a college degree was a way to establish a better life. Additionally, ethnic identity and family support were identified as reasons for students to be successful in college. Sam said, “I want to get a better education so I may go back one day and try to help and give back to what they (family) try to give me.” Dave reported that, “(family) support makes me succeed, they both (parents) came from third world countries and now they’re both doing good because they had self-motivation, and seeing them, you know, why can’t I?” Alexa talked about her mom, “my mom kept insisting (that I start college) I’d be scared that if I did stay home some people get comfortable, I didn’t want to do that.”

Academic success was a requirement for the student who desired to be successful in the college environment. Susan said:

I need to be an example for my children; they (students) need to imagine their lives different, they need to do something different. If you want things to happen you have to do something. Look inside you, what exactly (do) you want?

In the electronic journal, Susan identified that for the Latino student, one-on-one personal time/help from the teachers is critical to the academic success of the student. Likewise, Alexa’s electronic journal reported a critical component of academic success for the Latino student
includes one-on-one time with the teachers. She stated, “If a teacher sees that a student is struggling the teacher should help that student.” Dave’s electronic journal reinforced the importance of teachers communicating that academic support for the Latino student is available by stating, “Some (Latino students) may not know that there is (academic) help and other may be hesitant to go for (academic) help, but I think (academic) help should be offered so they’re (Latino students) aware of it.” Sam’s electronic journal reflection supported the desire to achieve successful academic integration on the college campus as a means to achieving a different life pattern, “We need to work, I don’t know how to explain in English, like a conscience, we came here looking for something better.”

**Second-year student responses.** Additionally, second-year college students also reflected comments showing commitment to academic success. John said:

(after graduation) I can support my family, my mother and my little brother, and if you don’t push yourself, if you don’t let like people (family/friends) push you or if people push you and you’re stubborn and you don’t move and you don’t try to, you’re not going to get what life is going to give you because life is going, if people don’t do it, then what I’ve learned from life is that life or the Lord is going to push you in a different way.

Maria talked about her uncle’s influence on her education noting that he said, “I (sick uncle) want you to promise me that you’ll keep going.” Sarah mentioned going to school so she would be able to take care of her parents, “they (parents) want me to get my school taken care of, they have been there for me, and I know they are regardless.” Dean reported,

My family was encouraging, but I come from divorced parents and what more motivated me was working a nine to five job in a really, like working bad ones, and I just didn’t want to do that for the rest of my life.
Anaya commented on wanting her future to be better for her kids:

I really have to go to school because I have to create this future, not only for myself, but also for my child. I’d rather do it now that he’s little so that I can be home when he’s older and I can help him with his work.

Finally, Anna remarked on how her parents wanted better for her, “like my parents always wanted us to be different, they wanted us to be more so we wouldn’t have to be like, I guess you could say like being statistically the same.”

The electronic journals supported the benefits of academic integration on the establishment of academic success for the Latino student. John recognized that teacher and peer support are equally important in successful academic integration on the college campus; his electronic journal stated, “More help (from teachers and peers) when it comes to studying helps alleviate the stress of work, community and unity.” Anna’s electronic journal identified having someone (teacher) to go to for (academic) help as a critical element to successful academic integration on the college campus. In her electronic journal, Sarah believed that if teachers would be more understanding of personal lives, Latino students would have a better chance to succeed academically. Dean reported in his electronic journal that, “students seem to stay in groups of people they are more likely to relate to and if given the opportunity to challenge themselves (academically) they (Latino students) will stand out.”

Theme 2: Campus Community for the Latino student is Critical to Academic and Social Integration on the College Campus

The second theme that emerged demonstrated Latino students’ desire to be part of the college campus community. One hundred percent of students interviewed reported a sense of campus community to be an important factor in the development of successful academic and
social integration on the college campus. Interview questions number one, two, and three were used to address this theme. Codes associated with this theme included academic success and campus community.

**First-year student responses.** First-year student responses reflected the importance of campus community to academic and social integration. According to Alexa, “If someone needed help, if they’d ask me something, we help each other out, we’ll talk or review before class. Friends are important so you don’t have to be alone, you have to socialize with them.” In her electronic journal, Alexa commented that, “As a person who speaks Spanish I could help the student who needs help with their courses, and that “if a teacher sees that a student is struggling the teacher should help that student.” Likewise, Susan mentioned the need for support. She stated, “It is important that we encourage each other. The professors help us to keep working together, because (she) knew we can do it. I want to help them (other students) improve themselves.” Additionally, in her electronic journal, Susan stated, I personally have some complications that I am battling but I entered school a week late and it’s hard to catch up with one of my classes but overall I don’t feel left out….Being half Puerto Rican and half Italian is hard because through everyone’s eyes I’m white because I’m light skin – having some teachers that don’t really care about the race of people only their personality is comforting.

Dave identified his role as a tutor to have had a dramatic effect on his sense of making a difference on the campus community. In his electronic journal, Dave mentioned that having more help for the Latino student when it comes to studying would be very useful, and he noted that he has “developed a small relationship with two girls during my gap between classes – we talk and study together.” Sam said, “I’m still trying to get to know people. I would like to
actually get the time to hang out with the people that are new to me in all my classes and try to get more understanding with them.” In her electronic journal, Sam commented, “All the people rely on me, I want to help them improve themselves.” She also reflected the importance of professor support by stating, “The professors help us keep going on, they all were helpful, they work with everyone.”

**Second-year student responses.** Second-year student responses reflected the importance of campus community to academic and social success. John reflected on his need for friends, “I want best friends; friends can be a substitute family, I want people that I can count on to push me as hard as you can so I can get this stuff done.” John found this in one friend on the college campus. Additionally, in his electronic journal, John said that the most critical need for the Latino student on the college campus is “Translators, and more help when it comes to studying, study groups, clubs, non-class activities to help alleviate the stress.” Maria reported that she appreciated friends to help in class:

> Sometimes in class or sometimes out of class or before class sometimes I invite my friend over and we’ll study in my house, we need that. It’s good to help some people in college cuz if not I don’t know I’ll be stuck and lost.

Maria recognized the need for community to support academic and social integration on the college campus. Sarah said, “They (faculty) make us feel like we can do this and they make us feel comfortable because it is really hard.” In her electronic journal Sarah wrote,

> I don’t ever feel left out in LCCC, no matter what campus I go to, if I have any questions or concerns I am always helped. It has given me the confidence to ask for help when needed. I feel very accepted when I receive an e-mail for every event that occurs in LCCC, even though I don’t go to any it still feels nice to be included.
Anaya said,

She (faculty) kind of made all of us feel comfortable with each other. She was more like, no you’re not going to sit here and be quiet; you’re going to sit here and talk to each other. You’re going to sit here and help each other out. So having that kind of feeling of bonding and friendship between the other students helped me feel more comfortable with being in class and just coming to school.

Anna reported bonding and friendship in both academic and social environments.

Sarah and Anna experienced academic integration through the inclusive learning environment. Additionally, Anna’s electronic journal reflected that being accepted in the campus community helped her recognize that other Latino students can also be accepted, and it proved that there is not a difference. Moreover, she stated,

The critical needs (for the Latino student) is to have someone that they could go to to help them with their voice. Many times people can’t say what they want because they don’t know how to, don’t understand or speak English.

Another key factor that impacts campus community and the Latino student’s ability to achieve academic and social integration on the college campus that emerged is the Latino students’ deep commitment to family well-being. One hundred percent of students interviewed reported that, if necessary, they would place their educational advancement on hold to care for ill or impoverished family members. Similarly, a majority of students interviewed reported that they were not involved in campus social activities because the activities are held at times that they either have work or other family obligations. Therefore, overarching family obligations frequently severs securing the critical element of campus community or belongingness.
Latino students are committed to providing financial support for their family and themselves. This commitment has impacted Latino students’ ability to develop a sense of campus community and to integrate on the college campus both academically and socially. Eight out of the 10 students interviewed work at least part-time in order to provide financial support for their families. One of the two unemployed students was between jobs and actively seeking employment to assist with family expenses. Interview question number seven was used to address this theme: “How has your family’s influence affected your current sense of belonging on the college campus?” Codes associated with this theme included respect for family and commitment to education.

**First-year student responses.** During interviews, first-year college students reported a strong dedication to their family, even to the point they would forgo college to take care of loved ones. Sam said, “my time is pretty much taken up by my classes and taking care of the family back home.” Therefore, Sam had limited time for social integration. Likewise, Susan reported that her mother helps her take care of her daughter, stating, “My mother cares for my daughter always; we live with them temporary, I was sick last summer. They (family) are very helpful to me, I can’t do all I am doing without them.” Because Susan had to return home as quickly as possible to take care of her daughter, she had no time for social integration.

Anna also mentioned the need for a family bond. She said:

My sister lives right next door, and we all help each other out, you know, making sure my parents are good, watching the little ones. We all help each other out to make sure we get our daily stuff done throughout the week. I did take a year off (from school) because my older sister was in school at the time, so I helped her out with her first child, but I went back (to school) because it was very important that I get my stuff done as well.
Anna sacrificed social integration at the campus to help take care of family.

Additionally, first-year student responses reflected a commitment to providing financial support for family and self. Dave said:

I notice that some Hispanic students drop out of college (because) parents not having college degrees so they can’t really pay for them. They start working full time and they start noticing like, I don’t have enough to go to school, I might as well work full time; school is expensive, that’s why I joined the National Guard.

Sam added that he felt a need to contribute to family finances:

My checks are not that much but it’s something and it feels like, not like a duty to do, but it feels like one of your responsibilities as your dad’s first, the eldest that’s living with them, to help out. It’s like my dad and mom, the ones who gave me life, so like it’s just a way to repay them. The whole point of two jobs is to try to take an extra class this summer with my own money.

Both Dave and Sam recognized that maintaining employment is a means to staying in school and securing academic integration. Susan commented that her recent employment would help with family finances and school tuition. In her electronic journal Susan commented,

It’s hard, many rely on financial aid, with that being said, not much money is being given for people to take classes. I personally was given enough money only for two classes and I’m currently trying to make money for other payments that my financial aid won’t be able to help me with.

Second-year student responses. Second-year student responses also reflected a commitment to family. John struggled with the stress of family financial circumstances and was seeking employment. He stated, “It’s (financial situation) partially my fault because I’m not
working anymore.” John leaves after classes each day to seek employment and is not involved in any social activities on the college campus. Maria said, “I work, go to school, and come home to help my mom.” Sarah mentioned that her time was occupied with helping her mother, “I just do it (housework/chores) because my mom is getting old and she doesn’t have to do all this stuff.” Neither Maria or Sarah are involved in social activities on the college campus.

Sarah said:

During the week I have no time (for activities). Like I need like two seconds to at least breathe because it’s that serious. There is so much going on. And then some of us have very strict schedules. Like I literally have to get out of my class and walk really fast to catch the bus (to get to work).

In her electronic journal, Sarah stated, “At times it’s a bit difficult since personal life can get in the way of college life.” Similarly, in her electronic journal Anna mentioned, “I’m always busy, so I never really attended (social events). Some people are so busy that they try to be involved, but they can’t like in my aspect.” Additionally, second-year student responses reflected a commitment to providing financial support for family and self. Maria recognized the importance of creating a state of stability; she reported, “I balance it (work/school) out.” Sarah also validated the struggles of going to school and having financial responsibility. She said:

I have a job where it requires me to be there at certain times. It’s not like I can be like, I have school. I have bills like everybody else, and sometimes you get overwhelmed. You have to do this and you have to do that, you have to get a job. Like it’s a lot to juggle, and it’s hard. I have responsibilities at home, I pay some bills. I think work is my most stressful, I get really tired, I have to wake up at like four in the morning to do anything that was due because I’m so tired I don’t want to do anything when I get home.
Anna said, “I (work) full-time so I do 12 hours a day, sometimes 16 depending on the day, I have to balance out and do good time management.” In the electronic journals, Maria commented that the most critical needs of the Latino student are “easy access to get to school and into school, and affordability for college.” Sarah’s electronic journal response stated, “I don’t really interact with people I go to class with or with any activities that LCCC has to offer. I used to participate in activities before, but not anymore since I work now.”

Likewise, Sam reflected on the harmony of going to school and caring for family. She said,

I have a few friends that are in my classes, but we all go our separate ways because we actually have other things to do. Some have kids, their brothers or sisters to go pick up; some have work straight after school. And, it’s kind of hard cause now that we’re not in high school we’re trying to make more meanings of what it is to becoming an adult.

**Theme 3: Cultural distinction for the Latino student is imperative for a sense of belonging on the college campus**

The third theme that emerged reflects the Latino students need to identify their individual distinction as a Latino student to promote a sense of campus belonging. The Latino student is proud of their heritage and identifies cultural distinction on the college campus as a positive influence on their individual sense of belonging. One hundred percent of students interviewed reported campus recognition of cultural distinction as an imperative factor in their individual development of a sense of campus belonging. Codes associated with this theme included cultural distinction and campus community.

**First-year student responses.** First-year student responses reflected Latino student cultural distinction as an important key to campus belonging. Sam said, “I’m actually proud and
honored to be a part of the Latino group.” In her electronic journal, Sam spoke about helping a student from the Dominican Republic,

She (the Dominican Republic student) could be my daughter, if it was my child in the same situation I would want someone to help them. Now I have the opportunity to help, we have to get it right, support one another.

According to Susan, “Spanish people have more advantage than other people. When I talk to them (Latino friends) they know it too. We complain but we really have more advantages.” Susan’s electronic journal supported her desire to advocate for the Latino student, “I will always support my fellow peers (Latino students).” Alexa has learned from her dad that “Latinos stick together;” she continued “it also makes it easier like when I’m talking to people they also understand where I’m coming from, my point of view.” Alexa’s electronic journal reinforced her desire to be available for the Latino student, “As a person who speaks Spanish I could help the student who needs help with their courses.” In the electronic journal, Dave commented that there are a wide variety of students from different backgrounds on the college campus and that “joining groups that bring Latinos together and helping other Latinos” could form a common culture.

**Second-year student responses.** Likewise, second-year student responses reflected the importance of cultural distinction. Maria spoke about her need to be successful as a Latino student,

A lot of people talk about Latino’s, look they can’t do anything. But I was like look at me, I’ve been through a lot and I’m still going. It doesn’t mean you can’t do it. I’m gonna show them that I’m different and I can keep going for what I want.
In her electronic journal, Maria reported that being an advocate for Latino students by participating in this study will allow Latino voice and point of view to be shared. Sarah said, “You feel comfortable with people that are just like you. You kind of stick to your own people.” Sarah’s electronic journal stated, “I think Latino students should be given more opportunities to make ourselves known, to speak to different staff members and discuss some of the issues Hispanic students face.” Dean said:

Other students weren’t able to relate as much because they felt that they have a different view. If the school could find a way of how people can tell like their story of the background and where they came from, some background experience without them being judged, I think that would be really great because I feel like a lot of students have some type of story.

In his electronic journal, Dean stated, “I feel there should be more leadership opportunities for Latino student to challenge themselves and stand out.” Anna said,

They (Latino students) kind of more or less know where I’m coming from, or know like how our culture is or how we view things. At least in my view, we’re a lot friendlier, willing more to ask for help and work with each other. I just think that when it comes to other Latinos, they understand. Like if you don’t get something, they’ll explain it to you ten thousand times in different ways until you know (it).

In her electronic journal Anna stated, “Being a Latino student has opened a lot of doors for me. To see that you can help other Latino students in ways that others can’t, to help them achieve what they want is inspiring.”
**Research Questions Answered**

The first research question was, “How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity, and how do past experiences influence their sense of belonging, their ability to adjust, and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?” Latino students on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania reported the desire to achieve academic advancement to provide better opportunities for themselves and their families to be the primary influence that drives them to succeed academically (Theme 1). Eight out of 10 students interviewed work and go to school. One of the unemployed students was actively seeking employment, and all students acknowledged the financial, physical, and emotional burden associated with working and going to school. Additionally, it is important to note that the Latino student reported commitment to family responsibilities as a deciding factor related to academic progression. For the Latino student, family is priority, and every Latino student in this study indicated that academic progression would be placed on hold if a need to care for a family member presented itself. Social integration on the college campus was reported as a means to developing the sense of campus community and was significant to all participants (Theme 2). Finally, all participants identified cultural distinction as a key to social integration (Theme 3). Therefore, recognition of ethnic identity for the Latino student is paramount to college assimilation and academic progression on the college campus. Information regarding coding can be found in Appendix F).

**Subquestion 1a.** Subquestion 1a asked, “How do Latino students describe their academic integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?” Student participants in this study found that academic integration was dependent on teacher/advisor support and securement of at least one friend with similar goals/interests. The
Latino students in this study were goal driven and desired to improve their individual circumstances through academic success. Students in this study reported the greatest success in classes where teachers created interactive/intercultural classroom activities. Participants also indicated that academic success is directly related to improving their circumstances. Some participants perceived that Latino students have a reputation of not being able to do anything. Participants report that they want to show them (other students/friends) that they are different. Some students reported that negative comments and doubts regarding academic success were an inspiration for them to continue. Another participant was encouraged by other’s failures; the desire to succeed was enhanced.

**Subquestion 1b.** Subquestion 1b asked, “How do Latino students describe their social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?” Student participants in this study reported that social integration experiences were minimal. However, participants did recognize the value of social integration as related to a sense of campus belonging and college success. All participants reported that social activities were traditionally held on another campus, and transportation/time was an impeding factor to their involvement. Additionally, participants reported that taking the initiative to get involved socially on the campus was important to social integration. Participants who had teachers that created interaction in the classroom found the social integration experience to be enhanced.

**Subquestion 1c.** Subquestion 1c asked, “How do the perceptions regarding academic and social integration experiences on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania of first-year Latino students compare to those of second-year students who have had the opportunity to observe peer interactions on the college campus?” Comparison of first-year Latino students and second-year Latino students revealed that social interaction became
more focused during the second year. Social interaction continued to be important, but during the second year the focus was on academics and interaction with teachers and peers with academic goals instead of friendly social interaction. In John’s electronic journal he wrote, “study groups help alleviate the stress of the work.” In Dean’s electronic journal, he saw himself as an emerging leader, “If other Latino’s saw that (my leadership) then maybe they will be motivated (to succeed).”

For first-year Latino participants, the lack of social interaction was identified as a sacrifice to achieve academic success. The connection between social interaction and academic success was not evident to the first-year participants. Social interaction was only viewed as an opportunity to “hang out” with friends. The possibility of joining social interaction and academics was not apparent to first-year students. Sam said, “I would like to actually get the time to hang out with the people that are new to me, but we all go our separate ways because we have other things to do.” Alexa said, “It doesn’t really feel like I’m in college. I still feel like a high school student. I just feel like there’s still a little bit missing for me to like really feel accepted.” The sense of not feeling like a college student was a common theme among the first-year participants.

Five of the six second-year participants reported being more comfortable on the college campus their second year. The outlier was John; he said, “I still feel disconnected, I still don’t talk to new people, I miss my relationships from high school.” Maria said, “College (socialization) is like easy, just have to work a little bit harder (course work).” Sarah said, Like you just come, you meet people; and you don’t stick with those people. I noticed that. Like I have friends from like high school, but like my college friends, it’s like I always see you in class okay, but you don’t really stick. So having that environment
where people are here to do the work is good. Like it helps you just like be focused on school and not be focused on like where you come from and stuff like that.

Dean said,

I feel if you rely on somebody else to motivate you, there is going to come a point in your life where you are going to feel very down because one day they will either stop or maybe they just won’t be there that one time you need them the most. And then if you rely too much on somebody else motivating you, then you might end up quitting. So I feel like the most important thing is being confident and having self-drive and self-discipline especially. It takes hard work, sacrifice, and time and patience.”

Anaya said,

Coming back to school (this year) I realized that fitting in and being social (to just hang out) isn’t really kind of my priority or agenda anymore. It’s kind of going to class, talking to people, getting my coursework, and getting out.

Study needs and study partners were more easily identified and secured to enable academic integration. Both first-year and second-year Latino student participants reported work and home responsibilities play a crucial role in both social and academic integration on the college campus. Therefore, family support and encouragement is a key factor to social and academic success for both the first-year and second-year Latino participants. Without family support, participants indicated that they would not have the ability to continue their education. Additionally, both first-year students and second-year students found teacher/advisor support and self-determination to be critical components to social and academic integration on the college campus.
Review of Propositions

Proposition 1. Ethnic minority students who have no prior college experience find it difficult to navigate the campus environment and are prone to quitting (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Semi-structured interview question number one, “How would you describe fitting-in on a college campus?,” was a catalyst to engage participants in a discussion regarding participant perceptions of ease of campus navigation. A definite transition between first-year students and second-year students regarding perception of fitting in was identified in student interviews. Student participants reported a greater level of college belongingness during the second year. Electronic journal question number three reflected on the Latino students’ perception of successful college campus assimilation, “In your opinion, what are the most critical needs of Latino students on the college campus?” Dave stated, “Latino’s need more individual help from teachers, one-on-one.” Alexa stated,

I think Latino (students) should be offered more help when it comes to studying, a lot of Latin students that have just learned English have difficulty reading/understanding English notes as fast as English speaking students. Some may not know that there is help and others may be hesitant to go for help, but I think help should be offered so they’re aware about it.

“I feel there should be more leadership opportunities for Latino students to challenge themselves and stand out” (435). Anna stated, “The most critical needs of the Latino student is easy access to get to school and into school, and affordability for college.”

Proposition 2. Minority students’ cultures of origin moderate the meanings that they attach to college attendance, engagement, and completion (Kuh & Love, 2000). The interview questions that addressed the Latino students’ perception of intercultural engagement based on
their culture of origin included numbers four, five, and six: “Tell me about a time your family encouraged you to learn something new. Who was involved in the process? What was the outcome?, How do you think this experience has influenced your achievements over the years?, and Tell me about your family’s involvement in your decision to seek higher education.” Participants in this study reported family support/encouragement to be extremely influential in college attendance, engagement, and completion. Support of family was second only to the participants’ ardent desire to make a better life for themselves and their families. Moreover, it may be postulated that participants’ families are influential in developing this persistent desire to attend, engage, and complete college. The electronic journal additional comment section with the question, “Is there anything you would like to share about your experience as a Latino student on your college campus?” addressed proposition number two. Sam stated,

   It’s hard, many rely on financial aid, not much money is being given for people to take about four classes per semester. I personally was given enough money only for two classes and I’m currently trying to make money for other payments that my financial aid won’t be able to help me with.

Maria stated, “Being a Latino student has opened a lot of doors for me. To see that you can help other Latino students in ways that others can’t to help them achieve what they want is inspiring.”

**Proposition 3.** Knowledge of minority students’ cultures of origin and immersion are required to understand those students’ abilities to negotiate their respective campus cultural milieus (Kuh & Love, 2000). Interview question number three measured proposition three, “What is the difference between socializing with other Latino students and socializing with mixed cultural groups of students?” All participants reported a greater sense of acceptance with other Latino student groups. Participants indicated that there was a deeper level of
understanding with other Latino students. One student reported that other Latino students understand the difficulties faced on campus and will take the extra time to help them understand.

**Proposition 4.** Cultural dissonance is inversely related to minority students’ persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Interview question numbers seven and nine investigated the Latino students’ perception of family influence and campus belonging: “How has your family’s influence affected your current sense of belonging on the college campus? and Tell me about a time that you felt unaccepted and left out on the college campus.” Student participants reported that family support is paramount to college persistence. Respect and care for family was identified as a crucial element that determined college persistence. “If I see someone that I know like I know you can pass, but you’re failing on you own, I’m going to be like I’m not going to be like you. I’m going to succeed” (Dave). “I don’t like it, but they (counselors) push me to do the things that they believe that I should do because, you know, they said that they see potential in me” (John). Maria stated,

> A lot of people talk about Latino’s, look they cant do anything. But I was like look at me, I’ve been through a lot and I’m still going. It doesn’t mean you can’t do it. You can’t just stop, show them that we’re all different (Maria).

No student participants reported a time when they felt unaccepted on the college campus. Electronic journal question number two assessed proposition number four, “Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel left out. What did this mean to you?” “I don’t feel left out” (Sam). “I can’t recall a moment where I’ve felt left out” (Alexa).

I don’t ever fell left out. No matter what campus I go to, if I have any questions or concerns I am always helped. Knowing I can get help when I need it makes me feel even
more comfortable in the career I am choosing. It has given me the confidence to ask for help when needed (Anaya).

**Proposition 5.** Minority students who experience a substantial amount of cultural dissonance must acclimate to the dominant campus culture or establish sufficient connections with cultural agents at their institution to persist (Kuh & Love, 2000). Previous studies have found that successful student outcomes are dependent on student campus involvement, and when campus involvement behaviors are transformed, the experience is molded into the learner’s life (Kim et al., 2010; Wang, 2012). Interview question number 10 was used to investigate the Latino students’ perception of campus acclimation: “What helps you to feel a sense of belonging on the college campus?” Participants identified a sense of campus community where students help one another as a means to a sense of campus belonging. Additionally, Latino cultural distinction was identified as imperative to college success. No student participants sensed a need to acclimate to the dominant culture. Student participants reported a proud sense of culture and a desire to “stick together” and “help one another.” Electronic journal question number one assessed this proposition, “Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel like your were accepted. What did this mean to you?”

Being half Puerto Rican and half Italian is hard because through everyone’s eyes I’m white because I’m light-skin. Having some teachers that don’t really care about the race of people only their personality is comforting. I feel that this means for other people and myself that no one will take us for granted (Sam).

“The campus has a wide variety of students from different backgrounds. This makes me feel good towards the coming years because I’ll be able to meet new people and their backgrounds”
(Alexa). “Being accepted helps me know that many other students who are Latino/Latina can do it and prove that there isn’t a difference” (Maria).

**Proposition 6.** The degree to which campus cultural agents validate minority students’ cultures of origin is positively associated with reduced cultural dissonance and greater likelihood of persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Interview question number eight was used to assess proposition number six: “Tell me about a time that you felt accepted and encouraged on the college campus.” “My teacher even said to me, if you work on your Spanish, it helps you out” (Maria).

I’ve had professors before who if they don’t understand something they ask. Like stuff like that really helps me because if I’m like the only one in that class, people like would see that, you know, this is interesting, this is cool (Anna).

All student participants reported the importance of cultural distinction by teachers, advisors, and peers. Student participants reported a greater sense of achievement in classes where teachers created an interactive environment and took the extra time to validate learning.

**Proposition 7.** The quality and quantity of minority students’ connections with various cultural agents on their respective campuses is positively associated with their likelihood of persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000). Interview question number two addressed proposition seven: “From your experience, why do you socialize with other students?” All student participants recognized the importance of developing a network of student peers to enhance the college experience. However, second-year students, who were focused on graduating, reported less likelihood to participate in on campus activities. Electronic journal question number four was used to evaluate proposition number seven: “What are some ways you see yourself becoming an advocate for Latino students on your college campus?” “As a person who speaks Spanish I
could help the student who needs help with their courses” (Dave). “People rely on me, I want to help them improve themselves” (Susan). “Actions are needed more than ever, student involvement, student voice. Do not allow ethnicity to get in the way of destiny” (Dean).

**Proposition 8.** Minority students are more likely to persist if the cultural agents to whom they are connected emphasize educational achievement, value educational attainment, and validate their traditional cultural heritages (Kuh & Love, 2000). Studies have found that the Latino students who are more actively involved in ethnic programs on their college campuses, who developed academic networks, and who identify a campus connection are more likely to be academically successful (Guinn et al., 2011; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Romero, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). Further, empirical research demonstrates the importance of establishing campus connections with faculty and peers (L.M. González & Ting, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). As noted above, interview question number eight evaluated proposition number eight, “Tell me about a time that you felt accepted and encouraged on the college campus.” All student participants reported the importance of teacher/advisor support. Participants who had teachers and advisors who were actively involved in their academic advancement/scheduling, validated their achievements, and valued their cultural distinction reported a greater interest in persistence.

**Summary of Identified Themes**

Three themes emerged as the three data sources were studied.

**Theme 1.** College for the Latino student is a means to establish a different life pattern. The Latino participants identified that seeking a better job that would in turn provide a more secure financial outlook for themselves and their families was the catalyst that kept them going. Personal interviews revealed a commitment to academic success. A desire to achieve a different life pattern for self and family based on academic success was reported. One student stated, “I
want to get a better education, go back one day and try to help and give back to (family).”

Another student said, “I need to be an example for my children.” The electronic journals revealed the same commitment to academic success and also exposed the importance of faculty interaction for obtainment of academic success. One student said, “we came here for something better.” According to another student, one-on-one personal help from teachers is critical to academic success. Although the Cultural Congruency Scale does not specifically speak to the establishment of a different life pattern, the concept of ethnic values conflicting with academic and social integration was measured. Ethnic values did not interfere with academic and social integration.

**Theme 2.** Campus community for the Latino student is critical to academic and social integration on the college campus. A sense of college campus community was reported to be an important factor in successful academic and social integration. Latino students desire to be a part of the college campus community. Additionally, teachers that included class activities that foster interethnic collaboration appeared to enhance peer bonding and assist with the establishment of a positive campus community. Personal interviews reported, “It is important we encourage each other, I want to help (other students) improve themselves,” “I want people to push me to get stuff done.” Likewise, the electronic journals revealed the importance of sense of campus college community. One student said, “All the people rely on me, I want too [sic] help them improve themselves.” Another student spoke to the importance of both academic and social integration, “the most critical need is study groups, clubs, and non-class activities to help alleviate stress.” The Cultural Congruency Scale found that Latino students identified themselves as being compatible with other ethnicities and felt comfortable talking to peers about personal concerns.
Theme 3. Cultural distinction for the Latino student is imperative for a sense of belonging on the college campus. Another identified theme was the feeling that Latino college distinction promoted a sense of college campus belonging. All participants reported feeling proud of their Latino heritage during the personal interviews. One student stated, “I am proud and honored to be part of the Latino group,” and “I will always support my Latino student peers.” According to the electronic journals, Latino students wanted more opportunities on the college campus to make themselves known and to have the opportunity to talk about Hispanic issues. Additionally, there was a desire for more leadership opportunities on the college campus. The Cultural Congruency Scale found that the Latino student participants did not try to hide their identity nor did language and appearance interfere with fitting in on the college campus.

It is surmised that the Latino college student has a desire to be successful, and that, in general, college success can be equated to the procurement of financial gain. The Latino college student also has a desire for the establishment of campus community and recognition of cultural distinction. The results of the personal interviews, the electronic journals, and the Cultural Congruency Scale are covered in more detail in Chapter Five.

Table 3 displays an enumeration table showing how themes were identified from open coding.
Table 3

Enumeration Table

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open-Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<td>College a means to a different life pattern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraged to be different</td>
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</table>

Summary

The details of the study findings were reviewed. The 10 study participants were introduced and their voices were heard. The study results were presented, and the study themes were identified. Participant voice regarding academic and social integration on the college campus was portrayed and the research questions were appraised.

The results of the study found that Latino college students voiced a commitment to academic success and education as an avenue to establish a different life pattern. All participants viewed successful academic integration as a means to a better life for themselves and their families. This study’s participants voiced a desire to change their current circumstances and asserted that academic success was a means to this end. Although social interaction for this study’s participants was minimal, all participants verbalized that a sense of campus community played an integral role in the evolution of successful academic and social integration on the college campus. Additionally, all participants reported being proud of their Latino heritage and
voiced that cultural distinction recognition on campus greatly impacted their sense of belonging on the college campus.

In summary, Latino student voice demonstrates a desire for successful academic and social integration on the college campus. Several key factors that influence this progression were identified. Ultimately, educational outcomes may potentially be impacted if Latino student voice is given consideration.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

It is not known how Latino college students perceive their ethnic identity and how it influences their sense of belonging on the college campus. The problem of acculturation, or sense of belonging, in higher education is challenging for the Latino student (R.G. Gonzales, 2013; Iturbide et al., 2009; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Many Latino college students feel out of place on the campus environment and find it difficult to engage in unfamiliar environments (Iturbide et al., 2009; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Ultimately, this may have a profound impact on Latino students’ decision to stay in college (Strayhorn, 2008). Hence, revealing the Latino student voice and developing an appreciation of the Latino students’ perception of sense of belonging may dramatically affect their academic outcomes (Strayhorn, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to explore the self-perceptions of academic assimilation and involvement in campus activities of first- and second-year community college students on a rural college campus in northeastern Pennsylvania. The questions that guided this study explored how Latino students perceive their ethnic identity and how this perception influences their sense of belonging in both the academic and social arena on the college campus.

Ten students ages 19 through 25 participated in the study. Data were collected over a six-month period of time. Three data collection methods were used to gather information: electronic journals, individual interviews, and the Cultural Congruity Scale survey. Information was coded, categorized, and analyzed using descriptive analysis for the quantitative data and case coding for the qualitative data. Chapter Five is the culmination of the study and includes the summary of findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research.
Summary of Findings

The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reported that the Latino college student population is the largest ethnic enrolling student population in the country. However, according to the United States Census Bureau (2012) literature, Latino students are the smallest graduating student population. Why is the Latino population marked by these statistics? What is the driving force behind these statistics? Is there something the world of higher academia is missing in providing accessible education for the Latino student population? These unanswered questions became the fuel that drove this qualitative study. The Latino student voice was reflected and portrayed in the study.

The comprehensive review of literature, Chapter Two, revealed a lack of Latino student voice representation and introduced the significance of Latino perceptions regarding college campus belonging. This case study explored Latino student perceptions of their ethnic identity and how it influences their sense of belongingness and academic and social integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania. Additionally, the study gave voice to the challenges of the Latino student attending a non-Hispanic serving community college. Activities that may potentially aid the Latino student in developing campus self-advocacy and the critical elements of sense of campus belonging were identified.

The research questions that this study were based on addressed a variety of factors. First, how does academic integration on the college campus influence the Latino student? Second, how does social integration on the college campus influence the Latino student? Finally, is there a difference in perception of importance of academic and social integration between first and second year college students? To determine if academic and social integration influenced the Latino student at a rural community college in northeastern Pennsylvania, a qualitative case
study was conducted. The case study research method allows in-depth interviews for gathering data (Yin, 2014). The qualitative methodology with an element of quantitative data was used to gather data regarding the Latino student population voice. The study sample included four first-year college students aged 18-38 and six second-year college students aged 19-25.

Data were collected through in-depth, individual student interviews. Self-disclosure of ethnicity on college registration documents or self-disclosure of ethnicity on face-to-face recruitment was used to identify the Latino student. Written consent to participate in the study was secured prior to data collection. Student participants completed an electronic journal based on four leading questions prior to meeting with the researcher for the in-depth, face-to-face interview. During the personal interview, students were given the opportunity to voice their individual concerns about academic progression and socialization on the college campus.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the self-perceptions of Latino students at an institution of higher education in Eastern Pennsylvania. Specifically, self-perceptions of campus assimilation and involvement in campus activities were studied. The sample of Latino college students who participated in this study were four students ages 18, 19, 19, and 38 who were first-year college students and six students ages 19, 19, 20, 20, 21, and 25 who were second-year college students. All student participants were identified through enrollment services or self-disclosure during open recruitment. Selection was based on self-identification of Latino status. All students maintained normal and consistent matriculation and spoke and wrote English fluently. The findings of these interviews will be discussed in this chapter. Additionally, presentation of the research question is included: “How do Latino students perceive their ethnic identity and how does it influence their sense of belongingness, and academic and social
integration on a non-Hispanic serving community college campus in Eastern Pennsylvania?

In this qualitative case study, individual in-depth interviews were completed with each student. During the interview, each student was asked to expound on his or her individual experiences on the college campus. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants the opportunity to express their student voice. The semi-structured individual interview questions focused on participant feelings regarding campus belonging and what or who has influenced this perception. The interview questions are included in Appendix B. The semi-structured individual interviews began with this predetermined set of questions. Students then had opportunity to expound on perceptions, reflect on responses, and validate thoughts. The progression of thought may have been student initiated or facilitated by researcher probing. In alignment with Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory, the student’s sense of campus belonging and perception of its importance was evaluated.

Likewise, Nuñez (2009b) specifically analyzed the Latino students’ ability to navigate an ethnic environment and the ensuing sense of belonging on the college campus. The study was based on Tinto’s (1993) theoretical framework and sought to investigate reasons for student attrition. Data were collected from nine four-year public research institutions in various geographic locations. Surveys were distributed to first-year students during the 2000-2001 academic year and again during their second year in 2002. Surveys were part of a national longitudinal data set entitled Diverse Democracy Project Study that examined demographics, secondary school experiences, and college expectations regarding social issues and envisioned behavior. Four thousand four hundred and three students completed the surveys of which 362 Latino respondents were deemed appropriate for use in the Nuñez study. A good fit for the Latino sample was validated through a factor analysis on the Structural Equation Modeling
program and a covariance of latent constructs. The Nuñez study found that Latino students who were more actively involved on their college campus experienced an increased sense of belonging. Additionally, these students developed a healthy awareness of the dynamics of ethnic issues on the college campus.

Roche and Kuperminc (2012) found that the length of time a student was exposed to a culture and the number of opportunities to participate in the culture had a direct effect on sense of belonging. Roche and Kuperminc hypothesized that low school achievement would result from decreased sense of belonging and increased acculturative stress. The Societal Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale and the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale were given to 199 metropolitan southeastern middle-school students. The questionnaire assessed perceptions of school, family, neighborhood, peers, and level of emotional functioning. A factor analysis for study replication and an analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate variable discrimination. The findings confirmed that acculturative stress could be subdivided into discrimination stress and immigration stress. The study further reported that immigration stress decreases in direct response to length of time spent in the United States. Finally, increased sense of school belonging lead to a decrease in discrimination stress and an increase in grade point average.

Additionally, researchers have found that freshman socialization and learning experiences are different from senior experiences (Gloria et al., 2010). As Latino students spend more time in the college arena, they tend to perceive peer and faculty counseling as a viable option to meet their personal needs (Gloria et al., 2010). A study by Gloria et al. (2010) of 121 Latino students attending a west coast research university found that the identification of positive help-seeking attitudes was a learned process, and upper class-men traditionally displayed better help-seeking
skills. Volunteer participants were solicited in Latino classes, clubs, and housing environments (Gloria et al., 2010). Four different survey instruments including the Cultural Congruity Scale, the University Environment Scale, the Acculturation Ratings Scale for Mexican Americans II, and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale Short Form were used to evaluate the factors influencing the help-seeking behaviors of Latino students on the college campus (Gloria et al., 2010). There was a statistically nonsignificant relationship between culture and help-seeking attitudes (Gloria et al., 2010). Therefore, a more detailed exploration of the Latino students’ perceptions of factors that influence help-seeking behaviors would be a valuable addition to the educational literature (Gloria et al., 2010). Hence, examining Latino student self-perceptions of belongingness and academic and social integration experiences rather than Latino student college campus socialization behaviors may provide a clearer picture of the Latino student’s college campus experiences. Gloria et al. (2010) reported, “a more detailed exploration of the cultural values and processes that influence the help seeking attitudes and behaviors of Latino students is warranted” (p. 136).

This case study revealed three overarching themes. One, college is a means to establish a different life pattern. Two, campus community is critical to academic and social integration on the college campus. Three, cultural distinction is imperative for a sense of belonging on the college campus. The findings of this study suggest cultural recognition of the Latino student on the college campus may influence academic and social integration and perhaps impact academic progression. As the above studies have indicated, Latino students who are more actively involved on their college campus and spend more time in the college arena tend to navigate the college experience more effectively, experience less academic stress, and generally have better academic achievement.
There is a large body of research that identifies the factors that influence Latino college student adjustment; however, there is a gap in the literature reflecting student voice as a means to identify the key elements of educational persistence for the Latino student (Musseus & Quaye, 2009). This qualitative study gave a voice to the Latino student and demonstrates Latino students’ desire to make a better life for themselves and their families by persisting in the academic arena. To achieve this goal, the Latino students in this study identified family support as a crucial factor. Likewise, previous literature found family support to be a key component to academic success (Berrios-Allison, 2011; Page, 2013). Moreover, L.M. Gonzalez and Ting (2008) and Iterbide et al. (2009) found that Latino students in high stress environments might not feel comfortable participating in activities with unfamiliar groups. This study found that Latino students preferred to interact with other Latino students. The L.M. Gonzalez and Ting (2008) study found that belonging to a Latino student organization had the most influence on academic and social integration on the college campus. The importance of Latino heritage was one theme identified in this study. This finding matches the Cólon and Sánchez (2010) study that found Latinos who held onto their cultural heritage developed a greater sense of responsibility to succeed academically. Finally, family responsibilities have the potential of negatively impacting the sense of campus belonging (Museus et al., 2017). This relationship has the potential of negatively impacting a student’s progress. Research depicting the Latino student voice as it pertains to this relationship was lacking in the literature. This study found that students reported a sense of community as being imperative for academic and social success. Sense of community and academic achievement is influenced by several factors including environments, peer/faculty interaction/support, and social networking (Cole, 2008; L.M. Gonzalez & Ting, 2008; Museus & Neville, 2012; Nguyen, 2010; Strayhorn, 2008; Wang, 2012). In conclusion, this study gives
voice to Latino students’ perceptions of belonging on the college campus. Family responsibility, whether working to pay bills or physically caring for a family member, was the number one reason students did not achieve a well-established sense of belonging on the college campus.

**Implications**

The intent of this study was to give voice to the Latino student by revealing the perceptions related to academic and social integration on the college campus. Another intent of this study was to provide academia a blueprint of what is important to the Latino student to give insight to higher education administrative challenges of retaining Latino student populations. A final intent of this study was to promote dialogue and interaction among the Latino student population on the college campus.

The first implication of this study revealed the importance of college success to the Latino student. The desire to develop a different life pattern for themselves and their families is the driving force behind the Latino students’ academic achievement. The second implication demonstrated the importance of belongingness to successful academic and social integration on the college campus. The Latino students who reported a sense of community more easily established academic and social integration on the college campus. The third implication stressed the importance of cultural distinction related to the development of a sense of belonging on the college campus. Cultural distinction for the Latino student proved to ignite energy to support and become actively involved in academic and social activities on the college campus, thereby establishing a sense of belonging. We all need a place to belong is an age-old adage, but it has proven to be immensely impactful to the Latino students in this study. Perhaps a theory that begins with fostering cultural distinction will allow for the development of sense of community empowering academic growth that will result in the establishment of a different life
pattern. It could even be considered that a different life pattern could possibly create an arena for Latino cultural distinction that would fuel the Latino community allowing the process to be experienced repeatedly.

Cultural Distinction → Sense of Community → Different Life Pattern → Cultural Distinction

Figure 1. Exhibit of the effect of cultural distinction on the development of a different life pattern based on academic success on the college campus.

The voice of the Latino student has unveiled rich insight allowing the world of academia to have an opportunity to respond to this population’s unique needs

### Delimitations and Limitations

The potential limitations that could affect the outcome of the study include collection and analysis of data by the same researcher, potential researcher bias, and non-generalization of findings resulting from one college campus data collection site. Precautions included blind independent analysis of data by someone other than the primary researcher, use of open-ended questions exclusively to assure minimization of personal bias, tape recording of interviews, verbatim transcription of interviews using Livescribe Echo technology, member checking to maintain clear, and concise reflective representation of data.

Additional limitations of the study included a small sample size, potential minimal representation of national Latino community, and suppressed participant response secondary to ethnic reserve. Bandura (1991) stated, “Personal standards of excellence may lead people to endorse achievement statements or to produce achievement imagery” (p. 264) rather than portray accurate responses. However, using raw data supports a composite description of actual experiences and thus true essence of the data (Creswell, 2007). Significant participant
statements were used to develop a textural description of participant experiences to add valuable information to the educational literature (Creswell, 2007).

The scope of the research study was to explore the self-perceptions of the Latino college student regarding their individual sense of belonging on one community college campus located in Eastern Pennsylvania. As a result, the limitations based on the delimitations of including only those participants that are attending a rural community college may limit the illustration of the study. The number of participants from this study’s convenience sample is also a delimitation that may adversely affect the findings and recommendations. To minimize the impact of the delimitations, participants were purposefully selected from all academic disciplines to assure equal representation across the campus. Purposeful sampling produces understanding of the research question by the selection of participants who have insight into the research phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). However, there were certain parameters that were instituted to ensure authentic representation of first-degree seeking students that remained delimitations for this study. These parameters were in place to eliminate the risk of the study being skewed by students’ previous experiences on college campuses. These parameters included: first-year, first-degree seeking Latino students; second-year, first-degree seeking Latino students; volunteer participation; English language fluency; and computer access.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As the voice of the Latino student emerges on the college campus, higher education will glean great insight into the needs of this population. The numbers of Latino students in higher education have grown exponentially over the past decade and therefore, warrant researchers’ attention. Recommendations for future research include:

(a) Further research exploring the needs of rural versus urban Latino students.
(b) Further research depicting the differences between male and female Latino students.

(c) Further research studying a larger Latino college student population.

(d) Further research investigating the differences between community college Latino students and baccalaureate Latino students.

(e) Further research identifying the perceptions of Latino students who are actively involved on the college campus.

(f) Further research comparing the perceptions of Latino college students who work versus Latino college students who do not work.

(g) Further research comparing and contrasting perceptions of Latino college students at Latino serving institutions versus perceptions of Latino college students at Latino non-serving institutions.

(h) Further research studying educational success of Latino students who have no family responsibilities versus Latino students who have family responsibilities.

Summary

In conclusion, Latino student perceptions of college belongingness related to academic and social integration were identified and reported in this dissertation. This study revealed the Latino student voice and gave academia the opportunity to forge new avenues of Latino student involvement on the college campus. The greatest educational implication of this study is the potential for college campuses to engage in the development of campus cultural distinction for the Latino student with the possibility of fostering increased academic success. This progression can be summarized in the following originally developed flow chart.
Figure 1. Exhibit of the effect of cultural distinction on the development of a different life pattern based on academic success on the college campus.

This could escalate the Latino student college success rate. For the Latino student to thrive in a multicultural world, he or she must cross many boundaries and barriers to succeed. The statistics for Latino student academic success continue to be alarming. In 2000, there were 1,426,000 Latino students enrolled in higher education, and in 2009 this number rose to 2,434,000, representing a 70.7% increase (Census Bureau, 2012). Despite this dramatic increase in Latino enrollment in higher education, the graduation rate remains low (Ramirez, 2012). Ramirez (2012) reported a 9% degree completion rate in 2010 of college enrolled Latinos. Moreover, as of 2012, The Center for American Progress reported that only one in six employed Latinos over the age of 25 held a college degree (Cardenas & Kirby, 2012). Although the Latino population continues to rise in the US, the number of academically-prepared Latino students remains unacceptably low.

Life circumstances for the Latino student present a mosaic of challenges and struggles. However, statistics indicate that the Latino population continues to be the fastest growing college admission population in the country. Furthermore, the cultural opportunities in the college classroom may not be replicated in any other arena of the Latino students’ life. Higher education has the wonderful privilege of participating in the blossoming of individuality as it is influenced by life events and one’s day-to-day responsibilities. The understanding of individuality, that everyone is uniquely created, is what sets man apart from the rest of creation. The Latino student enters the world of academia with a unique ethnic composition. This study has unearthed a few of the details surrounding the Latino college students’ needs. Researchers and educators
are charged with providing and delivering excellent education to a variety of student populations.

It is important to pay heed to the rich voice of the Latino student as presented in this dissertation.

College success for the Latino student is the ultimate achievement. The desire to obtain a better life pattern for themselves and their families was evident in the Latino student voice represented in this study. However, this achievement is not without cost. Latino students’ find themselves bound to financial and family responsibilities in the midst of pursuing higher education. This study found that the Latino student who was engaged in academic, social, and cultural community found the needed support to enhance academic success. In conclusion, the institutions of higher education that facilitate Latino culture recognition and interactive learning environments will potentially impact Latino college student success.
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Appendix A

Participant Checklist

1. Are you a first time college student? Yes____ No____
2. If you are a 2nd year student, have you maintained consistent enrollment at this college? Yes____ No____
3. Are you a transfer student? Yes ____ No____
4. Have you completed any other college degrees, diplomas or certificates? Yes____ No____
5. Do you speak English? Yes____ No____
6. Do you prefer to read English or Spanish? English____ Spanish____
7. Are you proficient in reading English? Yes____ No____
8. Do you prefer to write in English or Spanish? English____ Spanish____
9. Are you proficient in writing English? Yes____ No____
10. Do you have access to a computer with internet? Yes____ No____
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you are either a 1st year Latino college student or a 2nd year Latino college student.

The purpose of this study is to explore the Latino students’ academic and social integration experiences on the college campus. Your perception regarding this issue is the focus of this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the research investigator. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. The interview, journal and survey are confidential and will not be used to identify particular individuals. The information you provide will be considered only in combination with that of other participants. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please notify the researcher in writing via email. The information obtained in the study may be published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings but your identity will be kept confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and return it to the researcher via email. When you complete the interview, journal and survey, you will be given an information sheet that will provide contact information if you wish to receive results of the study, and a reference list if you wish to further investigate information on the study topic.

________________________________________  ____________________
Participant Name                          Date

________________________________________
Participant Signature

Student Researcher:
Corinna Dotter, MSN, RN
Doctoral Student, Curriculum and Instruction
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA. 24515
Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions

1. How would you describe fitting-in on a college campus?

2. From your experience, why do you socialize with other students?

3. What is the difference between socializing with other Latino students and socializing with mixed cultural groups of students?

4. Tell me about a time your family encouraged you to learn something new. Who was involved in the process? What was the outcome?

5. How do you think this experience has influenced your achievements over the years?

6. Tell me about your family’s involvement in your decision to seek higher education.

7. How has your family’s influence affected your current sense of belonging on the college campus?

8. Tell me about a time that you felt accepted and encouraged on the college campus.

9. Tell me about a time that you felt unaccepted and left out on the college campus.

10. What helps you to feel a sense of belonging on the college campus?
Appendix D

Electronic Journaling Guidelines

(You may respond in English or in Spanish)

1. Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel like you were accepted. What does this mean to you at this point in your college career?

2. Tell me about something that happened this week on the college campus that made you feel left out. How did this affect your outlook at this point in your college career?

3. In your opinion, what are the most critical needs of Latino students on the college campus?

4. What are some ways you see yourself becoming an advocate for Latino students on your college campus?

Additional comments: Is there anything you would like to share about your experience as a Latino student on your college campus?
Appendix E

Cultural Congruity Scale

For each of the following items, indicate the extent to which you have experienced the feeling or situation at school. Use the following ratings:

Strongly Disagree  Strongly Agree
1  2  3  4

___ 1. I feel that I have to change myself to fit in at school.

___ 2. I try not to show the parts of me that are “ethnically” based.

___ 3. I often feel like a chameleon, having to change myself depending on the ethnicity of the person I am with at school.

___ 4. I feel that my ethnicity is incompatible with other students.

___ 5. I can talk to my friends at school about my family and culture.

___ 6. I feel I am leaving my family values behind by going to college.

___ 7. My ethnic values are in conflict with what is expected at school.

___ 8. I can talk to my family about my friends from school.

___ 9. I feel that my language and/or appearance make it hard for me to fit in with other students.

___ 10. My family and school values often conflict.

___ 11. I feel accepted at school as an ethnic minority.

___ 12. As an ethnic minority, I feel as if I belong on this campus.

___ 13. I can talk to my family about my struggles and concerns at school.

Gloria, A. M., & Robinson-Korpius, (1996). The validation of the cultural congruity scale and the university environment scale with Chicano/a students. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 18, 533-549. This scale has been on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) with adequate reliability. Gloria, A. M., Hird, J. S., Navarro R. L. (2000). Relationships of cultural congruity and perceptions of the university environment to help-seeking attitudes by sociorace and gender. Journal of College Student Development, 42, 545-562.* Reverse Score Items: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10. This scale has been used

Reproduced with permission.

Re: Cultural Congruity Scale - CCavanaugh Dotter

Alberta M. Gloria

Reply all

Yesterday, 11:57 PM

Cavanaugh, Corinna Rene;
Alberta M. Gloria
Inbox

You replied on 11/15/2017 12:14 AM.

Hello Dr. Cavanaugh Dotter ~ many thank for your email regarding the CCS.
I’m thrilled to hear that you have completed and defended your dissertation study – many congratulations! Yes of course to reproduce the CCS.
I do ask that you send me the final pdf of your dissertation if you are able and/or some summary of your study and utility of the CCS if you are unable to forward the file.

All the best and thank you!
Alberta
Appendix F

Coding

Open Coding: Identification of major categories

Categories listed in order of most frequently identified to least frequently identified.

1. Works and goes to school. Time management important. Taking night classes to fit in work. No time for study groups. “How bad do you want it?” Aligns with Theme 1.


3. “Making friends is good.” Need to be around other people. Find someone you have something in common with – similar problems/similar major. Friends work together. Sense of community. A best friend is important. Socialization/friends are important. Socialization easier with like students. Aligns with Theme 4.


5. Encouraged by other’s failure. Does not want to fail. Wants to make a difference/support family/wants better life. Everyone wants to graduate. Aligns with Theme 1.

6. Mom and Dad big inspiration. Extended family important. Family has commitment to learning. Family encourages education. “Show them you’re different.” Must be in school, working, or leave home. Aligns with Theme 3.
7. Respect for family. Cares for siblings. Cares for extended family. Family helps student make a way to go to school – transportation, share home responsibilities. Aligns with Theme 3.

8. Teacher support important. Tutoring/Advising important. Teacher understanding of Latino differences important. Speak slowly. Pair students/initiate friendships. Teachers need to have students’ best interest in mind, go the extra mile. Don’t assume stereotypical culture. Find one teacher to encourage you. Support is available in college – know your resources. Aligns with Theme 4.


10. Interaction between cultures – need to take initiative. Classroom interaction helpful. Everyone wants to talk. Diverse classes helpful. Long-term friends are friends known from outside of school. Aligns with Theme 4.

Open Coding:
Identification of major categories – 1st year students compared to 2nd year students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Year</th>
<th>2nd Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends important, interest in meeting new friends. Group activities in classes lead to friendships. Socializes with known friends. Little interaction outside of class. Takes initiative to interact with other students.</td>
<td>Friends with similar interests/similar problems. Social time not as important – in class good. More comfortable around Latino’s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different languages stick together. Comfortable with Latino friends. Does not feel like college student.

Friends encourage one another/help when struggling/study groups. Helps others. Comfortable in mixed groups. Need to be around others.

Mom and Dad big inspiration. Family care for one another. Respect for family.

Family in support of education. Family commitment – cares for younger siblings, helps with finances.


Works and goes to school. Home responsibilities. Hard to keep up.

Teacher/tutor important. Teacher must have students’ best interest in mind.

Teacher interaction/support important – do not make assumptions about culture. Advisor support important.

Self-motivation, speak up, participate Education goal – to give back.

Self-discipline, self-motivation, persistence.

Axial Coding: Core (Focus) Categories

1. Academic Success: Want to make a difference, support family, want better life, needs support of family, teachers and advisors. (Theme 1)

2. Respect for Family: Families help each other, care for each other whatever the cost. (Theme 2)

3. Commitment to Education: Works and goes to school, time management stressors, financial stressors. (Theme 3)

4. Campus Community: Friendships important, need to be around others with similar interests, help each other. (Theme 4)

5. Cultural Distinctions: More support from Latino peers. Latino’s stick together. Presence of cultural differences. Every student has a story. (Theme 5)

Selective Coding: Generalizations/Propositions
1. Academic success of the Latino student hinges on the students’ desire to establish a different life pattern. Self-motivation and self-discipline, as well as family, teacher and advisor support are critical elements to academic success. Latino academic success is defined as establishing a better life for oneself where financial family support is attained. (Theme 1)

2. Respect and care for family takes top priority for the Latino student. This priority drives all education decisions for the Latino student. Latino students’ will sacrifice a college education for family. (Theme 2)

3. Commitment to education involves great sacrifice for the Latino student. The majority of Latino students maintain continuous employment while going to college. The financial burdens and time management stressors are taxing for the Latino student. (Theme 3)

4. The Latino student reports campus community to be an important aspect of college life. The Latino student recognizes the importance of the support and encouragement from campus friendships and social assimilation. The Latino’s desire to help one another is a direct reflection of this connection. (Theme 4)

5. Cultural distinction for the Latino student is imperative to college success. The unique Latino cultural differences establish a secure common ground for the Latino college student. It is in this unique environment that the Latino student can thrive and be challenged to succeed. (Theme 5)