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Making a Difference and Facilitating Success: A Model of Chicana/o Student Retention in Chicana/o Studies

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Making a difference and facilitating success: A model of Chicana/o student retention in Chicana/o studies

by

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DEDICATION

To Lee, who's endless patience and calmness sustains me.

To Mom, Dad, and Natalie for believing in me.

To the eight students and their families. May this dissertation be an enduring reminder about how far your families have come and how far you will go.

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DEFINITIONS

This list of definitions outlines commonly utilized terms the reader will find in this study. It is meant to clearly articulate my understanding of the language in the context of this research. Further, today there remains a quandary when referring to people who represent the Latina/o ethnicity. For this purpose I specifically outline how I define the terms that reference the participants in this study. Terms are listed in alphabetical order.

Attrition: Failed re-enrollment of a student in education in consecutive academic terms. Also known as 'dropout,' which can imply that leaving higher education is solely the individual student's fault when institutional factors are also at play.

Chicana/o student(s): In this study, *Chicana/o* is a term employed to represent Mexican American students. The term has come to be used as a way to reflect one's dual cultural identities, historical constructions, and political struggles for social equity (Jones & Castellanos, 2003). My choice to use the term *Chicana/o* when referring to participants in this study was a political choice meant to symbolize my epistemological assumption that recognizes and values the historical, political, and social struggles of Mexican Americans.

Chicana/o studies: Chicana/o studies is a field that grew out of resistance to dominant Anglo scholars and practices in American higher education. It is a fluid and multidisciplinary field of study and specifically focuses on appreciating and applying the ways of knowing, being and living among Chicana/o people over history and in today's society.

Culturally relevant: Ladson-Billings (1995) defined "culturally relevant" teaching as a relative and contextually based form of teaching that meets three criteria: (1) culturally relevant teaching must develop a student academically, (2) culturally relevant teaching must

value and nurture cultural competencies and capital, and (3) culturally relevant teaching must develop a student's critical consciousness or ability to critique personal, social and political systems that impact their lives and communities.

*Educational attainment rate***:** The educational attainment rate is the percentage of people/students who graduate from any given institution, college, or department.

Equality: In this study the term *equality* serves to mean that any relational or material possession of political, social or educational content is distributed evenly and balanced among all people.

Equity: In this study I operationalize the term *equity* as a synonym for justice and fairness based on need. For instance, while all Chicana/o students have the right to pursue higher education in the United States, the schools in which this education takes place are unfair in that certain schools will have more resources than others, which indirectly and directly impacts students' academic participation. Therefore, education is provided to all equally, but the resources for individual schools are unjust and can require increased need among certain people.

Hispanic: Hispanic, from the Latin word for "Spain," has the broader reference, potentially including all Spanish-speaking peoples in both hemispheres and emphasizing the commonality of language among communities that sometimes have little to nothing else in common (Jones & Castellanos, 2003). The U.S. Office of Budget and Management in 1978 first coined this term.

*Latina/o***:** *Latino*, which in Spanish means "Latin," but which as an English term is probably a shortening of the Spanish word *latinoamericano*, refers more exclusively to

persons or communities of the western hemisphere and of Latin American origin (American

Heritage Dictionary, 2000; Jones & Castellanos, 2003).

*Latina/o versus Hispanic***:** Both terms are often used interchangeably in the United

States. Many groups reject the term *Hispanic* because of its broadness and because it was

given to the Latina/os by the United States government without consent (Jones &

Castellanos, 2003). However, there are certain regions in the United States and certain

groups of people who prefer the term *Hispanic* over *Latino.* It must be recognized that many

college students may prefer one term over the other, and it remains a personal preference

based on personal and political ideologies.

Persistence: Whereas retention is a term used to understand the role of an institution

in contributing to the success and graduation of college students, my previous research

(Vasquez, 2007) has led me to assert that *persistence* is the process whereby a student

demonstrates the desire and action to stay within the system of higher education from

matriculation to graduation. Persistence is comprised of student experiences and actions that

contribute to their success and graduation from college.

Retention: *Retention* is the period of time that extends between matriculation and

graduation (Garza, 2006). The retention rate measures the institution's ability to re-enroll

students from year to year, eventually leading to the completion of a college level credential.

The retention rate is conventionally measured at college campuses on an annual basis.

In the context of this study, the term *retention* is employed to mean the specific

process of establishing and maintaining the strategies and actions (i.e., social, academic,

personal, financial) that promote the academic success and eventual graduation of Chicana/o

undergraduate students (Casteallanos & Jones, 2003; Garza, 2006). Teaching methods,

curriculum, professor-student relationships and ideology, to name but a few, influence the retention process.

Retention Rate: The percentage of people who are retained by the institution of higher education or continue on with their bachelor's degree into the next academic term.

Student Success: This term is a commonly used term in American higher education, but it can take on different meanings or be so broad that it is hard to understand. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the term *student success* will be used to refer to successfully retaining and graduating students from institutions of higher education with bachelor's degrees. For example, It will often be said that my goal of this project is to understand how to better facilitate student success among Chicanas/os in higher education. Such language refers to my work as contributing knowledge that is intended to increase the retention, graduation and overall educational attainment of Chicanas/os—what I refer to as *student success.* Success is a fluid term and I recognize that just because a student graduates from college does not mean they can or will be successful. However, to conduct a dissertation on Chicana/o student success it is important that I operationalize the term for purposes of this study.

Further, student success research is a broad topic in higher education and focuses on many different identities and contexts making it important to continually seek models of student success that are both theoretical and practical. Padilla (2009) substantiates my understanding by stating "We need to develop general models of student success that also can be applied locally to specific situations and contexts so that we can achieve both generality and specificity. Moreover, the general and local models ought to be able to help educators to enhance student success" (p. xvii). With Padilla's words in mind, my work

here seeks to understand the local perspective of student success by investigating how a

Chicana/o studies department impacts Chicana/o student success.

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Going through a graduate degree program is not always predictable and often frustrating. This frustration and lack of predictive elements in graduate school required myself to rely heavily on a network of individuals who deserve my respect. They were the people who read my work and gave me honest responses, supported me during personal adversity, asked how my day was going, and showed care for my learning and development: Ms. Crystal Guererro, Ms. Kathryn Moriarty, Dr. Jessica Ranero, Dr. Jose Cabrales, Dr. Natasha Croom, Ms. Marcia Purdy, Mr. Ignacio Hernandez, Ms. Susana Hernandez, Mr. Joe Campos, Dr. Emily Sanders, Ms. Nikki LeBlanc, Dr. Carol Jambor-Smith, Dr. Michelle Espino, Dr. David Perez, Dr. Susana Munoz, Dr. Marisa Rivera, and Dr. Irene Vega.

The most cherished relationships I have in my life are those I hold with family members--my partner, Dr. Lee L'Hote; my mother, Mrs. Bethann Vasquez; my father, Mr. Philip Vasquez; and my sister, Ms. Natalie Vasquez. At the end of the day they are the people I can count on to support me, encourage me, and give it to me straight. I would have left graduate school a long time ago if it were not for their endless patience, love, understanding, and direction. Most importantly, they are the people who saw the worst and best of me during this time and showed nothing but belief in my abilities as a scholar and human being. I love you all dearly.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the eight students who allowed me to feature their stories in this dissertation. You all showed me the power of higher education and the influence one person can have on a community. You also showed the world that college educations could be more than just professional development. You showed that a higher education could inspire one to change our communities for the better and improve the lives of people who follow us. You deserve all the successes you will achieve.

ABSTRACT

For every 100 Chicana/o students only 24 will enroll in college and of those students only seven will obtain a bachelor's degree (Yosso, 2006). These data present the need for increase examination of how students are retained in higher education. Therefore, this study sought to further understand and explore the retention factors contributing to the development and anticipated college completion of a case of Chicana/o studies students working on their bachelor's degrees. Findings revealed that retention was impacted by academic factors such as faculty affirmation, and positive contributions to academic development. Social factors contributing to retention included community building, developing and discovering a sense of self, and supportive personal relationships. With a theoretical framework grounded in the model of student engagement and validation theory guiding the analysis, the model of Chicana/o student retention in Chicana/o studies was conceptualized. The model provides an understanding of how validation, relational learning, and engaging academic spaces helped to facilitate increased knowledge acquisition, personal development and professional aspirations. This study provides new knowledge and evolution of existing theories, which speak to retention in understudied contexts like Chicana/o studies. Recommendations and implications are provided.

PREFACE

The following study is intended to represent the beginning of a serious journey intent on contributing knowledge that tells our world how the Chicana/o studies department at California State University Fullerton (CSUF) contributed to the retention of Chicana/o students on the path toward bachelor's degree completion. One may ask what brings a researcher to this type of inquiry among an often subjugated and under heard population like Chicana/o students in higher education. In short, I seek and struggle to bring about transformation and improvement to the under-education of Mexican American students in U.S. higher education. This study is my contribution to the aforementioned agenda that is shared by many others in our communities across the world.

It is my hope to share what I have learned from my research in the forthcoming pages. At the end of this study it is my intention for the reader to understand the problem facing Chicana/o students in higher education and what their retention experiences were like within the Chicana/o studies department. This will then lead into my explanation of the implications to be carved from this research as well as steps to help higher education policy-makers, administrators, and practitioners understand the factors that contribute to the retention process in an understudied environment like a Chicana/o studies department.

Broadly, I believe education to be an extension of our society's political, social, and economic ideologies and can be contradicting as both oppressive and liberating. This understanding helps me to realize that I will never have the sole answer to our problems in American higher education, nor do I think a sole answer exists. It will take a collection of works over time to improve our communities. Therefore, this paper is one among many and I encourage all readers of the following work to read the pages with critical eyes and with a

perspective that allows you to learn from the forthcoming pages. I do not claim to have the answers to all of our problems and I do not believe one person can transform our education system alone. We have to work as a team.

My Personal Location within the Study

For me, the researcher, taking the reader on this journey is a personal adventure with my life experience as a biracial Chicano, first-generation college student, brother, son, and partner serving as my inspiration. I am passionate about studying how Chicana/o students persevere in educational environments and cultures laden with colonizing and impersonal methods of teaching and learning (i.e. competition in the classroom, lack of discussion, void of personal and emotional learning).

Throughout my graduate and undergraduate education I have been presented with literature shedding light on Latina/o students as being from poor immigrant families who do not value education and remain unassimilated into the "American way." I was frequently left with the impression that research produced and distributed to students was presenting Chicanas/os and Latina/os as a population with deficits in need of rescue. I believe these orientations toward Latinas/os in higher education have lead to a destructive social narrative that describes them as inherently destined to fail in college. However, I see Chicana/o and Latina/o students as a heterogeneous group of people who come from all walks of life and ways of knowing that can facilitate a successful college journey. I envision my scholarly work as a platform to challenge the institutional and systemic barriers that deter Latina/o college students from obtaining a college degree. Ideally, as a scholar my work will present Chicana/o and Latina/o people as distinct and capable of educational success in American higher education.

Who is a Chicana/o Anyway?

Before beginning I see it appropriate to situate my operationalization of the term "Chicana/o" for readers unaware of its meaning and significance. For this study, *Chicana/o* as a term denotes people who have ancestry in Mexico and its indigenous roots, but are mainly conditioned by a U.S. upbringing and all its accompanying factors like oppression, racism, ethnocentrism and assimilation. However, like all identities there is no essential Chicana/o and I urge readers to adopt a fluid understanding of the identity beyond the Mexican paradigm. *Chicana/o* is a political term that recognizes the historical, political and colonizing struggles of Mexicans over time and serves to promote an increased appreciation and recognition of Chicana/o people and their contributions to society. Therefore, to understand Chicana/o as a term is to understand the marginalization and oppression that has shaped its people and their identities (Acuña, 1998, 2007; Anzaldua, 1999; Casso, 1975). I choose to name students of this identity as Chicanas/os in this study because I recognize their political and institutional struggle in American education. This leads me to believe they are students who sprint to achieve success while other dominant groups simply walk.

Additionally, I choose the term Chicana/o because I identify as a Chicano. I grew up as a bi-racial Chicano in southern California. This experience socially branded me as a Chicano because of my brown physical features and my surname of Vasquez even though I have an Irish side to my ancestry. This branding allowed me to personally identify with being viewed as an outsider in American society. I also identify with the racism that I encountered at the micro and macro level of American education when referred to as a "beaner" or "not GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] material." Now I wonder how many former GATE kids are writing a dissertation? Finally, as a Chicano who is now

interested in the intellectual understanding of Chicana/o education I prefer the term Chicano because I believe it recognizes the historical and political struggles of the Chicana/o people in America.

Why Chicana/o Students?

My focus on Chicana/o students came from my fascination and anger with dominant ideologies that constructed Chicanas/os as people who do not see value in formal education. Since I personally identify as a formally educated Chicano and biracial person who values education, I believe it is my responsibility to contribute representations of these students in higher education that contribute to increased opportunity and inclusion. My intentions can also lead to critical examination of the institutional actors and policies that serve to perpetuate minimal success for Chicana/o and Latina/o students in higher education. This can hopefully lead to changing how Chicana/o students are seen in the college context and bring us all a step closer to equitable educational practice.

I openly and intentionally chose to focus on an underrepresented group like Chicanas/os in this study while also recognizing the reality that they are considered as part of the Latina/o ethnic group of the United States. Therefore, it is often necessary to discuss the project in the context of Latina/o students for a fuller understanding of my research. Either way, the personal development that a postsecondary education can offer lights my spirit and passion to work for others who have a hard time achieving what I have already achieved—a college degree. This passion served as part of my worldview and how I viewed injustice in education. Therefore, I use the Chicana/o ethnic group as my entry point into understanding how educational problems and successes persist in American education. Growing up in an upper middle-class family with a Mexican father and an Irish mother who never went to

college showed me that Chicanas/os do not need formally educated parents to show a young son or daughter the value and excitement of pursuing a higher education in today's world. I believe we can learn from Chicana/o students and help others because of their stories.

Why Chicana/o Studies?

Having grown up in a household where destructive constructions of minorities were challenged by my parents, I have become a person who sees ethnicity as a salient part of my identity. Often in society, I witness the essentializing of underrepresented groups like Latinas/os and Chicanas/os in order to account for them and their experiences in aggregate and to further marginalize them as members of the community. It is as if Latina/o, Black, Asian, and other ethnically minoritized beings share the same lifestyles, work ethic, values, and political positions. This is evident when our universities and colleges clump all academic fields dealing with ethnicity together as one category of "ethnic studies." This completely ignores the diversity among ethnic studies and further perpetuates essentialized understandings of the research, service and teaching being done in these types of academic units. Additionally, departments like Chicana/o studies are not highly researched contexts in educational inquiry and we can still learn a lot more about the practices and experiences adopted by members of their field. With a minimal amount of student retention research in the field of Chicana/o studies, I was curious if their practices of retention were consistent with, or contradictory to existing literature on the topic.

Historically, Chicana/o studies, while small, was plagued for decades by dominant researchers in the academy that devalued their knowledge, distorted history, stereotyped Mexicans and ignored the historical significance of Mexicans in the United States (Acuña, 2007; Cordova, 2005; Macias, 2005; Mindiola, 2005). Even to this day it remains an area of

study that is marginalized and under constant threat from budget cuts and higher accountability. Therefore, as part of my work in this study, I seek to challenge and counter dominant constructions of what it means to be Chicana/o in American higher education by exploring the first-person accounts of Chicana/o students and how they saw Chicana/o studies as contributing to their retention along the journey to a bachelor's degree. Additionally, this research can contribute to the protection of Chicana/o studies and the ideals of academic freedom by providing research that substantiates the understanding of how Chicana/o studies is contributing to their students and indirectly to our broader system of education and democracy.

Furthermore, I do not want to work from a space that Rendón (2003) referred to as the "conservative White middle" (p. 34). Instead, I wish to work toward inclusive brown-centered models of student success in higher education. To do this my research journey will explore how a Chicana/o studies department impacted student retention as understood through the narratives of Chicana/o undergraduates as my unit of analysis. A Chicana/o studies department is an interesting place for me to study Chicana/o student success for multiple reasons. First, my understandings of the field have led me to view Chicana/o studies as an often-resisted field of study in higher education (Acuña, 2007; Mindiola, 2005; Valverde, 2004). This does not mean that Chicana/o studies is not a valuable, diverse and rigorous area of study. However, the academy is dominated by Eurocentric practices and ideologies that resist Chicana/o studies, which I discuss in detail during chapter one. Therefore, it is important for me to give a perspective not often heard in the academy. Second, I am focused on Chicana/o studies because of a personal and ongoing engagement in asking what student success looks like from culturally or ethically related areas of study. I

believe it is valuable and worthy work to learn from Chicana/o studies and progress forward with localized models of student retention for Chicana/o students. Only then can we increase awareness and the idea that Chicanas/os are a capable people.

CHAPTER 1: STARTING POINT

A couple of [Latina/o] *professors made a big difference, because I see in them what I can be. I see that if they were able to get their Ph.D. and they came out of the same streets and barrios I grew up in, there's no reason why I can't do it…because they made it. It inspires me to do this—*Student narrative about the support from Latina/o professors (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004, p. 35).

Starting Point

Before introducing you, the reader, to the main components of my dissertation I would like to begin by sharing my point of entry or starting point for this dissertation. This starting point was a result of my preparations inside and outside of the classroom as a student of higher education and I invite the reader to join me on this journey of understanding.

To begin, my academic agenda consisted of contributing knowledge that strives to increase the educational equity and opportunity among Latina/o college students in American higher education. I arrived to this research concerned about the problem of the low-attainment of bachelor's degrees among Chicana/o students. Alarmingly, only 7 out of every 100 Chicana/o elementary school students will graduate from college (Yosso, 2006). Data like these were especially of concern to me because Chicanas/os, the youngest and largest minority, make up a majority of the Latina/o population in the United States and remain behind other racial/ethnic groups with respect to educational attainment (Yosso, 2006, U.S. Census, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). This continued reality has spawned a plethora of scholars and models of practice that promote Latina/o and Chicana/o student retention and college completion (e.g., Gildersleeve, 2006; Nora, 2003; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006; Rendón, 1994; Rochin & Mello, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Much of this literature over the years has explained what is and is not working for these students in American colleges and universities with the hope of changing oppressive systems of

education. I appreciate this work and recognize its contribution to the field, but the fact remains that Chicana/o students are still accessing higher education at lower rates.

I believe that a need persists and requires scholars to explore what factors are precluding or enhancing the retention of Chicana/o students on their journey to the bachelor's degree. Specifically for this inquiry, I worked to explore what factors in the Chicana/o studies department at California State University Fullerton (CSUF) precluded or enhanced the retention of eight Chicana/o undergraduate students enrolled in the department. As an academic unit, Chicana/o studies can sometimes exist on the margins of higher education's collection of disciplines and fields of study (Acuña, 2007; Hayes-Bautista, 2000; Mindiola, 2005). This marginalization is facilitated by the dominantly-oriented academic's critique of indigenous knowledge and research methods, threat from the critiquing and questioning of power structures, and minimal or non-existent understanding of non-traditional pedagogy (hooks, 2003; Rendón, 2009). However, they can also be seen as knowledge rich and well-studied learning spaces.

My review of the literature resulted in only a handful of studies directly related to student retention or learning in Chicana/o studies departments. Perhaps this is because of the low numbers of actual Chicana/o studies departments in American higher education. Either way, Chicana/o studies is an understudied area of the academy and warrants further inquiry. Specifically, in this study I focused on a Chicana/o studies department in order to understand the social and academic occurrences that impacted student success in a marginalized and culturally relevant field of study in higher education. Further, the history of Chicana/o studies as a field points to its resistance of the dominant Eurocentric epistemology of the American academy, which I will outline below (Acuña, 1998, 2007; Casso, 1975; Olguin,

1991, Rendón, 2009; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso 2006.) For me, this is perhaps what makes it a more interesting place to investigate student retention experiences.

Finally, this study took place in Chicana/o studies at CSUF because of it is a department offering bachelor's degrees at a major comprehensive Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) that prides itself in teaching and service to Latina/o and Chicana/o students. I also had access to the university because of my connections to administrators and faculty as a former student at CSUF. Since I am investigating Chicana/o undergraduates in a Chicana/o studies department it was important for me to be in a university with an undergraduate-focused Chicana/o studies department, but also in an institution that values and rewards teaching. CSUF embodies both. Additionally, there existed only a handful of fully sanctioned Chicana/o studies departments, with full-time professors, offering bachelors degrees in the Unites States. Many of these departments exist in the southwest United States. Because of the scarcity, CSUF was of high quality, realistic, and feasible.

CSUF awards bachelors and master's degrees as well as offering credentialing programs and post-baccalaureate education. It is one of 23 campuses that comprise the California State University system—one of the largest university systems in the United States. As of the spring 2009, CSUF enrolled almost 38,000 students. The university is comprised of 28% Latina/o students. Specifically, CSUF enrolled 7,436 Chicana/o students in the fall 2008 semester. The Chicana/o studies department enrolled 38 majors (includes students who identify Chicana/o studies as a second major) and 10 minors in the fall 2009 semester. In 2008 the university awarded 11 bachelor's degrees to Chicana/o studies majors. Interestingly, all 11 of the Chicana/o studies degrees awarded that year went to students who identified as Chicana/o (CSUF Institutional Research and Analytical Studies, 2009).

The Problem Facing Chicana/o College Students

This study addressed two problems facing Mexican Americans, or whom I refer to as Chicanas/os in U.S. higher education. The first being that Chicana/o students are not graduating from college with a bachelor's degree at rates in parity with their increases in the U.S. population as the largest and youngest underrepresented group (Rendón, Nora, Cabrales, Ranero, & Vasquez, 2008; U.S. Census, 2008a, 2008b). A possible reason for these low rates can be partially explained by the second problem, which is that if Chicana/o students are to successfully complete a bachelor's degree they must first endure the isolating and dominating Eurocentric paradigm of American higher education embedded within the academy and its fields of study (Vasquez, 2007; Valverde, 2004; Villalpando, 2003). This dominant ideology defends and places value upon objectivity, colorblindness and individual merit in the academy that can impede a Chicana/o student's success in college.

Understanding this problem has sparked my interest in what Chicana/o student retention looks like when practiced outside of the Eurocentric paradigm, or from what I view to be the brown center of the academy (Rendón, 2009). Chicana/o studies values cultural, communal, familial and indigenous ways of knowing and learning often discarded by the Eurocentric paradigm (Acuña, 1998, Olguin, 1991). Further, with so much attention given to Chicana/o and Latina/o student success in fields like STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) in higher education, I asked what student success looked like from a Chicana/o studies perspective. Therefore, to narrow my focus, I sought to address the two aforementioned problems by investigating how Chicana/o studies, as an academic department, precluded or enhanced the retention of a case of Chicana/o students at California State University Fullerton (CSUF). To understand the Chicana/o studies department in this

research, I called upon Chicana/o student experiences as my source of data. In the end this study was about Chicana/o students and how they can show us what Chicana/o studies may or may not have done to help facilitate increased retention of Chicana/o students in higher education.

Chicanas/os: Part of the Latina/o Majority in the Minority

In order to understand the demographics of Chicana/o students it is important to first understand the broader demographic make-up of Latina/o people in the United States. The Latina/o population in the United States is now the majority in the minority. In 2000, Latinas/os represented about 12.6% of the total population in the U.S. while Whites were the dominant group at 69%. Today, Latinas/os are the clear majority in the minority and represent about 15.1% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b). The total U.S. population as of July 1, 2007 was 301.6 million people and is projected to increase to 438 million by the year 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b). Overall, the U.S. population has increased drastically in past years and is now one of the most populous nations in the world behind countries like India and China.

In 2007, the underrepresented population in the U.S. topped in at 102.5 million or 34% of the total U.S. population. Specifically, California had 20% of the nation's underrepresented people followed by Texas, which was home to 12% of the total underrepresented population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b). With the rising population of underrepresented bodies in the U.S., the White population is projected to decrease in size to about 47% by the year 2050 resulting in drastic changes in population demographics of the United States (Pew Research Center). This change in the population will require education to transform and change along with its newly shifted demographics.

The growth of Latinas/os in the U.S. is expected to continue. The Pew Research Center (2008) projected that the Latina/o population will triple in size and account for nearly 30% of the nations total population by 2050, compared with 14% in 2005. The growing population of Latinas/os will require that all facets of the U.S. recognize their presence and demand for access to social, political, and educational benefits. These shifts will require educators to address the demands of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os interested in furthering their education through the nation's colleges and universities. Additional information is displayed in Table 1.1 and depicts the detailed U.S. population breakdown by race/ethnicity as well as the projected growth of underrepresented bodies living in the U.S.

Table 1.1

United States Population by Race/Ethnicity

	July 1, 2000 Total (millions)	July 1, 2000 Percentage	July 1, 2007 Total (millions)	July 1, 2007 Percentage	2050 Projections
Total U.S. Population	282,194,308	100	301,621,157	100	438,000,000
Hispanic	35.6	12.6	45.1	15.1	29%
White	195	69	199.1	66	47%
Black	37.2	13.2	40.7	13	13%
Asian	12.2	4.3	15.2	5	9%
American Indian/Pacific Islander	4.2	1.5	4.5	1.5	n/a
Native Hawaiian/Alaska Native	910,595 (thousand)	0.3	1	0.3	n/a

Source: Adapted from U.S. Census (2008b); Pew Research Center (2008)

Chicanas/os within the New Majority

Among Latinas/os, Chicanas/os people comprise the vast majority of the Latina/o population in the United States. Recent data disaggregated the Latina/o population and showed that Chicana/os made up over 65% of the total Latina/o population. Puerto Ricans and Cubans represented 8.6% and 3.7% respectively (U.S. Census, 2006). Table 1.2 displays the overwhelming majority of Chicanas/os in the Latina/o population. Chicanas/os are important to understand because they have become the youngest and fastest growing subgroup among Latinas/os and are also some of the most economically stricken groups in the U.S. with one out of two Chicana/o children living in poverty (Yosso, 2006). These realities leave me to ponder how educational opportunity can be but one way to alleviate the systemic educational oppression of Chicanas/os in America.

Table 1.2
Distribution of Latinas/os in the U.S. 2006

	2006 Percentage	2006 Total (millions)
Chicanas/os	65.5	28.3
Puerto Rican	8.6	3.7
Cuban	3.7	1.6
Central American	8.2	3.5
South American	6	2.6
Other	8	3.4
Total	100	43.2

Source: U.S. Census (2006)

Problem 1: The Chicana/o Path to Educational Attainment

The population of Latina/o people in the United States is expected to grow to nearly 30% of the total populace by the year 2050 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). This reality can be

met with a call for increasing the educational attainment of Latina/o people in the United States including Chicanas/os. Ideally this call for increased educational attainment will be for purposes of developing critical consciousness among Chicanas/os that enable them to thrive in American society. According to Freire, (1971) this kind of critical consciousness can allow students to succeed by learning to recognize and change oppressive systems that serve to hold them back. There is still work to be done when referring to the educational attainment of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. This is especially alarming when only 12.7% of Latinas/os ages 25 and up completed a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 29.1% among their White counterparts in the same age group. Below I present the broader educational pathway for Latina/o students and then shift to the educational pathway for Chicanas/o, specifically.

The Latina/o Educational Pathway

Overall Latina/o educational attainment at all levels has remained low since the 1980's when compared to other sub-groups in the population of America. Low educational attainment among Latinas/os is a distressing reality considering their growth in the overall U.S. population. Latinas/os face many barriers to educational success such as attendance at poorly funded and segregated schools, limited academic college preparation, lower levels of parental formal education, and growing up in poverty (Rendón, et al., 2008). Specifically, these realities can include being taught by underprepared and non-credentialed teachers in addition to poor infrastructure like libraries, technology, and learning equipment. Additionally, with family members who may not have high levels of formal education, Latinas/os can come from homes with minimal college knowledge necessary to navigate the often daunting and complicated journey to college for first-generation college students

(Auerbach, 2004; Auerbach, 2006; Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Ortiz & Gonzalez, 2000; Padilla, 2007; Vasquez, 2007). The broader educational pathway presented below represents the major benchmarks in a Latina/o student's college going. These benchmarks include: (1) high school completion, (2) college enrollment, and (3) college completion. At these various benchmarks, Latina/o students continue to fall behind other major groups.

High school completion.

Alarmingly, Latina/o students begin their education at a disadvantage. According to data from the Pew Hispanic Center (2008), in 2006 Latinas/os age 25 and older who had only completed less than a ninth grade education was about 24%, compared to their White counterparts at 3.5%. Additionally, the Pew Hispanic Center data showed that for this same age group, Latinas/os who only graduated high school was about 28% while Blacks and Whites who only completed a high school diploma were about 34% and 31% respectively.

College enrollment.

As shown in Table 1.3, in the fall of 2007 there were about 18.2 million students enrolled in American higher education institutions (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2009). About 64.4% of the total enrollment was White, who made up the dominant group enrolled in the fall of 2007 compared to 11.4% of Latinas/os. This is troubling considering that Latinas/os as a population has grown, but not surprising in view of the dismal descriptors of Latinas/os and their completion of a high school diploma. Perhaps what is more troubling is the fact that only about 9% of Latinas/os are enrolled in public four-year institutions (the institutional context for this study). Public four-year institutions are important because they are the institutions that award bachelor's degrees. Simply put, if students are not enrolled in

the four-year institutions then bachelor's degrees are not being awarded. Table 1.3 shows the

enrollment of Latinas/os in all sectors of higher education.

Table 1.3

Fall 2007 Enrollment Rates by Race/Ethnicity

	Total #	Total %	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	American Indian	Non-Resident
Total	18,248,100	100	64.4	11.4	13.1	6.7	1.0	3.4
Male	7,815,900	42.8	65.8	11.0	10.7	7.2	1.0	0.4
Female	10.432,200	57.2	63.4	11.6	14.8	6.3	1.2	2.8
Public 4-year	7,166,700	39.3	67.2	9.3	11.2	7.0	1.1	4.3
Public 2-year	6,324,100	34.7	60.5	5.4	13.7	7.0	1.2	1.5
Private 4-year	4,463,500	24.5	66.5	7.6	14.3	5.9	0.7	4.9
Private 2-year	293,800	1.6	50.5	17.2	25.8	4.2	1.6	0.7
Undergraduate	15,603,800	85.5	64.4	12.8	13.4	6.7	1.1	2.1
Graduate	2,293,600	12.6	63.9	6.1	11.5	5.6	0.7	12.2
Professional	350,800	1.9	69.8	5.5	7.9	13.7	0.7	2.5

Source: Adapted from Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, (2009)

College completion.

Many Latina/o students who do make it to college will most likely not graduate.

Overall, the 2007 rate of completing a bachelor's degree as a Latinas/os was only about 8%

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2007a). For educational attainment beyond a bachelor's degree, as

depicted in Table 1.4, Latinas/os remain behind their peers. For example, in 2007 only

12.7% of Latinas/os completed a degree beyond their bachelor's degree (i.e., master's,

doctoral), compared to 29.1% of their White peers and 52% of their Asian peers.

Additionally, the breakdown of the type of degrees earned by Latinas/os and other groups is

provided in Table 1.5.

Table 1.4

Educational Attainment Rates by Race/Ethnicity for People 25 and Older: 2003-2007

Completed 4 years of High School or more*

	Total all races	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
2007	85.7	86.2	82.3	87.8	60.3
2006	85.5	86.1	80.7	87.4	59.3
2005	85.2	85.8	81.1	87.6	58.5
2004	85.2	85.8	80.6	86.8	58.4
2003	84.6	85.1	80	87.6	57

Completed a Bachelor's Degree or Higher**

	Total all races	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
2007	28.7	29.1	18.5	52.1	12.7
2006	28	28.4	18.5	49.7	12.4
2005	27.7	28.1	17.6	50.2	12
2004	27.7	28.2	17.6	49.4	12.1
2003	27.2	27.6	17.3	49.8	11.4

Note: * All individuals with at least a high school diploma and some college.

** All individuals with a bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, and first professionals.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, (2007a).

Table 1.5

Degrees Earned by Level in 2005 by Race/Ethnicity

	Total in 2005	Total Percentage in 2005
Associate's Degree Total	**696,660**	**100.0**
White	475,513	68.3
Black	86,402	12.4
Hispanic	78,557	11.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	33,669	4.8
American Indian/Alaska Native	8,435	1.2
Non-resident	14,084	2
Bachelor's Degree Total	**1,439,264**	**100.0**
White	1,049,141	72.9
Black	136,122	9.5
Hispanic	101,124	7.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	97,209	6.8
American Indian/Alaska Native	10,307	0.7
Non-resident	45,361	3.2
Master's Degree Total	**574,618**	**100.0**
White	379,350	66
Black	54,482	9.5
Hispanic	31,485	5.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	32,783	5.7
American Indian/Alaska Native	3,295	0.6
Non-resident	73,223	12.7
Doctoral Degree Total	**52,631**	**100.0**
White	30,261	57.5
Black	3,056	5.8
Hispanic	1,824	3.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,911	5.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	237	0.5
Non-resident	14,342	27.3
First-professional Total	**87,289**	**100.0**
White	63,439	72.7
Black	6,313	7.2
Hispanic	4,445	5.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	10,501	12
American Indian/Alaska Native	564	0.6
Non-resident	2,037	2.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, (2008a)

The Chicana/o Educational Pathway

As previously demonstrated, Chicana/o students make up the majority of Latinas/o in the U.S. and it is no surprise that the specific subgroup data for Chicanas/os is similar to the broader data about Latinas/os. Tara Yosso (2006), a prominent critical scholar of the Chicana/o educational pathway and author of the widely cited *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*, summarizes the educational attainment of Chicana/o students in American education at all levels. Figure 1.1 is a succinct summary of her work that paints a picture of the low-rates of attainment among Chicana/o students at all major educational benchmarks.
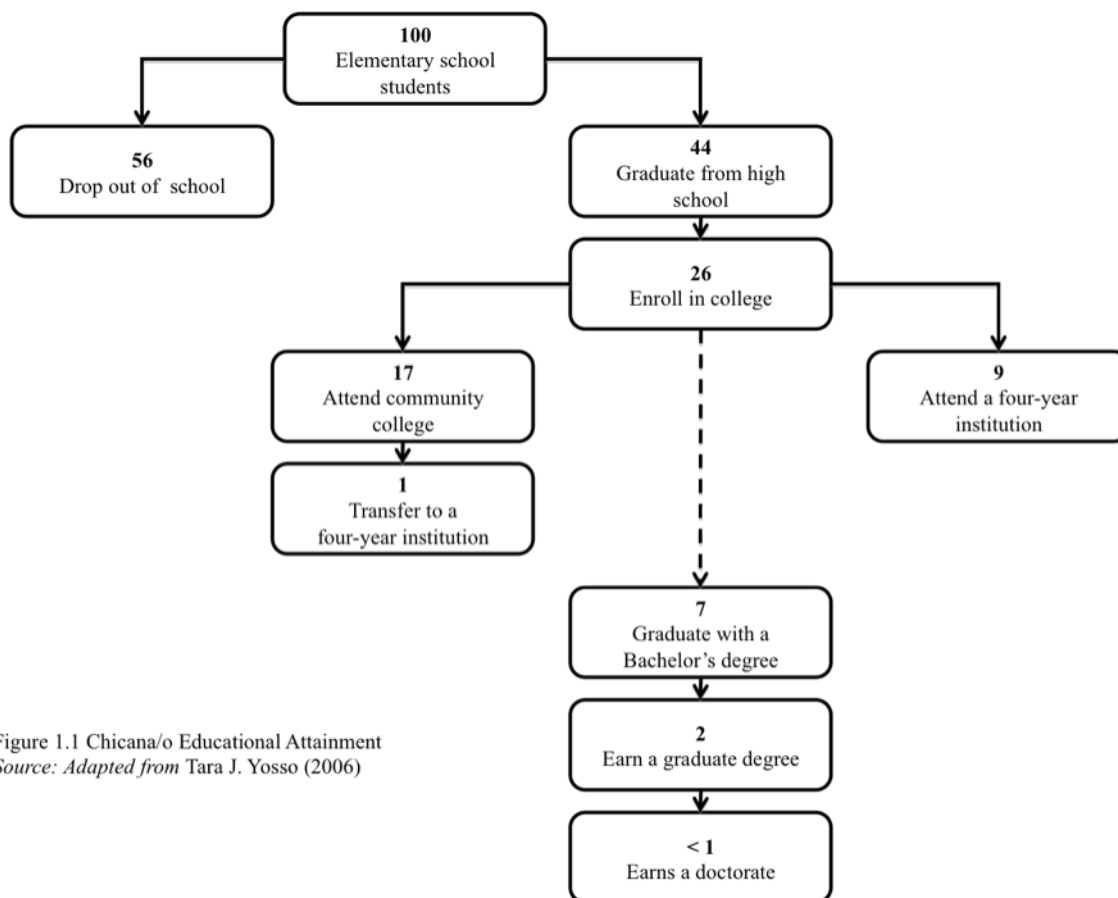
Figure 1.1 Chicana/o Educational Attainment
Source: Adapted from Tara J. Yosso (2006)

Problem 2: Encountering the Eurocentric American Paradigm in Higher Education

In addition to the demographic problem stated above, which paints a picture of the low rates of educational attainment among Chicana/o students, a Eurocentric worldview dictates how Chicana/o students experience American higher education and thus pushes them out all together (Olguin, 1991). One cannot understand Chicana/o college students without first understanding the Eurocentric culture of the academy, which can view Chicanas/os as outsiders and can be determined to keep them on the margins of the academy (Acuña, 1998, 2007). This paradigm must be disrupted and transformed so that Chicana/o students can be let in to succeed, but also create their own ways of knowing and being that are valued and appreciated in higher education. One will quickly discover that it is a field of rich knowledge, rigor, and excellence in teaching and service.

The Eurocentric paradigm I refer to as problematic is summarized in the following points. It is destructive to Chicana/o students in college for its resistance to learning from non-dominant or non-Eurocentric epistemologies like Chicana/o studies (Olguin, 1991). Therefore, professors in Chicana/o studies may have a more difficult time with tenure because of non-traditional research, graduate students may have a hard time getting dissertations approved, and political and social agendas that value and place worth on a dominant focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) in curriculum skew a well-balanced and liberal education (Casso, 1975; hooks, 2003; Olguin, 1991, Rendón, 2009; Solorzano, 1998; Yosso 2006). These practices influence student experience, teaching, policy development, and allocations management in the academy. Therefore, the academy operates as a club that lets certain people and ideas in while others are kept out. Ideally, studying student success from outside the Eurocentric paradigm can shed light on

what factors contribute to the retention of Chicanas/os in lesser-known programs. The following explanation of the Eurocentric paradigm in higher education is adapted from my understanding of past scholarship that has explained its permeation in higher education and shows how Chicana/o studies can be resisted (Acuña, 1998, 2007; Casso, 1975; hooks, 2003; Olguin, 1991, Rendón, 2009; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso 2006).

1. Privilege is extended to Eurocentric epistemologies that value truth seeking, competition, objectivity/positivism and expert-based teaching. The Eurocentric paradigm resists qualitative knowledge and epistemologies of culture and ethnic worldviews (Rendón, 2009; Yosso, 2006).

2. Value is given to teaching, service and research, but research is given priority and rewarded disproportionately compared to service and teaching in research-intensive institutions. The Eurocentric paradigm resists education that seeks to disrupt and transform oppressive systems and institutions (Acuña, 1998; Solorzano, 1998)

3. Emphasis is given to the German model of education that privileges applied knowledge and specialization in certain disciplines and fields of study. The Eurocentric paradigm resists interdisciplinary perspectives (Casso, 1975; Olguin, 1991, Rendón, 2009; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso 2006). Interdisciplinary perspectives embrace the multiple knowledge claims spread over multiple fields of study and rejects the approach that only invites knowledge founded in one area of study (i.e., sociology only).

4. Eurocentric educators exist to reproduce the social, political and intellectual status quo (i.e., seeking single truths and objectivity, maintaining economic power, dominant research methods of writing and analysis). The Eurocentric paradigm

resists education as a tool for transformation and alleviation of social problems (also see Freire, 1971; hooks, 1994, 2003).

Over the decades, Chicana/o studies and Chicana/o students have emerged as an alliance that resist higher education's dominating Eurocentric paradigm in the hope of making space for different ways of knowing, being and learning. In fact, according to leading Chicana/o studies scholar Rodolfo F. Acuña (1998) the Eurocentric paradigm is harmful to many Chicana/o students who often enter higher education from communal and ethnically oriented perspectives (i.e., family support, cultural practices, language, indigenous knowledge, etc.). It is for this reason that I took interest in learning more about how a Chicana/o studies department facilitated student retention among Chicana/o students when they may be resisting dominant practices in the academy—dominant practices that have been shown to be harmful (e.g., Rendón, 1994, 2009; Vasquez, 2007). The Chicana/o studies environment may shed light on retention practices and policies that work for Chicana/o students who aspire to college degrees.

Historically, during the 1960's and 1970's Chicana/o students and scholars began to resist and disrupt dominating Eurocentric perspectives in the academy. Their struggle resulted in demonstrations and scholarship that questioned the dominant ways of knowing and learning in higher education. It provided a voice to the communal and change-oriented Chicanas/os who were becoming powerful majorities on some college campuses, yet had no area of study for their ethnicity. The Chicana/o resistance resulted in the creation of Chicana/o studies departments and centers at places like the University of California Los Angeles, California State University Northridge and California State University Fullerton,

but not without resistance from dominant groups in the ivory tower (Acuña, 1998, 2007; Mindiola, 2005).

Understanding the problem of the Eurocentric paradigm of higher education was important for this study because I have shown that Chicana/o studies was founded out of resistance to this exclusive culture. If we wish to see more success among underrepresented groups than scholarship needs to disrupt the dominant paradigm and privilege the new and non-dominant ways of knowing, teaching and being.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to contribute understandings about what experiences in Chicana/o studies preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention. This study will explore the subjective experiences of students to examine how their Chicana/o studies department contributed to their retention and pathway to the completion of a bachelor's degree. Additionally, my personal and academic goals inform the purpose for this project and are outlined as the following: (1) further understand and contribute data to improving the journey to a bachelor's degree for Chicana/o college students for increased equity, (2) understand how a student's experiences in their academic unit impact their college journey to a bachelor's degree, (3) promote the educational success stories and experiences of Chicana/o college students, and (4) advance understandings and theories that explain what factors preclude or enhance student success (i.e., retention and graduation) among Chicana/o students.

Research Questions

This study was based on the premise that Chicana/o educational success is impacted by institutional factors such as the students' interaction with an academic department.

Additionally, this study sought to provide a venue for Chicana/o students to share their experiences in Chicana/o studies in order to learn what student success looks like from the margins of the academy. To work toward this purpose, three main research questions guided me as the researcher and are specifically meant to advance understandings of Chicana/o students in U.S. higher education.

1. Why do Chicana/o students choose to study in Chicana/o studies?

2. What academic factors in a Chicana/o studies department preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention (i.e., pedagogy, curriculum, special academic programs, academic validation, professional development, etc.)?

3. What social factors in a Chicana/o studies department preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention (i.e., interpersonal validation, peer support networks, special events, programming, community building, etc.)?

Significance of the Study

The Chicana/o and Latinas/o population in the United States has grown to an all time high (see Table 1.1). Increases in Latina/o and Chicana/o student enrollment has also been documented in higher education. However, the degree completion of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in undergraduate education remains problematic with educational attainment rates remaining below other racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, this work held various degrees of significance for personnel at all levels of the higher education system. Below are the significant contributions of this study for practitioners and policy makers.

Higher Education Practitioners

For the purposes of this study, practitioners include both student affairs administrators and faculty. This study is important to their work for the following reasons:

1. The institution's student and faculty demographic composition as well as racial/ethnic climate may have a significant impact on the retention of Chicana/o undergraduates. Therefore, this study can assist practitioners in designing curricula and student services meant to specifically serve the Chicana/o student population.

2. Typically, curriculum in college uses the scientific approach and traditional pedagogy (i.e., lectures, banking education, competition) to teach students (Dei, 2007; Freire, 1971). Understanding the academic experiences of Chicana/o students can allow practitioners to design new and effective ways of teaching and learning that foster student success.

3. Knowing what derails or helps to retain a Chicana/o undergraduate will help practitioners be more careful and strategic in their work. Having information about Chicana/o students who come to faculty and student affairs professionals for assistance and guidance will allow practitioners to serve Chicana/o students more appropriately.

Higher Education Policy-Makers

In addition to practitioners, higher education policy makers will benefit from this study because of the influence they have on public and institutional policy in higher education. The specific audiences of policy-makers I speak to in this study are governing and executive institutional officers, deans and department chairs. The significance gained from this study is contextualized in a single institution and represents data that can qualify understandings of student success. For example:

1. Policy in the institution is often guided by research findings. This study can provide interpretive data to the bank of information and research used to design and improve

policy for student learning among Chicanas/os—albeit based on the sole institution in this study.

2. Personal accounts and narratives of Chicana/o students' experiences will help give personal testimony to the policy making process in higher education. Such testimony allows for multiple perspectives to be considered during the creation of educational policy.

3. Knowing the specific occurrences that occur in Chicana/o studies will help justify increased funding for retention initiatives aimed at Chicana/o undergraduate students.

4. Understanding student success in Chicana/o studies can assist policy makers with challenging traditional ways of teaching and learning in favor of new approaches that grow from the outside of the dominant political in higher education.

Summary

The specific problem to be investigated in this study is the lack of educational success and participation among Chicanas/os in the U.S. system of higher education. Additionally, Chicana/o students encounter institutional and systemic barriers that serve to push them out of higher education and derail their aspirations for higher learning. Chicana/o studies emerged as an academic unit that resists the systemic barriers derailing students and seeks to increase the recognition of Chicanas/os as contributors to society and knowledge. Further, even as the majority in the minority, Chicanas/os and Latinas/os continue to lag behind their peers at all educational levels. Therefore, the central purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Chicana/o studies precludes or enhances Chicana/o student retention. Understanding student success from the Chicana/o studies perspective allows higher education to learn about the impact of culturally relevant study on the retention of Chicana/o

students in postsecondary education. From this problem and purpose, this study seeks to ask three research questions: (1) Why do Chicana/o students choose to major in Chicana/o studies?, (2) What academic factors in Chicana/o studies preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention?, and (3) What social factors in Chicana/o studies preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention?

The significance of this research is that the results can assist higher education practitioners and policy-makers with developing pedagogy, programming, curriculum, and polices that take into account the unique and diverse needs of Chicana/o students. In the next chapter I will outline the significant themes from the literature on Latina/o and Chicana/o students in higher education. This background information informs readers about this project's topic and identifies the gaps in current research that can be filled by this study.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Poor minority-student success rates threaten both individual goals and the realization of state and national goals because the fastest growing population segments (minority and low-income) are the segments that experience the lowest levels of student success (Padilla & Norton, 2009, p. 158).

Introduction

Having now outlined the problem, purpose and research questions that framed my study it is necessary to introduce some of the contextual and theoretical consideration when studying Chicana/o and Latina/o student retention in higher education. Therefore, this chapter will examine significant research findings related to the student success of Chicana/o and Latina/o college students. As already stated, 'student success' in the context of this study is defined as successfully retaining students along the pathway to the completion of a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution of higher education. The literature presented in this study was delimited from my broader search for and analysis of existing knowledge claims in order to understand gaps in current research and areas for further inquiry. This chapter also serves a practical purpose in that it is intended to provide contextual and background information needed to understand retention issues on college campuses that both deter and promote success.

I have structured this chapter into several main sections and have attempted to be as in-depth as possible. I invite readers to peruse the chapter or read it carefully in recognition that we all come to this type of work with multiple levels of understanding. The first section will discuss the evolution of retention theory in higher education. I will argue that the foundations of retention theory are continuing to evolve and have been countered by authors who focus on retention among students of color. A rethinking of student success from a

Chicana/o studies perspective in this study may possibly contribute to the dismantling of the "one size fits all" approach to fostering student success. The second section will discuss the pre-college factors impacting student success among Chicana/o and Latina/o students. This section includes a brief snapshot of pre-college roadblocks along the way to college, discussion of the college-going for Chicana/o and Latina/o students, and finally a brief presentation of some existing barriers to transferring from a community college to a four-year university. This section is important to understand because society must realize that getting to a four-year college as a Chicana/o student can be quite difficult and trying for many families. The third section will address some of the college experiences impacting Latina/o student retention once they arrive on campus. Paying attention to how students achieve success in higher education and the experiences they encounter will serve to provide a better understanding of how to make the college environment more welcoming for Latina/o students. The fourth section will outline the existing knowledge about Chicana/o studies and how the field has evolved since its creation in the American academy. This information is helpful to understand the position of Chicana/o studies in higher education and why I argue it is a field of study on the margins. This marginality left me wondering if we are not recognizing practices in Chicana/o studies that may help broaden our understanding of retention. Finally, I will end the chapter with a discussion of theoretical framework that provided the parameters for this study and assisted me with exploring and analyzing the data.

Evolution of Retention Theory in Higher Education

The goal of increasing participation in higher education has been studied rigorously throughout the middle and late twentieth century (Braxton, 2000). However, much of the foundational research on student participation and attrition in higher education has focused

on traditional students who represent dominant groups (e.g., Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Tinto, 1987). Now, as the United States is witnessing an increase in their non-dominant groups attending college, the experiences of how underrepresented Chicana/o students are retained in Chicana/o studies provides a new perspective on current understandings of student success.

The study of retention is not a new field in higher education and remains a vastly studied sector of educational research for over seventy years (Braxton, 2000). Retention is different from persistence in that the term 'persistence' is defined as the student's ability to progress toward completion of an educational credential. Retention on the other hand is defined as the institutions ability to retain a student from year-to-year at a respective institution. Therefore, the overall focus of retention studies is to understand how the institution impacts and contributes to the educational attainment of college students. In the case of this study, I focused on how an institutional academic unit, Chicana/o studies, impacted the retention of individual Chicana/o college students. Here I introduce some of the foundational knowledge and its evolution over the past years.

Tinto's Three Phase Model of Student Departure from College

Vincent Tinto (1975) is highly cited as pioneering retention theory in higher education though his work heavily focuses on the deficits of students and their ability to separate from their community and family in order to assimilate into their new college environment. The problem that Tinto addressed in his work on attrition from higher education spoke to the reality that much of the literature on student departure from higher education did not make the distinction between whether a student leaves because of academic failure or voluntary decisions. Thus, the Tinto model of student departure was made up of

three phases that explain college student departure decisions: (1) separation, (2) transition, and (3) incorporation.

Separation, transition and incorporation.

Tinto (1975, 1987) showed higher education, through a three-phase model, that a student would successfully transition into college and persist to degree completion only when they first separate from their family and community of origin. If a student failed to disassociate from their family and community, then they were more likely to depart from college during their first months, or year of college. The second phase of Tinto's model was the transition stage in which new students begin to associate and interact with the new institution and its people in order to adopt the knowledge and norms of the new college community. According to Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000), this transition phase is facilitated by isolation and training in the first months of college, which is intended for students to learn new ways of being in college. The third stage of the Tinto model, incorporation, takes place when the new student adopts the norms and language of the college community in order to be considered as a competent member of the institutional culture.

Once a student has successfully separated, transitioned, and incorporated along their journey into a new college environment they will likely persist to degree completion (Tinto, 1987). This model is problematic in that it belittles a college student into a deficit holding person who is required to join the mainstream and adopt the dominant cultural norms of the status quo. While foundational to retention studies, I am still critical of Tinto's model and will seek to focus on the institution as the problematic element, which must respond to the

unique needs of Latina/o students in order to provide increased educational equity and opportunity.

Moving Beyond the Work of Tinto

Over the years as work on student retention has evolved, many scholars have moved beyond the work of Tinto (1975, 1987) in order to critique his individual and assimilation-oriented theory of student attrition and retention in higher education. One of the recent works that attempts to abandon Tinto's model is Braxton's edited volume titled *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* (2000). Braxton takes aim at Tinto's departure theory based off of his understanding that the Tinto model lacks consistency and is only partially supported. Instead, Braxton calls for scholars to create new models of retention in higher education to recognize the multiple and fluid contexts impacting the retention process. Studying the experiences of underrepresented students like Chicanas/os fits nicely into Braxton's call to action. The movement beyond Tinto has helped to understand and study retention among underrepresented students in college.

One way to move beyond Tinto (1987) has been to challenge the terminology used in his model that explicitly labels transition to college as a process of separation and incorporation. Rendón, Jalomo and Nora (2000) challenged Tinto's ideas of separation and incorporation from one culture to another. The terms "incorporation" or "integration" carry with them an assimilationist viewpoint that requires underrepresented students to abandon all cultural ties and adopt the cultural norms of dominant groups in order to successfully progress through college. Therefore, all responsibility for success lies on the students with no responsibility given to the institutions and its practices. Furthermore, Tierney (1992) showed that when a student who has strong cultural ties to their family and community and is

suddenly required to separate from these cultural bonds they will not be successful in college. The separation approach is also harmful because it constructs the majority culture as the norm and status quo. Those who wish to be considered competent members of the college culture must adopt such constructions of the norm (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Rendón, et al., 2000).

Research since Tinto (i.e., Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Rendón, et al., 2000) has suggested that instead of separating from past family bonds and community ties, underrepresented students can maintain relations in both their new and past cultures. This is known as dual-socialization and allows underrepresented students to maintain their individual uniqueness without having to assimilate into the status quo of American higher education in order to fit in (Rendón, et al.). The ideas of dual-socialization challenge and rethink Tinto's ideas of separation in order to be successful in college by showing that students do not have to separate and incorporate into a new college environment in order to persist. In fact, a major weakness of Tinto is his assumption that a student must become what he or she is not in order to be successful in college. Instead, research like this study is required to rethink how college campuses retain students of color, who may have different relational expectations then those of their White peers.

To move beyond the harmful separation and integration concepts in foundational retention theory, Rendón et al. (2000) showed that through a bicultural concept of student participation in college, underrepresented students might navigate their own specific culture (minority) and also move through the institution's (majority) culture simultaneously. Employing the work of Valentine (1971), who worked with African American students to show that people learn to practice mainstream culture and their own culture at the same time,

showed that Tinto's model sets up a hierarchical relationship among different cultures and communities. In Tinto's model, the majority culture (White, upper-class, male) is positioned as supreme and takes on a more important role in education than any other group (Tierney, 1992). Therefore, all other cultures are seen a lacking in the necessary elements to position students for successful college completion. Through the bicultural framework, students can exist and work in multiple cultures and practice in the majority culture without having to desert their underrepresented elements of identity that may be seen as deficits or unworthy of acknowledgment (Rendón, et al.).

Past Research on Chicana/o Student Retention

Specific to Chicana/o student retention in college, Yosso (2006) also took aim at Tinto's model. Through critical race counterstories (i.e., stories that challenge the master narratives in education), she provided another way of examining college retention among Chicana/o students. In Yosso's model of the Chicana/o undergraduate stages of passage, she posits that the college transition and retention process is one of shock, community building, and critical navigation of multiple environments. Yosso also critiqued Tinto's separation process as harmful to Chicana/o students because it causes stress and adversity in a time that should be liberating and exciting for a young person moving to college.

The Yosso (2006) model begins with a stage of culture shock based off of hearing the stories of extreme isolation, alienation, harmful assimilation, discrimination, and racism among Chicana/o students in American education. This culture shock has the potential to eliminate a student from college. Therefore, community building is a way to allow for student to persist and the institution to retain students of color. Through the second stage of transition, community building, Chicana/o students create social and academic networks that

allow them to navigate the complex world of college in order to be successful and move toward completion of college. These communities can be diverse and include study groups, mentor relationships with faculty and older students, social groups, student organizations, or family and community relationships (Yosso, 2006). Once students establish a sense of community to move beyond culture shock in college, they can begin to critically navigate the institution. The third stage, critical navigation in college, involves navigating, not negotiating, between their cultural and familial worlds and the world of college. Critical navigation allows Chicana/o students to navigate their college environment by incorporating their cultural saliency into their college culture to allow for both biculturalism and dual-socialization, as discussed earlier. Yosso contributed a different viewpoint on student persistence among Latina/o populations by showing that students of color can be successful in their college pursuits by forming a college environment that is conducive to their own identity and not the identity of the majority.

Need for More Understanding of Chicana/o Student Retention

In sum, the work on student retention has grown over the years to critique and build upon Tinto's model of student departure. Perhaps the lesson learned from the work thus far is that blanket theories on student retention are problematic and ignore the diverse student body in higher education today. One size does not fit all. Instead, research must continue to develop frameworks that explore the multiple and subjective issues and stories of success among Chicanas/os in various institutional types (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rendón, et al., 2000; Yosso, 2006).

Pre-college Factors that may Impact Chicana/o and Latina/o Retention

As we move through the beginning of the twenty-first century, one of the most prevalent issues in education is that of educating students beyond the K–12 system of education (Chang, 2002; De los Santos et al., 2006). This is particularly true for educating underrepresented students. Approximately one-third or about 35% of Latina/o students who manage to complete the K–12 system of education immediately go on to college after high school graduation (Nora, 2003). Low rates of college participation are a major reason Latinas/os are overrepresented in lower level occupations such as service workers, crafts people, and nonfarm laborers. On the other hand, Latinas/os are underrepresented in the higher paying jobs including technical fields, managers, and administrators (Nora). Therefore, the retention of Latina/o students in higher education environments remains one of the most important issues related to promoting underrepresented people to the middle and upper tiers of society. To understand the entire picture of Latina/o student success in higher education, it is important to include pre-college experiences because what happens to Latinas/os in grade school and high school can impact college access and completion.

Experiences along the Way to College

The K-16 (kindergarten through college degree) educational system has long been referred to as the educational pipeline. However, Nora (2003) found that the system is more like a "seamless web with tears in the fabric" (p. 52). Using a database representing actual enrollment figures from preschool to high school, Nora found that of the 2,856 Latinas/os who enroll in preschool only 4.2% earned an associate's degree 14 years later. Of the same sample only a mere 1.6% graduated from a four-year institution. Additionally, of the total sample used by Nora, only 6% of those students who graduated from high school earned a

bachelor's degree. These statistics are disconcerting and help to inform this study. Further, educators face a future in limbo. If we are to work to improve the participation of minority students in higher education, we must first recognize the problems in our K–12 schools. The following statistics further display past findings of deficiencies in K-12 education:

1. In 1999, 68% of eighth graders received instruction in mathematics from a teacher who did not hold a degree or certificate in mathematics (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004).

2. In 2000, 93% of students in grades 5–9 were taught physical science (chemistry and physics) by a teacher with no degree or certification in the physical sciences (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004).

Additional problems in the pre-college time span of many Chicana/o and Latina/o students' lives are discussed below. It should be noted that some may not see these factors as individual deficits of a student, but rather as circumstances of being Latina/o in the United States where the dominant culture and structural power is founded in discourses of White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchal superiority and European-centered canons (Dei, 1996, 2007; Giroux, 1981, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005, Rendón, 2009). Therefore, an understanding of the following set of barriers is required in order to understand Latina/o student success in the American context.

Growing up in poverty.

In 2005, the overall percentages of families with children living in poverty were higher for Blacks, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders than for Whites and Asians (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Among the list, poverty-related risk factors include: low test scores, absence of stimulating

books and trips, living in unsafe or isolated neighborhoods, and being raised by a single parent household (Padilla, 2007).

Attendance at segregated and under-preparing schools.

As described in previous work (Rendón, Nora, Cabrales, Ranero, & Vasquez, 2008), Latina/o students may attend high-poverty schools that usually have less-experienced, non-credentialed teachers, as well as inadequate libraries and laboratories. These schools offer courses that are not as rigorous as a student would experience in predominantly middle-class schools. Students at resource-affluent schools also have access to Advanced Placement (AP) examinations and thorough college-preparatory curriculum. Further, segregated schools in low-income areas suffer from low student achievement and graduation rates (The Civil Rights Project, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Additionally, compared to White students, Hispanics reported: (1) taking a higher number of developmental (also known as remediation curriculum) courses, (2) having lower scores on the college qualification index, (3) not enrolling in college-preparatory curricula, (4) having limited enrollment in advanced courses, and (5) neglecting to take college placement tests (Swail, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005).

Limited English proficiency.

American schools privilege the use of the English language in their constructions of successful and competent students. In 2005, the percentages of students who spoke a language other than English at home were higher between Latina/o and Asian elementary and secondary students than all other racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, Latina/o, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students had the highest percentages of students who spoke English with difficulty (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2007a). Nonetheless, Padilla (2007) noted that some of the "highest achieving Latino high school students are bilingual as compared to lesser achieving monolingual (in either English or Spanish) Latina/o students" (p. 3). Padilla's work is similar to Yosso's (2006) work where she found that bilingual ability is a form of capital that may assist a student in persisting through education rather than a deficit that limits his or her ability. Again, this previous research sees the students' linguistic and cultural capital as assets in education rather than deficits.

Need for more Latina/o role models.

A major factor influencing children's success in education is the presence of role models (National Council of La Raza, 1998). For Latina/o students, it is particularly important for there to be a presence of Latina/o adult role models in the school and classrooms. According to the National Council of La Raza, Latina/o teachers, personnel, and administrators serve as role models for Latina/o students. These role models can provide a vital link between the parents and the school. This is significant for Latina/o students who oftentimes have parents who are without the formal education to provide their children with needed guidance about educational opportunities. Additionally, the presence of Latina/o role models in schools shows non-Latina/o students that members of ethnic and racial groups hold professional positions. It is important to note that while any qualified teacher can provide a quality education to Latina/o students, the lack of Latina/o role models in schools contributes to the failure of school systems to respond to the linguistic, cultural, and social needs of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. Also, according the NCES (1996), the proportion of minority teachers is mostly smaller than the proportion of minority students.

Math and science achievement.

Raising academic achievement in schools has been a priority of teachers, presidents and governors over the past decades in American history (ETS, 2003). In today's world there has been increased focus on raising science and mathematics achievement among American students. In fact, according to the National Assessment Governing Board, in order for students to be at the proficient level in science and mathematics disciplines they must be able to analytically integrate math and science concepts into the solutions of complex problems. There is no definite way to predict that scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test are necessary to succeed in a college undergraduate program. However, proficiency in these disciplines is vital to continue one's education because of the relevance these disciplines have to doing well on standardized tests such as the ACT or SAT (ETS). These tests are then used to determine admission to colleges and universities, which can be a pivotal threshold in the educational pathway of Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

Latina/o students are far behind their White and Asian student peers in the fields of science and mathematics in high school. In 2000, 20% of White twelfth graders and 34% of Asian students scored at or above the proficient level on the NAEP assessment (ETS, 2003). In contrast, just 4% of Latina/o students scored at or above the proficient level. Educators can be sure that the small percentage of Latina/o students at the proficient level represents a formidable barrier to raising the representation of Latina/os in higher education.

Family support and encouragement.

In order for a student to be successful depends highly on what the student's parents know about the college journey (Tomas Rivera Policy Institute [TRPI], 2002). Family

members, especially parents, can support and encourage their child by learning to effectively utilize resources provided by the schools, counselors, and college representatives.

In a study on the barriers Latina/o students face when applying to college, Zalaquett (2006) found that 83% of his Latina/o student sample received minimal guidance from adult family members. Most of these students were first-generation students who came from families where parents had no historical knowledge about college. Moreover, the parents of these students often did not speak English and suffered from language barriers in the schools and colleges (Zalaquett, 2006). This is unfortunate because many Latina/o first-generation college students make many of the college decisions on their own, while middle- and upper-class peers have parents and resources to help guide the college decision making process (Zalaquett). To explicate this point succinctly, the more support and encouragement among Chicana/o and Latina/o students and their families can provide for more college knowledge in the home and possibly demystify the college-going process (Vasquez, 2007).

College Access

The field of college access is vast and in-depth. While this paper is not about the college access process from secondary to post-secondary education, it is still important to summarize some salient past research in the college access process that may impact retention of Chicana/o and Latina/o college students.

In a review of Latina/o-centered college access research (e.g., Auerbach, 2004; Auerbach, 2006; Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Ortiz & Gonzalez, 2000) it became evident to me that that the community and family as well as outreach programs during the college-going process may impact Latina/o student success. Understanding college access is critical to understanding student retention. For many

Chicana/o and Latina/o students, successful completion or engagement in a college access program can assist in developing higher educational aspirations and commitment to completing a college degree (Gildersleeve, 2006). In other words, Latina/o student success begins before even enrolling in an institution of higher education.

The Family's Role in College-Going

Like much of the research on college access and college-going among young Latina/o students, my review showed that engaging family members (not always biological parents, but also friends or family members who serve as a primary guardian) in a student's life contribute to Chicana/o and Latina/o student success (enrolling and completing college). The research showed that students' families played major roles in the college-going culture in their household through forms of involvement such as encouragement, support, moral support, and aspiration development (Auerbach, 2004; Auerbach, 2006; Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Ortiz & Gonzalez, 2000).

Education versus *Educación*

Having the desire for an "educated" student takes on different meanings in different families. In other words, Latina/o parents see a different kind of educated person that is not only defined by formal education accomplishments. For instance, Latina/o families depicted in Auerbach's (2006) study on moral support among Latina/o immigrant parents showed that to have an 'educated' student (in the American sense of being highly trained in formal educational settings) meant that in addition to being a good student in school, Latinas/os must also have an *educación*—understanding and displaying of proper action and life initiative to care for and look after one's family and community. This is important to understand because Auerbach's research showed the field of education that Latina/o parental

involvement in college-going looks very different from white middle-class parent college-going involvement and mainly comes from parents in the form of moral support. For Latina/o families, involvement meant that a parent morally supported their student and did what they could to develop their students *educación,* rather than their education. Therefore, Latina/o parents' definitions of having an educated son or daughter are quite different from the dominant American culture, which places high value on formal education. This results in Latina/o parents being disconnected from the formal process of education in the United States. Therefore, in order to promote student success among Chicana/o and Latina/o college students the field of higher education must first recognize the multiple familial factors that contribute to the education and *educación* of Chicana/o and Latina/o students (Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Gandara, 2005; Martinez, 2003; Saunders & Serna, 2004).

Immigration Status

The immigration status of a student and their parents can influence the college-going and college success of Chicana/o and Latina/o students. Auerbach (2006) demonstrated how the formal education levels of Latina/o immigrant parents are significantly lower than those of other groups. However, the literature also showed how parental support is not always lacking just because of the parents' immigration status. These immigrated Latina/o parents wanted very much for their student to succeed and were willing to support their students and demonstrate a value for education in the home (Auerbach, 2006; Contreras, 2005). This is important because it shows how immigration status need not be looked at as a student deficit in education. To explain, in her analysis of data on Latina/o student college-going inputs, Contreras (2005) found that Latina/o students are the largest group of first-generation college students and showed how this group of students is reproduced through the education system

that considers family experiences and family construction into its production of merit and distribution of social capital; thus, reproducing inequality because of one's immigration status.

Transferring from Community Colleges

Community colleges appear to be the primary gateway to higher education for Latina/o students. One study on community college transfer and retention provides an appropriate glimpse into the world of Latina/o students transferring to a four-year college or university. Linda Serra Hagedorn (2008) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of community college students based on a database developed through a longitudinal study known as TRUCCS (Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students, 2001-2006) funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Lumina Foundation for Education. A large group of students (n=5011) from Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) participated in her study. The LACCD enrolls approximately 8% of the state's community college students and 6% of the public undergraduate enrollment in California. Hagedorn found that the following factors influence community college student success.

Backtracking.

Oftentimes students backtracked (i.e., took courses out of sequence such as enrolling in a course that was a pre-requisite for a course the student already successfully completed). Participants in the Hagedorn (2008) study were not only enrolling in courses that were not necessary for goal achievement, they were also increasing college costs and time to the awarding of a college credential. Hagedorn attributed the backtracking phenomenon to the unavailability of courses or inaccessible course meeting times, and/or concern that after

stopping out for longer than a semester students might have forgot previous course learning. With a problem like backtracking, higher education must begin asking questions on how to improve the process of student advising.

Lack of adequate advisement.

Students in Hagedorn's (2008) study were usually unengaged in a set of educational goals or aspirations. Students also missed specific objective necessary to reach their goals. The problem can be attributed to the high ratio of advisers to students (2000:1). Students often relied on their peers or self to navigate their way through college (Hagedorn, 2008). These findings are problematic because it shows administrators and practitioners that students are nomadic during college with little guidance or advising.

Critical mass.

Critical mass can be defined in Hagedorn's (2008) study as a level of student and faculty representation that brings students a degree of comfort or familiarity. Hagedorn wanted to explore whether Latina/o students would be less likely to feel marginalized in an environment where there were higher proportions of other Hispanics students (i.e., Hispanic Serving Iinstitions), and if this comfort level would result in higher levels of academic work. Using data from the TRUCCS project, the study revealed statistically significant positive trends in student success between the amount of Hispanic students and 1) the proportion of other Latina/o students and 2) the proportion of Latina/o faculty.

General Factors Associated with Chicana/o and Latina/o College Retention

A number of factors have been associated with the retention of Chicana/o and Latina/o students in higher education, and these factors are discussed below. Some of studies dealt with students in general, but when appropriate, studies specific to Latina/os are

discussed. Latinas/os are one of the least formally educated populations in the United States because they have such high attrition rates in high school and are consequently less likely to attend college (Brown, 2002; Gandara, 1995). For example, in places like California and Texas where about half of the population is Latina/o, only 11–13% enrolls in four-year colleges and universities (Gandara, 1995). With such high Hispanic attrition rates it is no surprise that there is a significant lack of representation in college programs.

Financial Aid

Financial aid is a major component of attending college for students who do not have enough money to afford college tuition and relative costs associated with enrollment in higher education. In 2000–2001 institutional, state, and federal sources dispersed 74 billion dollars in student aid, a 7.1% increase over the previous year (College Board, 2001). Additionally, 73% of all undergraduates received some form of financial aid (College Board). Both theory and common sense suggest that economic circumstances play a vital role in a student's retention and persistence to degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students receive aid in various forms, so it remains difficult to predict a student's success based on financial aid status alone. However, evidence is generally clear and consistent in indicating that receipt of aid in the form of grant awards, work study, and loans all reduce the economic barriers to completing a college degree (Pascarella & Terenzini).

Financial aid can have many affects on a student's retention and persistence to degree completion. In fact, many minority students have family responsibilities in the home. For instance, Nora (2003) noted that many times students must take care of family members, work full-time, and may even have children of their own. In a review of studies done of student retention and financial aid, Nora found that financial aid can reduce the stress of

students and enhance their commitment to the institution providing that the institution is able to give enough financial aid to allow the student to stay enrolled in classes.

Research investigated how financial aid affects college persistence and retention on minority students. Bettinger (2004) found that Federal Pell Grant programs reduce attrition rates in college and university institutions. For higher education administrators, this information implies that federal- and state-based aid matter in higher education (Bettinger). Minority student must be given attention because without such aid programs persistence and retention is affected year to year (Bettinger). Additionally, studies have indicated that grant aid has a positive and significant effect on retention and persistence of undergraduate students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Campus Climate

The factors that influence Chicana/o and Latina/o students' retention in college can vary from place to place. Accordingly, understanding the campus' racial and ethnic makeup is vital when looking at what makes a student succeed and remain enrolled in their particular educational environment (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2004). Obstacles to a Latina/o student's retention on the campus can include racism, discrimination, hostility, self-doubt, negative stereotypes, and alienation (Swail et al., 2004). These obstacles can be especially harsh at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). This potentially cold environment calls for higher education administrators to be particularly mindful of student needs when considering the retention of students.

In higher education research, the campus climate has been defined as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Research over the years has begun to provide important guidance in

understanding how to achieve diversity while improving the learning environments for students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). One step in improving the learning environment lies in understanding and developing programs and policies that improve the campus climate for groups such as those who represent racial/ethnic minorities. According to Hurtado et al. (1999), this step towards creating more diverse learning environments involves institutional agents understanding the campus climate from the perspectives of the individual members who represent racial/ethnic minorities in the college.

A campus climate where Latina/o students perceive their surroundings to be hostile may also impede on success. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005), studied educational outcomes at a four-year univerity and found that a hostile campus environment may include perceived discrimination in the classroom, and stereotyping among campus agents. Students in their study also perceived the campus climate to be more hostile to students who speak Spanish at home and in their personal community. Therefore, Hurtado and Ponjuan's study showed scholars and practitioners that diverse curriculum, high levels of academic support, and accommodation for non-primary English speakers can alleviate characteristics of a college environment that may foster hostility toward Latina/o students.

Overall, the literature revealed how the different, interrelated aspects of the climate for diversity are linked with a broad range of educational outcomes for diverse groups of students (Hurtado et al., 1999). An important belief underlying this conceptualization of the climate for diversity is that various racial/ethnic groups often view the campus in a different way, and each concept is legitimate because it has real consequences for the person (Astin, 1968; Tierney, 1987). Research showed that increasing the racial/ethnic diversity on a

campus while neglecting to attend to the racial environment can result in challenges for students of color. Research has recognized how various racial/ethnic groups can experience difficulty as a result of a poor racial environment. This research showed that individuals' and particular groups' perceptions of the environment are not insignificant or insubstantial, but have tangible and real effects on the transition to college and on educational outcomes of minority college students (Hurtado, et al.).

Alienation

Alienation by a campus or individuals in higher education is a recognized roadblock along the way to the completion of a bachelor's degree. Alienation can possibly invalidate a student and their sense of making worthy contributions to the academic community. In fact, Acland and Azmi (1998), in studying the experiences of minority students in higher education institutions, found that students of color were dissatisfied with the lack of students from diverse backgrounds. Also, the lack of diverse faculty and staff added to their dissatisfaction and alienation, making it difficult for students to adjust to life away from home and to cope with the impersonality of studying in a large institution. One student, according to Acland and Azmi (1998), stated that "staff need training on how to treat ethnic minority students" (p. 81). In addition to alienation, students in this study claimed that cliques of White students dominated social activities in the university. Furthermore, Acland and Azmi found that students gained support through cultural clubs and organizations as such social interaction allowed for friends and support groups that addressed their needs. It is important to note that students found these social groups more effective than the formal institutional support offered by university personnel. The idea of alienation is important to

understand because if Chicana/o and Latina/o students are to succeed we need to create spaces that validate them and include them in the academic community.

Strategies for Recruitment and Retention

Many universities have special recruitment and retention offices for Chicana/o and Latina/o students in addition to other underrepresented groups. However, these programs may possibly be more bent on recruitment and less concerned with retention (Vasquez, 2007). Simply having such programs available can be counterproductive if all efforts focus on access to the university for Latina/os with no real retention program in addition to the recruitment efforts (Seymour & Hewitt, 1997). Research also suggested that when special retention programs are made available to all students, they reduce stigmatizing Latina/os and other minorities who gain social and academic skills from the special programs, which strive to integrate all students together as one community.

Remedial, or developmental education and specific population programming have many benefits, but developmental education has both critics and proponents. Critics argue that remedial education can sometimes hinder the self-confidence of underrepresented students by singling them out from their White counterparts, while proponents of the program speak of its ability to bring students from resource-poor K–12 education systems to an even playing field with students who come from schools with high achievement (NCES, 2000; Seymour & Hewitt, 2000; Sorensen, 2000).

Serving as a Student Mentor or Tutor

For an advanced student to serve as a mentor or tutor for newly enrolled students was found to have positive effects on the mentor's or tutor's retention and persistence (Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 1998). Having mentor programs greatly helped new students integrate

into the university environment along with giving upper-level students the opportunity to share gained knowledge and experiences as college students (Good et al.). Such programs can help the mentor and protégé affect the overall retention and persistence. Without such affirming experiences in college, student success can be compromised not just for Latina/os, but all minorities (Chang, 2002).

Support from Peers and Role Models

Latina/o students may be able to learn more about themselves because they may be among fellow peers and role models who can provide a comfortable and safe environment where peers such as faculty, students, and staff can share common experiences (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004). This can lead to increased support for Latina/o students as they persist to degree completion. Other studies have also provided understanding of peer support as a way to increase student success in college (i.e., Hurtado, & Ponjuan, 2005; Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007; Vasquez, 2007). Further, when students do not feel that the environment and people around them are not supportive they can face barriers to persistence such as alienation, isolation and confusion (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). A gap in the literature with respect to understanding peer support and its impact on student persistence exists because studies have primarily focused on the beginning years of a student's journey to a bachelor's degree when peer networks may still be developing. Future research, including this study, can add to this understanding by expanding on ideas of peer support in college by focusing on students in their later years of their undergraduate programs.

Pedagogical Strategies

Academic and classroom retention factors are difficult to measure in a post-secondary institution, but may have a substantial influence on students of color, especially African-Americans and Hispanics (NCES, 2000). Research indicated that the manner, in which academic content is introduced to students as highly competitive, quantitative, and lecture in format, is inherently disadvantageous for underrepresented populations (Brown, 2001; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997, Rendón, 2002, 2009). African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latina/os possess strong cultural values of group and community membership that may be at odds with the perceived levels of individualism and competition associated with traditional college learning environments (NCES, 1996).

Retaining Latina/os in higher education may be as simple as changing the way faculty approach the teaching and learning process. In fact, designing an inclusive curriculum like that in Chicana/o studies, which values diverse learning styles and is attentive and responsive to diverse cultural orientations can also be a motivator when introducing academic material (Acuña, 2007; Brown, 2001). Many minority students are drawn to service-oriented careers that give back to the communities from which they came. Therefore, introducing curriculum with cultural values in mind may help underrepresented students remain motivated to stay enrolled (Brown, 2001; NCES, 2000). For example, in his article titled *Service-Learning as a Pedagogy for Engineering,* Edmund Tsang (2000) noted that the key reason disciplines like engineering are taught in lecture and competitive formats are because engineers lack the interest in reflective and personal learning. Perhaps other fields and disciplines are also uninterested in reflective learning. Reflective learning is a vital component to service-learning pedagogy. Jacoby (1996) defined reflective learning as "learning about the larger

social issues behind the needs to which their service is responding. This learning includes a deeper understanding of the historical, artistic, sociological, cultural, economical, and political contexts of the needs or issues being addressed" (p. 7).

Evolution of Chicana/o Studies as a Field

Chicana/o studies is a field of study that has been part of the higher education system since the 1960's and 1970's. As stated in chapter 1, Chicana/o studies is a field that grew out of resistance to dominant Anglo scholars and practices in American higher education. It is a fluid and multidisciplinary field of study and specifically focuses on appreciating and applying the ways of knowing, being and living among Chicana/o people over history and in today's society. Additionally as the field has grown so has its community of participants. The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) was founded in 1972 during the height of the Chicana/o movement in the U.S. NACCS is the established academic organization for the field. In fact, its mission is to create a space where Chicana/o students and scholarship can develop their talents. Further, a working understanding of Chicana/o studies can be explained by quoting Macias (2005) in his description of the field

The field of Chicana and Chicano Studies centers on the study, analysis and understanding of the varied experiences, cultural production and social locations of the Mexican origin populations in the United States and in the Americas. It places this study within the context of the United States, borders, transnationalisms, and increasingly, within the context of globalization (increasing economic and related integration and interdependence in the world. (p. 170)

Historical Context

The most recent historical movements among Chicana/o people has taken place over the past 50 years as Americans have moved to illegalize Mexicans with the creation of a militant border patrol and racism toward immigrants. However, Mexicans have been contributing to the United States and also participation in higher education in California since the middle of the nineteenth century (Camarillo, 1984; Tudico, 2010). During World War II discrimination began to heighten because of the boom in the Mexcian-American population and its threat to the majority population. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon to see "no Mexicans allowed" signs throughout places in the southwest and broader United States society (Acuña, 2007). During this time about 30% of Chicanas/os lived in sub-standard housing and averaged an eighth grade education. This caused many Chicana/o populations to be ghettoized in places like Los Angeles' eastern side and Chicago's Pilsen Barrio. The political power of these people was stomped on by the status quo during this time when gerrymandering was common in order to prevent Mexicans from gaining representation in the government at all levels. It was in 1965 when César Chávez began protesting the poor working conditions of migrant farm workers and formed the National Farm Workers Union in order to demand better working conditions and increased equity. The 1960's were an important era for Chicanas/os because they became more aware of their political and constitutional rights in the United States and even saw increases in their enrollment and participation in higher education (Acuña, 2007; Cordova, 2005; Macias, 2005; Mindiola, 2005).

It was during the 1960's and 1970's that Chicana/o people began to visibly act against the oppression and marginalization coming from the status quo in the United States. School

walk-outs and protests were common and continue to this day. However, what was important was that Chicana/o people began to be viewed as commodities in the economy, which was apparent when the Coors Brewing Company in Colorado began marketing directly to Chicana/o people and supporting scholarships and investments in Chicana/o businesses. Obviously they were being viewed as dollar signs to corporate America. Opinions on the commodity perspective vary, but the point is that people were starting to see them as part of society, but not necessarily as equals in society. The government took notice as well and coined the term "Hispanic" to refer to a larger population of Spanish speaking and Spanish sur-named people (Castellanos & Gloria, 2006). This essentialized a diverse sub-population in the United States and helped to create the resistance to labels we see in America.

Gains in political power also came in 1976 when President Carter received 81% of the Latina/o vote in the United States and thus made several political appointments of Latina/o people. This all increased the visibility of Chicana/o people, but did not necessarily increase their power. By 1980, Latina women were starting to demand increased pay and access to professional work and education because they were feeling their marginalization through an unemployment rate of 51% and earnings of 49 cents to every dollar their male counterparts were making (Acuña, 2007).

This history eventually lead to increased efforts in Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP) which provided Chicana/o students with the validation that they were worthy to be in higher education. The increase in access and participation in higher education for these students resulted in an more visible demand for Chicana/o studies programs, professors, and curriculum throughout the United States. In fact, in 1973, California universities contained over 50 Chicana/o studies departments, institutes or programs. To this day some of the

notable programs exist at places like California State University Northridge and University of California Los Angeles. The Northridge program is especially notable with more than 25 tenure lines and over 40 part-time instructors who teach and research on Chicana/o related knowledge and perspectives (Acuña, 2007; Cordova, 2005; Macias, 2005; Mindiola, 2005). Even with such struggles and gains in the Chicana/o movement, problems exist today as we see marginalization of Chicana/o people throughout society, but they have increased their voice and contributions to the academy, which helps to further legitimize and appreciate them as a population of deserving Americans in education and beyond.

Evolving Field of Study

The historical context coupled with the oppression of Mexican Americans in mid-twentieth century America led to academic resistance among Chicanas/os in the academy (Olguin, 1991). This struggle against the dominant forces within higher education institutions resulted in including Chicana/o studies as a sanctioned field of study in colleges and universities. The following list represents some of the goals for creating a Chicana/o studies within higher education during the 1970's and 1980's during which many Chicana/o studies departments were born (Macias, 2005):

1. Create new knowledge about the diverse Chicana/o community,

2. Reformulate old knowledge,

3. Apply research knowledge to the improvement of Chicana/o communities,

4. Support culture and community

5. Support social change and equity

6. Place gender as a central construct in the study of Chicanas/os

7. Support Chicana/o dreams and aspirations

Essentially, what is important to understand here is that Chicana/o studies continues to face issues of legitimacy from their colleagues and critics in higher education. Mindiola (2005) explained that Chicana/o studies is threatening to mainstream and dominant members of society because Chicanas/os who conduct research about other Chicanas/os will shine light on the powerful's biases. However, at the same time, White scholars who conduct research on other White people or other people of color are legitimized and rewarded in American higher education. This further dehumanizes and delegitimizes Chicana/o scholars and studies in the U.S. context (Acuña, 2007; Mindiola, 2005; Pizzaro, 1998; Valverde, 2004).

Chicana/o studies by no means extinct. Yes, it faces resistance from dominantly oriented Anglo scholars and those in control of our education system. However, it remains an academic place where hope and possibility to change and serve Chicana/o communities endures. In fact, Cordova's (2005) research with Chicana/o studies pointed to the idea that if the academy would allow Chicanas/os to fully embrace their communities and Chicana/o roots then not only is a student personally transformed, but also the communities that Chicana/o studies seeks to serve.

Additional research also points to the impact of Chicana/o studies on student success. For instance, it has been found that Chicana/o studies and other ethnic studies help improve the sense of campus environment and inclusion in the academic community (Chang, 2002; Henderson-King, & Kaleta, 2000). Further, Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that taking ethnic studies courses like Chicana/o studies increases the self-confidence and sense of belonging among Latina/o students in higher education. My work is different because I explored the social and academic factors that specifically helped or hindered an individual's journey through college. This work offers an in-depth understanding of how students view

the retention efforts of the institutional agents and how meaning can be made from these first-hand accounts. Thus, Chicana/o studies makes for an interesting and appealing academic unit for me to explore Chicana/o student success.

<div align="center">**Theory Framing this Study of Chicana/o Student Retention**</div>

The research questions in this study asked: (1) Why do Chicana/o students choose to major in Chicana/o studies?, (2) What academic factors in a Chicana/o studies department preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention (i.e., pedagogy, curriculum, special academic programs, academic validation, professional development, etc.)? and (3) What social factors in a Chicana/o studies department preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention (i.e., interpersonal validation, peer support networks, special events, programming, community building, etc.)? Therefore, I would like to outline the theoretical knowledge and models guiding my understanding of the possible academic and social factors that will emerge in this study during data collection. The following theories were useful for me during the analysis of the data. Because my questions asked specifically about the "social" and "academic" factors, it is the theoretical framework that provided the lens by which I operationalized such terminology. Having been informed by this theoretical framework allowed me to be more attentive to emergent data that hopefully resulted in a deposit of awareness about Chicana/o student college life.

Validation Theory

In order to understand the academic and social dimensions of student success, I employ the theory of validation (Rendón, 1994, 2002). Rendón defined validation as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (1994, p. 44). There are two types of

validation in Rendón's model. The first, academic validation, occurs when in- and out-of-class agents take action to increase the student's learning capabilities and confidence as a college student. The second, interpersonal validation, arises when in- and out-of-class agents take strides to help students increase their personal development and adjust to their new social environment. For clarity, I see the terms "social" and "interpersonal" as interchangeable in the context of this study.

The theory of validation has six elements, which fit well when studying Latina/o students in higher education. The first element places the burden and responsibility for initiating contact with students on institutional agents such as professors and counselors. Many times, according to Rendón, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are hesitant to ask for assistance and guidance because of their past experiences with having been treated as incapable and unfamiliar with the higher education system. Second is the idea that when validation is present, students feel proficient enough to learn as well as develop a sense of self-worth. Third is the notion that validation may be a prerequisite to student development. Rendón stated that students are more likely to become engaged with their university's environment if academic and interpersonal validation is offered on a consistent basis. Fourth is that validation for a student can occur inside and outside a classroom. Individuals such as faculty, counselors, coaches, spouses, and children often support students and promote academic excellence and personal growth (Rendón, 2002). The fifth element of the Rendón's theory is that validation is a developmental process as opposed to an end resulting in a final outcome of working with students. According to Rendón, many instances of validation throughout the college experience can result in a more fruitful academic and personal experience. Finally, the sixth element of Rendón's model is the importance of

offering validation. This is especially important throughout the first year of college and during the first weeks of a new student's first academic term.

Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) recognizes the inevitable limitations of expecting all new students to become involved in their college community regardless of their background or socioeconomic status. In the validation model, institutional agents, not students, are expected to take responsibility and communicate to students that they are capable learners and valuable members of the university learning environment. Additionally, validation theory insists that college faculty and administrative staffs take active roles in reaching out to students to reassure their role as students and to support students in their new academic and social changes. Finally, Rendón (2002) makes it clear that there are many differences between traditional and nontraditional students, and that it is vital for institutional agents to distinguish between the two types. Even more important is the reality that validation theory also recognizes the invalidation of students. Invalidating experiences were found among engineering students in my previous research that uncovered hostile classroom environments, competitive learning contexts and professors who teach with methods that embarrass students and question their academic ability (Vasquez, 2007). This understanding that education can be both affirming and invalidating recognizes the complex nature of studying retention and why a focused framework like validation theory helps us to see a more nuanced experience among college students.

Model of Student Engagement

I broaden my understanding of academic and social factors impacting retention by utilizing Nora's previous work on student engagement to better assist me in exploring the research questions in this study. Nora's (2003) Model of Student Engagement addressed the

pre-college and in-college factors that affect Latina/o student degree completion.

Collectively, these factors can determine the educational success of Latina/o students.

Again, like validation theory, this model allows for higher education researchers to explore

institutional factors at play in the college process for Latinas/os instead of just examining the

individual traits of a particular group (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Using existing

theories, Nora devised a persistence model consisting of six major components: (a) pre-

college/pull factors, (b) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance, (d) academic and social

experiences, (e) cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, (f) goal determination/institutional

allegiance, and (g) persistence (Nora, 2003).

Pre-college/Pull-factors

The first component of the model addressed the pre-college preparation and

pull-factors that deter students from higher education. The academic ability of students in

high school academics will help or hinder students' persistence later on in college.

Additionally, in the first component the student's engagement in high school and the

activities they participate in will likely determine their educational aspirations long before the

college selection process. Financial assistance is a major factor for Latina/o students when

considering a college education. Financial aid is a way to even students out financially in

order to reduce or eliminate financial barriers to higher education (Nora, 2003). Family

support is also vital in the future persistence of a high school student headed for college.

Parental encouragement and support extract a positive effect on a student's initial interest in

college and integration into the college environment as well as the student's commitment and

decision to remain enrolled in college (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Sense of Purpose and Institutional Allegiance

The second component of the model addresses the student's initial commitment to attend a specific institution. Allegiance to a specific school will improve the chances of retaining a student once they enroll in college (Nora, 2003). According to Nora, supportive evidence of this positive influence includes past studies which all found that the student's commitment to an institution put forth a positive effect on the student's decision to remain enrolled in college level education (Nora).

Academic and Social Experiences

Academic and social experiences have been the focus of many higher education administrators because they seem to be the most influential on the persistence and retention of Latina/o students. Academic experiences include both formal and informal interaction with faculty and campus leaders. Faculty can also have enormous influence on a student through mentoring and validation in and out of the classroom. These interactions in the academic climate exert a positive association between the student and the institution. Social experiences include peer group interactions, perceptions of prejudice/discrimination, and encouragement and support from staff and fellow students. Perceptions of prejudice and discrimination are easily sensed by Latina/o students in the classroom and on campus (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Consequently, these social experiences affect their academic performance, experiences with faculty, and intellectual development.

Cognitive and Non-cognitive Outcomes

Cognitive factors affect persistence and include educational grade point averages (GPAs) and the development of students to recognize their actual intellectual gains and perceived gains while in college (Nora, 2003). Non-cognitive gains include a greater

appreciation for the fine arts, valuing diversity, and greater self-esteem. All of the above mentioned cognitive and non-cognitive factors influence whether or not a student remains committed to the university which leads to reenrollment and persistence to graduation (Nora).

Goal Determination/Institutional Allegiance and Persistence

Goal determination/institutional allegiance relates to the extent students are determined to attain future goals, which may include going to graduate/professional school. Allegiance to the institution refers to the student's perceived sense of belonging and whether the college experience has been worthwhile and meaningful (Nora, 2003).

Finally, the five components of Nora's model are related in some way to lead to the final component of persistence. Persistence refers to whether the university is successful in creating a space where the student feels passionate enough about their education to reenroll in the institution of higher education until degree completion.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

In summary, this literature review served to introduce past research on Chicana/o and Latina/o student success in higher education with the goal being to contextualize my study and also point to gaps in existing research that my study will fill. Specifically, I chose to discuss the past literature in different sections that delimit the literature about the field of higher education to Chicana/o and Latina/o student success factors.

The first section discussed the evolution of retention theory in higher education. The foundations of retention theory are vast and have been countered by authors who focus on retention among students of color. Hopefully, this study can contribute to dismantling the "one size fits all" approach to fostering student success and provide a Chicana/o and Latina/o

centered approach to studying and understanding retention. Second, my discussion of the pre-college factors that impact college experiences provides a snapshot of pre-college roadblocks along the way to college, discussion of college access, and finally a brief presentation of some existing barriers to transferring from a community college to a four-year university. This information is important because it helps to understand what a Chicana/o or Latina/o college student faced before they even enrolled in post-secondary education. Next, I discussed some of the general experiences impacting Latina/o student retention in higher education such as financial aid, mentoring, pedagogy and campus climate. Paying attention to how students achieve success in higher education and the experiences they encounter will serve to provide a better understanding of how to make the college environment more welcoming and appreciative of Chicana/o and Latina/o students.

Chicana/o studies has been a field of study in higher education where students can connect with multiple and fluid culturally based ways of knowing, being and living. This approach to learning and life can be an interesting site for exploring student success. Therefore, this chapter provided a discussion of the evolution of Chicana/o studies as a field of study. My study will directly contribute to such a knowledge base in higher education research. Finally, my conceptual framework showed us how validation theory and the model of student engagement were relevant tools for me to utilize during the data collection and analysis in this study. The conceptual lens employed in this study was a way for me to inform the readers how I am approaching the topic of student retention in this study in order to focus on a specific and localized understanding of student success in higher education.

CHAPTER 3: A PATH TO UNDERSTANDING CHICANA/O STUDENT SUCCESS

Certainly as democratic educators we have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination (hooks, 2003, p. 45).

Introduction

My research design for this inquiry involved studying a small group of California State University Fullerton (CSUF) Chicana/o students, or case of students, through extensive interviewing in their Chicana/o studies department. Understanding who or what was making a difference, obstacles encountered, and the students' views of their experiences in Chicana/o studies can help to inform educational practitioners and policy makers of the particular experiences these students underwent while attempting to earn a college degree. Findings from this study can also allow us to learn about the students' first-hand accounts from Chicana/o studies and hopefully evolve from their experiences to bring about change for the future. My research design allowed me to examine how Chicana/o studies contributed to the retention and success of Chicana/o students, specifically. To investigate how Chicana/o studies impacted the retention of Chicana/o students, an interpretive and constructionist research design was employed. This type of research will be utilized to bring some of the narratives of Chicana/o students to light in order to develop meaning and understanding that can lead to action. Through the employment of an anti-oppressive research design, I will obtain the accounts of the social and academic factors at play in Chicana/o studies as told through the narratives and voices of Chicana/o students.

In this chapter, I have outlined my research design in detail to show how in-depth, site-based interviewing with study participants will lead to exploring the research questions scripted for this inquiry. First, I present my epistemology as a researcher who remains

personally connected to this research and construction of knowledge attempted in this study. From there I will demonstrate how ideas about ant-oppressive research design will guide my rationale for research design choices. Next, I will discuss the case study interviewing procedures for this study and provide the foundation for fieldwork and forthcoming analysis of the data. Ethical considerations, limitations, rigor and trustworthiness of this study are included in this chapter.

When all is said and done, I hope to display my research design as a demonstration of my effort to form meaningful relationships with study participants in order to avoid non-personal, sterile and objective-seeking inquiry. For this way of investigating educational problems can seek to "speak for" Chicana/o students rather than "speak with" Chicana/o students. Overall, my research pathway to understanding the research questions was guided by critical theoretical perspectives and a weaving of qualitative research tools—more widely known as bricolage in qualitative research circles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This ensured that my research recognized subjective dimensions of Chicana/o college student experiences and how I can work with them to make meaning from our own lived experiences.

Epistemological Position

My explicit methodological goal for this study was to form a meaningful cohort of CSUF Chicana/o students, including myself, who seek to share and explore their personal experiences in Chicana/o studies while working toward the obtainment of a college degree. I then aspired to present the findings of my study by sharing the experiences of Chicana/o students in order to understand student success as seen through their subjective lenses. From this descriptive account of their time in Chicana/o studies we can then move to an analysis of the data and implications for future work. The subjective narratives that emerged from this

study served as knowledge claims for myself and speak to my interpretations of what I learned from individual Chicana/o students. Therefore, as one who identifies as Chicano and recognizes the fluid nature of knowledge, I will also have a role as interpreter in this research. I recognize my experiences as part of the research process because they will inevitably influence my interactions with student participants as we explore the research questions together. Further, I was not seeking to make generalizations about the students' experiences or to be objectively removed from exploring their college journey. For me, epistemologically, the stories and narratives of the people in this study that served to qualify higher education's understanding of localized and contextually-based retention practices. These epistemological assumptions and approaches to what constitutes knowledge directed my research design.

Constructionism

In order to explore the academic and social factors impacting retention in Chicana/o studies, I approached this research from a constructionist epistemology. Constructionist research is an epistemological "flavor" of what is commonly known and referred to as qualitative or interpretive research (Creswell 2003; Crotty, 1998). Qualitative research has a long history in anthropology and sociology. It is no longer limited to these disciplines and has become an accepted method of inquiry in the social sciences and education disciplines (Merriam, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) made it clear that qualitative research belongs to no single discipline. Thus, qualitative research uses a wide array of methods that are not distinctly its own in studying social phenomenon. Additionally, the researcher is allowed to be creative and construct research settings that allow for deeper understanding and relationship development with study participants. Constructionist inquiry is especially useful

in understanding human experiences, as it allows the perspective and voice of the participants to be explored and understandings to inductively emerge from the data gathered (Crotty, 1998; Esterberg, 2002).

Specifically, constructionist researchers view knowledge as a social and contextual construction, which is created in the lived experiences of an individual (Crotty, 1998, Rendón, 2009). In essence, from a constructionist epistemological worldview there exists many truths and realities. I do not see the world as embodying one truth, but multiple truths and experiences of a collection of people. Therefore, since I do not seek exactness in this research, I can only present to the reader what I uncovered during my own interviewing and analysis. Further, since this study asked questions about the process and experience of being Chicana/o in Chicana/o studies, a constructionist inquiry remains relevant and important.

Anti-Oppressive Research Design

Overall, I want this study to be meaningful for not just academe and myself, but for the communities of Chicana/o students who want to go to college. As of now it remains a predominantly inaccessible place for many students, but as this study will show, Chicana/o studies can be a place of validation and increased access to institutional resources, people, and services. I want to assist in the creation of more positive and enriching educational encounters for Chicanas/os and Latinas/os who aspire to higher learning. Because of this position, I consider this study an attempt at committing myself to anti-oppressive research. Anti-oppressive research is the commitment of one's self to bringing about social change through the research process with political intentions that place the researcher as an agent of action (Potts & Brown, 2005). While there are challenges to so called "anti-oppressive research" from both traditional and critical perspectives, I do know I am positioning myself

as a researcher who inserts my political motives into the study of Chicana/o student retention with the intent being to bring about scholarship that informs practices of inclusion, democracy and liberation. I do not seek to replicate existing structures of domination and marginalization through my work. The studying of Chicana/o student retention can lead to greater learning environments in both the social and academic lives of college students. Overall, I do this work to continue my personal struggle toward transforming our education system into one that is inclusive of diverse ways of knowing, being and learning. This struggle will likely endure beyond my lifetime, but during my life I wish to move us from exclusion toward equity and appreciation for the contributions of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in U.S. society. This study is my contribution.

Strategy of Inquiry: Case Study

While considering my strategy for collecting data in this study I was regularly reminded of the quote, "Through exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in active experience, one is able to get inside the questions, become one with it, and thus achieve and understanding of it" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). Therefore, since I sought to understand the factors in Chicana/o studies that impact the retention of Chicana/o students, I chose to immerse myself in the field of a Chicana/o studies department and study a specific case of students grounded in a certain context and period of time. This strategy of data collection was appropriate because it allowed me to form relationships with a small group of students. I also do not seek to generalize my findings in this study, and thus a case study is consistent with my aforementioned epistemological and methodological perspectives.

Case studies are found in many educational research projects, and it is important to note that while case studies are highly written about in the literature, no standard use of the term exists (Merriam, 2002). In my work, a case study was employed because a specific group of students (Chicana/o undergraduate students) in a specific point in time (spring 2010) who existed in a specific space (Chicana/o studies) was under investigation. In essence, a case study is an explicit and operational "thing" that can be continually studied and understood (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2005). It is a bounded system. Additionally, a case study is found to be primarily a qualitative approach to research because it is often concerned with understanding an operating system of people or things with much of the results in case studies being highly descriptive and inductively interpreted (Merriam).

To add specificity to this approach, this case study was an intrinsic case study. As described by Stake (2005), an intrinsic case study is a case that is of interest to someone or something. An intrinsic case study can be employed in qualitative research when the purpose is not to theorize or build theoretical conclusions (although this can be the case in some instances), but to broaden understandings of a particular process or event. In this case, the intrinsic interest is in understanding what retention looked like for Chicana/o students who studied in Chicana/o studies. An increased understanding of this intrinsic case study will allow higher education stakeholders to better plan for the educational success of Chicana/o college students. Moreover, a case study strategy accepted the diverse experiences of student participants to be described and understood more deeply.

The case study strategy assisted with designing the data gathering process for this project. Furthermore, a case study strategy permitted me to assume a more reflective and critically observational stance to the case. Stake (2005) helped articulate the role of the

researcher in conducting the case study, which will be of assistance in designing the information collection process for this study.

> In being ever-reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating on recollections of records—but not necessarily following the conceptualizations of theorists, actors, or audiences. Local meanings are important, foreshadowed meanings are important, and readers' consequential meanings are important. (p. 450)

From this "ever-reflective" stance, a case study approach helped me, the researcher, to trust my impressions and reflections on the case being studied. This stance permitted interviews to be conducted that gathered information about the many dimensions of the academic and social factors in Chicana/o studies and the impact they had on Chicana/o students.

Research Site

The site for this study was in the Chicana/o studies department at California State University Fullerton (CSUF). In order to contextualize the case study for this research, I provide a brief snapshot of CSUF for a glimpse into the campus and it's student body. This information helps to explain my relationship to the site and how I gained access and further understandings of CSUF in preparation for this case study. My data and information presented here is garnered from interviews with administrators, faculty, students, and student affairs professionals at CSUF directly linked to work with the Chicana/o studies department. The CSUF website and staff in the Office of Institutional Research and Analytical Studies also provided general and factual information regarding current statistical profiles (California State University Fullerton, 2008).

CSUF is a large comprehensive university and at the time of this study enrolled roughly 37,000 students among eight academic colleges. The eight academic colleges (education, art, communications, health and human development, business and economics, natural sciences and mathematics, engineering and computer science, and humanities and social sciences) offer a variety of academic programs, which all have unique and diverse approaches to teaching and learning. Chicana/o studies is part of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. At CSUF, 85% of the campus is made up of undergraduate students seeking bachelor's degrees. This makes it a prime location for studying undergraduate college students.

About 28% of the CSUF student body identify as Latina/o. White students make up about 32% of the student enrollment. Since 2004, the CSUF campus has been designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), making it eligible for federal programming meant to enhance educational opportunity for Latina/o students under the Higher Education Act of the United States. In addition to being an HSI, CSUF also leads the state of California and the United States with awarding bachelor's degrees to Latina/o people. As of 2008, CSUF ranked first in California and fifth in the U.S. for the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Latinas/os. Specifically, in 2007, CSUF awarded 1,504 bachelor's degrees to Latina/o students. That year, the university awarded over 6,295 bachelor's degrees. This translates to Latina/o students receiving about 24% of the total bachelor's degrees awarded in 2007 at CSUF.

CSUF as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

As stated, California State University Fullerton (CSUF), the site for the study, is an HSI. It is important to share information on HSIs since CSUF is designated as one of the

nation's premier Hispanic Serving Institutions (HACU, 2008) and consistently ranks in the top ten univerities to award college degrees to Latinas/os.

Economic circumstances of the current world present a clear decision for young students on the verge of graduating from high school. They may either choose to move onto post-secondary institutions or be casted to the labor force because of the decrease in value of a high school diploma (Stearns, Watanabe & Snyder, 2002). As a result, higher education enrollment has grown. A large part of such growth has been among the Latina/o student college population. In fact, overall Latina/o student enrollment climbed 68% in just a 9-year period from 782,000 in 1990 to 1,317,000 in 1999 (Stearns, Watanabe & Snyder). As this college population has continued to increase in the twenty-first century, HSIs will play an increasingly important role in the education of the largest minority group in the United States. Additionally, HSIs are important to understand because they enroll almost 50% of all Latinas/os in American higher education (Santiago, 2006).

There are about 250 HSIs in the United States with the heaviest concentrations existing in states like California and Texas. In fact, HSIs are both community colleges (53%) and four-year institutions (47%) of higher education (HACU, 2008). Specifically, HSIs are defined differently in two cases. First, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) define an HSI campus as any university or college with at least 25% of the enrollment being comprised of students who identify racially/ethnically as Latina/o (HACU, 2008). Second, the federal government defines HSIs in the same way as HACU with respect to enrollment, but also requires that the HSIs' Latina/o enrollment have at least half who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). It is important to recognize that HSIs were not created to serve a specific population and the

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federal designation has nothing to do with any given mission or purpose of an institution. They have evolved through a geographically driven increase in the U.S. population of Latinas/os who have decided to pursue higher education. It should also come as no surprise that HSIs exist in concentrations of the United States where the population of Latinas/os is higher like Texas and California (HACU, 2008; Santiago, 2006).

Selecting CSUF as a Research Site

CSUF was chosen as a site for this study because it proved to be a feasible site for myself as the researcher. Primarily, since I wanted to study a Chicana/o studies department I had to be at an institution with such academic offerings. Indeed, CSUF has one of only a few Chicana/o studies departments in the nation. Luckily I had an *in* as an alumnus of CSUF, having obtained my B.S. degree in 2005 from the institution. My role as a student activist and member of the community exposed me to professional relationships with administrators and faculty members who served as mentors for me during college. Therefore, I had a network of administrators and faculty members as well as understandings of the CSUF campus as a student. This all lead me to seek to create a study site at CSUF. To do this I gained access to the campus by meeting with the Chicana/o studies department chair and faculty members. I also met with the Associate and Assistant Deans who oversee Chicana/o studies at CSUF and gained the support of the Dean of Students at CSUF. Through meetings and interviews with these campus agents I was able to obtain their own perspectives on the department and their student body. These preliminary meetings and interviews with CSUF agents helped to provide me with the contextual information needed to design this study and recruit participants. Additionally, during the fall semester of 2009 while I was preparing for this study, these scholars and administrators helped me obtain official permission to work on

the campus and granted me visiting scholar status at CSUF to conduct my research officially. I am grateful to their support and providing me with information that made my understanding of the Chicana/o studies department deeper. I have included more detailed descriptions of the Chicana/o studies department in chapter four when I introduce the case's context in-depth.

Procedures

The overall approach to studying Chicana/o student retention in Chicana/o studies was based on an approach to relationship-centered interviewing. This means that the data for this study was collected using my observations as data from individual interviewing methods. This work strived to be relationship-centered and sought to engage with students in sites other than formal clinical settings (i.e., coffee shops, eateries, campus events, etc). Here, I outline my procedures to collect the experiences of Chicana/o students during my case study exploration.

I visited CSUF over the course of two semesters to explore and understand the research questions asked in this study. This time period began in the fall of 2009 when I began meeting and interviewing CSUF agents to select a research site. Having laid the necessary groundwork for the study, I collected data from interviews with eight Chicana/o students. The data collection period of time began in January 2010 and concluded in June 2010. During this time I engaged with the research site to interact with students during individual interviews. I scheduled four individual interviews with each student participant. These in-depth individual interviews explored the academic and social factors in Chicana/o studies that impact the retention of Chicana/o students. The interview protocols were employed as guides for my conversations with students (See Appendix A).

My approach to interviewing was informed by Seidman (2006) and his three-phase process for collecting qualitative data (i.e., interviews). I employed his strategy for data collection and adapted it to my study and the requirements necessary to thoroughly explore the research questions. Since my study was centered on individual interviews, Seidman's approach allowed me to structure my time in the field constructively. Seidman's three-phase approach was a tool that divided data collection into three phases. Ideally, this approach allowed for relationship building and prolonged exposure in the field to the case being studied.

Phases of Data Collection

According to Sediman (2006), the first phase of data collection should be centered on getting to know the study participants and their experiences that help shape the context of information being gathered. Without an understanding of where students are coming from or what their life history and experiences in education are, the researcher is treading on rough terrain (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006). For this reason, I conducted introductory interviews with each of the student participants. This allowed me to break the ice, begin to develop rapport and provide a foundation for the future discussions during individual interviews.

The second phase of data collection, according to Seidman, allows for the researcher and participant to explore the questions at hand and how it plays out in the lives of participants (Seidman, 2006). In my study this phase required several visits to CSUF in order to fully understand Chicana/o studies from the perspective of study participants. This was the phase when I worked over several months to conduct individual interviews with each study participant

In the third phase of the Seidman's approach, the researcher and participants begin to reflect on what they have learned with one another and begin to make meaning out of the conversations that have occurred (Seidman, 2006). The third phase required that I conduct final interviews with each student participant at CSUF in order to begin constructing meaning from my fieldwork and preliminary findings. This phase allowed students to reflect on their experiences during the research process and continue making meaning from our experiences together. Further, these concluding conversations and interviews allowed for students to further communicate what their experiences meant to them and their education, which served to enrich the data collected during this study. Conceptually, I display my phases of fieldwork interviewing in the table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Field work stages of data collection

Method and Phase of Fieldwork	Topics to be Covered
Interview 1 (phase 1)	Introductory interview that explores each students personal artifact, focuses on why students study in Chicana/o studies, why they are in college, what they hope to do after college, why they believe education is important, explore their personal life stories, previous activities, rapport building between researcher and students.
Interview 2 (phase 2)	Individual interviews with each study participant to explore the academic factors in Chicana/o studies impacting student success (i.e., pedagogy, special academic programs, faculty relationships, advising, professional assistance, etc.).
Interview 3 (phase 2)	Individual interviews with each study participant to explore the social factors in Chicana/o studies impacting student success (i.e., peer support networks, mentoring, personal and interpersonal social development, activities, etc.).
Interview 4 (phase 3)	Interviews that explore some of the preliminary findings of the researcher and reflection of findings among student participants (a.k.a. member-checking).

Model for In-depth Individual Interviews

Four individual semi-structured interviews with each study participants were conducted. In semi-structured or in-depth interviews the purpose is to explore the topic while allowing the respondent to express themselves in their own words (Bloom, 1998; Chase, 2005; Esterberg, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The role of the researcher is to allow the respondent to speak and to follow his or her lead during the interview (Esterberg, 2002; Solrozano & Yosso, 2001). These types of interviews are particularly useful with marginalized groups who often times are unable to tell their whole story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypothesis (Seidman, 2006). Rather, the purpose of interviewing is to gain an understanding of the experiences of others and the meaning they make out of those experiences. The semi-structured interviews allowed data to be collected in a less clinical setting and were consistent with the research methodology.

Interview Protocol

To guide my interactions, not dictate them, I developed an interview protocol for each phase of data collection in the study. A copy of the protocol is included in Appendix A. The semi-structured protocol used in this study helped to ensure that academic and social factors impacting retention in Chicana/o studies were explored with students while allowing for the discussions to flow freely and feel less like an interview and more like a conversation. I resisted the form of sterile interviewing so often witnessed in qualitative phenomenological research. Sterile interviews allow respondents to submit themselves to the role of "object" or "subject," which is an oppressive way to explore phenomenon in interpretive inquiry (Bloom,

1998). Therefore, my approach to interviewing allowed for study participants to lead the conversation and for myself to follow.

The approach I took for developing the protocol and specific interview process was that I saw my interactions with students as opportunities for the study participants and myself to make meaning from their time in Chicana/o studies. Esterberg (2002) substantiates my interview development process by showing that interviews can be formal sessions where the interviewer remains detached from the discussion, or they can be enjoyable conversations that attempt to make meaning about the topic at hand. Perhaps more important in this case study was my desire to ensure that data gathering was not cold and impersonal. This would have been an inappropriate stance for me as I have a personal interest in Chicana/o and Latina/o student success in college. I also did not want to perpetuate domination in my learning process by "doing interviews on students." As a democratic educator, it was important for me to ensure that the ideals of fairness and liberation in the learning process were communicated in my approach to understanding the research questions. bell hooks (2003), in her book *Teaching Community*, eloquently stated the ideals of democratic teaching and learning when she described conversations as the central location of the democratic educator's pedagogy.

> Conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator.
> Talking to share information, to exchange ideas is the practice both inside and outside
> academic settings that affirms the listeners that learning can take place in varied time
> frames (we can share and learn a lot in five minutes) and the knowledge can be shared
> in diverse modes of speech. (p. 44)

These words remain with me as I venture off into the field and begin collecting data with Chicana/o college students.

Study Participants as Coresearchers

The primary source of data collection in this study will came from eight Chicana/o students enrolled in Chicana/o studies at CSUF. I discuss the participants in detail during chapter four. The prerequisites for participation were that each student was full-time, had completed at least 12 credit hours in the department and was of advanced standing (i.e., junior or senior status). These prerequisites allowed for the participants to have the ability to draw on multiple classroom experiences and interactions with the Chicana/o studies department. For clarity it is important to understand that this study's data emerged from in-depth interviewing that explored the Chicana/o studies department's contribution to student retention—as seen through the eyes of Chicana/o students. Since I have witnessed researchers interacting with students as if they are toys for the academic playroom, I was mindful and conscious of how I viewed students in my study. For this reason, I wanted to collaborate with students to create knowledge and meaning that lead to change. Therefore, I saw students not as subjects or objects, but as participants and coresearchers.

Transpersonal research literature, which is understood as being an intuitive and spiritual frame of reference for the research journey sees research participants as much more than participatory objects (Anderson, 1998). Instead transpersonal research takes it even further and views participants as *coresearchers*. This terminology recognizes that the participants are storytellers for understanding the world and therefore are taking the research journey along with the primary researcher. Referring to participants as coresearchers also recognized their investment of time and thought during the research process (Braud &

Anderson, 1998; Anderson, 1998; Rendón, 2009). Knowing this alternative terminology intrigued me and allowed me to express my research process as relationship-centered. I employed the term coresearchers interchangeably as reference to participants in my work because it recognized the reality that they are investors in this study. They are coresearchers because they played a role in the meaning making of this study and therefore played a vital role in my own interpretations that are presented in this report. While I did the directing, writing and analyses of the data in this study, the students were still the ones who owned their stories and joined me along the road to meaning making. I was more of a participating guide who directed and presented the narrative.

In referring to students and viewing them as coresearchers rejected the researcher/researched binary. Further, the relational research process with coresearchers involved both formal and informal types of fieldwork because in addition to formal data gathering strategies, moments of small conversations over a meal or cup of tea served as an excellent opportunity to share stories with one another as it related to the study. These informal strategies were productive only if the student felt ownership over the work being done. Seeing students as coresearchers helped to fulfill this relational approach.

Recruitment of Coresearchers

I recruited coresearchers indirectly and directly through email and CSUF agents who have access to students. Specifically, I had contact with student affairs professionals, Chicana/o studies faculty and academic administrators at CSUF who assisted with gaining access to student email addresses and other contact information. Professional staff at CSUF supported my study and helped me coordinate the collection of student contact information.

Once CSUF staff and I gathered information to contact students about participating in my study, I set up information sessions or information phone calls for interested students to come and gain information about the study and agree to participate via the informed consent process. The information sessions allowed me to gage the seriousness of each student and also get a better feeling for his or her experiences that could be explored. These information sessions occurred in the winter of 2009/2010. The information sessions allowed me to explain the reasons for my interest in their experiences. I also explained the parameters of the study (i.e., time commitment, timeline of study, risks, benefits, confidentiality, etc.). In fact, some CSUF professors in Chicana/o studies permitted me to conduct recruitment sessions in their classes as an opportunity to teach and learn about educational research among Chicana/o people. Once a student and I agreed to be part of the study together and all informed consent documentation was gathered, the student was included in the cohort of coresearchers and scheduled for interviews.

Coresearcher Risks and Benefits

This study presented minimal risks and benefits to the coresearchers. Risks may have included uncomfortable questioning or challenging thoughts. There were no major risks of physical harm associated with participation in this study. Benefits to participating in this study included possible increased reflection and awareness of education problems and how they impact each student. Another benefit may be increased awareness of a student's social location in the academy and how they can work to change such factors for the better. There were no financial or material incentives associated with participation in this study other than the researcher's commitment to fund all costs associated with participating in interviews (i.e., food, beverage, candy, supplies, etc.).

Data Analysis

My analysis of the data began during the spring 2010 and continued into the beginning of 2011. During this time I spent many hours reading through transcripts so that I could become familiar with the data I collected and identify any areas in need of clarification. It was during this time that I also referred to the literature and decided to follow a process for presenting the results of the study by describing the narratives of coreseacrhers through a lens of validation theory (Rendón, 1994) and the model of student engagement (Nora, 2003) outlined in my theoretical framework for this study. Here I describe the process I employed to analyze my data for this dissertation.

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of making meaning. It is not mechanical and gives focus to a creative process (Esterberg, 2002; Rendón, 2009). Thus, the results of this study shed light on the experiences of individuals who represent a specific population of students as interpreted by myself and myself only. I can only express to the readers of the work the lessons I have learned from this study because I was also assuming the role of data collection instrument. Therefore, results from my study represent an intellectual understanding of the coresearchers stories as told to me. These results were grounded in the academic literature, under review by my academic advisors, and methodologically rigorous in order to add trustworthiness to the study.

This study made use of transcript-based analysis since this type of process is the most rigorous approach used to analyze transcript data (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In transcript-based analysis, a complete transcript of the interview discussion was made. Each audio recording was transcribed throughout the data collection process. The transcripts were transcribed using a *Microsoft Word* document with all participant identifiers removed for

confidentiality. I then used a coding method of analysis to extract voices and concepts from the data, which then allowed for the results of this study to be finalized. Creswell (2003) defined the coding method as "the process of organizing material into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks" (p.192).

Phases of Data Analysis

The first phase of my analysis included the transcription of audio-recorded interviews collected during my time in the field with coresearchers. This phase began after my first round of interviews in January of 2010 and continued until the last transcript was completed in June 2010. The transcription became a bit daunting for me personally and seemed to take an eternity to complete. Therefore, roughly eight of a total 45 hours of interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service in Chicago, Illinois (my residence at the time of this study). When all was said and done I had collected interview data from eight participants, which totaled 45 hours of audio recording and resulted in 261 pages of transcribed text. Sometimes I would have to conduct two interviews with one student during the same week and in certain circumstances this caused two interviews to be on the same transcript. I consider this accumulation of transcripts the first phase in my analysis of the data because it helped me to understand how to improve the interviews and relationships with coresearchers. Additionally, transcribing data while I was still conducting interviews allowed me to stay connected with interviews and discussions that happened at the commencement of this research project since my time with the Chicana/o studies department lasted 10 months (September 2009 to July 2010). I should also note that during this phase I was able to follow-up with students on points of clarification or contextual information needed to complete my transcripts and interviews with each coresearcher. I was therefore

immersed in my data for roughly a year when my findings were solid enough for academic defense in the spring of 2011.

The second stage was my first complete reading of the data--a direct and necessary stage in the analysis. Perhaps it was the most tedious because of the necessary note taking conducted during this first read through with a binder full of my completed data set. My first read through included editing for copy errors and inserting parenthetical notes to clarify colloquial discussions with coresearchers. This ensured that the data was transcribed correctly and reflected the contextual reality of my time with the students. My note taking during this stage was also intense and included filling a notebook with interview notes and possible emerging themes that would come to mind at all times of the day, week, months, and year. At the conclusion of this phase I was prepared to begin a through coding of the data in order to address each of the three research questions and work toward analyzing the data through the lens of my theoretical framework.

The third stage of analysis consisted of reading each transcript individually. During this process keywords were written into the margin of each transcript based off the coresearcher's responses during interviews and conversations. Additionally, I made use of note taking thoughts and emergent themes of the data collection during this step. These notes helped me to better recognize and develop preliminary concepts buried in the narrative data. According to Creswell (2003) and Maxwell (2006), this stage of the analysis should be an ongoing process, which involves asking questions, reflection, and continual writing. This process was perhaps the most time consuming and intense because it was an activity that required me to continually focus on the data for several days at a time. This process was repeated for each of the three research questions. Therefore, in the end I was left with three

different binders, each containing the transcripts specifically coded for each research question.

Additionally, since each research question was given its own read through during this phase I developed a more efficient way to organize the piles of coded data that accumulated during phase three. I developed a basic matrix that allowed me to cluster each of the similarly coded passages in the pages of transcript data. For instance, to answer the first research question (why do student major in Chicana/o studies?), I had coded transcript passages that all spoke to a students desire to gain new historical perspectives about Chicanas/os, to name one example. Therefore, I created an emerging theme titled "increased historical perspectives" and then cut and pasted each of the passages from all 261 pages of transcripts into the matrix. This also allowed me to see if the students were collectively sharing experiences or encountering individual circumstances. The matrix also provided an additional document to review and allowed me to concentrate on specific components of my discussions with students and organize what they were saying about Chicana/o studies. Once initial narrative depictions of student success in Chicana/o studies were developed, I presented the results to my faculty adviser and colleagues for review and discussion in the fourth phase of analysis. Changing, questioning, and editing my interpretations enhanced the value of the findings.

Trustworthiness

It is clear that my study sought to provide a platform for voice and subjective experiences in Chicana/o Studies. This approach was informed by my epistemological position explained earlier in the chapter. In contrast to work like mine, quantitative researchers often employ tools to objectively measure a given phenomenon with the intent

being to expose truth and generalized realities about our world. Assessing the quality of this approach to research is often conducted by measuring a work's reliability and validity. Since this is not a quantitative study I will be brief in my explanation of these terms. Essentially reliability can be asserted when a researcher's study and results are repeatable and consistent over time. Kirk and Miller (1986) defined reliability in three ways: (1) the level to which a measurement, when given repeatedly over time, will remain consistent or the same, (2) the measurements stability over time, and (3) the given measurements in a quantitative study will remain similar as time progresses. Therefore, a study is reliable when its measurements are the same over time. Validity is referred to and assessed as to whether the study instruments are accurate and actually measure the given variable (Golafshani, 2003). When applied to scholarship, these two constructs alert consumers as to the trustworthiness and usefulness of the work. I would like to move beyond this language, but keep in tandem with the idea that interpretive research can be trustworthy as well. I make this distinction because for one to objectively assess reliability and validity in my study would be inappropriate due to the acknowledgment that my research does not seek objective and inferential findings. Thus, I replace the words validity and reliability with the term trustworthiness and explain what trustworthiness means to this study and whether my research can be seen as credible and useful.

Since I, as the researcher, performed as the instrument of data collection in this study, it remained imperative that the readers be able to trust my collection and presentation of data in this study. Since I am the tool of measurement in this context I employ the concept of trustworthiness to account for the ability and effort of myself as the researcher to inform and illuminate student's individual voices (Golafshani, 2003). Trustworthiness in my study is a

concept in my research that helped me to ensure that my interpretations of the data were as accurate and rigorous as possible. To this end, I did seek validity in my research in the sense that my interpretations could only be trusted if grounded in rich and in-depth data because when this work is said and done it is only my interpretations that can be spoken for. I was not attempting to prove anything, but rather understand and make meaning from a case of Chicana/o students who are studying as Chicano Studies majors and minors. Maxwell (1992) supported my argument because of his position that since generalizable results in interpretive work is not the goal, than issues of meaning and interpretation become central when assessing qualitative research. Rather, it was important to see and assess the quality and integrity of a study because a single standard that can be applied to the interpretive paradigm will inherently endure as problematic due to the varied nature of qualitative research (Crotty, 1998; Golafshani, 2003; Maxwell, 1992). In this case, it was important to recognize that experiential knowledge is created through a process of socially constructing realities and therefore will be different as the context changes (Crotty, 1998). Since I had informed my study with a thorough review of academic literature, spent months engaging with the case at hand (i.e., interviews, observing classes) and collected first-hand narratives from students as the primary data to be analyzed it is defensible to state that this study is trustworthy.

Trustworthiness of Myself as a Data Collection Tool

As the researcher in this study it was important for me to be reflexive and aware of my role in the research process to achieve rigor and trustworthiness. Reflexivity (the act of responsive reflection) allowed me to critically locate myself in the work I was conducting. Since interviewing involved me being engaged in the setting of this study, it was important for me to be reflexive of my role as the data collection tool to ensure maximum

trustworthiness. This is because in interpretive research I was unable to predict what I would find or how I would then analyze and present such information. In fact, Merriam (2002) pointed out such issues of trustworthiness and rigor in the research process as better understood once one immerses her self into the field and question at hand. "In qualitative research we learn how to deal with these issues through immersion in the process and through our actions and unintended outcomes" (Merriam, 2002, p. 422). Reflecting on the unintended outcomes of a research journey and deciding how best to respond to such outcomes is the test of trustworthiness. For instance, in this study, I continually wrote throughout my fieldwork and shared my impressions and findings with coresearchers in an effort to affirm the meaning of their experiences and presented narrative. This process helped to ensure that the story or narrative was methodologically convincing (Miller & Crabtree, 2005).

Pilot Study: Testing the Interview Protocols

The interview protocols were subjected to review by the use of a pilot study with Latina/o undergraduate students to prove as reliable tools for my interactions with students. Because I lived in Iowa during the design of this study, a pilot study on Latina/o students at CSUF was not possible. Therefore, Latina/o students from Iowa State University served as practice for the protocols.

The pilot study using the interview protocol was conducted with five students. The purpose of this pilot study was to introduce the data collection instruments (e.g., focus group interview questions) to individuals with no relation to this study. The interview protocol was presented to the pilot study participants just as the researcher planned to administer the questions in actual focus group interviews. After the pilot study, peer participants offered

suggestions to clarify minor parts of the interview protocol questions. It was concluded that the interview questions contained in the protocol were clear enough to employ during the data collection of this study. Timing of each interview protocol during the pilot study allowed me to conclude that interviews were likely to last about 1-2 hours depending on responses.

Additionally, forthcoming review of the interview protocol by faculty members and fellow doctoral students added trustworthiness to the data collection instrument. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with the intention of reducing threats to trustworthiness. Threats to the protocol's trustworthiness included unclear or irrelevant questions contained within the interview protocol. A pilot study determined that the interview protocol was a trustworthy tool for beginning data collection in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were continually addressed throughout this study. To ensure participant safety, I was exempted/approved through the Internal Review Boards (IRB) at my institution, Iowa State University, and the research site, CSUF. All participants were made clearly aware of the reasons and purpose of this study through informed consent meetings that took place before each coresearcher agreed to participate.

I also was mindful that my study had the potential to form relationships between myself and students. This relationship-centered approach to research can pose unconventional moments in seeking to learn about students and their educational life experiences. For that reason, I remained mindful of the appropriateness of locations that students and I meet and how I interacted with each student. Confidentiality throughout the

research process was maintained by not using identifiers on any documentation or

recordings.

Strengths of the Study

A strength of my study was that it accounted for a telling of some of the Chicana/o

student experiences in Chicana/o studies. Through an interpretive research design my study

allowed for narrative data to be collected and analyzed for increased understanding of student

success among Chicana/o students.

An additional strength of this study is that it sought to resist domination in the

research process. Through continued engagement and relationship-centered data collection

with co-resarchers, I was able to encounter students who wanted to travel along this journey.

This approach was a strength because it ensured that coresearchers were centered in my

decision making for this inquiry. Therefore, this work was a space where people were

empowered and represented in a way that promoted equity and opportunity in education.

Summary

In summary, this study employed a relational design to account for the experiences of

Chicana/o student success in Chicana/o studies. The setting, CSUF, a large comprehensive

institution, is a leader in graduating Latina/o students from college. Therefore, through

engaged interviewing and immersion over time, I engaged in a self-reflective and

illuminating process that was creatively depicted through narrative development as it related

to the research questions. Data was analyzed over time through transcript-based analysis.

This data analysis allowed for the stories and experiences of coresearchers to be nurtured and

developed in order to provide the best interpretation possible. Finally, all coresearchers were

protected through human subject review at my institution and their own. Additionally,

confidentiality was maintained at all times in order to provide a secure environment where students felt safe enough to share their journey through college with me. Since, I speak with Chicana/o students in this work and not for them, it was important that my research design written in this chapter be reminded of the dangers of research as a colonizing activity. Overall, it was the perpetuation of domination that is to be avoided and resisted in this study design. If domination is asserted over coresearchers at any time, the work becomes untrustworthy and dangerous.

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING THE CORESEARCHERS

I just want to have a life with meaning and Chicana/o studies will help me get to that point in my life. (Sofia, coresearcher)

In the previous chapter I briefly introduced the participants who provided the data for this study as coresearchers. This chapter will provide a more in-depth introduction of the coresearchers in this study as people who came to the Chicana/o studies department intent on making meaning out of their professional aspirations. They are people who are deeply grounded in their family's history and experiences as Chicanas/os. I hope that by sharing information with you about them in aggregate and as individuals will help the reader to understand the context under which this case of students were observed. First, I will explain the details and demographics of the Chicana/o studies department at CSUF. This will include a description of their demographic make-up and curriculum list. Following the departmental description will be biographical vignettes about each of the coresearchers featured in this study. These vignettes help to personalize the narrative and understand the position of each student who was gracious enough to provide time and thought toward the completion of this project.

The student coreseacrhers were comprised of eight people, three men and five women. Each student identified as Chicana or Chicano and approved of my description and definition of their ethnic identity in this paper. All were seeking the completion of their bachelor's degree at CSUF during our time together. Since the completion of this study three of the students have graduated and one has already begun her graduate education. Each student was selected because they were an upper-division (more than 70 total credit hours completed) student who was officially enrolled in Chicana/o studies during the Spring 2010

semester as a major or minor and had completed at least 12 academic credit hours in the

department (4 classes, or one semester). This prerequisite was selected as a cut-off for

participation because it equaled one semester's worth of coursework, which was enough time

to have experienced Chicana/o studies classes, professors, peers and exposure to activities.

However, as table 4.1 depicts, students who participated in this study had completely

surpassed the minimum participation requirements. Notably, the average credit hour

completion of the coresearchers in Chicana/o studies was 31 credit hours. Additionally, each

coresearcher was both a first-generation American and first-generation college students

making them a special for me to work along their sides.

Table 4.1
Coresearcher qualifying demographics

	Chicana/o studies units completed	Transferred to CSUF	Major/Minor	U.S. generational status	College generational status
Sofia	33	No	Minor	First-gen	First-gen
Zoe	39	Yes	Major	First-gen	First-gen
Frankee	12	Yes	Minor	First-gen	First-gen
Ernesto	36	Yes	Major	First-gen	First-gen
Anita	24	No	Major	First-gen	First-gen
Genevieve	33	No	Major	First-gen	First-gen
Pilar	39	Yes	Major	First-gen	First-gen
Antonio	31	No	Major	First-gen	First-gen

Chicana/o Studies Department Description

The department of Chicana/o studies at CSUF is one of several ethnic studies

departments in the university. It is housed in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences

and offers undergraduate degrees. My understanding of the department is grounded in my

interviews with professors, deans and students who all described a thriving learning

environment on the cusp of change and improvement as they all worked to move the

department forward. I also gathered information from the California State University

Fullerton Office of Institutional Research and Analytical Studies (2010), which provided me with up-to-date demographic information about the department. I hope that this description of the department helps to understand the context under which the coresearchers provided me with their experiences.

During the 2009-2010 academic year Chicana/o studies enrolled 38 majors and 10 minors in the department. Additionally, about 30 percent of the students in Chicana/o studies identified as Chicanas/os themselves. Six full-time, tenured and tenure-track faculty members were employed in the department during the 2009-2010 year, five of which were men. Nine part-time adjunct faculty members also contributed to the department's teaching responsibilities at the time of this study. Graduation rates in the department were also provided by CSUF and show that 11 students, six of who were women and five who identified as Chicana/o, graduated from the department with bachelor's degrees in Chicana/o studies. Interestingly, six of these students had transferred to CSUF making them a graduating class predominantly made-up of a group too often left behind at college graduations. Furthermore, the institutional graduation rate in 2009 for Chicana/o transfer students at CSUF who graduated within four years was 65 percent. Chicana/o students who directly enrolled (did not transfer) at CSUF finished by their sixth year at a rate of about 45 percent in 2009 (California State University Fullerton Office of Institutional Research and Analytical Studies, 2010). Thankfully, CSUF collected Chicana/o-speicific data and disaggregated data sets for the Chicanas/os students in order for this study to have a more specific understanding of graduation rates among this group of students at CSUF.

Chicana/o Studies Curriculum

The bachelor's degree in Chicana/o studies requires a minimum of 120 units, which includes courses for the major, General Education, all university requirements, and free electives. A total of 36 units from the following courses are required for the bachelor's degree in Chicana/o studies. The minor requires a completed 24 credit hours.

The curriculum offered by the department of Chicana/o studies is centered on the appreciation and application of varied perspectives centered and grounded in Chicana/o history, politics, knowledge and theory. Their curriculum is an example of the diverse fields of study Chicana/o studies explores in their teachings. Each faculty member contributes to the department with course offerings in law, education, sociology, art, culture, indigenous history, human services, and health. The curriculum offered by the department is guided by their departmental learning goals, which are as follows:

1. To develop knowledge and appreciation of Chicana and Chicano experience from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on the social sciences, humanities, and the arts;

2. To gain knowledge and understanding of the role of critical theory and perspectives to understand phenomena, including issues of race, class and gender, and politics;

3. To understand diverse viewpoints and experiences through group communication and collaborative team work;

4. To understand how to bridge academic content and practice through service learning.

Appendix C is a list of courses generated directly from the Chicana/o studies department at CSUF and reflects their course offerings during this study. The coresearcher's individual credit hours displayed in table 4.1 were taken from this list of courses.

Introducing the Student Coresearchers

The following section is a set of biographical vignettes. As the researcher, I felt it was most important to share myself with the students so that they would feel comfortable sharing themselves with me. Therefore, as part of the relational-centered design of this study a great deal of time was spent learning about the coresearchers life and aspirations. Perhaps what was most interesting about this group of coresearchers was that they were all passionate about Chicana/o studies and all had their own ideas and goals with respect to its application in their life. Additionally, these students did not go without adversity and struggle in their life. Their struggles represent the motivation behind their desire to earn a higher education. What was so inspiring was that these students had grown to realize the politics and reality associated with being Chicana/o in the United States. They all recognized their status as underrepresented students and embodied a level of consciousness and critical thinking that was necessary to be successful. Therefore, their individual thoughts and perspectives provided me, the researcher, with experiences that yielded meaning.

Sofia

The story of our coresearchers begins with Sofia. I especially enjoyed Sofia's maturity and wisdom she communicated through her personality and experience as a Chicana living and working in southern California. As a young girl in middle school, Sofia had come a long way at such a young age as she attended The Latino Future Leaders Academy—a leadership development camp for young people. This program was a special weeklong retreat where young Chicanos and Chicanas like Sofia were nurtured and provided with educational and leadership development for the purpose of providing a gateway to earning a college degree. I share this information because often we overlook, or ignore the college

journeys of people like Sofia, who, based on her demographics, would probably be bet

against in the mainstream culture of American society. However, Sofia made it to college

and excelled in her academic setting. She was the first student selected to be a coresearcher

in this study and I recruited her after recommendations from professors I met while I was

planning for this study. In fact, three professors had mentioned Sofia as a student I needed to

speak with for this project.

Sofia was born in *Aguas Calientes*, Mexico and moved to the United States when she

was a young toddler. Sofia credited her parents and family members with sacrificing

themselves for her to pursue a better life. Her parents always pushed Sofia to succeed in

school as she matured and began to consider a college education even though her parents did

not go to college. Her dad possessed a high school education and her mother had completed

school up to the sixth grade in Mexico. Like many Chicanas/os in Southern California, Sofia

grew up in a diverse community nestled in the northern corridor of Orange County,

California. She attended school as a young girl and provided me with a glimpse into the

circumstances she persisted within as a young immigrant.

> I had kind of a crazy childhood because when we moved here we lived with my uncle
>
> and faced a lot of obstacles like many Latinos in pursuit of a better life. I had to live
>
> in a house where my uncle had allowed 30 people to live. Imagine how I did my
>
> homework? It was not easy. (Sofia)

I though it was insightful of Sofia to recognize the impact of her parents educational

attainment on her aspirations to go to college when she expressed their support to me by

saying "they were so supportive, but they didn't have the college knowledge I needed. "

Eventually, hard work and a drive to make it to college, coupled with familial support, made

it possible for Sofia to complete high school and be admitted to CSUF as a first-year student. She majored in political science and minored in Chicana/o studies. During our time together I asked Sofia why she decided to minor in Chicana/o studies. She said it was to compliment the missing perspective she found in her major of political science. She spoke of Chicana/o studies as giving her the added perspectives needed to fulfill her own aspirations in political science that would have otherwise been missing from her experience in college. She further explained that she had three main reasons for being part of the Chicana/o studies department at CSUF: (1) she possessed a commitment to social justice and activism, which was nurtured in Chicana/o studies and complimented her work in political science courses, (2) she recognized that many Chicanas/os were not completing high school and college and she saw this as a problem she could fight against as an educator who understood the Chicana/o struggle, and (3) she developed a level of consciousness toward the Chicana/o commuity and desired change for her people who saw physical labor and low rates of completing formal education dominate ways of life in her community. She saw Chicana/o studies as a way to bridge the gap in context that existed in her major's courses and interaction with political science professors. Additionally, Sofia was involved with many student organizations and service commitments at CSUF such as the Mesa Cooperativa, Model United Nations, Associated Students (student government) and the CSUF Academic Senate. She credited these experiences with giving her the setting to critically analyze educational problems, which she hoped to develop as a graduate student after college.

As a coresearcher it was meaningful for me to spend time with Sofia because her and I were able to share our passions for education and social justice. The terminology "college knowledge" that Sofia used to describe her parents role in her own college going made Sofia

an excellent coresearcher for this project because she understood the problem at hand in this study. In fact, Sofia communicated to me that she had read and is aware of validation theory (Rendón, 1994)—the theoretical framework for this study. When I was interviewing Sofia and she explained her situation in these specific terms I learned that Sofia had been accepted to an Ivy League university where she planned to commence studies for her Master's degree in higher education administration with a focus on the college journey of Chicanas/os. Since Sofia and I share a lot in common in our professional lives, it was important for me to connect with Sofia and I believe we achieved a relationship of connection and trust because at the end of our time together Sofia and I expressed that we felt a relationship build as colleagues and as friends.

Zoe

Our story continues with the second student coresearcher I selected for this study. His name is Zoe and he was a Chicana/o studies major at CSUF who planned to graduate in the spring of 2011. Zoe was a special guy to me because my first interview with him was also my very first interview I conducted for this study. I was so nervous because of the stress from this project and he ended up being so mellow and easy to talk with. We were soon chatting away about our experiences as college students.

Zoe grew up in Orange County, California with a few stops in other states along the way because of his parents moving around during his youth. Zoe was raised by his mother along with his brother, who is a college graduate. Unfortunately, when I first met Zoe he stated that "I guess where I come from people do not really excel. I mean where I come from there are not a lot of good schools or teachers." What followed was Zoe's powerful narrative about his somewhat troubled, but inspiring youth and how he eventually ended up in

Chicana/o studies at CSUF as a first-generation college student. I hope that his story can show that people do make something of themselves even if they do not go to the best schools or come from the best neighborhoods. These life contexts should not exclude people like Zoe from higher learning and he did not let these obstacles get in his way.

During my time with Zoe I had come to learn that he was a lifelong learner who valued education and enjoyed learning in school. However, his life circumstances and decisions as a young man impeded his development and success as a young student. Zoe explained that he always loved to learn in school and was even tested into the advanced classes. However, Zoe had to move to a new neighborhood that exposed him to drug dealing. Zoe started selling drugs and eventually had conduct violations in his name at school. Because of these unfortunate circumstances, Zoe moved on to a continuation school and began working on finishing high school.

At his new school Zoe reflected on his circumstances and recognized that he had two choices—to either go to jail or go to school. That is when he started taking his education more seriously and worked to raise his grade with more acceptable levels of performance. His grandfather, who served as Zoe's role model even went so far as to offer him money for good grades just so that they could at least get him out of high school. Zoe's grandfather is a small business owner in the local community of CSUF and always encouraged Zoe to either learn some kind of business or trade, or continue on to college for higher learning. It was his grandfather who Zoe credits with always looking out for him and his brother.

What makes Zoe such an erudite coresearcher is that he developed a critical mind at a young age. Zoe always had deep insights and critical perspectives about the world when he met with me and this helped me to understand what he was learning and thinking while in

Chicana/o studies. He told me about his junior high school years when he saw a picture of a man in Vietnam during the war who had lit himself on fire in protest (referring to the famous picture of Buddhist monk Quang Duc in 1963). Many people probably remember the image from its elevation as one of the most powerful pictures ever taken. Zoe explained that when he saw that image he realized there are movements in the world and he wanted to find something where he could be a contributor. It was not until later on that he stumbled upon Chicana/o studies.

While in continuation high school students were able to take some classes at the local community college. He decided to take an introduction to Chicano studies class and the rest was history. He had found his movement. Because he had already reached age 18 and had nothing going for him at the high school, Zoe enrolled in the community college without a high school diploma. That is what was so fascinating about higher education. Zoe never graduated from high school and never obtained his diploma, but he still managed to attend a community college, transfer to a four-year university and when this study was being conducted he was preparing to graduate with his bachelor's degree. Zoe's perspectives as a coresearcher for this study were grounded in his unique pathway to higher education and I am grateful for his openness and candidness during our time together.

Frankee

The next coresearcher was Frankee. Frankee was a Chicana/o studies minor and a philosophy major at CSUF. Frankee was chosen for this study because she displayed insight into how Chicana/o studies contributed to her experience as a college student and she was eager to share with me. While she is not a major in the department, she has taken 12 credit hours and intended to enroll in more classes as she prepared to graduate in the 2011 academic

year with a minor in Chicana/o studies. Frankee sees her Chicana/o focus in philosophy as an important contribution to her college success.

When Frankee was a young woman growing up in southern California she was always conscious of Chicana/o culture in her life. She always spoke of how supportive her sister and family were during the college years and during her youth. In fact, her sister was a major source of guidance and support because she had gone to college and was working on her graduate education during our time together. As first-generation college students in their family the two *hermanas* (sisters) grew to be close. Overall, Frankee's family members are a very close and spend time together outside of work with large parties and celebrations of family members' accomplishments. She believed a major tenant of Chicana/o people is their concern and care for family and community. Frankee's parents expected her and her sister to go to school, but Frankee did not go to college right after high school. Instead she chose a life like many young people who decide to enter the work force and start a family. She had a son and eventually began her new life with him and her boyfriend and baby's father. She even became a medical assistant and worked with patients before her time at CSUF.

Frankee and her family had a good life until suddenly tragic events caused her partner and son's dad to lose his life. He was a military veteran and this made her life very complicated and head in a direction she never expected. She was enveloped in a legal battle with her partner's parents over social security and veteran's benefits, which were entitlements for Frankee's son. A settlement was eventually reached in her case. The outcome of that case was irrelevant because the greater lesson for Frankee was that she never wanted to be in that situation again—having to defend herself with no knowledge of how to do so. She decided that she would go to college.

Frankee began her education at CSUF under stressful circumstances in her life. However, she was motivated and took action to change her life. She aspired to be a lawyer and saw her educational experience in Chicana/o studies as being the vehicle for her to defend people in situations of stress and vulnerability. She decided to major in Chicana/o studies because it helped her feel connected to her people. Additionally, Chicana/o studies allowed Frankee to see that Chicana/o studies was about problem solving and raising awareness in our communities. Because the immigration debate is a hot topic in he U.S. Frankee hopes to attend law school and eventually earn her juror's doctorate. This will allow her to apply her skills in argument and philosophy while coupling the social justice and community-based skills she learned in Chicana/o studies.

Ernesto

The next corresearcher was Ernesto. Ernesto was a son of Mexican parents and was a first-generation college student and also a new father to a young baby girl. What was impressive about Ernesto was his striking seriousness when he discussed Chicana/o studies. I always thought that he seemed like a person who would be perfect for a job as a professor. My hunch was right because Ernesto strives to eventually earn his Ph.D. in Chicana/o studies and become a professor who helps students like himself and the communities of Chicana/o people who face hardships. During this study Ernesto was enrolled as a Chicana/o studies major. He was also earning a degree in African-American studies. This makes his sense of history as it relates to ethnicity and race excellent and relevant to this study; thus one of the reason's he was chosen for this study. He had completed 31 credit hours in Chicana/o studies and planned to graduate during the 2010-2011 school year.

Ernesto grew up in the Los Angeles area and was always interested in sports as a young man. He even aspired to play football at Notre Dame University. Eventually when it came time to leave high school, Ernesto plans had changed and he enrolled in CSUF. It was at CSUF where Ernesto sharpened his understanding of Chicana/o history and political struggles. He studied movements of Mexicans and also the historical events that shaped them as a people in the U.S. All of this new found knowledge got the notice of his professor who mentored Ernesto during his college years. His professor in Chicana/o studies helped him gain professional experience by asking Ernesto to help with research projects, assist with teaching courses, and leading study groups for younger and less experienced students in Chicana/o studies. The validating experiences for Ernesto sparked a flame of passion within Ernesto to address why so many of our young people in the Chicana/o community do not make it to college or even finish high school. The recognition and consciousness that Ernesto had toward the oppression of his people is why he decided to associate with Chicana/o studies. He says that he saw the world as it was due to imperialism and colonization of Mexican people in America. That is why he wa starting to focus on academic literature that dealt with colonization of people of color and the decolonizing struggle of people who try to bring about change in local communities. While he was just beginning his academic development as a professor, I saw Ernesto well on his way to accomplishing his goals and helping many future students.

Anita

Anita joined this study as a corresercher after she responded to my recruitment presentation in one of her Chicana/o studies classes. Anita, like Sofia, had a lot in common with me because her studies in college had inspired her to earn her graduate degrees and

work in higher education. She hoped to work with college students someday and help them earn their education. She was an accomplished student with an intellectual mind, meaning that she was constantly asking questions and ascribing meaning to life and community issues. Further, Anita still had about two years of classes left in her degree program at CSUF. At the time of this study Anita was declared as a Chicana/o studies major and had completed 24 credit hours in Chicana/o studies.

Anita grew up locally in Anaheim, California. Her mother moved to the U.S. from Nayarit, Mexico when Anita was only a baby and always encouraged Anita to go to school and be successful. Anita always displayed her admiration for her mother who only completed tenth grade in school. Anita gives a lot of credit to her mother, who she explained was a serious and hard working mother who expected excellence from Anita. Having been raised by a single mother and as an only child allowed Anita to create a large family from the people her mother befriended when she arrived in the U.S. She spoke often of her time with her "LA family," as she called it, referring to the people in her life who support her and provide a foundation of inspiration for Anita. She is a clearly supported student and displayed the characteristics in life that contribute to student success (i.e., family success, liking for school, high achievement).

Her mother's encouragement and guidance worked because Anita loved to play school as a young girl and continues to love school supplies and stationary used in the classroom. I laughed when I heard this because I too always loved school and could never have enough pens and notebooks—even as an adult. It was a funny thing to have in common with Anita. Her love for school paid off when Anita was placed into Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) at her local school, which allowed her to take more challenging courses

and prepare for college. Her participation in GATE and in AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) during school contributed to her college-going and eventual enrollment in CSUF.

Anita enrolled as a Spanish major at CSUF when she began her college career. However, she soon began her general education requirements and was exposed to her first Chicana/o studies course. During her time in Chicana/o studies she realized that she was feeling connected to the department unlike her feelings toward the Spanish department, which were detached and not exciting. Her liking of Chicana/o studies also exposed her to the *feminista* (feminist) movement in Chicana/o and Latina/o studies. She was drawn to a focus on Chicana/o women because of their importance and huge contribution to the Chicana/o way of life. However, the only place that would feed this interest for Anita was Chicana/o studies and that is why she decided to switch majors. She also said that Chicana/o studies was a good major for her because it was focused on presenting women or *mujeres* as powerful members of our society who hold knowledge and historical perspectives that are priceless for Chicana/o people. However, Anita said that Chicana/o women were looked at negatively in the U.S. and that it was her wish this kind of reality. Chicana/o studies as a major in college was seen as her vehicle to do so. It takes experiences like Anita's to realize choosing majors in college blindly as high school students may be useless because it was not until she arrived at college and was exposed to material that spoke to her personally that Anita decided what she wanted to do with her life.

What was fun about Anita was that she and I were able to engage in discussions unlike the other students. Anita was well versed in terminology of higher education, current events in higher education, as well as an advanced understanding of higher education

research. When I asked her how she learned so much so fast she simply stated "I read." For an undergraduate I was impressed and often took the opportunity to talk shop with Anita, which provided me with more information for the study, but also let me get to know her a lot better.

Genevieve

Genevieve came to me as a student coresearcher when she responded to my call for study participants because she felt the need to help out with Chicana/o studies and help her people in any way. I always appreciated how open Genevieve was during our time together sipping coffee and chatting about our lives. Genevieve is a warm person who is close with her family and values being heavily involved at CSUF during her tenure as an undergraduate. She is a Chicana/o studies major and had completed 33 credit hours in the department when we conducted our interviews together. She hoped to go onto law school and become a lawyer someday because she was passionate about Mexican immigration in the U.S. and saw herself as being capable of helping and empathizing.

Genevieve grew up in Yorba Linda, California with her parents and brother. Her mother was born in the U.S. and graduated from high school before starting her family. Genevieve's father is an immigrant from Mexico and finished his education up to the sixth grade. Genevieve spoke about the fact that her father was an immigrant and because of this he was judged a lot by others in the community. However, Genevieve's father encouraged her to reach high in education and strive to be better than any of her ancestors that came before her. What was so fascinating about Genevieve was that the women in her family represent the climb of Chicanas/os in society as the years have gone by. This was illustrated when Genevieve spoke about how she was a third generation CSUF woman among her

family. Genevieve's grandmother is part of the custodial staff at CSUF and has done her job there for decades. Her mother is also part of the custodial team at CSUF. Now that Genevieve is a student at CSUF she always referred to the fact that her grandma and mom were responsible for cleaning the Humanities building at CSUF while Genevieve attended classes in the same building. To Genevieve it represents the climbing of her family to a better life. She was constantly aware that her ability to be successful in school rested on the backs of women and men like her grandmother, mother and father.

Genevieve was also involved in student activities at CSUF. Among her accomplishments she was most proud of was her leadership and membership in a sorority chapter at CSUF. She saw herself as a leader and took advantage of the leadership opportunities in the sorority having held executive directing roles for projects like recruitment, activities, and daily chapter business. Her leadership skills were evident because Genevieve spoke with a tone of seriousness and warmth. She was attractive to many people including myself because it is very simple to feel at ease around Genevieve. This is perhaps what made her a great coresearcher for this study.

Genevieve was drawn to Chicana/o studies at CSUF because she was exposed to the field during her college general education courses. After her first course she realized that she was going to be required to unlearn all she had learned in high school and relearn a new world from the Chicana/o studies perspective. Her exposure to Chicana/o studies showed her the importance of history and how Mexicans and their customs can be completely ignored in education. She spoke of the field opening her eyes to a new reality among Chicanas/os facing oppression in various ways. She decided to be a major after she realized that what she was learning in Chicana/o studies could help her be a better spokesperson for her people.

She sees the field as valuable to her life because she was closer to her Chicana/o roots as well as intellectually developing herself to prepare for law school. She sees Chicana/o studies as a safe place to explore her ideas without feeling attacked or threatened by her peers or professors in other departments. Finally, Genevieve had a deep drive in her to give back to the Chicana/o community who she considered the benefactors of her education.

Pilar

I met Pilar at an academic conference when she came up to me and asked "are you the guy wanting to meet Chicano studies majors?" I quickly said yes and gave her my quick ten-second-elevator speech about the project. She said that several people had mentioned it to her and she was interested in being one of the student coreseacrhers. I quickly set up an intake interview with Pilar and she volunteered to be part of the study.

Pilar is a Chicana/o studies major at CSUF. She had completed 39 credit hours in Chicana/o studies and was also heavily involved with student organizations on-campus. I knew that Pilar would be a good coresearcher because she immediately told me that she had a lot to say about Chicana/o studies and a lot of feedback for improvement. This should come as no surprise since she is part of the MEChA (*Movomiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan*). Her experiences in this organization and as a student leader have allowed her to gain a critical perspective when it comes to education. Like some of the other participants, Pilar wished to earn her graduate degrees in education and work in postsecondary settings. It should also be said that she was instrumental in starting the Chicana/o studies student organization that helped the department address some of the student concerns about course offerings, mentors, and advising in the department. She is a leader because she sees herself and others as capable of changing realities for the better.

Pilar was a transfer student and had her first experience with Chicana/o studies at the community college level. This introduction to the field provided her with a new perspective on how to see the world. She sees a large labor-based community in southern California who are capable of doing more. Pilar's recognition of the underachievement of Chicana/o people was a serious issue that needed addressed. She stated that she was a Chicana/o studies major because it was a place that taught her the history and knowledge contributed by Chicana/o people. This new knowledge for Pilar will help her in her education and future career as an educator. She believed that if she was aware of problems she can figure out what to do to fix them. She sees Chicana/o studies as being the vehicle for such awareness in her life.

Antonio

Antonio came to me as the last coresearcher in this study. He seemed apprehensive at first because Antonio was a returning adult student at CSUF majoring in Chicana/o studies and working toward the completion of his college degree. His wife and two children have had experiences in colleges at the four-year and two-year levels. He was apprehensive because he thought that maybe he was too old for the study and I quickly countered his assumption by explaining that I was interested in experiences of undergraduate students regardless of age. After all, American universities and the programs within them are not exclusive to an 18-24 age group, who are considered "traditional" students. Antonio had completed 36 units in Chicana/o studies when he was selected for this project and was also working on a second degree in history.

Antonio's life began as a child who was born in Mexico and moved to the U.S. as a small toddler. His mother a father worked along the California beaches of Manhattan Beach and the South Bay area of Los Angeles. As a family they even were able to purchase and

live in a home in South Central Los Angeles. His parents were encouraging for him and provided a foundation that valued education. However, the school system did not see the world in the same way as Antonio and his family. Instead he met with his high school guidance counselor and was told at age 15 that he would either be in jail or dead with babies after high school because all the Mexicans ended up that way. Therefore, Antonio was tracked into vocational education programs in high school and worked with drafting and wood shop as a student leader. He graduated from high school and began a career and a family with no college education. Back in those days it was still possible, or at least more common. It was not until 2003 that Antonio was injured at work and required to undergo surgeries and medical therapies for his severe injury that required him to leave his job. It was this moment that his wife helped him bounce back and required that he enroll in school because no husband of hers was going to just sit at home with kids to take care of. He knew that others were counting on him and so he did not let his injuries take him down even though the pain was unbearable.

Antonio enrolled in community college and eventually transferred to CSUF as a Chicana/o studies major. He says that the reason he chose Chicana/o studies was because he has always loved history and found that history in American society was often clouded with fantasy and storytelling. It was at community college that Antonio took his first Chicana/o studies course and realized that history is stories and if that is the case then he was going to tell a new story. He was committed to understanding history from the Chicana/o perspective and even decided to double major in history just to expand his knowledge base.

At CSUF Antonio was a student who excels and likes to challenge people. However, what was great about Antonio was that he has a charm that can critique you and make you

feel like the best person in the world at the same time. His experiences in Chicana/o studies blend with his personal life and it was exciting to learn about the experiences of Antonio in the Chicana/o studies department.

Moving Forward

Having now introduced you to the coresearchers who were interviewed for data in this study, I will move to the presentation of findings in the following chapter. The students' biographical vignettes will help provide the needed background information to understand where students came from and what motivated them to be a college student.

CHAPTER 5: CHICANA/O STUDIES AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF

STUDENTS

I think that sometimes it is easy to feel singled out as the Latina, but in Chicano studies I had my fellow students who were sharing the struggle with me. It just feels better sometimes to be around your peers and think of them as caring about how you do in school. (Anita, coresearcher)

Academic research requires that problems be posed and questions be answered or understood more deeply. Therefore, I have structured my results of this study in a clear and easy to follow format. To that end, in this chapter I have provided my findings as they relate to each research question. I begin with research question one followed by the second and third research questions. It is my hope to present findings that describe the narratives I received during my data collection process. I am not attempting to answer the research questions with a sole and final response. Consistent with my methodological perspective, I am not presenting the results of this study as an essentialized understanding of what retains Chicana/o students in higher education. Rather, these findings represent the case of students and together we explored their experiences as college students with a more in-depth approach. Here I share what I have learned at their side.

Chicana/o Studies: A Home Away From Home

I begin with the first research question: Why do Chicana/o students choose to study in Chicana/o studies? I asked this research question to inform the context under which the coresearchers were entering their field of study. Understanding the motivations of the students to become a student in Chicana/o studies can help to inform higher education and other community members of some of the factors that contributed to students' decisions to major or minor in Chicana/o studies. Additionally, understanding the reasons students chose

Chicana/o studies can help unveil some of the preliminary academic and social factors in the department that impacted the students in this study.

Chicana/o studies was described as a warm place for students, even thought it still manages to continue working on needed improvements. However, at the end of this study I have been left with the impression and knowledge that Chicana/o studies exists to provide validating and academically challenging educational experiences for students to grow and seek out their own path in life. On many occasions I found myself reflecting on how the students wanted to fit-in somewhere, be around their people, understand history at a deeper and more personal level, and have an outlet for their developing consciousness and awareness of the world's disparities. Chicana/o studies turned out to be the home away from home for these students and their ambitions where they could develop their minds and self.

> With Chicano studies I felt as if I belong and was part of the team. It was like everyone was sharing a common bond or interest like a family. In Chicano studies there seems to be a sense that everyone understands or recognizes where we are coming from. I want to go to graduate school or law school because of what I have learned from my academic home [Chicana/o studies]. (Frankee)

Sofia also sees Chicana/o studies as not only a "homey" place, but as a safe place for students to share and discuss with one another.

> I think that a lot of students who end up minoring or majoring in Chicano studies identify themselves as Chicano so it feels very homey in the classes. Some students can speak Spanish and talk about jokes just within our culture. So that's what I always felt like – it didn't always feel like a lecture or a classroom. It felt more like a discussion and an open forum. (Sofia)

Upon reflecting about how he ended up as a Chicana/o studies major, Zoe described how his major provided him with a place where he felt comfortable and able to feel included.

> I chose it because it felt right to me. Nothing else fit for me. I fit-in with Chicano studies. Nothing else was going to be good for me because of what I was interested in, like justice and history. I really don't know what else to say other than that its [Chicana/o studies] all I grew to know in my college career and it just felt right for me. I have other classes in college, but I have a home in Chicano studies. (Zoe)

Selecting a major in college can be a daunting experience for many students and the coresearchers in this study are no exception. For the eight coresearchers in this study choosing to be a student in Chicana/o studies was a decision that came with seriousness and a desire to change the communities from which they came. Comprehending the contexts from which these students have risen can help educators gain deeper knowledge about the selection of an academic program and how students may become introduced to studying Chicana/o studies. The findings from this study, as they relate to research question one, revealed that choosing Chicana/o studies as an academic program in college originated from a set of experiences that depict how the coresearchers stumbled upon their home away from home.

Introductory Experiences

Introducing students to the field of Chicana/o studies was vital for students to learn from the collection of knowledge housed in the Chicana/o studies department. Among the eight coresearchers who participated in this study it was determined that each of them had a specific experience that directly contributed to their enrollment as students in Chicana/o studies. For example, introductory experiences included meeting a Chicana/o professor,

taking their first Chicana/o studies course, participating in social activism, personal development and life occurrences, and other events that lead to the desire for a personal connection to learning. Because of Chicana/o studies being a relatively small field in American higher education it is important to be mindful of the intense personal commitment students in this study possessed when they arrived at the footsteps of the department. This seriousness is unique because these students are driven by community change and a desire for personal growth and not purely for personal economic gain. If introductory experiences were absent then they would have possibly been left alone along the pathway to find their passions in life somewhere else. Chicana/o studies for these students was the catalyst for providing them with further learning and higher aspirations. Students somewhat appeared to see Chicana/o studies as a sort of haven or to put it more simply, a long lost home.

Whether from a sibling or a community college professor, it was the introduction to a student's passions that sparked a desire to learn more. Introductory experiences were perhaps the most influential because they lead to other experiences that sharpened students' goals and determination to earn a college degree. For example, Zoe was toward the end of his college education when I met him and was trying to find his passion in life before being shown the opportunities in Chicana/o studies. As earlier told, he had been getting into serious trouble in school and was looking for a way out of his destructive life path, which was filled with drug-dealing and not being a productive high school student. However, this did not hinder Zoe's longing for knowledge and increased learning in his life. His own introductory experience was described to me one afternoon when I first met Zoe and he was telling me about the things that changed in his world. One of the many contributions to Zoe's success was his faith and devotion to leading a purposeful life. He explained in the

following passage that he would probably not have ever been introduced to Chicana/o studies if it were not for the Church. His newfound faith set him in the right direction to earn a college degree and directly linked him with forthcoming experiences that brought him to where he is today.

> Well I started going to community college because I found Jesus. I know it sounds odd but it's a big part of the story. I had always been going to church, but I feel like I got a lot of encouragement from my church to be better and have morals. But I am not one of those pushy Jesus people, so no worries. So the church really encouraged me to get out of the gangs and get out of the continuation school. I woke up one day and realized that I needed to make my life right and go to college. I started by going to church in order to get my self in order before I tackled college and Chicano studies. (Zoe)

When I asked Zoe what he meant about getting his self in order he explained that it was not that he couldn't be a good student, but he had to be a good person first. For Zoe, becoming a good person was accomplished by his faith in Christianity, but it should go without mention that many venues provide people with the opportunity to make themselves a good person (whatever the term "good" may mean to people). Either way, the point is that Zoe's experiences show educators that aspirations are not always developed along traditional pathways. Additionally, while Zoe was not the model child, he still deserved and continues to deserve a second chance. Chicana/o studies may have been one of his second chances and it could not have come to him without a powerful introductory experience.

Zoe's experiences represent the other students in this study because each coresearcher faced a life experience that set them on the path they are on today. To further demonstrate, it

was the absence of a Chicana/o perspective in high school classed that fostered a longing for increased knowledge as it related to Chicanas/os in Pilar's life. Pilar started her college journey as a community college student and was introduced to Chicana/o history in one of her first college classes. It was during this class that Pilar came to the realization that Chicana/o history had been completely ignored in her high school studies. To further drive her frustration Pilar thought of how many Chicana/o students she went to school with who may have had no idea where they came from because of the school's failure to acknowledge Chicana/o historical perspectives. It left her wanting more.

> So then when I went to community college I took a course that fit my schedule and was exposed to this cool new history that I never knew existed because I never learned about it in high school [referring to Chicano history class she took in community college]. When I found out about this historical perspective I felt like I had to know everything now. (Pilar)

> As we have already heard from Pilar and Zoe, their academic lives were connected with their own personal questions and struggles. It is through these introductory experiences that students appeared to sharpen their interests and ambition in addition to exploring how they wanted to grow as a person. Anita, a student interested in a faculty career one day is a solid example of how students stumble upon learning that creates intense personal interests not found in other areas of study.

> I originally majored in Spanish and became involved in MEChA [*Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicano Aztlán*]. With the passing of time I eventually got involved in my first Chicano studies class. What was great about Chicano studies was that it was something to learn about me. It was very different than the Spanish program. In

Chicano studies they focus specifically on my people and our struggles. In Spanish it is more about Iberian Studies and not Chicano studies. I was able to connect with Chicana *Feministas* [Feminists] and writers. I longed to connect with this type of intellectualism. My first class was with Dr. Jimenez, a *mujer* [woman] who was the first woman to get tenure in Chicano studies. It was just an introductory class, but it was great and was exactly what I wanted at the time. As I took more and more classes in Chicano studies I eventually changed my major to be Chicano studies here at CSUF. (Anita)

Sofia also allows us to understand how a personal connection and social action related to the struggles of Chicana/o people introduced her to the field.

So when I was a first-year student I was taking my general education requirements and decided to take a Chicano studies class. It was a speech class, but from the professor I learned to advocate on social issues facing the Chicano community. I even participated in some protests to stop fee increases at the Cal State because it impacts Chicano students and it really pushed me to want to do more. But back to my class, our speeches in class had to be centered on social justice issues. I was so sucked in because I was learning about the struggle of my own people. (Sofia)

Introductory experiences are not universal, which makes this description somewhat unique in that it displays the process by which some students will stumble upon Chicana/o studies. However, what I have learned from these students and their reasons for involving themselves with Chicana/o studies is that Chicana/o studies is not a mainstream major for everyone. For these students to have been successful in their pursuit of a degree in Chicana/o studies required more than just wanting to go to college. It required a purpose for going to

college and viewing their education as a means to make a contribution to alleviating problems in their communities and the world.

Consciousness Development and Awareness

While consciousness development is not the sole focus of this study, it appeared as a highly salient factor in students' decision to major in Chicana/o studies. For that reason, it is important to explain what the students experienced to guide them toward increased awareness of the world around them and their location within such a world. Before describing students' consciousness it is appropriate to employ Freire's (1971) explanation of consciousness because his famous text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* was cited as required reading by each of the coresearcher's. In Freire's theory of critical consciousness, people are able to recognize the limit situations in the world around them and be able to pick out the political and social contradictions that exist to hold people back. According to Freire, by recognizing these limit situations it may turn silent voices into active voices. Further, consciousness is usually developed by the recognition of everyday occurrences that hold representations of oppression or inequality. For this group of students, the representations of the world around them showed that schooling and educational practices are not equal, that many problems are systemic, and that Chicana/o families have to sacrifice life and freedom for future generations to be successful. Most importantly, the coresearchers saw a role for themselves in alleviating the limit situations they had observed.

Ernesto, who speaks with a soft voice, but assertive tone, summed up the representation of consciousness and awareness among the coresearchers in this study when he spoke about his research on gangs as part of an undergraduate research fellowship. He

recognized the systemic nature of the problem and saw himself in a role of attempting to improve the situation.

> Gangs are good examples of how we see a group of criminalized individuals do things that they probably would not normally do if their situations were different. So I figure that if we can move away from blaming individuals for their problems and start blaming the systems that hold these students back we may be able to get more people into college. It is like we all think that the Civil Rights movement fixed everything, but it didn't. Our people are still in low-paying labor positions and not rising to the top of leadership in our local and national communities. I hope that my work can change these kinds of social problems so we don't look at people as wasted, but as having potential. Like I eventually want to study in the inner city schools. Out of every eight Chicanos that go to community college, only one transfers. So how is it that a lot for our students get into the education system, but do not finish? (Ernesto)

Further awareness of problems in the community were represented by two of the coresearchers, Anita and Sofia, who spoke directly about their unintended volunteerism as classroom translators growing up in the schools where the English language is privileged. They saw that not all students could understand the teachers and therefore were not learning at the same pace as English speaking students. We can only guess that they somehow recognized, at such an early age in elementary school, they had to help their peers so they did not fall behind in their studies. Either way, the two students saw an unequal learning environment and a role for themselves in the solution even in un-ideal circumstances.

> I would assist my teacher during recess with her younger students since she was Anglo-American and her Spanish skills were not that good. So I would volunteer

during school and after school to help her with the younger students who were still learning English. I volunteered to help the kids because I think they should be able to understand what the teacher was telling them. I really just wanted to help because so many kids have teachers who cannot speak Spanish and so I thought I could help out in that way. (Anita)

There were no resources for us in our neighborhood or school. I mean we would have to translate for other students what the teacher was saying into Spanish because some kids did not even know what the teacher was talking about. In retrospect, I see myself in a lot of the literature I read now as a student. I see the lack of resources to help students succeed. How do they expect us to make it? I mean I feel like I just got through and was lucky. (Sofia)

Zoe shared his experience about questioning why some students make it and others do not. He recognized a problem and saw himself as somewhat of a consequence of the problem. This recognition and awareness in Zoe lead him to start reading some of his brother's college books about Chicana/o studies.

I think that part of my consciousness about Chicano studies developed when I was a freshman or sophomore in high school because my older brother was starting to go to college and I picked up a couple of his books. He was taking some Chicano studies classes. And I listened to a band called Rage Against The Machine and it totally opened my eyes to a whole different light, shedding a whole different light on society and how things are really done. And I think the oppressive nature of the academic system within the high school kind of furnished this anti-establishment sentiment in me. And I think that that's a result of, like you said, having always felt that there

was something wrong, that there was a clear difference or distinction between people that live in one area of my town and people that live on the other side of town. Like why did I get to live next to a drug dealer? (Zoe)

Personal familial struggles contributed to the coresearchers' heightened awareness about the world and how their own social location was determined by the sacrifice from past generations of family members. This included each of the students being deeply aware of their own parents and family members struggles to have a student in college. Additionally, the students were aware of the historical location of their own family. This was demonstrated in their ability to discuss the roots and ties to Mexico and the various regions their families represented. This close connection to their personal and familial struggles helped determine what they wanted to do with their life and Chicana/o studies ended up being the field of study that helped to facilitate these aspirations. Anita, spoke about how she would discuss the immigration of her mother to the U.S. She spoke of how being aware of the sacrifice made by her mother had inspired her to do well in school in the hope that someday she would be able to give back by being an educated woman.

My mom would tell me about her coming here in the back of a truck. So I know that her journey was hard because she doesn't tell me everything that happened to her. She sacrificed herself for me to be here today. As a mujer [woman], she came here by herself to sacrifice herself in the name of her family. I always honor my mom in one way or another. I try to get good grades and scholarship to show my mom I am working hard. (Anita)

Genevieve discussed her recognition that her mother faced people who assumed a lot about her because she was a Mexican woman working as a custodian. Genevieve was able to make

herself conscious of the essentialization of Chicana/o people as solely Spanish speaking and quiet. In fact, behind her mother was a young daughter going to college and working to make life better for those around her.

> I would see how people would treat my mom and dad because they were Mexicans. I mean my mom would tell me that this one time she was cleaning a bathroom and this dorm girl came into the bathroom yelling at her in Spanish and my mom replied to her in English and the girl felt like so stupid because she assumed my mom only spoke Spanish when she really does not. I mean my mom also gets to that campus to clean at like three in the morning and I am here trying to get an education because I do not want people to treat me like that. My mom really wants me to achieve more than she did even though she is a very successful person, but you know, parents want there kids to do better than they did. (Genevieve)

The heightened awareness among coresearchers lead to their learning more about the depictions of reality they were witnessing. Whether it was from a book, a song, or a family member, one thing is certain in the context of these students. For them, Chicana/o studies was a platform to further develop their consciousness and achieve their goals in life. Their personal experiences and observations served as a source of inspiration these students used to decide on their academic plan of study in college.

Affirmation of Interests

Experiences that affirmed the interests of coresearchers in Chicana/o studies showed that Chicana/o studies was a place where people can be heard and valued. Perhaps these students are fortunate because they found Chicana/o studies as a place where they could be affirmed and have their intellectual interests welcomed. The department did not formally

facilitate such affirmation among the coresearchers, who were deciding at that time on whether they wanted to formalize their academic plans in Chicana/o studies. Rather, the students took initiative to learn more about the department and its offerings of both curriculum and faculty relationships to finally see Chicana/o studies as a place for them and their work. Zoe showed me that Chicana/o studies at CSUF was a department that would allow him to build off of his informal introductions to Chicana/o studies in high school and community college. For Zoe and the other students Chicana/o studies affirmed their interests to learn more based off of the small tastes they experienced as high school and community college students.

> I came to CSUF when I was 22 and I discovered that I could be part of the Chicano studies program. It was more of a choice of where I could go and not where do I want to go. Since CSUF had a Chicano studies department it was great. I would be able to be done in two years and build on my Chicano studies knowledge I brought with me from the community college, which was my goal at the time. For me, everything was going to be ok as long as I was in school and CSUF was a great choice because it gave me a chance. While I am very happy being here my choice in schools was impacted by my past experiences in school. I mean since I never went the traditional way to college I was impacted with minimal choices. However, I love learning and just wanted to be in school no matter what. (Zoe)

In addition to their intellectual aspirations of wanting to learn more about Chicana/o knowledge, coresearchers expressed a unique opportunity to combine social activism and academics in Chicana/o studies when deciding whether they wanted to major or minor in the departments. Genevieve aspires to be an international law attorney one day and saw her

learning in Chicana/o studies as a way to further facilitate such a goal. For her the department provided clarity of her professional goals.

> Yeah, I have just realized that it's a struggle to succeed in school and learning through Chicano studies has been able to allow me to see what I want to do with my life and work. I want to work in international law in order to help change the way we see Latino immigrants in this world. (Genevieve)

Zoe appreciated other fields of study in his education, but Chicana/o studies proved to be a place that would welcome his longing to challenge systemic problems in his world and practice a form of activism in his life.

> I like biology a lot too, but I am interested in becoming an activist or challenger to the system that holds people like me back. Chicano studies is a place that will let me know and do what I am passionate about. I want to know where oppression originates and Chicano studies is a place where I can explore these interesting ideas in my head. (Zoe)

Chicana/o studies was an academic space that helped connect students with their learning and professional goals. Since the department combined various topical areas of study for students they were able to offer students a common field of study. Whether they wanted to be a lawyer or a teacher, Chicana/o studies was shown to students that it can be a safe place where they can build on their interests and express themselves without fear of ridicule or misunderstandings. Frankee spoke about how the department represented a guide in her life. Whether obtaining letters of recommendation from professors or feeling more confident in classes, Frankee showed me that she decided to minor in the field because it challenged her to aspire higher and work harder.

For me Chicano studies is a place where you are pushed and feel so much in common with people and topics in the field. I feel like I can relate to the information and respond with more confidence because they speak to us about things I have already begun to question. The field motivates me to do well and try harder in my life and in my work. The professors are great and really push us students to seek higher educational aspirations. One of my professors is a lawyer and he is helping me by writing letters for my law school applications. He really supports me by pushing me beyond my bachelor's degree. He basically says that the bachelor's is not enough. That is what I really like about Chicano studies. (Frankee)

I went on to ask Frankee why she felt more comfortable in Chicana/o studies and she elaborated on why she decided to be a student in the department.

I feel like in Chicano Studies it is more comfortable, like we are all going through the same things with our families and work and stuff. Its kind of like we all can understand one another I would say. I feel welcome in Chicano Studies and like I belong more if you know what I mean. Its not like my other classes are horrible or anything, its just something is special about Chicano Studies. Its just I feel like this is something that can connect me to my culture and my ancestors with an emphasis on our people and that is what I want to get out of college and my career. Its good to learn and know about our heritage and how it can apply to our work. (Frankee)

Further, Ernesto also explained in simple terms that he feels more confident with expressing his personal and experiential knowledge about the world when he is in Chicana/o studies, "I mean, in Chicano studies I can really apply my own knowledge about the world and have it

be understood by my fellow students and faculty members, which feels good and makes me want to come back."

What can be taken away from this set of experiences among the coresearchers is an understanding that students felt they were heard and affirmed in Chicana/o studies during their early experiences with the department. The feelings of increased confidence and the affirmation of their goals and interest helped to factor in what was important for them when choosing to study in Chicana/o studies.

Personally Connecting to New Historical Perspectives

Coresearchers often spoke about connecting to their roots, or connecting with their people. Therefore, when the time came to choose a college degree program the personal connection to learning new historical perspectives contributed to students choosing Chicana/o studies. A personal connection to their learning was facilitated in the Chicana/o studies department through providing never before seen texts, media and classroom activities. However, when it was related to choosing Chicana/o studies these students expressed the desire to earn their education in a meaningful and personally enriching manner. Antonio often spoke to me about how he loved history and the story telling that was found in history. Because of this Antonio longed for increased Chicana/o-related historical knowledge in his academic pursuits when he arrived at CSUF. When I asked him what Chicana/o studies allowed him to do versus other majors at the time he was picking a program he responded that it was a department that would allow him to provide a new perspective to the historical representations of Chicanas/os.

For me I wanted more knowledge now and know how to ask questions about history.

Since my other major is history I have to provide the counter voice. I have to ask

'why has this happened or why has it happened this way?' It helps us to have multiple accounts of history. Its like there are three types of history: there's, our's and the truth. We need to know that ethnic studies has no clout and so we have to recognize that it was not until the 1960's that history began to be heard about our people. So its all the history before that we need to ask about because we didn't just show up in the 1960's. I think that is why I can provide history to my family and others from a different voice. I can provide more information about my people. For the most part, that is why I choose Chicano studies, to just make sure I am the counter-voice among people in my life, which majoring in Chicano studies would allow me to do. (Antonio)

Ignoring the historical contributions of Chicana/o people emerged as a poignant observation in the experiences of the coresearchers. It was often the most spoke about topic when I first met students because they had been experiencing education as a Chicana/o studies student, which was a discovery in each of their lives that contributed to their success. What I learned is that students often realized, once in Chicana/o studies, that so much history is ignored in the education system about Chicana/o people and their contributions to society. When the students were asked to reflect on why they choose Chicana/o studies each student spoke about their desire for new knowledge about Chicana/o people. Their teachers and schools' curriculum had ignored the inclusion of Chicana/o perspectives in the classroom and often were void of resources for students to pursue such knowledge. This created a thirst for new knowledge as it related to Chicana/o people.

I mean it [Chicana/o studies] brings to light so many unheard of theories and readings and histories about Chicanos. I think it is good because society has neglected to tell

the story of Chicano history and the struggle in this country for Chicanos. Its not
even like its overlooked or forgotten about, but in my opinion its neglected because it
is purposefully kept away from society to further marginalize us as a people. I mean,
to learn about Chicano studies is to learn about knowledge that is not understood or
known to many people. (Ernesto)

Pilar also noticed that her schooling was lacking in the Chicana/o studies perspective in the
curriculum. However, she noticed it as a more subtle lack of Chicana/o history and
knowledge.

For me, I did go to a high school that had a lot of history, but no emphasis on Chicano
history. I had a diverse school, but I didn't have any Chicano teachers to really
expose me to some of the professional and historical aspects of being Chicano.
(Pilar)

Overall, the coresearchers longed for increased learning and the addition of diverse
historical perspectives to their lexicons. A thirst for knowledge and its connection to their
own people is what was missing in their educational experiences prior to Chicana/o studies in
college. Anita expressed the seriousness that Chicana/o studies brings to her life and future
professional career when she discusses the importance of Chicana/o history in her learning.

The Chicano studies major plays a huge role in my life because first, it helps me put
labels onto concepts and experiences that I live in. It makes me a more educated
person and seriously consider the reasons for doing what I do. The Chicano studies
helps me pin-point what I can and cannot do in my life to change the community for
the better by understanding history and its impact on our lives. Like I can help out in
my local community at the schools for instance by helping garden, tutor, or assist in

other ways. Chicana/o studies was a place that would provide me with a clarification

of circumstances and the past. It has led me to learn more about the political and

social experiences of Chicanos that have shaped how I live today. (Anita)

For Genevieve, Chicana/o studies turned out to be an opportunity to reconnect with history

after growing tired and bored with the discipline. However, with a connection to history she

felt more inspired to learn more and work harder.

> When you are in classes you learn about things that I never learned before. I hate
>
> history, but in Chicano studies we learned a lot about history and because of that it
>
> was fun for me. It was great to learn about my people's history. Something intrigued
>
> me about Chicano studies and its connection to addressing injustice in the world. It
>
> pisses me off to learn about the problems Chicanos face and it makes me angry
>
> sometimes, but it drives me to work hard and do something about what I have learned
>
> about. (Genevieve)

Connecting with their historical roots and the idea of becoming a lifelong learner was

fostered in the Chicana/o studies department for the coresearchers in this study. Pilar showed

me that when students will commit to increased learning in their lives when excitement and

personal connections are made in relation to academic activities.

> Chicano studies really helped to provide me with various perspectives and more
>
> knowledge about Chicanos in this country and how we can work with this field of
>
> study to advance appreciation and contributions of the people in our community. You
>
> know, its like I can learn about the educational pipeline and feminista scholarship
>
> along side with other information like graduate education of Chicanos. Chicano
>
> studies has given me a life-long area of study I can call my own. (Pilar)

With new historical knowledge and a deeper sense of personally connecting to Chicana/o studies, coresearchers were left with the confidence to learn and direct their own intellectual activities. Personally connecting to their studies also helped students sharpen their own ability and desire to be a Chicana/o studies member. Since Chicana/o studies practices the work of connecting academia to the community it was important for students to see these connections in their own college education. When I asked Anita what it meant to be a Chicana in college she responded with an erudite perspetive.

> Being a Chicana to me means being socially and politically aware about your surroundings, the people you work with and about the passions you have to serve and improve your community. Standing up for our rights against things like budget cuts and other social problems means having to fight for what we have in order to help our little brothers and sisters who will come after us. I think it means being more consciously aware of issues in our community and among our people. It also means that we have to represent and connect with our pasts and history. I do connect to my indigenous roots in Mexico, but I am also Mestiza because I have existed between political and cultural borders my whole life here in the U. S. and to Mexico as well. (Anita)

Anita demonstrated to me that choosing to be a student of Chicana/o studies was not just about the students' own lives, but about how they can contribute to their own communities and help localize their personal understanding of the overwhelming and astronomical problems in our world. This critical awareness was found among each of the cresearchers and provides us with a preliminary understanding about how they approach their learning as college students.

Academic Factors Contributing to Chicana/o Student Success

This project sought to look at academic retention factors with a more in-depth and relational process guiding the exploration of experiences. The findings of this study take the understanding of academic contributions to student retention to a higher level because they reveal what student success looks like from the margins of the academy in Chicana/o studies. In this section I hope to communicate that Chicana/o studies can be a unique and varied learning opportunity for students. Particularly, the findings of this study revealed a set of four factors that directly responded to the second research question, which asked: What academic factors in a Chicana/o studies department preclude or enhance Chicana/o student retention (i.e., pedagogy or teaching styles, curriculum, special academic programs, academic validation, student development, etc.)? The three academic factors contributing to student retention were: (1) experiences of academic affirmation, (2) positive contributions to academic development, (3) and encountering negative and hostile learning environments. Together they form a representation of what academic factors contributed to their retention and academic learning in higher education.

What was revealing about this particular case of Chicana/o studies students was the fact that they were walking away from Chicana/o studies as changed individuals who were inspired and determined to bring a more critical perspective to our world. They were articulate beyond my assumptions with respect to their reading, vocabulary, and analysis of major issues in today's world. In fact, there were times when I felt I was speaking to Chicana/o studies experts (because I was) and it was refreshing to engage with students in such a way. Each of the eight students gave credit to their academic experiences in Chicana/o studies as being the catalyst for their increased intellect and self-confidence. They

told me stories of support, challenge and even difficulty. It is from these experiences that we can further understand what factors in Chicana/o studies contributed to the coresearchers' collective and individual successes.

The professors played a major role in this academic development among coresearchers. Chicana/o studies professors were the facilitators, or sometimes even the deterrents, of student success in each of the thre factors I discuss below. These factors were viewed by students as positive and necessary for success. Perhaps what was unique about this case of students was that their professors realted to them and their issues since each of the professors mentioned in this study were of some Latina/o ethnicity. Genevieve hinted at this relational and unique aspect of what it means to have a group of Latina/o professors.

> In Chicano studies the professors are like us and know that many of us are first-generation students and have to work harder to just be in the game and in Chicano studies they realize this about us and make that extra special effort to support us. (Genevieve)

This foundation of support and acceptance by faculty members was critical for the development of coresearchers and helped me to understand what it was like to be a Chicana/o student in Chicana/o studies.

Experiences of Academic Affirmation

The most prevalent finding in this study was that the department of Chicana/o studies was an affirming place for students to feel safe, supported and even challenged. They felt that they were valued as members of the academic community in Chicana/o studies and were worthy of making contributions to their learning and the learning of others. However, experiences of academic affirmation do not necessarily happen all of a sudden. Rather, it

was an intersection of multiple circumstances that lead to the following findings. Circumstances included experiencing professor assistance, seeing professors as people, classroom comfort, and development of educational aspirations. It was the combination of these experiences that lead to affirming their worth as students and more importantly as human beings.

Professor Assistance

Assistance from professors in Chicana/o studies was articulated by the coresearchers as consisting of one on one attention with respect to their writing, thinking, and future educational efforts. In fact, each of the students in this study said that they had connected with a professor more than once regarding their academic work or assignments. Professors made themselves available outside of class and during traditional office hours. They even provided access to students by making themselves available during class time and at campus events. It provided a combination of both formal and informal academic access to professors. The assistance was noticed by students and also mentioned as one of the most positive aspects of Chicana/o studies because of the connections students had formed with professors. A simple yet important example of professor assistance was with writing for a class assignment. When asked what helped him to improve, Zoe answered that it was his professor who invested in his academic ability

> Well I think I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to both things, but when it came to writing I kind of get hesitant and Professor Gomez really helped me improve. I mean Gomez recognized that I was working a lot and had troubles at home and how that impacted my ability to complete the work well. Gomez was really cool and understanding. I felt like he genuinely wanted me to be better. (Zoe)

Professor assistance was also experienced by students when they needed clarification or room to process questions they were pondering during their education. Professors proved to be a valuable point of reference for students because they were present. Anita showed how the availability and willingness of professors to help was important for her.

> I have always had good communication with Dr. Jimenez and always email her and visit her office hours for help or support on my work and questions I may be pondering in school. It really helps me clarify things so I can make a good argument, you know? She has always been there for me and I have never had a professor like her. She is one of my role models in the Chicano studies department because she is the kind of professor I want to be, but of course with my own spin on things. (Anita)

To further illustrate the assistance offered among professors, Sofia told me about what she thought the most positive thing in Chicana/o studies was when she spoke about the professors as a group of supportive and helpful people.

> Positives? Well for me, the majority of the faculty members in Chicano studies are very supportive, very open to you coming by and asking for help in case you need assistance with an essay or you want to clarify the lecture in class. Like I always would go visit professors to talk about readings we were exploring in class. That was always a point of great learning for me. And I always felt that everybody was very open in the courses too. So if a student wasn't sure about a topic or they just didn't know enough about anything from Aztec culture to your roots to the Chicago movement, the professors always helped people and didn't seem to make them feel stupid or dumb, you know? (Sofia)

As shown here, the assistance provided by professors included academic clarification, support with assignments, writing improvement, and support for future learning. Because of this connection and assistance from professors the students viewed them not as faculty, but as role models and collaborators in their academic development. It appears that without the assistance of professors the students would have had a tougher time staying connected to their learning and drive to earn a college degree.

Professors as People

The coresearchers in this study made consistent comments about the openness and personal nature of their professors. Viewing their professor as a person and not a sterile teaching agent was part of the warmth of Chicana/o studies with this case. Getting to know professors through their work, research, personal stories, or anecdotal stories in classrooms made students feel more safe and comfortable around their faculty members. Personal stories from professors are the obvious ways of viewing professors as people, but Zoe shares how a professor's work in research has the potential to show a different side of an instructor.

I think that more than anything at this level of my career or whatever, my academic career, I think that I actually do communicate on that journal or essay level so that when I'm reading something that a professor of mine has written, like I get to know them and I understand who they are just a little bit more. You know like Dr. Cabrales, I'm taking him for a class. And we've been over one of his essays that he published like in *Harvard Law Journal* or something like that. I got a really good sense of who he is. You know? Because he even mentioned it too. I mean he mentioned it himself that he doesn't really divulge a lot of himself in the classrooms, anything like that, personal issues. But that through his work, you know that's one of

the ways that we might actually see what kind of person he is and what he's about.

And it's true, you know it's true. I looked at his work and I saw, okay, this is who

this guy is and I like him. (Zoe)

Seeing a professor as a person with a story and experiences that make them human was part

of the demystification of the academy for these students allowing them to feel more

connected with their program. A common discussion I had with students dealt with the fact

that they perceived the professors to view students as colleagues or peers in the learning

process. Professors who shared teaching responsibilities with the students (i.e., leading

discussions, creating assignments), or recognized the varied interests in a classroom and not

just the professor were viewed as more collaborative rather than dominating. I turn to Zoe

who shared his impression of the professors as people when he responded to my question that

asked him to share why he thought he was close to the Chicana/o studies professors.

I think more than anything he just – he accepted the fact that maybe I was a peer and

not so much a student who is less than him. Or at least that my intrigue or interest in

the subject matter was on par with what his might be or something like that. So it

really helped me to personalize the teachers, you know all the teachers because I

would talk to him and others out of class and I didn't feel like they looked down on

me. (Zoe)

Additionally, students spoke about their professor sharing their personal struggles in

education. The professors' individual struggles humanized the faculty because students saw

them as having shared experiences or interests. Sharing experiences with professors showed

students that they could be successful and be a role model to students as well. Relating with

and viewing the professors as people also created a family-like environments that made

students feel free to express themselves honestly with the professors for the sake of assessing their abilities and needed improvements with their learning. Anita spoke to me about how she feels that connecting with female professors was important for her because of her feminist scholarly interests in Chicana/o studies. Like other coresearcher in this study, Anita related to one of her professors and shared how she saw herself in her role model. Connections were created with students and faculty because of these shared experiences.

> I look up to Doctora Jimenez because she is a first-generation mujer [woman] and is able to connect with me because she has a similar background as myself and also interested in Chicana feminism. She is a child of immigrants and from a rural farming town. Like, my family is also from a rural town. So we both have agricultural ties. Since we both liked school and were able to be students we had to fight the gender barriers presented to us as *mujeres* [women]. We both faced similar struggles with our families as mujeres. Sometimes it hard to get support from family and so we had to connect as Chicanas in our Chicano studies department. She is also a role model to me because she demonstrates what it looks like to be in academic life and also connect with the community. I look up to her because she makes herself available for the students and she cares about my progress in college. (Anita)

Antonio drives home the point that Anita made above. By professors connecting to students through their shared experiences caused him to feel more excited and interested about being in college and learning in class.

> They [the professors] give us more of their own life story about their family and how they grew up as a Hispanic. I mean we have three older professors and young professors, which makes it a good mix. We just get to connect with the professors

because they are open with us about their experiences, which makes classes more fun

and interesting. (Antonio)

Viewing or perceiving the professors who lead classes in Chicana/o studies as humans with

personal struggles and triumphs made connections possible for students. Students felt that

they actually knew their professors personally, which in some contexts is taboo. However, it

has proven to be an enriching source of learning for this case of students and shows educators

that the personalization of professors in formal learning environments can further engage

students in their learning. Perhaps what is most important is that coresearchers viewed their

professors as role models, which in turn contributed to their retention and success as

undergraduates.

Classroom Comfort

Comfort in the learning environment was an important component of the Chicana/o

studies case of coresearchers. Each of the eight coresearchers noted that their experiences in

Chicana/o studies classes felt safer and more comfortable when compared to experiences

outside of the department. Students felt an increased freedom to make statements and

opinions known to the peers while learning new material or engaging in reading assignments

during class. Genevieve shared how she felt more comfortable in Chicana/o studies classes

because of it feeling less judgmental.

I think that in Chicano studies we have a lot of discussion and commentary about the

lessons in class. It is not always lectures and is often more engaging than my other

classes. It makes me more comfortable expressing my opinion and saying what I am

thinking. I mean, it is easier to get involved in class when you are in Chicano studies

because you feel like you are more comfortable and able to connect and be wrong

without being penalized by the professor or other students. (Genevieve)

Sofia noted how she observed an increased level of openness between herself and her classmates in Chicana/o studies. Sofia explained to me that when students feel more comfortable then the learning is more productive. This was explained by showing that even when someone was not understanding something they were not scared to speak up and ask.

I always felt that myself and everybody else were very open in the courses. So if a

student wasn't sure about a topic or he just didn't know enough about anything from

Aztec culture to your roots to the Chicago movement, nobody was ever too shy to ask

what is this, what is that, or to express their opinion about stuff. It was like we all

knew we came to the subject matter from different perspectives and were patient with

one another to learn at different paces. (Sofia)

No matter the context, verbal contributions to the lessons and discussions in front of the instructor and other students is not always easy for every student. However, what was clear in this case was that a certain level of increased classroom comfort made students feel more secure and confident when it came to making worthy and valuable contributions to their learning and that of their peers. Feeling heard and more understood in class was also part of the classroom comfort. The sense that people will not make fun of someone or make them feel stupid was part of being heard as a Chicana/o studies student. This perception that they were being understood as members of their learning community contributed to the students sense of belonging in the department. Frankee shared how she felt everyone was more connected in Chicana/o studies, which made her feel more comfortable during class time.

I feel like in Chicano Studies it is more comfortable, like we are all going through the same things with our families and work and stuff. Its kind of like we all can understand one another I would say. I feel welcome in Chicano Studies and like I belong more if you know what I mean. Its not like my other classes are horrible or anything, its just something is special about Chicano Studies. We all get eachother and feel like we have lots in common. (Frankee)

Classroom comfort stood out as a salient and relevant contribution to the students academic experiences in Chicana/o studies. It tells us that classrooms are dynamic and fluid with the potential to inspire students to feel more comfortable sharing and contributing to their learning. Most importantly was that coresearchers felt they were worthy contributors to their academic community, which can directly lead to their increased confidence in the classroom and overall validation.

Development of Educational Aspirations

Understanding experiences of academic affirmation in this study included listening to students speak about how they felt the department of Chicana/o studies helped them to see their future beyond college. Developing students aspirations beyond the bachelor's degree specifically included encouraging students to pursue graduate or professional studies in various fields. For this case of coresearchers, all of who were first-generation college students, just getting a bachelor's degree seemed like a feat above the rest. Therefore, to experience a professor or fellow student encouraging them to reach higher resulted in feeling that they belonged and had a place in the academic arena.

Everyday someone would say that we all have to go to graduate school or advanced studies. They really wanted us to see ourselves beyond the bachelor's degree because

we had made it to this point and so many of us do not make it this far. We are the ones qualified to go higher. We really have to push ourselves. Our professors in Chicano studies are good examples because they have achieved the highest levels of education and came away from it alive and so I think that I could do it as well. It just feels right being here and I don't think I would have felt as much a part of college if it were not for the extra push from my professors in Chicano studies. (Frankee)

Additionally, students were allowed to experiment during their time as Chicana/o studies students to see what their own work can look like once they were done with college. For instance, there was a deep sense of giving back to the communities that propelled these students to higher learning in the first place. Faculty members supported the community-centered perspective of these students in the academic classroom by challenging them to think of ways in which they can develop their passions through applicable learning. Upon reflection of his connection to faculty members, Ernesto opened up about how he feels he is pushed to think of ways to give back to his community.

> I am very family-oriented with my professors. Like I feel like some of them are my friends and family members. Like my faculty mentor, Dr. Gomez, and I have a great relationship and he is like a father figure for me. He is my faculty champion. I like how he and the rest of the professors know us by name and not really just as a number or something. The most important thing is that they let us study what we are interested in and then ask us to think of ways that we can take what we have learned and use it to help the people who got us here like our family or neighborhood. Like, even in some classes we have to visit schools or local charities to see what the real-life work is all about. (Ernesto)

Logistically, the professors helped facilitate aspirational development because they were the ones who communicate that each of the students has potential to think big and be big. They helped students strategize about how to select graduate schools, apply and interview for programs, and also write recommendation letters for students. Coupled with this encouragement and push to think beyond college, professors also challenged students with high standards and expectations of excellence in the students' individual work. Students appreciated the push from professors because they said it made them feel that the faculty thought of them as capable and able.

> My Chicano studies professors were the closest to me and more supportive than anything. I mean they wrote grad school letters of recommendations, and letters for scholarships and fellowships. I was not always successful at every opportunity, but the fact they saw potential in me and challenged me more than other professors helped me feel I could go on to grad school. (Sofia)

Like Sofia, Frankee also felt more capable of going to graduate school after she connected with a professor who shared her passion for law and music and expressed to her that she too can be successful in law school. In addition to the aspirational development Frankee was also introduced to special resource programs just for people like herself.

> One of my professors is great because he wrote me a letter of recommendation for law school and he is a lawyer too. He always said that I would make a great lawyer, which is what I really want to do. Also, I am a singer and he is also a musician and a lawyer. So I relate a lot to him because we both want to be in law and be musicians. He introduced me to a lot of things that are available for minority groups and stuff. That was really helpful because a lot of what I found were resources for women and

> minorities who are applying to law school. It gave me a lot of help with essays, studying for exams and getting good letters. Without help from my professor it would not have worked out for me. (Frankee)

The educational aspirations of students were an important component of students feeling validated in their academic community. The professors served as role models and facilitators for students who wished to further their education. This proved to be a valuable consequence of connecting with accessible professors who cared and understood the specific contexts of their students and what it meant to be a first-generation college student considering advanced studies.

Positive Contributions to Chicana/o Students Academic Development

A student is expected to develop in multiple ways while in college. Individual learning styles, classroom contexts, curricula, professors and instructors, policy, class sizes, and time further complicate the development of students. The list can go on and on. In this study it was revealed that coresearchers saw their Chicana/o studies experiences contribute positively to their academic development. Whether it be from inspirational texts discovered in class, or acquiring new and understood knowledge, coreseacrhers in this study expressed the positive contributions to their academic development in four different ways: (1) inspirational learning, (2) increased acquisition of knowledge, (3) personal connection to learning, and (4) increased confidence. Together these four intersecting contributions left students with increased ability and proficiency, but even more important is that the students grew to know themselves a little better during the process.

Inspirational Learning

Coresearchers spoke of how so much of their learning was inspirational in Chicana/o studies. Their classes, curriculum, professors and acquiring new knowledge inspired students to learn more and do more with their life and education. Overall, students felt committed to giving back to their communities because of what they were learning as well as a drive to work toward being a more aware and altruistic individual. Genevieve helped to explain what inspirational learning in Chicana/o studies means.

> They [the professors] really care about the students and takes extra steps to help the students. That inspires me to continue wanting to serve our community and want to help the people who just need an extra push in the world. There is so much potential out there in the world. However, people just do not know how to get that potential into motion. I want to help them do that and grow to be a better person. (Genevieve)

Sometimes being inspired happened by chance and without intention from the professor. For Antonio it was his professor who helped to inspire him to always try and see potential in himself and the people around him. Instead of viewing his education as solely a personal endeavor, Antonio was inspired to see how his education can contribute to the world and not just himself.

> My first professor was Dr. Ranero and she opened my eyes to a lot more with regards to Chicano studies. She really let me know that when people tell us we can't do anything, she taught me that we can. *Si se puede* [yes we can]. She really inspired me and helped me see what my education can offer this world we live in. (Antonio)

Lessons learned from Chicana/o studies also have the potential to inspire students who are seeking a college degree. For the coresearchers in this study it was interaction with

professors, speakers and texts that taught them life lessons. For example, Ernesto shared how his time in Chicana/o studies inspired him to have a less selfish approach to the world.

> I need to remember that it is not about me or about my way of life. It is about my community, you know? I mean it should be a struggle to make life better for our people we exist among. I just remember Chicano studies as helping me open the door to be here today and that Chicano studies opened the door for me to make a difference. A speaker once told us that we are not the best and the brightest, we are the blessed and the fortunate. Now I need to figure out what I should do with being blessed and fortunate. I try to remember that and let it guide me into the future. (Ernesto)

Perhaps what was most poignant was that the inspirational learning experienced by coresearchers allowed them to see themselves as part of the solutions to societal ills. They were no longer viewing themselves as people who were oppressed, but rather as people who have the ability and will to change the lives of others for the better.

Acquisition of Knowledge

The acquisition of new and expanded knowledge during college was facilitated in the students' Chicana/o studies experiences. Their interactions with the Chicana/o studies department showed that students gained a great deal of knowledge during their studies. This newly acquired understanding of their personal identity, professional aspirations, and how to critically question and apply new ideas and perspectives helped them become more well-rounded people. Introductions to the varied Chicana/o scholarly, scientific, artistic, communal and familial contributions to the world allowed students to develop their own interpretation of new information and how they could contribute to society. Pilar explained

how the diversity among her Chicana/o studies professors allowed her to be exposed to various ways of thinking and being in the world. She even had to figure out a new way to channel all the new knowledge she was gaining.

> I have learned so much because I've been exposed to a lot of different theories and ways of thinking.   Like every professor kind of hits you up in a different way. Like they are, very intellectual, very health and global oriented. Professor Jimenez gives you like the women's perspective and kind of more like how we should be able to speak up in the world. She doesn't do a lot of lecturing. It's more of presentations and you kind of dialoguing with the rest of the class and that kind of thing. That really helps me gain new knowledge from other students too. And then there's Dr. Romero who is very old school so he gives you the old school history lesson in every lecture he does. And then there's Professor Preciado who kind of gives you the what's happening now in our community, like in our backyard, like what are we going to do about it sort of thing. He encourages us to ask how each of us will solve problems. Its not like the community college where I just kind of got the basic history, movement, and politics sort of thing. But here there are so many different topics in Chicano studies that I never even thought to explore. I started writing more because I was learning so much and had to do something with all the ideas in my head. (Pilar)

It was also observed among the coresearchers that the increased acquisition of knowledge during college lead to the development of a critical perspective toward social and community problems introduced to them during their studies. Antonio said that he felt more enlightened

in Chicana/o studies and because of it felt like he was able to provide an under-heard perspective in his learning environment.

> Chicana/o studies was an area in college that enlightened me more. It was like reading the books in classes really opened my eyes to things I had never learned about before. I started questioning a lot of the things we were reading in my other classes. I started saying things like 'it didn't really happen that way…' or 'from my perspective it looks like this…' The things that writers were writing about in history and other classes always provided me with a chance to ask the 'but what about this' questions. This is when I discovered that I had a more critical point of view, meaning that I was able to see things outside of the mainstream, like in my classes and stuff. (Antonio)

What was most inspiring is that each of the coresearchers in this study saw themselves as a worthy contributor to problem solving within the Chicana/o community including immigration, education, gangs and violence, politics, and the arts. Their newfound knowledge and awareness gave them the confidence to see themselves as part of social justice and social change. For example, I asked students to reflect on some of the important lessons they gained from Chicana/o studies. Antonio shared an experience he had in class and community projects.

> Well I really learned a lot of lessons from Dr. Romero. He is so easy to be around and a good teacher. You can't really tell what he is thinking, but at the same time he challenges us to think about things in a different way. Like he had us go to an elementary school with predominantly Mexican students and see what it was like to be a child in that school. It really helped me remember what sad conditions our

schools can be in, yet we have nowhere else for them to go. Part of the class was to

understand the needs of Chicano children and Dr. Romero really helped us

understand how little kids go through school nowadays. I hope that one day I can be

a good teacher for students in challenged schools. (Antonio)

Increasing one's knowledge is an obvious outcome of a college education. What made these

coresearchers interesting was that their increased knowledge in school lead to increases in

their personal connection to learning and increased confidence, which I discuss below.

Personal Connection to Learning

With increased knowledge from Chicana/o studies came a personal connection to

learning in the lives of coresearchers. Students were more interested in academic work when

they were able to find a personal connection to learning they were not finding in other classes

and departments on campus. Most importantly was their increased knowledge about

Chicanas/os in the world lead to them feeling their learning was relevant to themselves, their

families and the communities in which they resided. A personal connection to learning

included experiences that showed coresearchers how to live a Chicana/o-centered life, which

is what Zoe reflected on as a term titled *Chicanismo.*

Well, for a long time I have been working with what is called Chicanismo because so

many of us have been stripped of our indigenous roots or de-tribalized. We need to

change our situation in society and appreciate our history and contributions. We need

to reconnect with our roots and indigenous heritage. We have to try and find a way to

recognize that there are many of us and that we can have a voice if we come together.

Chicanismo is a political position that seeks more emancipatory circumstances for

Chicanos. We need to focus on what changes need to be made and how we can act

on those ideas. The theory of Chicanismo is only useful up to the point that action is required. In other words we have to blend our theory with real life. So you can't have Chicanismo without action or change. Chicanismo is a like a liberation kind of thing that makes Chicana/o perspectives central to any work. It really allows me to see myself in the work I do because I can relate more with the struggles we encounter. (Zoe)

Anita showed me that as a Chicana in higher education it was important for her to make personal connections with other women because she was interested in learning about the feminist scholarly movements and the application of feminist theory to education. For this reason she showed that role models have the potential to provide students with personal connections to their learning not found throughout higher education. This may be specially true for women in the academy.

With Dr. Jimenez I was able to take a class that introduced me to the educational pipeline issues that Chicanas face. We read *The Latina/o pathway to the Ph.D*. [Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura, 2006] I also knew an author of a chapter in that book. It was awesome that she introduced a book with someone I knew and was from where I grew up because it was a book by my people and about my people. I really looked up to her for all she has taught me. She introduced me to so many texts, which really opened my eyes to educational problems our community faces. She also was the one who inspired me to pursue higher education as my career. I even had her for a class that I took at CSUF. It was all about the *mujer* [woman] and the struggles she goes through. We learned about sexuality issues and what *mujeres* [women] face

when the encounter the machismo in our world. It really was a class that contributed

to my growth as an educator and as a *mujer* [woman]. (Anita)

Coresearchers also expressed an increased interest in current events and their relationship to

the Chicana/o community. Genevieve shows that even just a simple thing like what she

watches on the news can make her think of Chicana/o studies and how her people would

view triumph and tragedy played out on American news channels daily.

Well I guess I am just recently interested in my Mexican roots because of what I read

and hear in Chicana/o studies. Knowing about it makes me pay more attention to the

current events in today's world as it relates to Mexicans and also what I read in

newspapers and watch on television. (Genevieve)

Overall, a personal connection to learning kept students coming back for more. With the

personal connection to their lessons and relationships in school it was easy for them to see

themselves as part of the community of scholars who had ideas of their own. Perhaps what

was most worthy of understanding in this section is that a personal connection to learning

among students lead to them seeing their education and knowledge acquisition as relevant.

Increased Confidence

Increasing one's confidence was a product of the increased affirmation and

knowledge acquisition among coresearchers. The increase in confidence produced students

who were more likely to speak up in their Chicana/o studies classes, write papers, make

presentations, draw their own opinions and conclusions, and also engage with their

professors. Frankee shared how she believed the Chicana/o studies department made her feel

welcome and capable of doing good, which according to her was a sign that it was ok to

make mistakes and learn from them.

I guess I feel like I don't second-guess myself in Chicano studies like when I turn in a paper I am more confident than other places. I don't ask myself what I am talking about in Chicano studies and they always say its ok to be wrong or in need of more information. In my other classes I am always second guessing myself and feeling like I am not smart enough and in Chicano studies I feel like I am not going to be judged if I say the wrong thing. (Frankee)

In addition to contributing to their Chicana/o studies classes coresearchers felt that their learning in Chicana/o studies gave them more confidence to speak up in other classes where they may be the only one who is capable of making points that contribute knowledge about Chicana/o people and history. For example, Antonio spoke about how his increased confidence gave him the strength to challenge history lessons he was part of in his second major and felt that a Chicana/o perspective was necessary.

Chicana/o studies gives you more passion for the topic and helps us feel better and more confident to speak up in class and make a point. It is also good because we are able to defend ourselves in other classes outside of Chicano studies when someone says something wrong about Mexican history. (Antonio)

Writing is a skill necessary for success in college. The writing ability and proficiency of coresearchers improved according to students. For instance, they all felt more confident inserting their own voice in their academic work and also felt that their writing was worthy of being improved after working with their professors. Essentially, students saw value in writing and used their time with professors and fellow students to improve their writing skills. The students gave credit for their improvement because of the confidence they gained as a consequence of patient professors, multiple writing opportunities and personal

connection to their work. Additionally, for students in this study the increased confidence with their writing ability demystified the graduate school experience they would soon encounter. Sofia was off to graduate school soon after her participation in this study and she shared with me how she became more confident with her writing.

> Chicano studies always required a lot of reading and a lot of writing. But it was because of my mentors and my professors in Chicano studies that I really felt comfortable in writing and maturing in my writing. I could literally see paper by paper, or year by year, as my writing really matured because of the feedback they had given me and really the encouragement that they had given me to trust my own writing. I always felt like 'no, I don't have enough citations or, no, this isn't right or I'm not sure.' And I really was given confidence to trust my analysis, my opinion and my evaluation of readings, movies, discussions, everything, you name it. I just feel more confident in my writing and I just kind of progressed so that graduate school writing is not as intimidating now. (Sofia)

The increased confidence found among the coresearchers in this study showed that Chicana/o studies contributed to student development by making students see themselves as scholars, writers, analyzers, and speakers. What was inspiring about this contribution to the students retention was the fact that each students felt more comfortable being themselves and expressing themselves freely. Increasing their confidence is more of a product of previously discussed affirmation and knowledge acquisition that helped students see themselves as an expert, which is perhaps what inspires them to set goals higher than their college degree. Students' increased confidence showed students that they could be successful and have a voice that is heard by others.

Encountering Negative Academic Experiences

The findings up to this point provide us with a mainly positive and developmental collection of academic experiences among coresearchers. However, as in all academic settings there were certain findings that emerged from student stories and help provide a glimpse into some of the negative experiences among coreseachers. Specifically, the students in this study showed that there were three sets of experiences that help to see possible areas for improvement in the department of Chicana/o studies. While I was conducting my field-based interviews with students in their department I could not help but feel that what I was seeing and hearing from students were not complaints or anger, but rather they wished to tell me some of their setbacks in the department intent on making their area of learning better for future students. Therefore, these findings of negative academic experiences among the coresearchers should be seen as possible areas where academic can leaders learn about what their students faced and possibly change the way education is practiced at their institution.

There were two sets of emergent experiences from my interviews with coresearchers. These experiences represent the barriers students faced while enrolled as a Chicana/o studies student. Intimidation and self-doubt contradicts the aforementioned findings of increases in confidence. However, what I learned is that challenging environments caused students to second-guess themselves or doubt their abilities. With appropriate support and encouragement it may have been easier for students to work through their intimidation and self-doubt. Passive learning involved students experiencing classroom lessons and assignments in traditional methods such as lectures, writing research summaries, and lacking opportunities to provide their own analysis in class and in writing. Together these sets of

findings communicate a collection of experiencing negative academic environments. If not addressed or discussed further it is possible that retention may be impacted for future students.

Intimidation and Self-doubt

Coresearchers expressed a deep sense of commitment to making their academic home better for the students who come in the future. Therefore, students spoke clearly about times they felt as if they were not good enough or worried about the opinions of their professors. Specifically, the idea of intimidation came from students feeling that their professors, in certain circumstances, inserted themselves as the sole expert on topics covered during classes and lessons. For example, Zoe shared how an overwhelming sense of intimidation came over him when he was taking a class where the professor's own professional work and priorities dominated the class activities.

> A lot of my professors have a hard time, specifically Professor Preciado, taking them selves out of the equation. When it comes to teaching, they always are part of the teaching. Like in one class I was taking with Preciado where he set-up the class so that everyone in the class had to volunteer at the organizations he worked with. Everyone in the class has to do service learning in OC [Orange County, California, U.S.A.] and we read all of his published articles and papers. He put together a reader with readings from his own work. I don't know what to do with that. Like are we suppose to reach the same conclusions like he does? I mean if we disagree it is hard to ignore that we are disagreeing with him primarily and I always wondered if he would not like me if I disagreed with him. (Zoe)

Zoe's experience with intimidation is not intended to communicate that professors do not have expertise to offer a class. Also, it is not to say that the classroom is totally egalitarian either. Rather, what Zoe showed me was that when he faced a professor or situation where someone is seen as the all-knowing expert it may be harder for students to speak up. The sense of intimidation during class was also experienced by Ernesto when he was abruptly invalidated as a member of the learning environment.

> There was this one professor who always shut us down because he believed he knew better than we did. Whenever we were trying to engage and get a discussion going he would say something to shut us down and take control of the class. One time we had a guest come to visit our class and I asked a question during the presentation and he tried to embarrass me by making others think my questions were stupid by saying 'what a ridiculous question to ask.' I mean I think its great to challenge people in class, but he is not like that. He likes to be the expert and he is like following the banking model, you know. Instead of me learning and feeling like I was understanding the speaker I felt like I did something wrong. (Ernesto)

What is important to learn about experiencing intimidation, as Ernesto explained, is that instead of feeling a healthy challenge from his professor he felt as if he was doing something wrong or not capable of asking relevant questions. The intimidation experienced among coresearchers was important to note because it intersected with self-doubt.

Self-doubt came when students were intimidated by professors and afraid of their reactions to the students' individual work. Doubting themselves was problematic for this case of students because it often required additional time and effort to complete assignments.

For example, Antonio shared how he doubted the quality of his work because of the intimidation he felt with a certain professors.

> I have one specific professor named Dr. Gomez, but I am so afraid of him because he is so smart. For Gomez's class I was really intimidated at first and I am still a little bit to come degree. I guess I get intimidated because he is a highly intelligent person. I was intimidated because of my writing being critiqued by him and he gave me a lot of notes to improve upon. I stopped trusting that I could do the work and didn't finish the papers. I was feeling that I would not be on par you know what I mean? Like I was not good enough. (Antonio)

Unfortunately, because of his self-doubt Antonio turned in a late paper and received an incomplete in a class he enjoyed. The self-doubt is normal and healthy in certain low doses, but when the intimidation and self-doubt flood a student's learning it may become more of a barrier to student learning rather than developmental. Professors would be wise to consider the balance between themselves as the expert and facilitator of learning. Healthy challenges are important in learning and it is a delicate dance to provide validating and challenging support to students. However, the point here is that intimidation in high doses can lead to self-doubt and less confidence with individual students.

Passive Learning

Coresearchers experienced instances of passive learning in their academic lessons. Whether it was perceived out-of-date curriculum, need for more challenging classes, boring lecture-based classes, and perceived ease of certain assignments students felt they were just going through the motions sometimes. Passive learning would be explained in this case study as an circumstance where the student passively sits and received information from a

source with little to no opportunity to share their own analysis or application to experiential

knowledge in a students life. Freire (1971) famously referred to this type of learning as the

banking model where as students just open their brains and have information loaded into

them. These experiences were a turn-off, but not paralyzing to a student's development. In a

way these students were attempting to share with me the ideas they had for their department,

but sometimes they felt as if their voice did not matter because of the occasional passive

engagement found in their classes. The coresearchers saw their voices as not worthy of

contributing to contexts where they were required to just sit and listen or regurgitate facts

previously learned to demonstrate their learning. Anita shared how she sometimes felt bored

in her classes and wished for more invigorating activity.

> Well it depends, some professors are inspiring and some are boring and then there is
>
> everything else in between that. Some professors have a passive teaching style that is
>
> boring and hard to inspire. It is just lectures or no discussion with boring and un-
>
> updated material. When the lecture is dry with note taking and no interaction among
>
> the class it is a bad class, there is no collective among the class members. (Anita)

The sense that classes can lack a collective sense of learning demonstrated that passive

learning can lead students to change their goals or not see the value in what they are learning.

The idea that curriculum is not relevant or out-of-date is also troublesome. What students

need to feel is that what they are learning is needed and related to the world we all live in.

For example, Zoe shared how he could have taught himself some of the information in a

class because he felt the curriculum and research articles were irrelevant.

> I really feel out of place in his [professor] class because it is so basic and elementary.
>
> Like today we studied the states of Mexico and we had a worksheet. I felt like it was

kind of immature for us college students. I missed his class for several days and I

really didn't miss anything because it is so easy. There is this other girl named Lucy

who helped me get the notes I missed and she was like 'you didn't miss anything you

don't already know.' We discuss articles and they are dated from the 1990's and are

kind of old and out-dated. I know a lot of information in our class comes from census

information, but even that is somewhat out of date. (Zoe)

The passive learning experienced by the coresearchers shed light on some of the issues they

faced when it came to excitement about their studies. Students were exposed to situations in

which they were required to perform as a student or conform to the professor's ideas and

direction. Passive learning was a turn-off for students and what is learned from this set of

results is that the delivery and pedagogy of the professors in the classroom is quite possible

the most important opportunity to get students excited about their lessons and curriculum.

Social Factors Contributing to Chicana/o Student Success

What happens outside of the classroom or university is a vast and complicated world

for each human being. The eight coreseacrhers in this study are no exception to such a rule.

In fact, this dissertation does not even begin to enjoy the ability to provide in-depth and

detailed depictions of the students' individual lives outside of college. However, what I can

focus on in this section is that of their social and interpersonal interactions with individuals

and programs that contributed to the success of this case of students at CSUF. Therefore, the

final and third research question asked what social factors contributed to the retention of

Chicana/o studies students. With the theory of validation and model of student engagement

as my lens of analysis, I have focused my presentation of the data on the factors that

contributed to the students' educational development as people and members of society.

During my discussions and interactions with the coresearchers and Chicana/o studies department I observed many instances of students taking the initiative to improve their academic home—Chicana/o studies. Whether it was starting a focus group for student feedback or holding fundraisers, the department seemed alive and saturated with purpose. There is a deep sense of making sure that the future students, who will fill the chairs occupied by the coresearchers, embark on a journey in Chicana/o studies better than those who came before. It reminded me of how each student spoke of their parents wanting a life better than their own for their children. These students wanted a better life and better college experience than their own for the students who are being born at this moment.

During my time with coresearchers I observed many instances of students seeing what life is about and seeing how they fit into the world. It was as if they were just finding out what they were capable of in this life and that was magical. I cannot help but think of what Sofia shared about her finally believing in her ability to make a difference.

> I finally have enough courage and knowledge now to be a better person and become a great educator. I mean before college and when I first started college all I thought I was good at was being a good student. Now I see myself as more than a student. I see myself as a role model and as a mentor to other people and little ones in my family. I can finally say that I have work to do and that people are counting on me. For some reason it changed the way I work with others and see the world. I developed into a person who is confident and willing to do what I have to do to make life better for myself and others. (Sofia)

Discovering a sense of self is also a part of interacting with the world around us. For the eight students in this study it was a journey to discover something new about one's self. This changed them and made them a personal success no matter how their schooling turned out.

The relationships held by the coresearchers also contributed to their social success in college. The relationships of support and encouragement told students that they were able to be a successful college student and complete their aspiration of an earned college degree. Whether it was a student affairs professional or an old teacher from elementary school, the personal and supportive relationships in the students' lives served as an anchor and source of inspiration. It is important for students to foster relationships with mentors outside of their education. This is because they can use these relationships to sort through difficult life issues or confusion about their professional future.

Having introduced the salient social points found during this study, it is appropriate to represent the narratives of students in the three social factors that impacted the retention of these Chicana/o studies majors. These three factors are not mutually exclusive and interacted with one another throughout the tenure of the coresearchers at CSUF. The three factors are explained below and listed as: (1) community building, (2) discovering and developing sense of self, and (3) supportive personal relationships.

Community Building

Peer support networks or peer groups are commonly understood as powerful educational contributions to success (e.g, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez, 2011). However, what the coresearchers showed me in this study was that developing a peer group for support, inspiration, connection, inclusion and fun is hard work. In fact it is not an inherent system created for every college student. In fact, for these students they had to build

their own peer group for support and social connections. That is why I refer to their initiative to connect and struggle along side peers as community building. It recognizes that these students had to make their own community if such a community was to exist. It recognizes the work they put into their education to develop supportive students who believe in them and root for them. The reason social factors like community building in educational settings is important to understand because learning does not just take place inside a classroom or from speaking with a professor. The coreseachers in this study showed that they put just as much effort into their work and goals outside of the classroom as they did inside the classroom. Therefore, community building was a factor that contributed to the students' educational continuation throughout their bachelor's degree program. Antonio is an example of how his community allowed him to feel confident enough to share his ideas with campus administrators in the hope of shaping important components of the Chicana/o studies community. It demonstrated how students care greatly for their academic community and will do their part to make it better and improve its reality. At the heart of Antonio's comments was a desire to improve the environment and services available for students.

This last year my mentor became in charge of the CRC, the Chicano Resource Center. And I helped her start some things up. I appreciated the faith she had in me and it really made me feel like I could share ideas to add value to the CRC. Like, I was always going in there and I'd give her some suggestions on how to make money. There are some department that have little stores where they sell small little snacks, water and punches and stuff like that. I told her about that. I mentioned that in the humanities building in the fourth floor, the geography lounge, they have an honor store. You know they have a sign and box where you put your money in and it's all

honor system. And I said, 'Why don't you do something like that in the CRC?'
(Antonio)

Community building was shown to be grounded in the understanding among coresearchers as a method to build peer support for themselves as individuals, but also to develop connections that could impact future generations of Chicana/o studies students. That is why community was built for these Chicana/o studies majors by organizing and producing outreach programs and special events intended on helping to provide college access for young high school students. Ernesto showed that his desire to be part of the community was shaped by him wanting to be involved with activities that were meaningful and valuable to his growth and that of others.

> One of the main activities that we do every year in MEChA is the high school conference where we bring students from underrepresented communities to Cal State Fullerton. We expose them to college and give them workshops on history, culture, politics, admission requirements, motivational speakers, and experiences from college students, etcetera. That's my favorite event. I like outreaching to the community, but on the educational level. It seems more meaningful to me and makes me get life lessons I cannot learn in the classroom. Plus it feels good to have an understanding of college and help share it with others. (Ernesto)

Additionally, planning events for younger students helped the coresearchers see themselves as leaders and as having others count on them to be present and aware. When asked about what activities she has learned from the most, Sofia shared her desire to help families with the college transition process.

I think what sticks out is our *Dia de la Familia* [Family Day] that we coordinate with the Mesa Cooperative [student organization]. It is a more meaningful orientation program for our new students who have Latino families and programs and panels meant for that audience and with English and Spanish languages. It is a special way of outreaching to the parents in our communities who end up struggling about their student coming to college because they cannot understand the materials shared with college students sometime. It helps us give back to our students and community by letting them know their families are welcome, but also saying that the parents care and are capable of sharing college as a positive experience in their life. (Sofia)

These activities allowed students to work together to accomplish goals, coordinate logistics, design and implement educational programming, sharpen their collaborative work ethic, manage budgets, and create a fun and active life for themselves. It also began the younger generations commitment to going to college one day and knowing that there are people who are expecting them and supporting them. For the coresearchers this work involved serving as a role model or mentor for future students as a responsibility of their membership in the Chicana/o studies community at CSUF. Genevieve further demonstrated how her involvement with her sorority gave her the validation as a member of her academic community to assist in the development of younger students.

I really enjoy that now I can help future students. It makes me feel like I belong here. Like in my sorority I got to educate the new girls that came in so it's like these fresh little girls that come and they kind of don't know anything about sorority anyways and you get to teach them everything. You kind of have some sort of wisdom after having done it yourself, you know? It's a lot of social and serious stuff, but at the

same time it teaches you to grow up. I mean it taught me to grow up and realize I can

be a contributor to something bigger than me. (Genevieve)

Clearly, serving as a role model and coach in her sorority helped give Genevieve confidence to lead others and help with collaborative goals in her sorority.

Community building also included participation in groups that were supportive and reassuring for students who struggle with pull-factors in higher education like family, work and other external responsibilities that take from educational focus. Two groups stood out as highlighted examples of how powerful support groups assisted in the community building process for coresearchers. Frankee, a single mother, was in need of a group to connect with and bond with. She was hesitant of most student groups because her life made little time for activities. Rather, she was looking for connection during college. She found her group in *Mujeres* (Women), which is housed out of the Women's Center at CSUF.

It has been very reassuring that I am not the only one who is going through stuff like

a child at home and working. Its like, good to know that people are struggling like I

am in Chicano studies and those are the types of people I wanted to be around so that

I could understand I am not alone. Because of this common ground I have met a lot

of great people. I joined a group called *Mujeres* [Women]. I still go out with those

girls and we use our time to talk about school, work and our family lives. One of our

girls was just accepted to USC [University of Southern California] and so we all pull

for one another. This semester I was not able to attend the meetings because of a time

conflict, but they still keep in touch with me and let me know of the happenings in the

group. This group helped me here at CSUF and I feel that people are more serious

with one another and my friends and I really take things seriously in school and life. I

have made friendships here in Chicano studies and philosophy that I will have

forever. (Frankee)

I asked Frankee to further explain how this group shared the same struggles as her and how

that helped her in college.

It [*Mujeres*] is actually housed in the Women's studies department for Latinas to get

together and talk about different topics. Whether it was stress, or time management

or balancing life, school, work and family, we came together as supportive people,

but also to listen and help when needed. It was awesome because you get to meet

other great women who are Latinas who all have different life stories. It was our

escape and place to confide in one another and get whatever we want out of the

group. It allowed me to face another day and move forward with my education and

life goals. I felt included for the first time. (Frankee)

Inclusion was an obvious component to creating community for coresearchers like Frankee.

Furthermore, Sofia was intent on finding ways to connect with fellow students for support

because she felt the desire to know that other people are sacrificing like her to be in college.

The shared struggles and bonding over similar life circumstances proved to be an important

aspect of building community in Chicana/o studies. Outside of the classroom they were

among the diverse population and outside of the safety of their Chicana/o studies curriculum

and professors. That is why so many students tried hard to connect with other Latina/o

members of the college community.

In many ways support comes from a lot of places like family, work, professors and all

the others. In addition to my family, my peers made a huge difference for me pushing

through school. I mean I have my fellow Latinos who also had to work and come to

school just like me. It makes me feel better knowing there are people who also have

to make life changes in order to be in college. And also I think that sometimes it is

easy to feel singled out as the Latina girl, but in Chicano studies I had my fellow

students who were sharing the struggle with me. It just feels better sometimes to be

around your peers and think of them as caring about how you do in school. I have my

own little city here in Chicano studies. (Sofia)

Sofia further explained the support she had as a Latina in college from a group she was a

member of and valued greatly during college—*Hermanas Unidas* [United Sisters].

I also have my fellow *hermanas* [sisters] in *Hermanas Unidas* [United Sisters, student

organization]. They are really supportive of me and my goals in school. I also was

able to bond with students in that organization and that helped to motivate me to

change the world. It reminds me that my peers are also sharing in the fight for change

and we all want to help. We share a lot of experiences even though we are all unique

in our own way. I hope other students are able to find the connections I found there

in *Hermanas Unidas*. (Sofia)

Clearly, themes of inclusion and validation were present in the motivations behind students'

initiatives to create a community that would allow them to learn, grow and feel a sense of

belonging. This community sustained students because it allowed them to process and

contemplate all of the changes happening during their college life. If it were not for the

community I am afraid these students would have faced isolation and feelings of being left

out. However, what I found was that these students played a major and primary role in their

college success outside of the classroom.

Developing and Discovering Sense of Self

Developing one's sense of self, or getting to know one's self is a never-ending journey in life. The academic learning and validation experiences by coresearchers afforded them the opportunity to think more deeply about their abilities, worldview and role in society. By involving themselves in various work opportunities or interacting with people on a deeply personal level, students were more attuned with their abilities and sense of who they are as people after being a Chicana/o studies student. Activities that helped to promote the development of sense of self among coresearchers included involvement in their community and campus with service programs, activism, research groups, and student leadership opportunities. These activities then contributed to the students experiences of discovering the purpose of their life, find out their passions and determination to goal attainment.

Sofia showed that her education in Chicana/o studies had resulted in clarity of purpose and professional goals in her life. Her experience of discovering that education is her life's calling gave her something to make better because of her passion.

They [Chicana/o studies and student organizations] made me re-affirm my desire to earn my higher education master's degree and help alleviate the under-education of Latinos in America. I think that I can help with this social problem and I need to get my masters degree and work for this issue. I have goals and understand the politics of education, history, Chicanos, law, government, and so much more because of Chicano studies. I don't know when you get to the point of knowing what you want to do, but for me it has come now at the end of my college experience and realizing that I obtained my education and can feel empowered to do more than just rely on my

hands and body to make a living. I am here because of the struggle and sacrifice of my ancestors and Chicano studies has taught me to understand that. (Sofia)

Sofia's awareness of her social position in the world serves to create action in her life, which is a powerful consequence of her college degree. It is apparent that her experience as a Chicana/o studies student helped her to be a better person and more oriented to the needs of the people who are like her in American education.

Ernesto also had great experiences in his Chicana/o studies department that impacted his life outside of the classroom. Even though he was a tutor inside the classroom he still earned larger life lesions from his teaching experience. He learned to view the world from a more patient perspective and discovered what he wants to work toward in his career.

Aside from the study session and sitting in class, I tutor here. Like I tutor in history, English, essentially anything in the humanities I tutor. A lot of the times it's like students who are speaking English as a second language. They come in with papers and you have to correct them and sit down and look at the grammar. And not only does that help me with my grammar. But I've also become more understanding of people from different experiences. Like, okay, we can't sit there and judge people who speak a different language. Just because they don't speak English isn't a reason for us to think of them as unintelligent and that is why I want to be a professor someday and work to make others understand that knowing multiple languages is a good thing in school. It's the whole Mexican argument like well you're dumb because you speak Spanish. You know? I am really passionate about this issue and believe that I need to do this work to survive and feel fulfilled. Who would have

thought I would think this way just from meeting students in the food court to discuss

class papers. (Ernesto)

Perhaps what was most apparent in my discussions with coresearchers about discovering

themselves in college was my sense that students began to see themselves as part of a bigger

picture and that they were not the only person to consider in their decision-making. This

demonstrates a developed maturity and clarity of purpose in their lives. For instance, through

her involvement as a parent leader at her son's school, Frankee was able to understand that

her education would benefit more than just herself. The other mothers at her son's school

and her son himself would benefit from Frankee's hard work. This was a driving factor

behind Frankee's worldview that education is intended to help more than an individual.

> Yeah, and I am trying to even get involved with my son's school PTA [Parent
>
> Teacher Association]. I mean I was involved with activities like face painting and
>
> dancing with so much help from my own family who get involved with my son's
>
> school. I also like meeting other moms who want to advocate for their students and
>
> so I think I have more fun being involved with him and his school. I also notice I
>
> have information and perspective to offer others because of my academic
>
> development. I just realize that my life is more than being about me and includes
>
> supporting my son and making his life happiness and success my number one purpose
>
> in life. Getting my education will help him because then he can always say that he
>
> comes from a family with a college-educated mother. (Frankee)

Students were able to process their learning in Chicana/o studies and have the opportunity to

share their new knowledge or perspectives about the world with others outside of their

academic setting. The coresearchers showed that this process of moving beyond the

academy helped to clarify their sense of self and purpose in life. As seen through these examples, it was the application of their learning to their own personal worldview that proved developmental and vital to their academic success.

Supportive Personal Relationships

The coresearchers expressed a deep commitment to maintaining supportive personal relationships outside of their academic interactions inside the classroom and with professors. These relationships contributed to students' success because they provided students with mentors, supportive family, friends, and role models. Without these personal relationships students expressed concern over whether they would even be in college. This is because the relationships of support expressed to me during this project revealed that supportive agents were able to affirm the students' abilities to achieve success in college and helps make their experience exciting.   Most importantly, students felt their supportive relationships helped to make them better people and thus inspired them to do more and aspire to do more with their life. It is intentional that this section is not written about having mentors since it is clear that mentors are key to success for college students. However, the discussion should be broadened because one does not need to be a mentor to provide support and advise to a student. For instance, Anita showed that friends and peers are capable of pushing each other to work hard and make life decisions that lead to fulfillment and love.

> I think a couple of supportive people have been my best friends Jessica and Jose. They are the friends who have been there for me as I have gone through school and personally have helped me with my life and making me a better person. There is also Hope who is my friend from Chicano studies and MEChA. The four of us have been there for one another and pushing each other to be better and to grow. We always

hold each other accountable for one another and I think they will be my friends

forever. They have really shown that we can be supportive of one another

emotionally and professionally. We all came at the same time and went through the

same struggles as Chicano studies majors and will come out of it together. We are

bonded and without them I would never had made it. They really just taught me that

friends care about my success just as much as my family and professors do. (Anita)

What was clear from coresearchers is that supportive agents were shown to be patient people

in the lives of students who saw students as capable and worthy. In fact, several students

thought about past teachers and adults that had been patient enough to show them that school

and service are important life lessons. For Zoe, a professor from the community college saw

potential in Zoe and had the patience to work through some of his difficulties he came to

college with given his past discrepancies in high school and the community.

Well there's my advisor that I wanted to mention that made me recognize my

potential after only seeing myself as a drug dealer and troublemaker. Without her I

would have been thought of as a loser and she was the first person that make me feel

like I could be a successful person—whatever successful means. She's a really

inspiring person. It's like every time I was around her I felt like I was – like

something important was happening to make me better. (Zoe)

Supportive personal relationships were also shown to be honest and constructive in

order for students to develop a personal security that allowed them to gain enough confidence

to work through college's challenges and difficulties. Several students mentioned one

special advisor at CSUF who also advised student organizations on campus. Ernesto

explained that what this advisor does is make students feel like someone is looking out for them and is invested in their success as individuals.

> She really helped counsel us and she really worried about her students. She always stressed 'you're a student first, you're a student first.' She helped us out in our personal lives too by being there in the night or morning when we thought we could not make it any longer. Like she was a family marriage counselor so she knows how to counsel people, which helped because I think it is normal to doubt myself and every time I doubted myself I would speak with her and feel so much more supported and cared for. (Ernesto)

Anita took her relationship with the same advisor as a familial relationship where her advisor served as her academic mother, who proved to be an important initiative that students like Anita take. It shows that students want supportive relationships and need people to show that they are still capable even if they are not the smartest student or highest performing.

> I think a most influential and supportive person in my life is my advisor, who is my EOP counselor and mentor, but also my boss for my job on campus. She wears lots of hats [figuratively], but the hat I love the most is that she is my academic mom. I don't remember who told me this, but I remember being told to find academic parents on campus that can look after you and mentor you. They are people who have wisdom and experience with going through what I am going through right now as I try to earn my college degree. My mentor is like my academic mom in this sense. She has really helped me grow as a person who is emotionally open and able to live a purposeful life. I want to say that of course I have my mother, but she is my

academic mom because she knows all the politics on campus and helps me get

through all this madness we call college. (Anita)

Supportive relationships also came from siblings who encouraged and pushed students to see

beyond their years in college as having potential for more growth, service and learning.

Frankee shared how she relied on her sister throughout college to support her and kick her

into gear when she felt college was not worth her time.

My sister has been in my life and always has been close in my life. She always writes

emails and calls me. She works as a counselor and went to NYU [New York

University] and UCLA [University of California Los Angeles]. I mean as a first-

generation college student she accomplished so much and helps so many people. I

sometimes question what I want to do in my life and sometimes I think it would be

better to just go work and not get my bachelor's. She is always there to kick me in

the butt and tell me that if I don't finish school she will be disappointed. So she

always tells me how she wanted to quit so much, but had to do well in order to have a

better life down the road, you know. She always reminds me of my son too and how

he relates to my education. I mean if I have my education then maybe my son will be

more able to get his college education as well someday. So she is my person who

tells me how it is, but she is someone I listen too and someone who can be brutally

honest with me about things without it turning into a fight. I am not going to quit or

anything, but sometimes you need someone who is cheering for you. (Frankee)

The students showed that support in their non-academic lives came from a variety of

individuals and the lesson here is that supportive personal relationships are a key factor to

creating the drive and desire for college completion. Society should have open ideas about

what a supportive person does for someone. It is not just a pre-defined role for certain people. For instance, what is learned in this study is that supportive personal relationships can exist between institutional agents, family members, friends, or past teachers and role models. What was revealed here was that students need honest and supportive individuals who believe in life and the ability of their college student. Having these supportive agents in their life let them see how their education was important and how they can help serve others in the world because of their achievements.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to further understand and explore the retention factors contributing to the development and anticipated college completion of a case of Chicana/o studies students working on their bachelor's degrees. Ideally, what has been presented in the findings of this study is that Chicana/o studies was shown to be a validating and challenging learning environment that took steps to work with students as colleagues and future members of the community capable of accomplishing improvement in the lives of Chicana/o people. The findings were analyzed as separate research questions and explored the reasons for studying in Chicana/o studies and understanding the factors at play in the experiences of the coresearchers.

Understanding the motivations of the coresearchers to become a student in Chicana/o studies can help to inform higher education and other community members of some of the factors that contributed to students' decisions to major in a particular field of study. That is why several reasons for selecting Chicana/o studies as a major emerged to paint a picture of intention and feelings of inclusion. The coreseachers revealed a set of experiences that allowed them to decide that Chicana/o studies would be their home away from home.

Reasons for this selection among the coresearchers included introductory experiences, consciousness development and awareness, affirmation of interests, and acquiring new historical perspectives. These reasons intersected with each student and demonstrated a purposeful and driven group of coreseacrhers who were clear about what they wanted to do with their life and how they were going to get there. Additionally, understanding the reasons students chose Chicana/o studies can help unveil some of the preliminary academic and social factors in the department that impacted the students in this study.

Academic experiences in Chicana/o studies contributing to the success of students were vast and interactive, meaning that students shared a process of learning in the department that was more cyclical than linear. The academic factors found to contribute to success were experiences of academic affirmation, positive contributions to academic development, and encountering negative academic experiences. Experiences of academic affirmation included students receiving assistance from professors, building relationships with professors as people, feeling comfortable and safe in the classroom, and developing future aspirations after college. For the eight students in this study, this process was mainly facilitated by faculty members, who allowed students to feel close to their instructors and supported by their department. The positive contributions to students' academic development included inspirational learning, increased acquisition of knowledge, personally connecting to their lessons, and increasing their confidence. Encountering negative academic experiences included intimidation and self-doubt, and encountering passive learning environments among coresearchers. These negative experiences did not derail the coresearchers, but had the potential to paralyze their development.

Finally, the social experiences of students outside of the classroom allowed for their personal and interpersonal development. People outside of their education demonstrated belief and confidence in the coresearchers' individual abilities to do well and succeed in life, which proved vital to student validation as capable and worthy people. Three specific factors were revealed from the data about the social factors at play. First, community building included students possessing the initiative to create support networks, social groups, students organization, community outreach events and research groups as a way to provide learning and living that gave fulfillment to students. Their drive to give back to younger generations motivated their desire to build stronger communities at CSUF and beyond. Second, discovering and developing a sense of self also resulted from the data. Coreseachers were given the opportunity through interactions with other people to learn what their passions were and what the purpose of their lives would be. Perhaps discovering your self and purpose of life is part of the human condition and happens to many people. However, these students discovered such important aspects of their life because of their lessons with Chicana/o studies and their ability to take such lessons outside of the university. This resulted in applying what they learned to adverse realities of the world or problems they see in themselves. Either way, they were inspired to have purpose and understand what they were capable as people. Discovering that they had the potential to help others proved to be important to their drive as a college student. Finally, as stated earlier, supportive personal relationships facilitated the personal growth of coreseacrhers. Support and encouragement to work hard and serve others allowed students to see themselves as part of a whole. Whether it was a sibling, former teacher, or friend, students were supported and encouraged to strive for

excellence and it was this support and challenge from their personal relationships that helped students learn such lessons.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I need to remember that it is not about me or about my way of life. It is about my community. It is about a struggle to make a better life for our people (Ernesto, coresearcher)

We have arrived at the final chapter of this study when the narratives of Chicana/o coresearchers can be tied together to bring about practical meaning and recommendations for future work with student retention in higher education. Overall, this study has brought us to a deeper understanding of the retention factors impacting the college journey of eight undergraduate students studying in Chicana/o studies at CSUF. Their perspectives and experiences are only as useful as my ability to translate their stories into real and tangible steps toward action. Therefore, in this chapter I would like to share the three main overarching themes I interpret as representing the entire collection of data gathered in this study: (1) validation of the whole student, (2) relational learning, and (3) engaging and safe academic environments. Together these three themes represent the model of Chicana/o student retention in Chicana/o studies. Conceptually, the model can be employed as a guide to assist with the facilitation of academic experiences that serve to retain students and develop their academic and social abilities. After grounding the model in past research I will present a set of implications and recommendations to assist practitioners at all levels with learning how the model can be translated into action. Finally, I will close with a reflection on this work and how my experience as the researcher impacted my own learning and perspectives on student retention in higher education.

### Model of Chicana/o Student Retention in Chicana/o studies

This study employed two theoretical perspectives in higher education as the framework for understanding the retention factors at play in Chicana/o studies. First, the

theory of validation (Rendón, 1994) allowed me to understand student experiences by hearing the practices of validation in and out of the classroom. This also included listening to the invalidating experiences of students in order to gain insight and meaning based on students feeling worthy and included in their academic community. Second, the model of student engagement (Nora, 2003) helped me take into account some of the factors that contribute to retention and the processes students move through while earning an undergraduate degree. According to Nora's model, goal determination, pull factors, cognitive and non-cognitive learning, goal determination, and the institutional commitment of students all contribute to the retention and eventual completion of a college degree. Together, these two theories allowed me to interpret student retention at a deeper level and provided me with a lens to examine the interview data.

My analysis of the data and interpretation has resulted in three main themes: (1) validation of the whole student, (2) relational learning, and (3) engaging and safe academic environments. Together these three themes tie together the in-depth findings of this study and also advance our current interpretations of validation theory and the model of student engagement to be applicable for more localized contexts. I have arranged these three themes into the model of Chicana/o student retention in Chicana/o studies to help conceptualize the practices employed to assist successful students like those featured in this study. I believe the model provides a clear and inclusive representation of each coresearcher's journey and the factors at play in promoting their successes. Additionally, the model allows professionals to adopt a process that is intended to promote the facilitation of increased student success in higher education. I explain each theme below and connect them to past research.

Figure 6.1: Model of Chicana/o Student Retention in Chicana/o Studies.
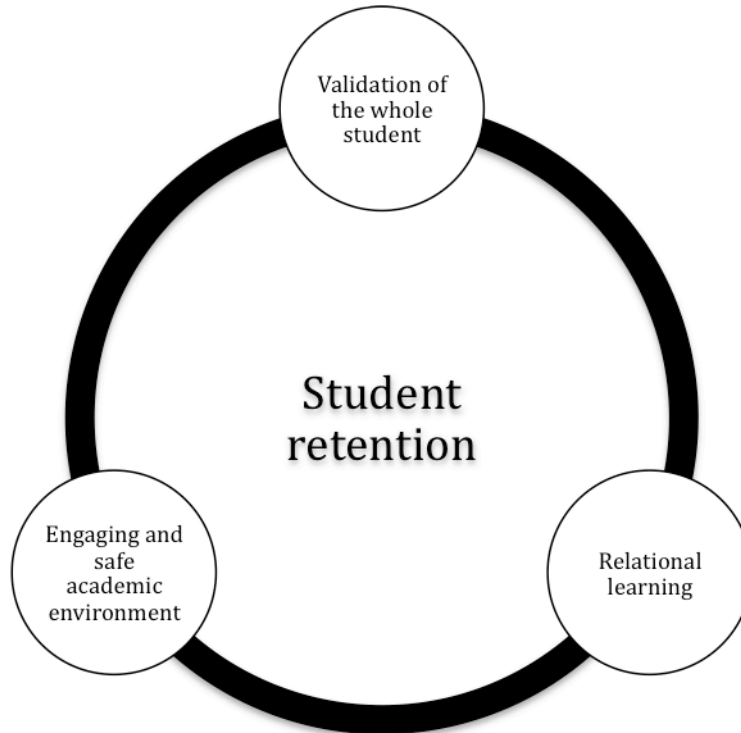
Validation of the Whole Student

       The validation of coresearchers was the most interesting and most substantiated

theme that emerged from the data in this study and confirms Rendón's validation theory

(1994). However, this study evolved her past work and demonstrated some of the

consequences of a department and its ability to validate students inside and outside of the

classroom. Validation of Chicana/o students in Chicana/o studies showed that affirming a

student lead to increased confidence and individual learning. For example, because of the

extra time her professors gave to assist with writing improvement, Sofia was able to notice

her own increase in confidence.

Chicano studies always required a lot of reading and a lot of writing. But it was because of my mentors and my professors in Chicano studies that I really felt comfortable in writing and maturing in my writing. I could literally see paper by paper, or year by year, as my writing really matured because of the feedback they had given me. (Sofia)

Validation was shown to be most successful when formalized and institutionalized into the practices of departmental agents like the professors in Chicana/o studies at CSUF seen in this case. Students were exposed to professors who were pedagogues intent on treating students as experts and not solely as learners. Together, their actions as a department represent the potential of reframing the capabilities of students and believing in them to produce high quality academic work. In turn, students were sent signals that the issues they cared for mattered and deserved the energy of the student and professor. The high expectations communicated by professors helped students realize they were cared for and accountable to people other than themselves. The accountability to others was a consequence of validating a student's interests and created a healthy pressure to reach higher and run faster. The idea that students are capable learners and members of the academic community confirm past research, which showed utilizing pedagogy that is less competitive and more relational has the potential to deliver messages of welcome and worth to underrepresented students like Chicanas/os (Brown, 2001; Gandara, 2005; Seymour & Hewitt, 1997, Rendón, 1994, 2002, 2009). Higher education professionals can learn from this style of interacting with students and see that students need to feel affirmed in their learning and told that they are expected to achieve excellence, but with the encouragement and support of others. This contradicts the competitive and Euro-centric models of higher education I described in chapter two that

encourages competitive learning, expert-learner paradigms and passive pedagogy (i.e.,

Acuña, 1998, 2007; Casso, 1975; Freire, 1971; hooks, 2003; Olguin, 1991, Rendón, 2009;

Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso 2006).

Students in this study spoke of the many fluid aspects of Chicana/o studies classes,

which allowed students to pursue academic activity of interest to them and allowed them to

make their learning relevant. In chapter five I described how the findings in this study

revealed that students were validated by the prospect of Chicana/o studies as an academic

place where they could study their own community and culture. This proved to be a

powerful component of learning. These validating classroom interactions made their

education culturally relevant and substantiated past literature on cultural relevancy in

education. Specifically, ideas from Ladson-Billing's (1995) work defined "culturally

relevant" teaching as a relative and contextually based form of teaching that meets three

criteria: (1) culturally relevant teaching must develop a student academically, (2) culturally

relevant teaching must value and nurture cultural competencies and capital, and (3) culturally

relevant teaching must develop a student's critical consciousness or ability to critique

personal, social and political systems that impact their lives and communities. Together with

their professors, students invested more in their learning when they were validated by the

cultural relevancy of their lessons.

Validation is important in academia, especially for underrepresented groups, because

of the alienation and isolation that can possibly disrupt their college education (Acland &

Azmi, 1998; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Yosso, 2006). When students asked why they

studied in Chicana/o studies they overwhelmingly told stories of how they were affirmed as

learners and future professionals interested in ideas of change. To demonstrate, Genevieve

and Zoe spoke about their feelings of validation while deciding to study in Chicana/o studies. It was seen as a place where they could become activists and not merely professionals, which Zoe made clear when he said, "I like biology a lot too, but I am interested in becoming an activist or challenger to the system that holds people like me back."

College meant more to coresearchers in this study than securing future economic security and they were looking for someone or something to affirm and formalize these interests. Chicana/o studies turned out to be that place for students. They were validated by the opportunity to steer their own educational journey instead of being told what to study and what to think. These data meant that students felt recognized in their department. They understood their goals and ideas to be valid and worthy of consideration. This has been shown in the literature to be rare in that many academic settings (e.g., engineering and science) are saturated with directives that can lead to invalidating and hostile learning environments for underrepresented students like hostile comments from professors or classroom spaces intended to reinforce competition in the classroom (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Vasquez, 2007). Perhaps, this study shows what can happen when teaching and learning in higher education are thought of and practiced differently.

I asked for coresearchers to explain the reasons they chose to earn a college degree in Chicana/o studies and they overwhelming described the department as a home away from home with warm and welcoming institutional agents (i.e., faculty). Individual students can interpret this welcoming atmosphere differently, but the students in this study felt their experiential knowledge would be formalized and accepted as worthy starting points for their individual development. The mere opportunity to study topics and historical events that were

meaningful lead to validation among students and contributed to their ability to move through college and develop future goals and educational aspirations. Chicana/o studies sent the signal that what students go through and how they see the world is acceptable in the academic arena and something that should be seen as an asset and not a deficit in one's life. The validation in Chicana/o studies demonstrated in this research helped to paint a picture of Chicana/o student success. The stories of affirming experiences should inspire those in power to consider the practices demonstrated in this study and how they can improve student retention.

Relational Learning

This work revealed that relational learning was a standout characteristic in Chicana/o studies. The relational climate allowed students and faculty members to genuinely get to know one another and understand the struggles that go along with attending college and aspiring to earn a college degree. This did not always happen in a typical location or setting like a classroom, but went beyond the academy into personal relationships of support and mentorship from professors. For instance, Ernesto was so connected to one of his professors, Dr. Gomez, that he was the person Ernesto turned to when he found out his girlfriend had become pregnant.

> When I found out my girlfriend was pregnant I was really stressed out and overwhelmed with the amount of pressure I felt. I turned to Dr. Gomez for support because he was the type of person who had demonstrated to me that he would help me see that my life would turn out ok and that I would finish college. I was so worried that I wouldn't be able to finish school and have to go to work right away.

He cared enough and I felt like he was a person who would give good advice. He is just so honest about things. (Ernesto)

Further, the coresearchers revealed they were never asked to assimilate to CSUF and were not under the impression that institutional agents were requiring them to abandon their cultural interests and aspirations to work in the community. In fact, coresearchers told stories about how they developed supportive social and academic relationships because of their connection to Chicana/o studies at CSUF. Professors provided knowledge and academic support that fostered relationships with students founded on care and interest. Students also developed powerful relationships with one another through student organizations, student support networks, and community involvement. All of these factors in Chicana/o studies helped to enable a sense of relational learning among students and faculty.

In the case of the coresearchers and Chicana/o studies in this study, relational learning allowed professors and students to reveal personal experiences, knowledge, and opinions during class discussions, writings or other learning activities. Instead of going through a course where no attention was given to the fellow participants, Chicana/o studies classes demonstrated that it was ok to get personal. It was ok to reveal personal information that helped to situate the subjective and contemplative components of learning so often missing in higher education (Rendón, 2009). The act of learning in Chicana/o studies was less of a performance because relational interactions lead to trust being built among students and professors. Therefore, relational learning transcended the expert-learner binary and helped students see their academic development as a collaborative process interdependent on other people no matter title or status.

As discussed in chapter two, retention studies have often focused on the separation and integration model of retention in higher education (Tinto, 1987). Tinto is among the most widely cited when it comes to this approach. However, since Tinto, scholars have called for more inclusive retention models that allow for a student's learning environment to embrace their cultural, familial, and communal connections (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009; Rendón, et al., 2000, Yosso, 2006). Higher education must not ask students to give up all they know to assimilate into a mainstream academic culture. Rather their difference should be embraced and used as a starting point for relational learning.

Student support networks also demonstrated the importance of relational learning for coresearchers. Each student was able to identify one, if not multiple peers who served as supportive agents during their education. They were not only able to identify students and groups which were meaningful in their life, but they were able to tell specific stories about how their relationships with fellow students lead to increased engagement in their learning. Frankee spoke about how she felt supported and cared for because of the relationships she developed in a student group at CSUF for Latinas called *Mujeres* (Women). According to Frankee, "If it were not for the support I found in this group I would not have made it through school. They believed in me and were the ones telling me I could do it." Examples of peer support networks are widely cited in the literature on student retention (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Hurtado, & Ponjuan, 2005; Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007; Vasquez, 2007). This study confirmed that peers support networks are an important component to retaining Chicana/o studies students and also that relations among students were crucial to their wellbeing. Overall, students may be able to learn more about

themselves because they may be among fellow peers who provide a comfortable and safe environment where peers can share common experiences (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004).   Moreover, relational learning can be fostered through openness to engage with people in different positions of power and influence, but what was most important about relational learning was that students felt heard and understood.

Engaging and Safe Academic Environments

Engaging and safe academic environments were revealed in the Chicana/o studies department. This meant that coresearchers were more comfortable making statements about their opinions and analysis during course discussions without fear of backlash or judgment from others. It also meant that students were comfortable to take risks with their learning because of their belief that professors welcomed such risks and would not punish students for trying new ideas and developing their analytical skills. The interactions with professors and fellow students during activities and reading discussions also showed students they had a lot in common with one another in that many of them were first-generation college students intimidated by the overwhelming sense that only people with so called " correct answers" are the ones worthy of participating in course learning. Rather, it was the challenge from professors in Chicana/o studies to push oneself to think critically and not feel pressured to answer correctly. What was safe about Chicana/o studies classes was that there were no right answers and only multiple answers. The faculty focused on creating welcoming spaces of permission and inclusion to help bring out multiple perspectives from students. These data confirm past research that stated diverse teaching and learning styles, and environments responsive to diverse cultural orientations can be a motivator for success in higher education (Acuña, 2007; Brown, 2001). These components were vital to student validation and

engagement in college because they finally realized that a dualist approach to education was no longer useful and that an adoption of more fluid and multiple perspectives held greater value.

Additionally, the data revealed that students in Chicana/o studies classes felt as if they were also teachers to fellow students. Feeling confident enough to correct fellow students or challenge assumptions without paralyzing one another demonstrated a more democratic and mature way of learning in the classroom. Antonio substantiated this point when he spoke about his role as both student and teacher during classes.

> I feel like my Chicana/o studies courses are more free and more mature. People do not get as offended if people say controversial things. I mean, when I hear students say something crazy or risky I like to always challenge them to think deeply about what they are saying. What people don't realize is that I challenge other students to test my own ideas. So in a way we are all taking risks in class and I do not always feel comfortable enough to do that in my other classes. (Antonio)

Instead of basing class discussion and activities on proving one's self as smart enough or worthy enough for high grades, safe and engaging classes in Chicana/o studies demonstrated democratic tendencies, which helped show students they had a role to play in class. Success would not be achieved by passively attending courses with little to no interaction. bell hooks (2003) spoke about democratic education when she wrote that discussion and dialogue were important components to a safe and engaging learning space. Community in the classroom was her way of showing that a course environment does not need to be authoritative and regimented to embody high quality and intellectual development. Rather, a free space of openness and willingness to engage in difficult topics was more

important for students than getting all the information needed to pass the next test (hooks, 2003). Instead, students should be judged on their contributions to the community of students and not on their individual ability to remember important facts and concepts from lectures.   Past research also confirmed that safe and engaging classrooms are important to underrepresented students who may feel they have no voice or are invisible to mainstream student culture (Solarzano & Yosso, 2001). Underrepresented students need to feel as if they are heard and recognized.

Limitations and Strengths

As stated in chapter one, I aimed to develop a study that would assist policy-makers, practitioners and administrators in understanding how to design programming and college-level learning environments that can aid in the retention of Chicana/o students seeking a bachelor's degree. However, limitations exist in this study and are to be considered by anyone interested in adopting policies, procedures and programs based on the data in this study. One of the main limitations of this study is that I based my findings and conclusions on a case of eight students who I worked with closely for over a year. These students represent a collective experience of Chicana/o students in Chicana/o studies at CSUF, but in no way represent an essentialized reality for all Chicana/o people—consistent with the methodology and purpose of this study. The experiences depicted in this study are to be used as a qualified representation of the retention factors contributing to student success as told through the eyes of the coresearchers.

Another limitation of this study was the setting of the research. The setting of this study was highly specific and took place in the Chicana/o studies department at CSUF. This department is one of only a few fully-sanctioned Chicana/o studies departments in the nation.

Therefore, the people, experiences and programs depicted in this study only speak to the departmental context depicted in this report. These findings do not translate to other Chicana/o studies departments and should not be treated as such. Faculty, curriculum and student relationships all contributed to the retention and success of students in this case, but under different contexts the results may have been different.

A strength of this study was that it was conducted with a relational methodology allowing myself as the researcher to be part of the meaning making. I was an insider with these students by having studied at CSUF and identifying as a Chicana/o college student (although I did not study in Chicana/o studies). I was not a sterile interviewer who avoided personal disclosures or opinions. My openness and understanding of the obstacles Chicana/o students encounter in higher education helped coresearchers see me as an ally who cared for their stories and experiences as Chicana/o studies majors and minors. This is a strength of my work because any objective measures like surveying or directed interviewing would have not allowed such meaning-making with students. I believe that my role as interviewer and insider helped to elicit the discussion and narrative needed to gain deep insight into the experiences of students. The time needed to gain an understanding of these students' experiences resulted in more in-depth data and deeper understanding of the context, all of which contributed to the strength of this study.

Implications

The findings in this study can better inform higher education administrators, practitioners and policy-makers about the struggles and triumphs Chicana/o students encounter when attempting to earn a college degree. The fact that this study was set in a Chicana/o studies department makes it even more compelling given that this context is not

highly understood and may benefit from recognition of its contributions to student success and retention in higher education. This is especially useful with students like Chicana/o students who may maneuver higher education differently than mainstream college-goers.

The results in this study showed that Chicana/o students are highly sophisticated thinkers having experienced or observed oppression in their families, local communities, and the world. Their heightened sense of consciousness allow higher education to learn that students come to college with noble intentions of learning more about social problems and finding a role for themselves in alleviating such struggles. It may be wise to incorporate these ideas into discussions around selection of majors and reason's students choose to attend college. Further, the academic and social factors described in this study depict a higher education environment where underrepresented students felt they belonged to the academic world and were worthy contributors to its survival and strength. Therefore, a major implication from this work is that the Chicana/o students are not always interacting with their university or college as a person who feels left out. These students demonstrated the empowerment and success that can occur when students feel that they belong and are considered productive members of the academic community.

Additionally, this study showed readers that the role of faculty in higher education does not always have to be as sole expert or carrier of knowledge. Rather, this study showed the potential for learning when students and faculty members share the responsibilities of learning as experts and learners. Students took ownership in their classes and assignments. They also engaged with faculty members to improve, address personal life issues, and seek mentorship. On the other end, there were professors available to meet students and contribute to the facilitation of their learning. Professors in this study saw students as

colleagues and students were more confident and eager to contribute. They were able to share more in class, feel comfortable reaching out to professors, and commit themselves to improving the department for future generations. When students were treated and seen as experts they acted accordingly. When students were treated as subordinate learners they acted as such. The implication here is that when we challenge ourselves to think about college learning in a different way we may stumble across highly capable students who just need validation.

Locally, this study can be valuable for the CSUF Chicana/o studies department. Students were honest in their assessments of teaching styles, activities, interactions with institutional agents, curriculum, classrooms, policies, student activities and much more. The Chicana/o studies department may want to employ this information as an in-depth case study analysis of their entire operation as seen through the eyes of the students. It is an invaluable student perspective for the department to gain insights into how they can improve their weaknesses and expand their strengths.

Finally, I believe the implications of this study go beyond the walls of higher education audiences. Ideally, with the correct outreach and presentation this research may have the potential to inform Chicana/o communities about what college can be and what students can expect from a college education. Instead of it being a daunting and highly stressful place it may be helpful to show the findings in this study as demystifying the academic world for those who see it as detached from their own lives. We can learn from the students in this study that experience and desire to make a difference matter more than future donations to the alumni association or gains in personal material wealth. Overall, what can be learned from this research is that Chicana/o students are not lazy and unwilling to do the

work deemed necessary for the awarding of a college degree. However, they are people who have intelligence, inclusive worldviews and an overwhelming desire to express appreciation for their heritage and desire to employ their education as a means to help others in their life.

Recommendations

The following set of recommendations stem from my work with the coresearchers in this study and our meaning-making that arose from their individual narratives. The recommendations presented here are offered as a starting point for various audiences, but should always be adjusted to fit with local and contextual realities. Suggesting future courses of action allows this work to begin its translation to reality and the creation of affirming academic spaces and the increase in participation of underrepresented students in American higher education.

Recommendations for Higher Education Faculty

The faculty members portrayed in this study were people who went against the norm and viewed their students as colleagues. This required a higher level of belief in student ability, and a teaching philosophy that invited students' experiential knowledge into the learning environment. Retaining students involved the inclusion of student perspectives in the creation of learning opportunities. Therefore, faculty members can approach teaching with a more relational and personal style. Utilizing class time to share student experiences or opinions is a way to foster classroom comfort as described earlier in chapter five. Faculty can develop relationships with students and not be afraid to learn about students' individual passions, anxieties, fears, problems, and interests. Professors can invite students to attend a conference together, conduct research with one another, have coffee, take a walk around campus, create book clubs or writing clubs, share past college experiences with students,

advise a student group, invite students to serve on committees, recognize students in front of others, ask about a student's progress in other courses, or offer assistance. The idea is that every professor can figure in some intentional practices of validation if they are willing to be mindful of their power and influence over students. Students have opportunities presented to them from professors that have the potential to inspire and ignite. I can personally attest to the fact that the only reason I came graduate school was because a professor told me I was capable and welcome in the academy. Without this professor's validation I would have graduated from college thinking that my bachelor's degree was the last step.

Instructors can foster safe and engaging learning environments by helping students see themselves as experts. Professors who see their students as experts created more confidence in students, which in turn produced higher levels of classroom interaction and discussion. One professor, Dr. Gomez, gave an assignment to students that required them to present a piece of academic literature and then teach the class about what they had learned. The students were required to facilitate a discussion and present additional information that would add to the class topic. Professors can create methods of teaching that actually turn teaching responsibilities over to the students.

Another recommendation to faculty would be to reconsider the idea that they are the sole expert on any given topic or discipline. This may cause dissonance with many in the academy, but we must work toward a more fluid understanding of what it means to be a professor and more importantly, a teacher. This is not to say that professors are not highly skilled, knowledgeable, well-read, inquisitive and erudite minds. However, they can employ their wisdom and present themselves as facilitators of learning rather than just a giver of information to be consumed. For instance, instead of telling students what to read for class, a

professor can present appropriate options for students to select on their own. As seen in this study, this practice can help students make personal connections to their learning and inspire future study. For example, Dr. Romero would assign students a community location to work with and then require students to write a paper and teach a class section on what they learned at their particular site. This is an example of how faculty members can facilitate development by presenting opportunities for learning outside of the classroom and beyond the faculty—in addition to formalized instruction. In chapter five, Pilar spoke about how her work at a legal law center in Dr. Romero's class was a catalyst for her activism and drive to go to graduate school one day implying that students are capable of inspiring themselves to learn and do more in their life. Faculty can help students see they are capable and successful.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Administrators

While this study was set in an academic department, student affairs administrators have the potential to influence the retention of Chicana/o students based on this study. Student affairs administrators can continue the endless and often under-recognized work of collaborating with academics to create experiences outside of the classroom that connect to the learning inside the classroom. Specifically, student affairs administrators can learn from Anita in this study and her discussion of seeking an academic mother. She had come to college and remembered being told during high school that she would have to find an academic mother if she was to succeed. She would need support and constructive criticism to make it through college and grow into an educated and professional Chicana. She found her academic mother in an advisor and supervisor at her on-campus job. This relationship helped Anita seek out opportunities like a research fellowship, conference presentations, campus activism, student organization involvement, and graduate school admissions. Her

advisor and mentor showed her how to connect her learning to her life and aspirations.
Student affairs professionals should work closely with other departments to help facilitate
opportunities to mentor and guide students from the classroom and into their professional
lives. This can include increasing outreach about graduate school opportunities, community
volunteerism, advocating for service learning opportunities, formal and informal mentoring,
social events on campus for students to engage with university personnel, and student
organization advising, to name but a few. Either way, student affairs professionals can adopt
practices that communicate to students that they have people available to support them and
assist them with the navigation through college just like an academic mother—or father.

Recommendations for Policy

Policy-makers are given a highly qualified understanding of student retention to draw
upon at their institutions with this study. Two specific recommendations come to mind with
respect to policy and this study. First, the professors in this study were employed in a
university where service and teaching were highly valued and rewarded components to being
a member of the faculty. This is quite different from major research institutions that place
considerable value on a professor's ability to secure external research funding, and publish
research no matter what their teaching and service ability may be at the time. What is
learned from this study is that when professors are rewarded for teaching and service great
things happen. Students in this study engaged frequently with their professors, participated
in campus life, demonstrated excellence in their studies, and aspired to continue their higher
learning after graduation. This was accomplished because the professors were willing, able
and supported in their work to develop students and not solely their research agendas.
Research will always be important, but teaching is just as important. Policy-makers can

design directives that give professors the opportunity to participate in more engaged teaching practices and not be punished for this kind of work when their tenure review comes about.

Second, students in this study were able to access institutional resources with relative ease because their professors and student affairs administrators were diligent and intentional about helping students connect to institutional resources and community involvement. Often resources are scattered throughout a university and it is the student's responsibility to locate and utilize these resources. However, in this study institutional agents were able to assist students with policy, advising, student activities, financial aid, personal counseling services, support networks, and professional opportunities. Simply put, students were able to navigate the institution because of the collaborations between university offices and the Chicana/o studies department.   It is as if the institution and the student met each other half way and shared the responsibility of connecting students with the institution. For this reason, policy can be developed that encourages cross-campus collaboration when working with retention issues. Policy can direct these resources to students instead of simply offering them, which in turn can assist with making the navigation of higher education less stressful and more centralized for student convenience and easy access.

Recommendations for Chicana/o Studies at CSUF

Coresearchers in this study made consistent reference to their desire to help improve the Chicana/o studies department for future students. They also said that while there is outreach to students there is minimal inclusion of students in the governing of the department. This has begun to change with a new student organization for Chicana/o studies students. However, the department would benefit from remaining tuned in to the students' concerns and suggestive improvements to the department, its classes, activities, and image

across campus. More advanced students can mentor younger students in the department to tend to the future graduates, and the department can make an effort to include students in their decision-making. While individual acts of validation and retention were evident in this study, the department can continue this positive characteristic of their department through institutionalizing practices that work.

Additionally, this report is an in-depth exploration of the factors in Chicana/o studies that contributed to the retention of their students. It is a case study specifically grounded in their students and their department. I would recommend that the department utilize the narratives of their students to improve the overall well being of the department. If not, than at least they have sufficient data to defend their work and development of Chicana/o studies graduates. This report serves to record the good that has been done in the department, the lives it has changed, and the improvements it will make.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study was set-up to gain understanding and not generalizations about being a Chicana/o college student. The goals were to contribute data to the study of retention in higher education, provide a voice to underrepresented students, and advance theoretical knowledge about student retention in higher education. Therefore, the study's design and presentation of findings lend themselves to employment as qualified representations of students who are often under heard or invisible on American college campuses. This topic of study cannot be the sole answer to how administrators, practitioners and policy-makers increase the college participation and completion among underrepresented students. However, it does add to the retention lexicon and provides a localized interpretation of student success from the margins.

As with any research study, there are always opportunities to expand scholarly data and the methods we use as scholars to reach our conclusions. Therefore, future research would advance this topic of study by continuing to develop in-depth narratives of Chicana/o students who study in other fields of study outside of the mainstream such as Women's studies or Queer studies. Underrepresented students are a large group and must be situated in specific contexts to be best understood. Replicating this study in other academic departments would add to our understanding of how Chicana/o students survive in the academy and who and what is contributing to this process.

I chose to speak of the experiences grounded in Chicana/o students. Future research may want to entertain the idea that this study can also be replicated with different groups of students. Retention in higher education among underrepresented students is still in need of more data-driven representations of the factors at play in an individual's journey through higher education. Scholars would be wise to continue their work with other student groups like LGBT students or other racial-ethnic minorities.

With respect to longitudinal research, this study would benefit from a longitudinal approach to moving beyond the retention discussion. For instance, the students in this study spoke often of their desire to work with their communities or challenge systems of oppression in their lives. It would be interesting to stay in touch with coresearchers at future points in time to gain a sense of what they have done with the knowledge gained during their time in Chicana/o studies. Since Chicana/o studies was the foundation for these students formal learning and often lead to their future aspirations it remains important to check-in and see what resulted from their life-changing educational journey.

Personal Reflection

This dissertation has kept me quite busy over the past two years. It has been a project I enjoyed and if it were not for such open and honest coresearchers I would not have been able to present this research I believe contributes to our knowledge about retention in higher education—especially among underrepresented students. I am concluding this project with excitement and optimism for a future in higher education that is inclusive and representative of the diverse society that benefits from an educated populace. In order to achieve this vision we must work as a community to continue questioning our methods and understandings. I trust that this project has achieved this for some readers, as I know it has allowed me to question all I have come to know during my career in higher education.

I am excited about the work I helped to create in this dissertation. I worked for years on this study having begun my journey with a keen interest in further study of validation and engagement in higher education among Latina/o college students. My reading and writing on the topic eventually brought me to the study you read at this moment. I am excited for the potential this research has to show educators the ways students are retained in higher education. We often think about higher education as being a comprised of endless tasks that require delivery to thousands of students in a relatively short amount of time. However, what I have learned with this research is that retention efforts are a collection of small efforts serving the individual needs of unique and capable college students. These small acts of support and retention from the agents who occupy the academy are in need of further understanding. I am confident that an increase in our knowledge about retaining college students is advanced from the meaning making and interpretations I provided from my collaboration with students in this dissertation.

I learned that a relational process of research is one of the most difficult processes I have encountered in my life. I was constantly questioning and doubting my interactions with students because of the conflict I felt as a doctoral student trying to achieve a personal goal of advanced study and my desire to empower students through the telling of their stories. What I learned was that this process takes enormous amounts of time, money, sacrifice, patience, and enthusiasm. However, at the end of my intense interviewing with students I am left with the feeling that they enjoyed our time together and were able to grow as individuals because of the reflection this project provided for each of them. What I did not realize was that in addition to all of the sacrifices made by students to be in college they also had to sacrifice aspects of their personal well-being in order to make time for me. For students to be present and meet with me required them to leave their family and children, give up income they would have earned if they were working, and commit themselves to sharing their personal and intimate experiences for the sake of helping others. Because of this I am in debt to them and hope they realize the power of their voice and its potential to influence others.

Unfortunately, as I was finishing this dissertation, the United States Senate failed to pass the DREAM Act, which would have worked to provide increased access for students like the people in this study. While my dissertation was not about the immigration status of college students, it still remained a salient aspect of the motivations behind each of the coresearcher's desire to help others and use their education to bring about change for the community. Students often spoke about how they were going to college because none of their other friends were able to do so. Like the literature and statistics demonstrates, for these eight students to be in college required that others be left behind. Students cited immigration as being a dominant reason so many of their friends were not in college. They realized their

privilege and were willing to use it for the betterment of their people. This makes them some of the most noble and respectable people I have ever met. It is no surprise to me that they are successful because I am a believer in education and its power to inspire and emancipate people. The DREAM Act failed and since federal legislation will be needed to help facilitate success and inclusion in higher education we must simply take a deep breath and start over again. We are fortunate enough to live in a place where we can try again and hopefully bring about desired change. Nobody said it would be easy. After all, it is not about reaching some defined end result, but about the continued struggle for equity and appreciation of difference.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

*Note: This protocol is a guide for discussion and is not intended to be adhered to rigidly. Rather, it is a guide to ensuring discussion is centered-around the topic for each interview. The researcher will be responsible for probing students beyond these questions in seek of deeper responses and meaning.

Interview 1

1. I asked you to bring an artifact that you could share with me and explain how it represents yourself and your aspirations in life. Can you begin to share what you artifact is and why you decided to share it with me?

2. What was coming to college like for you?

3. What was high school like for you?

4. What role does your family play in your education?

5. Did anyone encourage you to go to college? Did anyone help you get into college?

6. Why did you go to college?

7. Why did you pick/transfer to CSUF for college?

8. Did anything or anyone discourage you during your transition to college?

9. What do you hope to gain from a college degree?

10. How are you involved as a student with CSUF?

11. What is it like to be a Chicana/o at CSUF?

12. Why Chicana/o studies?

13. What do you hope to do with your degree and education?

Interview 2

1. What are some of the most positive aspects your academic program/major?

2. What have been some of the most problematic aspects of your academic program/major?

3. What does Chicana/o studies do for you?

4. Has Chicana/o studies contributed to your own success in college?

5. Has Chicana/o studies taken away from your success in college?

6. How did you first find out about Chicana/o studies?

7. Think about the faculty, staff, administration, and programs during your time at CSUF. Can you identify any person or special program that has helped you succeed during your time here at CSUF? Explain the positive influence this person/program has had on you?

8. Think about the faculty, staff, administration, and programs in Chicana/o studies. Can you identify any person or special program that has helped you succeed during your time in Chicana/o studies? Explain the positive influence this person/program has had on you?

9. Think about the faculty, staff, administration, and programs during your time at CSUF. Can you identify any person or special program that has made it difficult for you to succeed during your time here at CSUF? Explain the negative influence this person/program has had on you?

10. Think about the faculty, staff, administration, and programs in Chicana/o studies. Can you identify any person or special program that has made it difficult for you to succeed? Explain the negative influence this person/program has had on you?

11. What are classes like for you in Chicana/o studies?

12. How do your classes in Chicana/o studies compare to classes in other departments?

13. How does your relationship with professors in Chicana/o studies compare to your professors in other departments?

14. Has anyone in Chicana/o studies ever helped you out with a problem or issue you were facing in college?

15. How does Chicana/o studies support your goals and future professional aspirations?

16. In your own words and opinion, why do some people like you succeed at CSUF and why do some not succeed?

17. What have been the most important things you have learned in Chicana/o studies, and who has helped you learn these things?

18. If you were in charge of the Chicana/o studies what would you do to help other students like you succeed during their time as an undergraduate?

Interview 3

1. Are there people that invest in your life's success?

2. What important relationships do you have in Chicana/o studies?

3. What important relationships do you have outside of Chicana/o studies that help you succeed in college?

4. What kind of relationship do you have with fellow Chicana/o Students in Chicana/o studies, specifically?

5. What does Chicana/o studies do for you socially?

6. What kind of relationships do you have with students outside of Chicana/o studies?

7. What have you learned from fellow students in Chicana/o studies?

8. What have you learned from people who affirm your goals and achievements in Chicana/o studies?

Interview 4

1. What do you remember about our time together?

2. What has Chicana/o studies meant to you as a college student

3. Why do you think you have been successful in Chicana/o studies and at CSUF?

4. Given what you have shared about your educational experiences, how do you understand "college success" in your life?

5. What sense does participating in this study mean for you?

6. If you were in charge of the university and could change anything for students what would you change?

7. What are your thoughts on some of the findings I have gathered from our time together (will have to prepare student for answering this questions before interview)?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Chicana/o students in Chicana/o studies: An interpretive case study of Chicana/o student success from the margins

Investigators: Philip L. Vasquez, B.S., M.S.
                         Doctoral Candidate
                         Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

This is a research study.   Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to contribute understandings about what experiences in Chicana/o studies preclude or enhance Chicana/o (i.e., Mexican American) students' journeys to the bachelor's degree (i.e., retention and graduation). This study will explore the subjective experiences of students to examine how their Chicana/o studies department contributed to their obtaining of a bachelor's degree. Additionally, the goals of this study inform the purpose for this project and are outlined as the following: (1) improve the college journey to a bachelor's degree for Chicana/o college students for increased equity, (2) understand how a student's experiences in their academic unit impact their college journey to a bachelor's degree, (3) promote the educational success stories and experiences of Chicana/o college students, and (4) advance understandings and theories that explain what factors preclude or enhance student success (i.e., retention and graduation) among Chicana/o students. You are being invited to participate in this study because your experiences as a Chicana/o student may help us to understand and document ways to support undergraduate students on their way to obtaining a bachelor's degree.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for about five to six months and will consist of 3-4 one-hour audio-recorded interviews, and potentially one follow-up one-hour audio-recorded interview.   During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:

A. You will be asked to sign a consent form
B. The researcher will schedule monthly one hour interviews with you which will be audio-recorded
C. All interviews will be transcribed for data analysis. No identifying agents will appear in transcripts. During transcription pseudonyms will be created for both the name of the participant and their respective institution. Audio-recordings will be erased on year after data collection is completed (scheduled to be May 1, 2011).
D. Data will be coded and emergent themes will be interpreted by the researcher. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled based on need for additional information

E. Findings will be written up to be presented as a dissertation for the completion of the researcher's doctor of philosophy degree at Iowa State University.

RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks:
There are no physical or legal risks associated with this study. However, participants may feel uncomfortable discussing some personal experiences in their academic lives. In an effort to minimize this risk, pseudonyms will be established for each person. Any identifiable information will be kept separate from individuals' transcribed interviews as to not indicate any particular person. Identifiable information will be destroyed once transcriptions have been analyzed.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. A benefit in this case is defined as a "desired outcome or advantage." It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by advancing knowledge in the field of education through addressing the need for increased understanding of race in undergraduate education. This project will provide implications for increasing educational attainment among Chicana/o college students in American higher education.

COST AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any financial costs from participating in this study. You will not be financially compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy such records for safety assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: pseudonyms will be established for both individuals and institutions. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. All audio recordings will be destroyed.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Philip L. Vasquez at 714-213-2522, pvasquez@iastate.edu, 3814 Berkshire Avenue Ames Iowa U.S.A 50010.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study titled "Chicana/o students in Chicana/o studies: An interpretive case study of Chicana/o student success from the margins," as investigated by Philip L. Vasquez, has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

_____   _____
(Participant's Signature)   (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study titled "Chicana/o students in Chicana/o studies: An interpretive case study of Chicana/o student success from the margins," as investigated by Philip L. Vasquez, and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____   _____
Philip L. Vasquez, Principal Investigator   (Date)

APPENDIX C

Chicana/o Studies Course Offerings, Spring 2010

Course	Credit Hours	Description
CHIC 101 Introduction to Ethnic Studies	3	Basic introduction to the study of ethnic minorities
CHIC 102 Communication Skills	3	Basic communication skills, including oral and written expression. A unit on the mechanics of writing and reporting on a term paper is included as part of the course
CHIC 106 Introduction to Chicana/o studies	3	Role of the Chicano in the United States. The Chicano's cultural values, social organization, urbanization patterns, and the problems in the areas of education, politics and legislation. One or more sections offered online
CHIC 108 Linguistics and Minorities	3	Linguistics and the politics of linguistics
CHIC 190 Survey of American History with focus on Ethnic Minorities	3	American history as told from the ethnic perspective
CHIC 220 Mexican Heritage	3	Basic characteristics of the Mexican, especially the Chicano, society and culture from 1519 to present. Emphasizes arts, literature and history of Mexico and the Chicano in the United States
CHIC 302 Ancient Mexican Culture	3	Historical and cultural survey of principal pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico and their significance to Mexican society
CHIC 303 Cultural Differences in Mexico and the Southwest	3	Cultural conflicts in Mexico and the Southwest as seen by the intellectual thinkers of Mexico and the United States. Urban and rural problems
CHIC 304 Music of Mexico	3	Music of Mexico
CHIC 305 The Chicano Family	3	The Chicano family's development as an American social institution. Historical, cross-cultural perspectives, and the social and psychological dynamics of the Chicano family are discussed

CHIC 306 Barrio Studies	3	Analysis of the barrio or an agency within the barrio will be made after fieldwork is completed
CHIC 307 Research and Writing in Ethnic Studies	3	Research and writing in ethnic studies
CHIC 313 La Chicana	3	Cultural influences that the family, religion, economic status and community play upon the lifestyles, values and roles held by Chicanas. One or more sections offered online
CHIC 315 Chicana/o Theater	3	Analysis of contemporary Chicano/Latino theater in relation to its historical evolution. Emphasizes plays, playwrights and theater groups expressing the Chicano/Latino experience. Extensive play reading
CHIC 316 The Chicana/o Music Experience	3	Mexican folk and popular music and its relationship to the culture of Mexico. Pre-Cortesian period to the present in Mexico and Southwestern United States
CHIC 330 The Evolution of Mexican Literature	3	Survey and analysis of the Nahautl, Mexican and Chicano literature from pre-Columbian period to present
CHIC 331 The Chicana/o Child	3	The Chicano child from preschool through grade six. Emphasizes motor, physical, social, intellectual, emotional growth and development and their effect on school adjustment and achievement. Field observation of preschool and grade school children required
CHIC 332 The Chicana/o Adolescent	3	The Chicano adolescent's social, intellectual and emotional growth and development. Bicultural pressures from the barrio, family structure, school and achievement values
CHIC 333 Mexican Literature since 1940	3	Literature of Mexico since 1940: Carlos Fuentes, Rodolfo Usigli, Xavier Villarrutia, Juan Jose Arreola, Octavio Paz, Laura Esquivel and Juan Rulfo. Other contemporary authors may be included
CHIC 336 Trends in Spanish-American Literature	3	Main currents of Spanish-American literature emphasizing contemporary works. Relation between the artistic expression and the ideological values of the period
CHIC 37 Contemporary Chicana/o Literature	3	Modern Chicano writers in the United States: Alurista, Corky Gonzales, Octavio Romano, El Teatro Campesino and major Chicano magazines and newspapers

CHIC 340 Mexican Intellectual Thought	3	Emergence of the Chicano movement dealing with political, economic and sociological facets. Writings of Nahautl, Spanish, Spanish-American, Chicano and contemporary writers
CHIC 345 History of the Chicana/o	3	History of the Chicano from the pre-Columbian period to the present. The Chicanos' changing role in the United States, their cultural identity crisis and their achievements
CHIC 350 Mexican Life and Culture	3	Mexican Life and Culture
CHIC 353 Mexico since 1906	3	Mexican Revolution of 1910, stressing the political, economic and social aspects, as well as its contributions in the fields of art, literature and social reforms
CHIC 360 Chicanas/os and the Law	3	Relationship between Chicanos and the legal and judicial system, including the administration of justice, Chicano-police relations and prison system
CHIC 367 Latina/o Spirituality and Religion	3	Exploration of spiritual and religious dimensions of Latina/o life
CHIC 450 The Chicana/o and Contemporary Issues	3	Socioeconomic and political problems confronting the Chicano, including proposed solutions. Effect that social institutions have had on the Chicano community
CHIC 460 The Chicana/o and Politics	3	heory of urban politics and evaluation of issues that affect the Chicanos and American society. Evaluations and surveys will be made on political organizations in Hispanic-surnamed communities
CHIC 480 The Chicana/o and the Immigrant	3	Mexican immigration to the United States and its social, economic and political impacts on the Chicano and non-Chicano communities and other immigrant groups
CHIC 499 Independent Study	Varied	Independent study in Chicana/o studies