

Hispanic First-Generation University College Students and Their High School
Experiences

by

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ABSTRACT

School counseling comprehensive guidance programs are designed to meet the academic, career, and social/emotional needs of students (ASCA, 2012), included in that is preparing all students for college success. Because there is an increasing number of first-generation students attending postsecondary institutions (Strayhorn, 2006) and an increase in the Hispanic population in Texas (Pew Research Center, 2016) more research is needed for how to best serve Hispanic first-generation college students. This qualitative study focused on a sample of first-generation Hispanic college students attending a university and their experiences as they transitioned from high school to college with an emphasis on what public high schools did or what they could do to help facilitate that process for this group of students. Findings were reported from a sample group of Hispanic first-generation university college students. Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing data collection techniques were utilized to answer the key research question: What identifiable resources exist or should exist in public high schools for helping Hispanic first-generation college students transition from high school to college? Findings indicate that parents are impactful in their students developing a college going belief in themselves. Also, public schools and especially school counselors/comprehensive school counseling programs play an integral part in helping Hispanic first-generation college students transition to college. The students identified resources provided to them by their high school like their school counselor, assistance with college applications, FAFSA, scholarships, AP/dual credit courses, and college and career centers that helped them in their transition to college.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Even in 1848, Horace Mann knew the great opportunity that having an education can afford someone when he stated that “Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Mann, 1848). People who live and attend public schooling in the United States innately have an exceptional educational opportunity because no matter one’s background or social class, a person can pursue whatever career he or she would like with hard work and dedication. From the perspective of a first-generation college student, a bachelor’s degree is a life changing achievement. For someone who comes from a home where no one has ever gone to college to becoming the first person in his or her family to get into college, successfully navigating the college experience, and graduating is an amazing feat. This achievement requires much hard work, but for those who persevere, the payoff is great.

In Texas, the number of Hispanic births has exceeded the number of white births since 1998 (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2012). When looking at the population in Texas, the Hispanic population increased 56% from the years 2000 with a population of 6.7 million to 2014 with a population of 10.4 million (Center, 2016). This increase has put the Hispanic population in Texas at 39%, which is second only to the state of California (Pew Research Center, 2016). These statistics are important to the state of Texas, public high schools, school districts, and postsecondary institutions because it is important to know what works in helping this growing population of first-generation Hispanic students get into college. The transition from high school to college

is a daunting process to say the least. This is a time when most students live on his or her own for the first time and get to experience more freedom than he or she ever has before. Students start to become more financially independent and responsible for their own life decisions. For most freshman students, the transition to college can be challenging. For many Hispanic first-generation freshmen students, that challenge is even more complex with societal and cultural transitions as well (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Some of the added societal and cultural challenges that first-generation freshmen students face include coming from lower income homes (Terenzini et al., 1996; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), working more (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), lacking family support (Fallon, 1997), and experiencing challenges in cultural and social capital (Pascarella, Pierson, Terenzini, & Wolniak, 2004) among others. These additional challenges will be discussed further in Chapter II, the literature review section of this dissertation.

To help students transitioning from high school to college, today's school counselors design and implement comprehensive school counseling programs that promote student achievement (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2012), which impacts all students and especially first-generation college students. Moreover, while first-generation college students are dealing with these societal and cultural challenges, parents who have not gone to college rely on schools to provide information to their children about college (Holland, 2015). Many comprehensive school counseling programs are modeled after the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) National Model, which was developed in 2003 (Martin & Carey, 2014). This model provides the components for a school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). A school

counseling program is a collaborative effort that benefits parents, students, teachers, and other administrators and addresses the academic achievement, career planning, and personal/social development of students (ASCA, 2012). In an effort to achieve maximum effectiveness for school counseling programs, ASCA recommends a ratio of 1 to 250 for school counselors to students, and also that counselors spend 80% of their time in either direct or indirect service to students (2012). For all students, the implementation of school counseling programs that meet these needs are vital in supporting them in the process from high school to postsecondary education, but especially for first-generation Hispanic college students.

Statement of the Problem

According to Choy (2001), 34% of students at four-year institutions and 53% of all students at community colleges are first-generation college students. When looking at the Hispanic college going population, this population makes up 25% of community college students and 13% of university students across the country (Pew Research Center, 2012). Most Hispanic students start college at a community college (Harvey, 2003). According to Stephens (2009), only 12% of underrepresented minority students who start at a community college transfer into a bachelor's degree program within four years of starting college. As stated previously, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in the U.S. (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009); on the other hand, the Hispanic population currently has the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, research on the Access to Success Initiative (A2S), which makes up 378 postsecondary institutions across the country shows that 45% of low-income and minority students who attend a university

graduate in 6 years compared to 57% of other students (Stephens, 2009). This same research study shows that of low-income and minority students who entered a 2 year college, 7% earn a bachelor's degree within 10 years of starting (Stephens, 2009). With the research showing that minority students including Hispanic students who are pursuing a bachelor's degree are more successful when attending a university (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013), the current study focused on Hispanic first generation college students who are attending universities and examined what their high school did to help them get to college.

The Higher Education Act of 1965, which began federal funding for low income students to attend college and was later renamed Pell Grants gave first-generation college students more access to higher education despite income levels (Woodbury, 2005). This legislation is an important piece of going to college for low income students and by examining what public high schools have done to help Hispanic first-generation college students go to college, it was the hope that the results would be transferable to students in similar demographic areas who meet the same criteria as the students in the study. This information can be used by school counselors and school districts as they look at designing comprehensive school guidance programs that meet the needs of all students but especially Hispanic first-generation college students.

Graduating from high school and entering the world of being an adult is a critical time in a young person's life. The choice of whether to go to college or to enter the workforce is a choice that not only impacts the student and his or her family, but also society as a whole. As stated by Fallon (1997), "the future of the nation rests on the shoulders of its young people" (p. 384).

The benefits of a college education are illustrated well by Covaleskie (2014) who said that “college today is seen as a passport to a better life, where “better” is measured in *economic terms*” (p.93). The economic benefits or average earnings for someone with a four-year college degree in 1980 was 41% higher than those with only a high school diploma and 83% higher in 2010 (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013), showing that the average earnings for those with a four-year degree have doubled over the past thirty years. Further increases in average earnings are likely to continue in the near future, supporting the need for high school students to pursue higher education if they desire higher job wages. In the United States today, 24% of all jobs require a bachelor’s degree (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Furthermore, “by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require postsecondary education and training, up from 8 percent in 1973” (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013, p. 15). As these data suggest, it is increasingly important that our high school students, especially those who are first-generation college bound students, obtain a postsecondary education. Thus, it is also likely that the need for career transitioning support from high school counseling programs will also become greater as the youth population nears adulthood and enters the workforce.

Significance of the Study

More research is needed to evaluate what public high schools have done to contribute to Hispanic first-generation college students successfully making the transition into college and especially into universities. This study was significant because the researcher spoke directly to Hispanic first-generation college students who have the lived experience of attending public high schools and then transitioning into a university. The results of the study contributed to the field’s knowledge and shed light on what school

counselors can do to better prepare first-generation Hispanic college students for that transition.

When students go to college and graduate, they become less likely to be unemployed or to live in poverty (Baum & Payea, 2005). Additionally, those who go to college typically earn more than those who do not (Barrow, Brock, & Rouse, 2013). Barrow et al. (2013) noted: the benefits to getting a postsecondary education is that individuals with these degrees earn a higher income that equates to 50% more over their lifetime than someone who only has a high school diploma. Thus, high school students who decide to pursue college are in a better financial position to support themselves and their families in the future. For example, an earner who provides for dependents likely encounter numerous expenses for cost-of-living including housing, food, transportation, health care, child care, and other day-to-day living expenses (Gould, Cooke, & Kimball, 2015), and as noted previously a college degree makes providing these necessities more manageable.

One's financial position in life affects more than just wages and more than just the earner and their family. College graduates have better health and are happier in their jobs than non-college graduates (Barrow et al., 2013). Society also benefits from college graduates because the productivity of the labor force increases (Barrow et. al., 2013).

For most, college is a whole new world and many freshman students, especially first-generation Hispanic students, are challenged to navigate the college experience. Addressing the career needs of high school students including those who have the potential to become first-generation college students is, in part, a role that school counselors play in addition to the academic and social/emotional domains identified by

ASCA (2012). Counselors play a unique, and diverse, role in helping high school students prepare for careers, such as meeting high school graduation requirements and taking the necessary steps to enter college. For example, counselors might perform in any of a variety of roles, such as counseling students individually and in groups, making sure that students stay on track with credits and testing to graduate, ensuring that course schedules are correct and meet the needs of the student. Other roles that counselors play include attending Annual, Review, Dismissal (ARD) meetings and providing input to ensure that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are in place and appropriate, attend 504 meetings for students, helping students with social services, working with parents and other staff members, working with students on career goals, helping them plan for college or whatever they choose to do after high school graduation, and being a leader in the school.

Because this study was focused on one domain of high school counseling (career), the researcher has excluded specific duties tied to high school counseling roles in the academic and social/emotional domains. Thus, this study examined the perceptions of Hispanic first-generation freshmen in college about the services and support they received from their public high schools to prepare for and enter college. Because first-generation freshmen in college have the knowledge and understanding of the college process from a recent view point, their knowledge and experiences could help identify ways that counselors might further assist soon-to-be college students. These students were able to provide valuable insight into school counseling programs.

This study looked at what public high schools did to help these students transition from high school to the university they currently attend. If the respective high school that

the student attended did not do anything in his or her mind to help them, then these students had an opportunity to make suggestions based on their experiences as to what they believe would help first-generation Hispanic college students like themselves.

High school counselors are uniquely positioned to help support students and encourage their career growth and college pursuits; one goal in doing so is helping first-generation college students overcome the barriers of navigating and transitioning to college. Another goal is providing resources and tools that empower them to be able to achieve their dreams, no matter what their dreams are. The circumstances that a student is born into should not dictate or limit the possibilities in that student's life. He or she should be able to set dreams and with hard work make those dreams a reality, the epitome of the American dream. According to Callan (2004), "Education has also had a distinctively important role as the social right that secures access to 'The American Dream'" (p.84). With the resources available in high schools, through education and the unique role that school counselors play in schools, all students should have access to highly qualified individuals who can help them navigate and transition to college.

Purpose of the Study

There is a significant amount of research focusing on the characteristics, needs, and prevalence of first-generation college students (Atherton, 2014; Blackwell, & Pinder, 2014; Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017; Mehta, Newbold & O'Rourke, 2011); but much of the existing research addresses students' needs once they enter college – focusing on resources at the college level. This study, however, focused on high school resources that help students prepare for navigating and transitioning to college – a proactive approach that may encourage more high school students (especially

first-generation Hispanic college students) to pursue a college degree. With a growing number of demands placed on public schools as well as teachers (Ryan, Von Der Enbse, Pedergast, Saeki, Segool, & Schwing, 2017), it is important to know what is working in getting first-generation Hispanic students into college and what (if anything) we might do better to help this population navigate and transition to college. This study focused on attaining this information.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the transition from high school to college for first-generation Hispanic college students with a focus on public schools and the part they play in the transition.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1: What identifiable resources exist in public high schools for helping first-generation college students transition from high school to college?
- 2: What are the lived experiences of first-generation college students as they transition from high school to college?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded theory. Grounded theory seeks to explain the subject area being studied, which results in new knowledge in the form of a theory (Birks & Mills, 2011). In grounded theory, theory is formulated from the data, and before the time of this theory's inception, most research focused on testing existing theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Charmaze (2006), qualitative researchers collect and analyze data, and then generate theory "grounded" in the data (p.

2). When theory is based on data, it is more difficult to negate completely or for other theories to take its place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory methods are described “as a set of principles and practices” (Charmaze, 2006, p.9) that gather data from participants who have experienced the sought after phenomenon that the researcher aims to understand. Grounded theory begins with researchers gathering data through observations, interviews, and other data sources (Charmaze, 2006). Then researchers sort through the data separating them into categories that will be assigned codes that tell what each particular category is about (Charmaze, 2006). The researcher begins to analyze the categories and make comparisons between them (Charmaze, 2006). From this point, a ‘grounded theory’ is created (Charmaze, 2006). Not only does grounded theory seek to explain the subject area being studied, but also it focuses on explaining it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions present during the course of planning this research study. One assumption was that the first-generation Hispanic college students are successful given their current environment of being registered in their first year of college. Another assumption was that these first-generation college students had counselors or guidance programs that helped them in some way get to college. This population’s experiences are recent and reflect the most current practices in high schools to provide students with guidance for preparing for college. Also, it was assumed that this sample of students had significant feedback on their experiences transitioning from high school to college. Finally, another assumption was that because the participants’

experiences were recent, they would be honest and accurately reflect public high schools' efforts to provide guidance and support for students going on to college.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and definitions were used in the course of this study and serve to provide operational meaning for use in the context of how the researcher used them.

- American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model. A Framework for a comprehensive, data-driven school counseling program (ASCA, 2012).
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Application that students must complete in order to apply for Title IV aid, usually completed online (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013).
- Postsecondary Education. All education beyond the secondary level (Institute of Educational Sciences, 1979).
- Public schools. Schools funded by states that are open to children who live within specific boundaries surrounding that school and are created and ran using state and local authorities (Callan, 2004).
- School counselor. A professional who has earned a Master's degree and has met state requirements for the position of school counselor.
- Title IV Aid. Established by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and includes "Pell Grants, federal loans, education tax benefits, and state grant programs" (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013, p. 70).

Delimitations

This research study studied first-generation Hispanic college students who were currently freshmen in college about their experiences transitioning from high school to college. The students included in the study were traditional aged students who have recently graduated from high school in order to obtain a relevant and recent picture of what resources public high schools have provided. Excluded from the study were non-traditional freshman students, military veterans who are returning as freshmen, and any students who attended a private school or were homeschooled at any time during their high school career. Socioeconomic status of the students was not specified to obtain a more diverse sample. However, by specifying that the students must be first-generation college students, this increases the odds that students may be low socioeconomic (Terenzini et al., 1996; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The focus was on his or her personal experience and not that of anyone else i.e., cousin, brother. The research focused on public schools and anything that the school did to facilitate this process for students.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the location, which was the Texas panhandle. The findings may not be generalizable to other parts of the country that are not similar in demographics (Delmar, 2010). Another limitation is the method for data collection. Because the study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the researcher is relying on the participants to be honest during the interview process (O'Grady, 2016). Furthermore, results could be affected by the rapport built between the researcher and the interviewee (O'Grady, 2016).

Summary

Postsecondary education has the power to be the vehicle for an individual to achieve his or her dreams. For some more than others, the journey can be especially challenging, like for first-generation Hispanic college students. The challenges include not having parents who have previously navigated the college experience to lean on and seek guidance from among others. Oftentimes parents of first-generation Hispanic college students rely on public schools to provide information to their children about college (Holland, 2015). With that being said, school counselors play a critical role in the education system by designing programs that meet the academic, career, social/emotional needs of students (ASCA, 2012).

Chapter I provided background for the development of the current study that aims to answer the primary research question of: What identifiable resources exist in public high schools for helping first-generation Hispanic college student's transition from high school to college?

Included in Chapter II is a review of pertinent literature associated with first-generation Hispanic college students and the transition from public high schools to provide the reader with information about both. Chapter III provides the methodology and research design that was followed throughout the research process.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

First-generation college students transitioning from high school to college utilize school counselors as a resource or some type of school guidance program. To better understand how first-generation students utilize such resources, the researcher of this study surveyed existing literature on the topic of the school counselors' role in high schools to prepare students for college and developed a research study that generated more knowledge on this topic and contributes to the field's existing literature. This review of literature began with the following topics and presents thematic findings in the literature: a brief history of school counseling, a history of high school graduation rates, predicting factors for student success in college, definition of first-generation college students, challenges faced by first-generation Hispanic college students, information on higher education, and an overview of existing studies on the topic of first-generation Hispanic college students and the transition from high school to college. The aforementioned literature was included due to its relevance to the present study.

Brief History of School Counseling

School counseling is an important part of the educational system that impacts students, staff, parents, and the community as a whole. Looking back at a brief history of school counseling helps to understand the purpose of the profession. Jesse B. Davis is considered the first school counselor because he was the first person to set up a guidance program in a public school (Pope, 2009). His work in the late 1800s early 1900s helped lay the foundation for career counseling and school counseling (Pope, 2009), which

continue to be utilized in current public schools. Today's school counselor meets student needs in three areas of development: academic, career, and social/emotional (ASCA, 2012). The focus of the literature review was in the area of career counseling.

Frank Parsons, considered the father of vocational guidance (Herr, 2001), developed the Vocation Bureau in 1908, which is often said to be the beginning of professional (career) counseling in the United States (Gummere, 1998). The Vocation Bureau was a counseling center located in Boston in a high immigrant area. Clients would come in and fill out questionnaires then go through an interview process. The goal of the Vocation Bureau was to help their clients reach their full potential through their vocation while educating them on all of the options available to them (Gummere, 1998). Parsons (1909) believed that if people were active participants in choosing their vocations, they would be more satisfied and happy in their careers. Today this process of helping individuals reach their fullest potential through vocational guidance and educating them about career options is a part of the career development component specified by American School Counseling Association (2012) for comprehensive school guidance programs implemented by school counselors.

Frank Parsons was also a proponent of social justice which is a fundamental aspect of counseling. Social justice is best explained as "actions that contribute to the advancement of society and advocate for equal access to the resources for marginalized or less fortunate individuals in society" (O'Brien, 2001, p.66). Furthermore, Parsons was a big advocate for education and thought that it was a vehicle for social change (O'Brien, 2001). These ideals are still relevant today as we think about our first-generation college students and the opportunities that college affords them. For this population whose

parents have not gone to college, there is a reliance on schools to provide information about college and the college process (Holland, 2015).

During the 1900s to the 1920s, vocational counselors in schools were teachers who did their teaching jobs and then took on the work of a counselor with no extra pay (Gyspers & Henderson, 2001). There was no organizational structure besides a list of duties given to the teachers who took on the assignment. By the 1920s and 1930s, concern was beginning to arise about the fact that there was not a structure in place to make the vocational guidance uniform across a city or multiple cities (Gyspers & Henderson, 2001). The process to standardize school counseling had begun, and most notably organizations that advocated for and developed such standards.

One such organization that contributed greatly to developing standards for the profession of counseling is the American Counseling Association (ACA), which was created when four counseling related associations came together to create the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) in 1952. These four counseling associations of APGA included:

- The National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA)
- The National Association of Guidance and Counselor Trainers (NAGCT)
- Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education (SPATE)
- American College Personnel Association

At its inception, the APGA aimed to promote the development and enrichment of the profession of counseling (2016). APGA changed its name in 1983 to the American Association of Counseling and Development, then later in 1992 became the American Counseling Association. The ACA defined a *Code of Ethics* for counselors, which was last updated in 2014 – a current organization of today. Under the umbrella of ACA

today, there are 20 divisions, one of which is the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). The *ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (2016) outlines the ethical responsibilities of all school counselors. So even today, such organizations have great influence on developing standards under which counselors operate.

In addition to professional organizations' influence on standards for counseling practices, legislation has influenced standards of practice. In Texas, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) was created by the Texas Legislature in 1995 to oversee the certification and standards of professionals working in public schools. In Texas, an individual must be certified through SBEC with a school counselor certificate in order to hold a school counseling position in a public school, which requires holding a master's degree, having two years teaching experience, and completing a required test (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

An issue of concern even in 1923 was overloading a vocational counselor with other duties so much so that no counseling can be done (Gyspers & Henderson, 2001). There is a concern in today's education system that counselors spend a lot of time on noncounseling duties (Partin, 1993). Consequently, some states like Florida have passed legislation specifying the amount of time that a counselor must spend in direct student service, which was specified as 75% of a counselor's total time must be devoted to direct counseling services for students (Partin, 1993). The American School Counseling Association recommends that school counselors spend 80% of their time in either direct or indirect service to students (2012).

In looking at a brief history of school counseling, it is important to note how some social movements also influenced career counseling. For example, the launching of

Sputnik by the Soviet Union in October of 1957 put a renewed emphasis on career counseling in schools in the United States so its students could compete in science and technology fields (Schenck, Anctil, Klose Smith, & Dahir, 2012). The United States wanted to be the country on the cutting edge of technology, and they did not want our space program coming in 2nd place behind the Soviet Union. One year after the launch of Sputnik, The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was signed and identified school counselors as the people who could test students in schools and determine who excelled or had the potential to excel in science and do the best he or she could to encourage them to go to college (Schenck, et. al., 2012). That same legislation included funding for states and trainings for counselors in order to achieve the aforementioned goal. Then in 1963, the Vocational Educational Act took this legislation and expanded it to utilize career education for the benefit of everyone and their employability (Herr, 2002).

Federal legislation continued to impact school counseling and public schools when Upward Bound was created from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which was part of President Lynden B. Johnson's War on Poverty, in an effort to fight poverty and encourage low income youth to go to college (Peabody, 2013). Upward Bound targets youth who are at-risk and provides them with career information and knowledge about math and science fields (O'Brien, 2001). Moreover, this program aims to encourage students to finish high school and attend college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Shortly after Upward Bound's inception in 1964, Talent Search was created in 1965 as a part of the Higher Education Act and Student Support Services was created in 1968, which became the third educational opportunity program (U.S. Department of

Education, 2011). These three programs came to be known as the federal TRIO programs and are funded and administered by the US Department of Education. Currently, there are eight programs included in the TRIO programs designed to assist individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds navigate the educational process from middle school to graduate school (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Talent Search come into public schools to help identify and contact students who meet the criteria for these programs.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Higher Education Act of 1965, it established the federal government as the main provider of financial aid for college through Pell Grants (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). He signed the act at his alma mater, Southwestern Texas State College. His remarks showed his and the country's dedication to helping students be able to afford college:

To the thousands of young men and women, this act means the path of knowledge is open to all that have the determination to walk it. It means that a high school senior anywhere in this great land of ours can apply to any college or any university in any of the 50 states and not be turned away because his family is poor (Johnson, 1965).

Never before did students who could not afford to pay for college have the ability to go to college with financial assistance. This legislation opened the door for first-generation college students, low-income students, and disadvantaged students who were willing to put forth the work to go to college, graduate, and get jobs that would otherwise not have been available to him or her.

Today, this sentiment is still true and well identified in the literature. As one example, Fallon (1997) stated: "School counselors play a crucial role in helping first-generation students achieve their full potential by motivating, educating, supporting, and

believing in them” (p. 393). Supporting Fallon’s notion, Reid and Moore (2008) conducted a study in which the students interviewed named the school counselor as someone that they can go to in order to get information about scholarships, colleges and how to apply, and financial aid information. Both Fallon and Reid and Moore have identified the school counselor’s role as serving as a wealth of information for students as they make decisions on postsecondary education. The more information that a student has, the better able he or she is to make the decision that is best for him or her (Fallon, 1997).

In addition to providing information directly to students about college and the college process through guidance activities, counselors can help educate parents because they are a significant source of support for the student (Fallon, 1997). Counselors can offer students and their parents information to plan ahead. An academic plan, for example, helps a student identify goals and career paths to plan for the correct classes in high school as well as transition to college (Reid & Moore, 2008). Lastly, counselors also provide information to the school staff as necessary, which further helps support students and parents because it reinforces the message and the value in the message about going to college and preparing for a career after high school.

School Counseling Comprehensive Guidance Programs

School counseling comprehensive guidance programs are designed to promote student success while meeting the academic, career, and personal/social needs of their students (American School Counseling Association, 2012). Today’s high school counselors face a myriad of tasks every day whether it is the scheduling, graduation plans, personal graduation plans, parent meetings, Admission, Review, and Dismissal

(ARD) meetings, 504 meetings, duties as assigned, individual counseling, group counseling, staffing, transcripts, credits, or students in crisis among other tasks. ARD meetings in special education and 504 meetings consist of a group of people including teachers, parents, counselors, administration, diagnosticians and/or 504 coordinators, and the student that come together to make educational decisions for students. Everything done by the school counselor is done in an attempt to meet student's needs and help the student be successful in school and in life after high school.

With the development of the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs in 2003 came an outline of the components of a comprehensive guidance program which included four parts: foundation, management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012). The delivery part of this model seeks to meet the academic, career, and personal/social development needs of all of the students in a school (ASCA, 2012). As previously stated since the inception of this model, many states have followed this model and more closely designed their models to align with the ASCA National Model (Martin & Carey, 2014).

The state of Texas closely aligns the design of their school counseling programs with the ASCA National Model. Furthermore, school counseling programs serve the needs of students, parents, staff, and the community (ASCA, 2012), and this dedication to meeting the needs of students and those who support these students is important to student success. School counselors serve an important need in the school setting. According to the Texas Education Agency (2004), "Comprehensive, developmental guidance and counseling programs are vital to the achievement of excellence in education for all students. The Texas Comprehensive, Developmental Guidance and Counseling

Program is an integral part of each school's total educational program." These programs are made up of four parts which include:

- guidance curriculum
- responsive services
- individual planning
- system support (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

The guidance curriculum is designed to help students develop basic life skills. When students have issues that interfere with their personal/social, career, and/or educational development, school counselors intervene with responsive services. The individual planning component includes guiding students as they plan their own educational, career, and personal/social development. The first three components serve students directly and the last piece, system support, includes activities done in indirect service to students (Texas Education Agency, 2004). Each school district in Texas takes these basic components and designs a comprehensive guidance program that meets the needs of their students (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

In meeting the college and career needs of students and helping in the transition from high school to college, Choy (2001) has three recommendations: helping students aspire to college, navigate the college admissions process, and making the initial transition to college easier.

When looking at school counseling programs and how they meet the needs of students in public schools, it is important to take into consideration the changing demographics of the United States and the state of Texas. For example, in 2014 the Hispanic population made up 17.3% of the overall population in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2016). This number is expected to rise to 28.6% of the population by

2060 (Pew Research Center, 2016). The Hispanic population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). The Hispanic population in Texas increased 56% from 6.7 million in 2000 to 10.4 million in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2016). So in 2014 in Texas, the Hispanic population was at 39%, which makes Texas the 2nd most populous state behind only California (Pew Research Center, 2016). With the Hispanic population continuing to grow, it is important that public schools, school districts, and school counseling programs know what is working in public high schools to help this population get to college and to universities.

History of High School Graduation Rates

Over 100 years ago, a high school diploma was something that not all of the population in the United States could attain. For example, in the years from 1869 to 1870, only 2% of the population's 17 year-olds attained a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Historically, the number of students graduating high school has shown continual increases. During the 20th century, public education became something that was more available to all children. As a result, high school graduation rates in our country hit an all-time high of 83% in 2013-2014 according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016). That number does not include students getting GEDs or going through alternative programs. According to the U.S. Census (2015), almost 9 in 10 adults, which is 88% had at least a high school diploma. With so much of the population attaining that goal of a high school diploma, it is important for public high schools to offer resources that helps to facilitate the transition to college for all students and especially Hispanic first-generation college students so that college is an option for everyone.

Predicting Factors for Student Success in College

The goal for many seniors graduating from high school is going to college, and effectively doing so is tied to predicting factors for student success. In October of last year, 69.2% of high school graduates of the class of 2015 were enrolled in colleges or universities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). There are characteristics or aspects in student's lives that contribute to their success or failure in college, such as a sense of identity (Gibson & Slate, 2010; Tinto 1993), having a challenging curriculum in high school (Green, 2006), and frequent contact with the school counselor (Belasco, 2013), to name a few. But, in a longitudinal study done from 1992-2000, it was shown that 43% of first-generation college students left higher education without a college degree (Chen, 2005), indicating that many students in this demographic group experience failure in college. This staggering number can be linked back to the challenges that a first-generation college student faces when entering the world of college. According to Aronson, students attaining college degrees can be likened to a funnel where at different times students can be filtered out due to disadvantages or challenges (2008), like being less involved in educationally purposeful activities in high school (Terenzini et al., 1996) and college (Gibson & Slate, 2010) and upon entering college, lacking information about college (Fallon, 1997; Holland, 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Vasti, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, Ruder, 2006). In Tinto's dropout model, it is theorized that dropping out of college is a longitudinal process that is affected by a student's interaction both socially and academically in college (1975).

Research shows that there are a variety of factors that contribute to a student being successful in getting to college, which include having a sense of identity and

feeling like he or she matters being a critical component to whether or not a student will be successful in college (Gibson & Slate, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, another predicting factor that contributes to college retention and graduation is the education level of the parents (Terenzini et al., 1996). For example, in 1999 of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree, 82% went to college immediately following high school graduation compared to 54% of students whose parents had a high school diploma and 36% of students whose parents did not finish high school (Choy, 2001). Parents have a big influence on where a student goes to school and where a student lives while attending college (Fallon, 1997). Involvement by the parent/s increases the number of students enrolling in higher education (Fallon, 1997). Also, for students to have a challenging curriculum in high school is a predicting factor of going on to college and graduating (Green, 2006). Moreover, reoccurring contact between the school counselor and student was shown to increase the chances of a student going to college, and that was especially true for economically disadvantaged students (Belasco, 2013).

Definition of First-Generation College Students

According to Billson and Terry (1982), Fuji Adachi (1979) first coined the term first-generation college students. At the time, Adachi wrote in his paper "Analysis of the First Generation College Student Population (A New Concept in Higher Education)" that the term "first generation" refers only to students who do not have at least one parent who is a college graduate. Adachi also maintains that eligibility for first-generation status should be considered along with a student's low income status for the purposes of TRIO programs. These TRIO programs, which are sponsored by the US Office of Education adopted Adachi's definition of a first generation student (Billson & Terry, 1982). On the

other hand, Billson & Terry define “first generation students as those whose parents have had no college or university experience” (p.35). Therefore, they are the first in their families to continue their education after high school (Billson & Terry, 1982). Today, these definitions still stand for first-generation college students including: students whose parents had absolutely no post-secondary education (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Terenzini, & Wolniak, 2004) and students whose parents have not earned a bachelor’s degree (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, a first-generation college student will be defined as a student who comes from a family whose parents have no post-secondary education (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Terenzini, & Wolniak, 2004). Second generation students are students whose parents have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

In 1976, congress enacted Public Law 94-311 that mandates data collection, analysis and publication of data for a specific group and goes on to describe this group as “being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or decent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish speaking countries” (H.J. Res. 92, 1976, p. 688). The U.S. Census Bureau includes anyone who self identifies as Hispanic in their count of Hispanic people in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Challenges Faced by Hispanic First-Generation College Students

Research has shown that Latino students make up 57% of all first generation college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The challenges faced by first-generation college students begin in high school. First-generation college students tend

to be less involved in high school (Terenzini et al., 1996). From the perspective of a high school counselor, the benefits for students to be involved in high school activities are evident. If a student is participating in athletics or academic competitions, for example sports, science competitions, or one act plays among others, he or she has to pass in order to play - no pass, no play (University Interscholastic League, 2016). Participating in extracurricular activities creates an environment of accountability for the students. Research has shown that first-generation college students are more likely to have weaker cognitive skills in reading, math, and critical thinking, and they receive less encouragement from their parents to attend college (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Reid & Moore, 2008, & Terenzini et al., 1996). Furthermore, FGCS are more likely to come from lower income homes, have lower degree aspirations, to be Hispanic, and to be women (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996).

A big difference between first-generation and nonfirst-generation college students is family support (Fallon, 1997). It is understandable that parents talk to their kids about life, goals, and education based on their own experiences (Brooks-Terry, 1988). For this reason, when first-generation students enter college, they lack information about college (Fallon, 1997; Holland, 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Vasti, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, Ruder, 2006). A study done by Blackwell and Pinder found that even though the first-generation college students that they interviewed were not encouraged by their parents to go to college, they had an inner drive to make a better life for themselves, which led to them getting into college and graduating (2014). For families who do not know about financial aid and availability of scholarships, they may think that college is too expensive to attend (Fallon, 1997) and not consider it an option

for their student. Those parents who have not gone to college themselves rely on schools to provide information to their children about college, which places school counselors in a critical role (Holland, 2015).

The information given to students by school counselors concerning college is part of meeting students' career development needs as defined by the ASCA National Model and can also be defined as social capital. Social capital lies within the relationships that people have with others which result in access to different resources (Pascarella et al., 2004). Furthermore, school based social capital is the relationships or networks in schools that can be used to improve an individual's life (Lin, 2001). Students who have parents who are highly educated are at an advantage when it comes to social capital. This population has more knowledge about college and the entire college process (Pascarella et al., 2004). So, when we look at first-generation college students who do not have a parent who has navigated this college process previously, we are likely to see the kind of influence schools have as social capital in those student's lives. Likely, we see what Holland (2015) identified when he stated, "Schools clearly play an important role in helping students through the college application process" (p. 246). This important role of counselors to their students was also noted by Bryan, Day-Vines, Holcomb-McCoy, and Moore-Thomas (2011), when they found that student/counselor contact about college information is a significantly positive predictor of a student applying to college and the effect was stronger the earlier in high school that the interaction happened. This important role of counselors to their students was further examined in a separate study done by Holland (2015) that included 89 students and 22 school counselors from two different high schools; Holland (2015) found trust to be a key issue for students in

developing a relationship with the counselor and having that access to college information/social capital (2015). Furthermore, when students have limited resources, the academic support, guidance, and help that school counselors provide can be the social capital needed to assist students through the college admission process (Bryan et al., 2011). Working with students who are first-generation college students concerning college access, information, and resources requires counselors to be highly skilled and also to have ratios that allow them to be that source of social capital for students (Bryan et al., 2011). High student to counselor ratios and ineffective use of counselor time negatively affects the amount of time that high school counselors can spend with students on college and career counseling, which limits students' access to college (Bryan et al., 2011).

One of the biggest barriers in students being able to attain a postsecondary education is financial (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). One of the first steps in getting financial aid is completing the FAFSA, and it is important to note that the completion of the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can create a barrier in getting into college (Barrow, Brock, & Rouse, 2013; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Filling out this application is the way for students to access most of the financial aid that is available to them to go to college (McKinney & Novak, 2015). School counselors ensure that all students are career and college ready (ASCA, 2012) so helping and supporting students in getting their FASFA applications complete is just another level of support from high schools and school counseling programs. Pell-Grants, loans, and work-study eligibility are all determined by the federal government through the

FAFSA application; states and postsecondary institutions themselves also use this application to determine aid (McKinney & Novak, 2015).

Once in college, some challenges that prevent Hispanic first-generation college students from persevering and graduating are being homesick, the academic rigor, time management, and adjusting to campus life (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Research shows that students who are first-generation college students (FGCS) and minority students face more challenges both academically and culturally than nonfirst-generation college students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

When looking at the adjustment to campus life this population is learning the art of functioning in two different worlds (Mitchell, 1997). One world can be described as the culture of college and the other being their culture of home (Hsaio, 1992; Heinz Housel & Harvey, 2011). The balancing of these different cultures makes these students more at risk of dropping out of college (Fallon, 1997). For first-generation college students, the balancing of the two different cultures can be seen in a study done by Gibson and Slate (2010) that found that over a one year period “nonfirst-generation first-year students were found to have significantly higher levels of engagement in educationally purposeful activities than first-generation first-year students” (p. 382). One reason for the lower levels of engagement and participation in college could possibly be that this population is not as likely to live on campus or to develop relationships with professors (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004). Also, first-generation college students are also more likely to work more hours per week than non-first-generation college students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). According to Fallon (1997), first-generation college students work twice as many hours as second generation college students. Both of these findings

were confirmed in a study done by Pascarella and associates (2004) whereby longitudinal data from 18 four-year universities was analyzed. They confirmed that first-generation students were more likely to work more hours as well as live off of campus, which contributes to the issues of time management. Consequently, FGCS finished fewer credits over the three year period of the study (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Even though first-generation college students are less likely to be involved in educationally purposeful activities, looking at the benefits for those who do choose to become involved in said activities is important. Blimling (1993) found a benefit to living on campus when his study showed a positive correlation between learning outcomes and living on campus. Furthermore, when first-generation college students get involved in both academics and social activities once in college, it helps to compensate for the lack of knowledge about the college process (Pascarella et al., 2004). By living on campus, students are more likely to get involved in those academic and extracurricular activities. One explanation for this is that students are immersed in a culture that is different from their own: the college life. When students get involved in social clubs or academic programs in college, we must think about who the facilitators are for those organizations. Often times the people sponsoring these activities are college educated faculty whom the students interact with and learn from. Also, for first generation college students who are participating in these activities, they are surrounded with other students who share the same goals of a college education (Pascarella et al., 2004). Pascarella et al., (2004) found that first-generation students receive more benefit from their involvement in extracurricular activities even though they are less likely to be involved in them in college.

The challenges faced by first-generation college students impact the rate at which this population attains bachelor's degrees as seen by Chen (2005). Chen (2005) has shown that this population attains bachelor's degrees at a rate of 24% whereas those students who are not first-generation attain the same degrees at a rate of 68%. In 2012, the percentage of Hispanic people with a bachelor's degree or higher was 15% (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The benefits for the first-generation college students who do attain a bachelor's degree is shown by the U.S. Department of Education, which shows that educational attainment was linked to higher median incomes across the years of 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2013. In 2013, young adults ages 25-34 who had a bachelor's degree had a median income of \$48,500 while the same age group without a high school diploma or equivalent earned \$23,900. Those with a high school diploma or equivalent earned \$30,000 and the same age group with an associate's degree earned \$37,500 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015). The income ratio from not having a high school diploma or equivalent to having a bachelor's degree is very significant. In the same year, median incomes for those with master's degrees or higher was \$59,600. These earnings held true for females and males and across different races, i.e., Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015).

Higher Education

The Higher Education Act of 1965 helped low income students by making more federal financial aid available for students (Fallon, 1997). This legislation became known as the Federal Pell Grant program in 1972 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). President Lyndon Johnson signed this legislation in an effort to make college more accessible to middle and lower income students (Woodbury, 2005). By 1970, 34% of all

college aged individuals were attending college compared to 20 years earlier in 1950 when that number was only 15% (Woodbury, 2005). The United States, which includes federal, state, and local governments, spent \$160.9 billion dollars in 2011 alone on postsecondary education because it is believed that by doing so economic growth can occur (Barrow, Brock, & Rouse, 2013).

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) stated that students, especially first-generation college students, need to plan early and get necessary information as well as get support and encouragement early on in order to prepare for college. Programs that bridge the gap between higher education and high school help a first-generation college student overcome some of the barriers they face as they enter college (Petty, 2014). Programs that involve collaborations between high schools, community colleges, and universities have shown to be successful (Terenzini et al., 1996). As previously stated, first-generation college students who have an inner drive or motivation to succeed will do just that (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). There is a positive correlation between academic achievement and intrinsic motivation (Petty, 2014). Motivation begins by having an understanding of the person and where he or she is coming from (Petty, 2014). However, not all students are motivated by the same things (Martin, 2009). It is key for institutions of higher education to understand the challenges faced by all students but especially for first-generation college students as they develop and maintain programs to address these needs and hopefully help these students to stay motivated. Continuing to help this population succeed has to continue while the student is in college (Hsiao, 1992). There are many institutions that have programs that help FGCS be successful. The programs that have been the most successful in helping first-generation college students involve

having a comprehensive framework for helping students like tutoring, learning labs, advising, and tracking student progress (Terenzini et al., 1996). It is also important for faculty or administration on a college campus to make positive contact with first-generation college students and let them know that they are important and valued members of the campus (Terenzini et al., 1996). Colleges and universities must be careful though when designing such programs as sometimes these programs can isolate this population and make it more difficult for them to fit in (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011). This is something that institutions of higher education must be mindful of as they aim to meet the needs of Hispanic first-generation college students.

Existing Studies

The existing research on first-generation college students abounds with data on college persistence and attainment; however, only a few studies exist that examine the preparation and transition of high school students to college that high school counselors could glean from. As one example, Bryant and Nicolas (2011) conducted a quantitative study of college freshman from two different universities, one public and one private, and sought to examine the differences between first-generation college students and continuing generation college students in academic preparation, college exploration, and the college decision making process to contribute to the literature available for school counselors. A total of 306 participants participated in the survey. Their study found that continuing generation college students went to more college fairs, went on college visits more often, and asked for help with their college applications more frequently as compared to first-generation college students (Bryant & Nicolas, 2011). Furthermore, programs that identify and monitor and provide individual planning for first-generation

college students can help close the gap between themselves and continuing generation college students (Bryant & Nicolas, 2011).

In another quantitative study Le, Mariano, and Faxon-Mills (2016) evaluated a College Bound program that was started in 2008 for its effectiveness in helping students from low income families get to college. The study consisted of 384 College Bound participants who in the 9th grade made application to the program. Results of the study showed that of the students who participated in the College Bound program, 90% enrolled in college compared to 75% who did not participate in the program.

In a more recent study, Bryan et al., (2011) conducted a quantitative study using information from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 studying the effects of school counselors meeting with students concerning college information. This study analyzed 4,835 students' data. The results of the study showed that when counselors met with students concerning college information there was a significantly positive effect on the students applying to college.

Similarly, Smith and Zhang (2008) conducted a quantitative study in a medium sized state university assessing the helpfulness of teachers, counselors, parents, friends, advisors, orientations, first-year programs in the transition from high school to college as perceived by the college students who participated. This survey was given to 11 sections of an introduction to sociology class where 775 students were enrolled, and a total of 657 students completed the five-page long survey (Smith & Zhang, 2008). Their study showed that the sample of students perceived friends, professors, advisors, and parents as significant factors in their transition from high school to college (Smith & Zhang, 2008).

Talbot and Kuehn (2002) conducted a quantitative study of 109 high schools in the San Joaquin Valley of California to explore whether they were preparing Hispanic students for college. Their research found that rural schools with high populations of Hispanic students or all Hispanic students were successfully meeting the needs of Hispanic students by providing resources and support for their successful transition to college (Talbot and Kuehn, 2002). This could possibly be because the schools are working to meet the needs of all the students in the school with their policies and procedures instead of a smaller population (Talbot and Kuehn, 2002).

On the other hand, Moore and Reid (2008) conducted a qualitative study researching the perceptions and feelings that first-generation urban college students have on their own preparation for their postsecondary education. Their sample included 13 first-generation college students who graduated from the same urban high school (Moore & Reid, 2008). Upon completion of this study, they found that even though their sample of first-generation college students were successful in getting to college, they faced challenges once there (Moore & Reid, 2008).

A study worth mentioning was done by Storlie, Moreno, and Agahe Portman in (2014). They conducted a qualitative research analysis over all of the articles in the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* from the years 1979-2011 that covered the experiences of Hispanic college students. They found that this population experiences barriers like a lack of knowledge of the college culture, poverty, adversity, and a fear of failure, which have been mentioned in other research included in this study (Storlie, Moreno, & Agahe Portman, 2014). In their research, they found that two themes were emerging: the first being the realities that work against students being successful in

college and attaining degrees and the second being the conditions that reinforce a student's journey in higher education (Storlie, Moreno, & Agahe Portman, 2014).

Most of the studies in the first-generation college student/school counseling area of research are quantitative studies. The aforementioned studies provide insight into differences between first-generation and continuing generation students in academic preparation, college exploration, and college decision making (Bryant and Nicolas, 2011). Research from these studies provides information about a specific College Bound program (Le, Mariano, & Faxon-Mills, 2016) and the effects of school counselors meeting with students on their subsequent applications to college (Bryan et al., 2011). The fourth quantitative study listed does allow for students to provide feedback about their perceptions of the helpfulness of teachers, counselors, parents, friends, advisory orientations, and first-year programs in the transition from high school to college, but the student responses were given in a survey form (Smith & Zhang, 2008). The one qualitative study found allowed first-generation college students to describe their perceptions of their own preparation for postsecondary education (Moore & Reid, 2008). The current research does not address school counseling programs specifically and what those programs do or can do to help potential first-generation college students get to college hence the need for the current research project, which is a qualitative study that focused on public high schools and their school counseling programs and what resources exist or could be put in place to help this population get to college through the lens of the students who have recently graduated from a public high school and are currently first-generation college students.

Summary

What we know from current literature is school counseling programs are designed to meet the academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs of students. In summary, the major challenges faced by first-generation students are lack of family support, lack of knowledge about the college process, finances, lack of involvement in high school and college, and academic and cultural challenges. Programs that are designed to facilitate a smooth transition from high school to college have been shown to help first-generation college students be successful in college. There is much research on helping first-generation college students once they get to college as well as the prevalence of first-generation college students. But, there is not an exorbitant amount of research on what public high schools did while that student was in school that helped him or her make that transition. The current study aimed to provide research in this area.

The next chapter presents the research design for the current research project. The methodology used was supported by empirical research in the hopes of attaining valuable research outcomes that will contribute to the current field of research on first-generation college students, public high schools, and school counselors along with comprehensive guidance programs.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Background of the Study

With a significant amount of research focusing on first-generation college students and the transition from high school to college being quantitative, a need existed for qualitative research studies that allow this population to describe their lived experiences through high school and the transition into college. The current study was designed to contribute to this field of research and examine freshmen in college who are Hispanic first-generation college students and their experiences as they transitioned from high school into college focusing on what public high schools did or what they could do to help facilitate that process. This particular section focuses on the methodology of the study and explains how the research was designed and how analysis was carried out. Included in this section is research questions, rationale, the context, data sources and methods for data collection, how data was managed, and trustworthiness.

Research Questions

The answers to the following questions are the focus of the study:

- 1: What identifiable resources exist in public high schools for helping Hispanic students transition from high school to college?
- 2: What are the lived experiences of Hispanic first-generation college students as they transition from high school to college?

Rationale

In qualitative research, the inner experiences of the participants are brought to light through discovery and understanding of meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Because the goal of this study was to gain an understanding of first-generation college student's experiences, a qualitative methodology was chosen. Qualitative methods of research tend to analyze language in order to answer research questions (Field, 2009). In contrast, quantitative research is research that involves numbers as the data (Field, 2009; Roberts, 2010). Often times, quantitative research design controls the research setting and manipulates variables to produce data for analysis (Roberts, 2010). Because the goal was to understand the experiences of the first-generation college students participating in this study, using quantitative methods would not be the best fit.

This study used qualitative research methods along with grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) were pioneers in their field when they devised grounded theory, which consists of "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (p. 2). Grounded theory was increasingly popular with social scientists at the time of its inception due to its different approach from the way research was being done at the time. Prior to the development of grounded theory, researchers conducting research would first develop a theory and subsequently find evidence to validate it (Walker & Myrick, 2006) and test theories that already existed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Birks & Mills, 2011). On the other hand, in grounded theory, researchers start by gathering data and then a theory develops from the data itself (Walker & Myrick, 2006). So, in grounded theory, the researcher analyzes the data gathered in a study and theory emerges from the researcher's interpretation of the data, the research processes, and interpretive experiences while conducting the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The disadvantage to grounded theory is that researchers have built their theory on the data that

they have gathered, and their experiences throughout the research process, which may not be the only plausible theory based on the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Context of the Study

This study took place in the southwestern region of the United States. This region was selected because it has Hispanic first-generation college students who have previously attended public schools and are currently freshman in college. Moreover, there was access to the population of interest in this region. Ten students from a university in this region were chosen as participants for the study because research has shown that when students start at a university, they are more likely to attain a bachelor's degree (Stephens, 2009). The current study should be representative of other smaller urban communities that are similar in demographics and populations and are located in the southern states that tend to be more conservative. It would not be representative of larger communities or sparsely populated rural areas.

The interviews took place at the university's library in a private room to maintain confidentiality. According to Glesne (1999), it is helpful to choose places that are quiet, comfortable, and private, and also that a participant will be more willing to participate when the location is a convenient place for him or her.

Data Sources

In quantitative research, random sampling is often used in an effort to choose a large sample that represents a population so that generalizations can be made (Glesne, 1999). In contrast, qualitative researchers often use purposeful sampling in which participants are chosen based on the fact that much information can be learned from them as it pertains to the research project (Glesne, 1999; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom,

Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Convenience sampling involves using participants who agree to participate and are accessible (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Both purposeful sampling as well as convenience sampling were utilized in this study. A strength of purposeful sampling is that the information gathered has a strong correlation to the phenomenon being studied. A weakness of convenience sampling is that the researcher does not pick and choose participants, which can also be a strength because it will give a realistic picture of the phenomenon being studied.

The in-depth interviews with the participants served as the main source of data in this study. The participants were asked questions that were recorded, and the researcher asked follow up questions when clarification was needed. The published literature concerning the topic of study also served as a data source. The literature review provided the background necessary to understand more information about Hispanic first-generation college students. It is beneficial to use published literature because it is accurate and provides useful information.

Books by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), Glesne (1999), and Corbin and Straus (2008) do not specify a certain number of participants in qualitative research; however, in other studies similar to this one, the approximate numbers of participants was similar. For example, Moore and Reid (2008) used 13 first-generation college students in their sample studying the student's perception of their own experience as they transitioned from high school to college. The participants for the current study consisted of ten first-generation college students who are attending a university. These students were selected because they meet specific criteria: they are freshmen in college, Hispanic first-generation college students, and he or she previously attended a public school before high

school graduation. The study participants were selected by the researcher contacting the university. The college or university then sent out information to the freshmen students at that respective institution. The participants then contacted the researcher if they were interested in participating or just have questions concerning the research project. The students who agreed to participate in the study are representative of other Hispanic first-generation college students as they have been faced with similar challenges in their journey to get to college. This group of participants may or may not be representative of students living in very large urban areas as experiences for first-generation college students from those areas may be dissimilar.

Data Collection Methods

Unstructured interviews are not predetermined by specific questions and produces quality data because people are allowed to express their story from their point of view (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In structured interviews, participants answer specific questions that are predetermined by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data was collected through a combination of the aforementioned interview techniques called semi-structured interviews. There are a few predetermined questions, but for the most part the participants will be able to describe their story and their experiences. Qualitative research involves gathering information, drawing out the story, and learning about relationships and meanings as well as experiences (Rosetto, 2014). Charmaze (2006) has suggested coming up with a few broad open-ended questions when conducting a grounded theory study. Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) found that unstructured interviews with open-ended questions provide for the most data rich interviews. The researcher used this idea to develop the open-ended questions that were used in the

interview protocol. It is important that the interview questions cover the research topic and the participant's experiences (Charmaze, 2006). So, with the aforementioned research in mind, the four interview questions that were used in this study were designed to be open ended and ask about the participants' experiences in being a first-generation college student and transitioning to college from public high school. The first question resembles an example given by Corbin and Strauss (2008) in their book *Basics of Qualitative Research* (p. 27). These interviews gave the researcher the appropriate data for analysis in the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3). The participants in the study whose experiences were the focus of this qualitative research study consisted of 10 students who are freshmen in college. All of the students were students attending a university. These students must meet the specifications that have been previously described to participate in this study.

There are three main techniques for gathering data in qualitative research: document collection, participant observation, and interviewing (Glesne, 1999). For this study and the information that was being sought, the interview was the best methodology to use. The interviews served as a means of data collection, more specifically in-depth interviewing. "In depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation (Boyce & Neele, 2006). In carrying out this study, the goal was for the researcher as well as readers of the research

to have an understanding of the experiences of these first-generation college students and ways that their schools helped them to achieve transitioning to and attending college.

Rapport

For the most part, people speak more freely when they know you, which can be achieved by being perceived as a person who is going to take the time to understand the interviewee and their stories (Glesne, 1999). In other words, rapport in qualitative research is a “trust building mechanism” (Glesne, 1999, p. 96). There are aspects that a researcher can be mindful of as they go into an interview that can promote rapport building, which include having their appearance, behavior, and speech be acceptable to the interviewees (Glesne, 1999). My plan to help foster building rapport was to dress, behave, and speak in a professional manner. Also, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) have suggested starting interviews by asking background information about the interviewee, like his or her name and other easily answered questions in order to start to build trust with the interviewee. So, I started the interview by describing the purpose of the research to the interviewee, going over IRB statements, asking the interviewees questions on the Demographic Information sheet that were easily answered.

Interviews

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), most qualitative research uses interviews to collect data; interviews are also very important to grounded theory research as it serves as the primary source of gathering data (Birks & Mills, 2011). Through interviews, researchers can reach parts of reality that they normally would not have access to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The goal of the qualitative research interview “is to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and

why he or she comes to have this particular perspective” (King, 1994, p. 15). In-depth interviewing was utilized in an attempt to explore the participant’s experiences (Charmaze, 2006). The first stage of the interview consisted of building rapport between the researcher and the participant. Building rapport is a trust building activity consisting of interactions between the researcher and participants that encouraged them to talk about their life (Glesne, 1999).

The interviews followed specific steps to ensure that all required information was covered and addressed. The steps were as followed: introduction, providing the participant with information about the purpose of the study as well as confidentiality, going over IRB statements, asking about demographic information, and then the participant will sign informed consent establishing his or her willingness to participate in this study. Birks and Mills (2011) recommend taping interviews whenever possible, especially for new researchers when conducting grounded theory research. So, I obtained permission to audio record the session, and then I began asking research questions. Audio recordings were transcribed and shared with the participants in an effort to make sure that the data gathered was correct and representative of the participants’ viewpoints.

In developing the research questions contained in this study, there were many different aspects to consider. First, Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and Charmaze (2006) have suggested interview questions be open-ended because the goal of qualitative research is to attain as much information as possible about the research participants and their backgrounds that are relevant to the research study. Open-ended questions allow for participants to tell about their lives without just answering yes or no, like responses in closed-ended questions. Also, starting a question with “tell me about” is a good strategy

to use when coming up with interview questions as this allows the interviewee to take his or her answer in multiple directions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p.4). The first question asked in the interview was an open-ended question designed to get information about what they feel like has led them to becoming the first person in their family to go to college and begins with “tell me about.” The participants were allowed to provide their answer without interruption from me. Upon completion of the interviewee’s answer, I asked any clarifying questions that were necessary. The purpose of this question was to answer the research question focusing on the lived experiences of first-generation college students as they transition from high school to college. Because the other research question aims to identify the resources that exist in public high schools for helping students transition from high school to college, I developed the next two questions. These subsequent questions were open-ended questions as well designed to allow the participants to provide information about their personal experiences as first-generation college students. Birks and Mills (2011) have suggested making sure to get consent from research participants to follow up with them. With that in mind, times for follow up interviews were set by the researcher as needed in order to make sure that each participant was able to provide all of the information that he or she would like to and saturation was attained. Saturation occurs when new data does not add any relevant information to the established categories in the research (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

All required information including paperwork and applications was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board at Texas Tech University for approval. Institutional Review Boards were established to protect the rights of human subjects participating in

research (Glesne, 1999). No further action was taken concerning the research until such time as the research proposal was approved by the review board. All of the aforementioned steps were taken in an effort to ensure that all ethical standards are upheld.

Data Analysis

QDA Miner Lite a software package that is specifically designed for qualitative research data analysis, was used to analyze data gathered from this study. An advantage of using a software package such as QDA Miner Lite was that it helps the researcher to organize and maintain all of the data being collected. Once the Human Subjects Committee of Texas Tech University approved the study, the researcher went through the email responses of potential participants to select the participants. If preliminary interviews would have been necessary, those would have been set up at that time. It was estimated that this process would take two weeks. After the participants were chosen, the interviews for the research project were conducted creating the data needed for analysis. This process was estimated to take two to three months. During this time, interviews were conducted, the audio tapes were transcribed, and all of the coding of the data was completed. After each interview, the audio tape was transcribed. That information was then be put into the computer program for the coding to take place. The codes emerge as the researcher goes through the data (Charmaz, 2006). When themes started to emerge, the themes were entered into a codebook. From the codebook, the themes were displayed in a diagram or model in order to clearly display themes from the study.

Trustworthiness and Transferability

In qualitative data, validity is often referred to as trustworthiness which helps the reader to know that the data analysis was true and precise (Roberts, 2010). Corbin (2008) uses the term “credibility” (p. 301) to describe qualitative research and whether the research is truthful and credible. To help strengthen credibility of this study, peer debriefing was used, which consists of a peer posing questions and evaluating the data and conclusions of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This technique was utilized as it provides an opportunity for someone from outside of the research project to evaluate the study and provides for validation or trustworthiness of the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategy wherein a researcher gathers data from different data sources to confirm validity (Golafshani, 2003). To confirm the validity or trustworthiness of the current study and the information obtained from the first-generation college students, 10 school counselors working in public high schools who work with potential first-generation college students filled out questionnaires about their school counseling programs and ways that they serve students especially first-generation college students. Purposive sampling and convenience samples were used to select school counselors to participate in the study. In the convenience sampling, the participants of a study are chosen based on accessibility and having knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Furthermore, in purposive sampling, the researcher makes a specific choice about participants for a study based on the qualities that he or she possesses (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). A Facebook

post was made on the Lone Star State School Counselor Association Facebook page as well as the Texas Counseling Association Facebook page. Counselors who were willing to participate in the study contacted me; therefore, all of the participants will be chosen on a volunteer basis. To participate in the research study the counselors filled out a questionnaire. Also, all participants had to meet specific criteria like in purposive sampling. That criteria was as follows: they must hold a school counseling certificate in the state of Texas that is in good standing, and they must work with high school students and potential first-generation college students. Using the information provided by these school counselors through the questionnaires allowed for a confirmation of the accuracy of what the student participants stated in their responses. These questionnaires act as a second measurable data point to validate what the interviewees identified as resources/supports provided by high schools in the transition to college. Existing literature was used as another data point to triangulate findings from this study. Research findings from the current study either confirmed previous research findings or were able to supplement the understanding of such findings.

Limitations

This study focused on first-generation Hispanic college students who were in their freshmen year of college. A self-reporting method of data collection was utilized, which could limit the study by the student's willingness to provide information about his or her experiences. Self-reporting may result in skewed data because participants might embellish or even underrepresent their responses.

Conclusion

This study seeks information about first-generation Hispanic college students and their transitions from high school to college. Comprehensive school guidance programs in public schools seek to meet the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students. The support systems in place as well as suggestions from students about what he or she needed from public schools was also included in the study. Because these students have obviously been successful in transitioning from high school to becoming first-generation students who are freshmen in college, they offer valuable insight about the transition process and high school support programs in that process. The data and conclusions gathered provided specific information about comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors, and public high schools as well as how the sample was able to achieve this feat and ways to help facilitate the transition to college.

This research study sought to contribute to the research available for current school counselors and school counseling programs. Because school counseling programs train future school counselors, the current research contributed to the knowledge and skills attained in required classes like career development where graduate students are learning how to meet the career development needs of students/clients. School counselors and school counseling programs aim to meet the career development, social/emotional development, and educational development needs of students (ASCA, 2012). The research findings will be beneficial for counselors working with any population, but especially for those who will be working in public high schools and with potential first generation college students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Organization

Included in this chapter are the results from this study consisting of the following subsections: restatement of the problem, description of participants, analysis of the data, which will include the themes that emerged throughout the study, triangulation, and a summary of the findings.

Restatement of the Problem

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study focused on Hispanic First-Generation College students attending a university and examined what their public high school did to facilitate the transition for each of them to get to college. As previously mentioned, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in the United States (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009); on the other hand, the Hispanic population also currently has the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). When we look at the state of Texas, from the years 2000 to 2014 alone, the Hispanic population has grown by 56% (Pew Research Center, 2016). This is why it is important for public schools and specifically public high schools to know and understand what is working to help this population get to not only college but to a university. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the importance of getting these students to a university was shown in a research study on the Access to Success Initiative (A2S) that included 378 postsecondary institutions and showed that 45% of low-income and minority students who attend a university will graduate in six years, compared to 7% of

those who entered a two year college who will earn a bachelor's degree within 10 years of starting (Stephens, 2009).

Description of Participants

The following is a description of demographic information for each of the participants who participated in this study. Each one is listed under the pseudonym that each of the participants chose during the interview process in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for the participants.

Emily. Emily was a 18-19 year old student who is female. Her ethnicity was Hispanic. She was taking 17 college hours for the semester. She does work 9-12 hours per week. Emily was not living on campus, and she was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

DD. DD is a male student who was 19-20 years old. He was of Hispanic ethnicity. DD was taking 14 college hours for semester. He was not working and was not living on campus. He was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Frenchy. Frenchy was a male student who was 18-19 years old and was of Hispanic ethnicity. He was taking 16 college hours. He was not working and did live on campus. He was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Raphael. Raphael was a male student who was 18-19 years old. He was of Hispanic ethnicity, and was taking 14 college hours. Raphael was not currently working and did live on campus. He was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Dave. Dave was a male student who was 18-19 years old. He was of Hispanic ethnicity and was taking 13 college hours. He was not currently working and did live on campus. Dave was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Diane. Diane was a female student who was 18-19 years old. She was of Hispanic ethnicity and was taking 14 college hours. She was working and usually works three hours a week. Diane was living on campus and was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Jose. Jose was a male student who was 19-20 years old. He was of Hispanic ethnicity and was taking 12 college hours. Jose usually works 12 hours per week and was living on campus. He was not involved in any extracurricular activities on campus.

Benny. Benny is a female student who is 18-19 years old. She is of Hispanic ethnicity and is taking 13 college hours this semester. Benny usually works anywhere between 24-38 hours a week. She is currently living on campus and is involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Kristen. Kristen was a female student who was 19-20 years old. She was of Hispanic ethnicity and was taking 15 college hours. She was not currently working and was living on campus. She was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Sky. Sky was a female student who was 18-19 years old. She is of Hispanic ethnicity and was taking 15 college hours. Sky was working and usually works 30 hours a week. She was living on campus and was involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Analysis of Data

This section will include an analysis of the data along with themes that emerged from the data. The data was gathered from the interview questions in an attempt to learn more about the transition from high school to college for Hispanic first-generation college students.

Interview Question 1

Tell me about your journey to becoming the first person in your family to go to college. I would like to hear your story in your own words.

Family Support. The first theme that started to emerge was family support. Marquez Kiyama found that “families are crucial in the development of a college-going culture in the home” (p.23). Many of the students, more specifically 9 out of 10 of them, reported that their family supported and encouraged them to go to college. Whether students has the opportunity to experience a college-going culture is dependent on the importance the family places on education and how involved they are in the education process (Marquez Kiyama, 2011).

Emily: My mom always pushed me to go to college. She always told me that anything is possible and just always encouraged me

Raphael: My mom always pushed me to do well in school, and it was just basically one of the norms that we had in our family to excel in school.

For Dave, the way that his mom supported him and set the expectation for college was as simple as continuing to ask him questions and talk about college.

Dave: She always made sure to ask me where I wanted to go (to college) and who I wanted to be when I grow up, just simple questions like that.

Frenchy talked about his parent’s support and them wanting a better life for him.

Frenchy: As a small child, my mom and my dad, they both wanted better for me. They wanted to give me what they didn’t have a chance to pursue. And for them, that was an education.

As Frenchy was talking about his family and their support, he mentioned his grandfather who encouraged him to pursue an education and do well in school. His father and he would help his grandfather with the crops in the summer by working in the fields with a donkey and a cart. His grandfather told him that “a pencil is lighter than a shovel,” and has been something that has stuck with him. During the course of this study that was a statement that has also stuck out to me because it is so true.

Parents wanting a better life with more opportunities for their children was reiterated by Diane.

Diane: My father really did want me to be more than him, you know? To succeed more in life. And he'd always tell me when we'd have our little chats, 'I want you to become something more. I had to drop out because I had to help my family financially and stuff. But you don't need to be helping us. You just focus on school and 'make it'.

For Raphael, his mom made it to the 7th grade and works hard to ensure that he has opportunities like going to college.

Raphael: Graduating high school was a big thing because back in her schooling I think she made it to the 7th grade. So us advancing to higher things is really motivating us to keep going. And she does everything for us. She works hard every day and keeps it going so that we can, hopefully, live a greater life when we get older.

Family Support Limited. The second theme that emerged was that family support was limited. Research shows that first-generation college students have less parental support with the specifics of college and how to plan for their career (Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007), which leads to a big difference between first-generation college students and nonfirst-generation college students.....family support (Fallon, 1997). In this research study, several of the students, more specifically 7 out of 10 of them, spoke

about their parents supporting them, but not really knowing what college was all about.

For that reason, the extent to which their parents could help them was limited.

Benny: They play a role of being supportive, but none of them actually gone to college. I have an aunt and then my grandpa. They started to go that way, but they never went to college and then my parents never went to college. So, I mean they really didn't have any idea of what I needed to do in order to get here, but they supported me in the decisions I made.

Kristen made a similar comment to Benny about her family not really knowing the specifics about what has to be done to get to college.

Kristen: My parents who didn't go to college were encouraging me, but they didn't tell me the details about it.

Public School Support/Encouragement. The third theme that started to emerge when the students described his or her journey to becoming the first person in their family to go to college was the public schools that they attended encouraging and supporting them in their journey of getting to college. In the American School Counseling Association's Ethical Standards for School Counselors ethical standard A.4. Academic, Career, and Social/Emotional Plans states that School Counselors:

- a. Collaborate with administration, teachers, staff, and decision makers to create a culture of postsecondary readiness (2016).

Of the participants in the study, 6 out of 10 students reported that high school, middle school, and or elementary staff encouraged them to go to college. Raphael does a good job of summarizing his high school experience as far as it pertains to college.

Raphael. And then in high school we just kept talking about college, college, college and how it's different and how it actually IS a big deal and that's when we started understanding how it really changes lives and how it can make you better.

DD elaborated on Raphael's comment by describing a changing moment for him in high school on his journey getting to college.

DD. And for me, specifically, there was one day (in high school) that an advisor from the university that I wanted to go to, actually came down and spoke to me. And my counselors helped me ask questions and special information that I needed at the moment. That was probably the biggest step, I'd say, for me to get into college as the first one, first person.

More specific details about high school resources will be included in the results of question 2. According to Kristen, she never really thought about college until middle school. Her middle school had decorations around campus that got her attention.

Kristen: So when I went to middle school, we had college flags all over campus and that really had me thinking about, 'oh...college' 'what college do I want to go to?'

For Benny, she first knew that she wanted to go to college due to an elementary teacher.

Benny: The first time that I realized I wanted to go to college was back in third grade. I had a teacher name Mr. _____, and he was the best teacher and still my favorite teacher. I go visit him and tell him about my college experience. I feel like he pushed me in the right direction to open my eyes to see that I actually want to do something with my life. At that time I didn't know what I wanted to be, but I knew I wanted to be something successful. In order to do that I had to go to college.

Interview Question 2

What did your public high school do or what resources did they have that helped you get into college?

College Applications. The first theme to emerge was college applications. The first step to being able to go to college is filling out the applications. For seniors in high school who are teenagers, this process can be confusing. In a study done by Bryant and

Nicholas, research showed that nonfirst generation college students asked for help more often than first-generation college students (2011). Of the students interviewed for this research study, 8 out of 10 of them said that his or her high school helped them fill out their college applications. For Kristen, her high school played an important role in her getting to college.

Kristen: I remember in English class they made us go to the library and apply for college on Apply Texas. If they hadn't made us do it that day, I wouldn't have applied. I wouldn't have known the due date because I wasn't researching or anything about college during my fall semester of high school. So without them I probably wouldn't be in college, to be honest.

Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The second theme to emerge was FAFSA. As mentioned previously, one of the biggest barriers in students being able to attain a postsecondary education is financial (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). We know that one of the first steps to getting financial aid is completing the FAFSA. Of the students interviewed in this study 8 out of 10 reported that their high school helped them fill out their FAFSA. Dave tells about how his high school helped him get his FAFSA done.

Dave: They made sure I applied for FAFSA. My mom and I went down there after school and they helped us out, and just. They kept asking me questions and so did my mom. So I kept thinking about it.

Kristen elaborated on the information from Dave and described how if it wasn't for the school she may not have known how to fill out the FAFSA.

Kristen: They make us do our FAFSA. If they didn't make me do my FAFSA, I wouldn't even know the due date.

Sky mentions that her school held a FASFA night that helped students get their FASFA done. Her school recognized that filling out the FASFA was an important part of going to college and designated a specific night for students.

Sky: They helped me get my FASFA done. They had a FASFA night where my parents and I could go to get help with filling out the FASFA.

Scholarships. The third theme to emerge was scholarships. For the year 2017-2018, the cost to attend 15 credit hours at a university in the western Texas region is approximately \$25,000 (College for All Texans, 2017). As previously mentioned, one of the biggest barriers in attaining a postsecondary education is having the finances to do so (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). For 8 out of the 10 students, their high school helped them with scholarships. The high schools they attended helped them with knowing about the scholarships and also helped them fill out the applications for said scholarships.

Raphael: They sent us reminders of which scholarships were available and when they were due. And they just stayed behind us and making us focus on the things that we had to apply for and making sure that we got it in on time and that we did it to the best of our abilities.

Benny elaborated on how her school let her know about scholarships. Her school sent her email notifications about when scholarships were due.

Benny: My senior year we always got emails on the scholarship deadlines and what were eligible for.

For DD, his high school helping him to apply for scholarships helped him to be more motivated to go to college. His high school made an impact on him and his motivation to go to college by simply helping him to apply for scholarships.

DD: First there was general scholarships and then specific scholarships to the school that YOU wanted go to, which helped me be more motivated to go to the school since I am applying for those scholarships.

College/Career Center. The fourth theme that emerged from the study was high schools having a college and career center. When looking through the research, there is not much research out there on college and career centers in high schools. From the students who participated in the study, 7 out of 10 students reported that their high school had a college and career center to help them with everything that they needed to do in order to get to college. For the students who reported that they had a college and career center at their high school, they were able to get help there with everything college including the following themes that emerged: college applications, FASFA, and scholarships. DD explained the impact that his college and career center had on him.

DD: We had a college and career center where they had a bunch of counselors, and they had a specific period out of the day where they would help you apply for FAFSA, scholarships, and the colleges that you want to go to. I think that was the most beneficial, to me. They were the ones who kind of opened my mind to different types of schools and going where I wanted to go and doing what I wanted to do.

For Dave, he had a specific time that he would go into the college and career center. He explains that when he was in this center that he was focused on college information.

Dave: The college and career center helped me out. After football season I just had a period in there, and they were always telling me to apply to colleges, apply to scholarships, and they provided so many resources to do that. So I had no choice, but to think about college the whole time I was there.

School Counselor as a Resource. The fifth theme to emerge was the school counselor being used as a resource. In Texas, school counselors implement comprehensive school counseling programs that follow the ASCA National Model guidelines and promote student success in the following areas: academic, career, and personal/social development (American School Counseling Association, 2012). As stated previously, for parents who have not gone to college themselves, they rely on schools to provide information to their children about college, which places the school counselor in a very important role (Holland, 2015). During the interview process, 8 out of 10 students said that they use their school counselor as a resource during high school and in getting to college.

Bug: But, the only main thing I really used was my counselor in high school. I think the school counselor plays the most important role because they develop the more personal connection with the student.

Sky was also able to go to her school counselor to get help when she had questions about anything including college.

Sky: My counselor was also really supportive and very helpful. I would go ask her questions all the time about what I was supposed to be doing. She was always able to answer my questions, or she would find out the answers for me.

DD reiterates how his counselor was beneficial for him and helped in several areas.

DD: The college and career center had counselors, and they would help you apply for FAFSA, scholarships, and the colleges that you want to go to. I think that was the most beneficial, to me.

AP/Dual Credit Courses. The sixth and last theme to emerge for this research question was AP/Dual credit courses. AP (Advanced Placement) courses are courses offered to high school students that allow them to take a more advanced course in high school in order to prepare for college level work and possibly get college credit for the course (College Board, 2017). Students will take an AP test at the end of the course to determine if they have earned college credit (College Board, 2017). Dual credit courses are courses that high school students can take in high school and be enrolled concurrently in a college to get college credit for the course as well as the high school credit. During the interviews, 6 out of 10 students said that they took dual credit or AP classes in high school, and they felt like those classes helped them to be prepared for college level work as well as be successful in college.

Emily: I took AP and dual credit classes that had coursework that prepared me for what college was going to be like. I had to learn to be able to manage my time to get everything done.

Frenchy reflected what Emily said about AP/dual credit classes helping him to work on time management. He went a step further and named the specific classes that helped him, which were trigonometry, AP English IV, and calculus. Both students spoke

about the work that had to be done outside of the classroom to get everything done for the classes and how that prepared them for college courses.

Frenchy: There was a few classes that did really pushed me. One having been trigonometry. The other one was AP English 4 and then calculus. But, just those three courses have really prepared me because I had to do a lot of work outside of class and home. And as I was working I had to manage my time so those were a great help.

Benny also felt like the Pre-AP and dual credit classes in high school helped her in college, but also that they were comparable as far as the rigor to college classes that she was taking.

Benny: Pre-AP and the dual credit classes actually did compare to some of the college classes I have here.

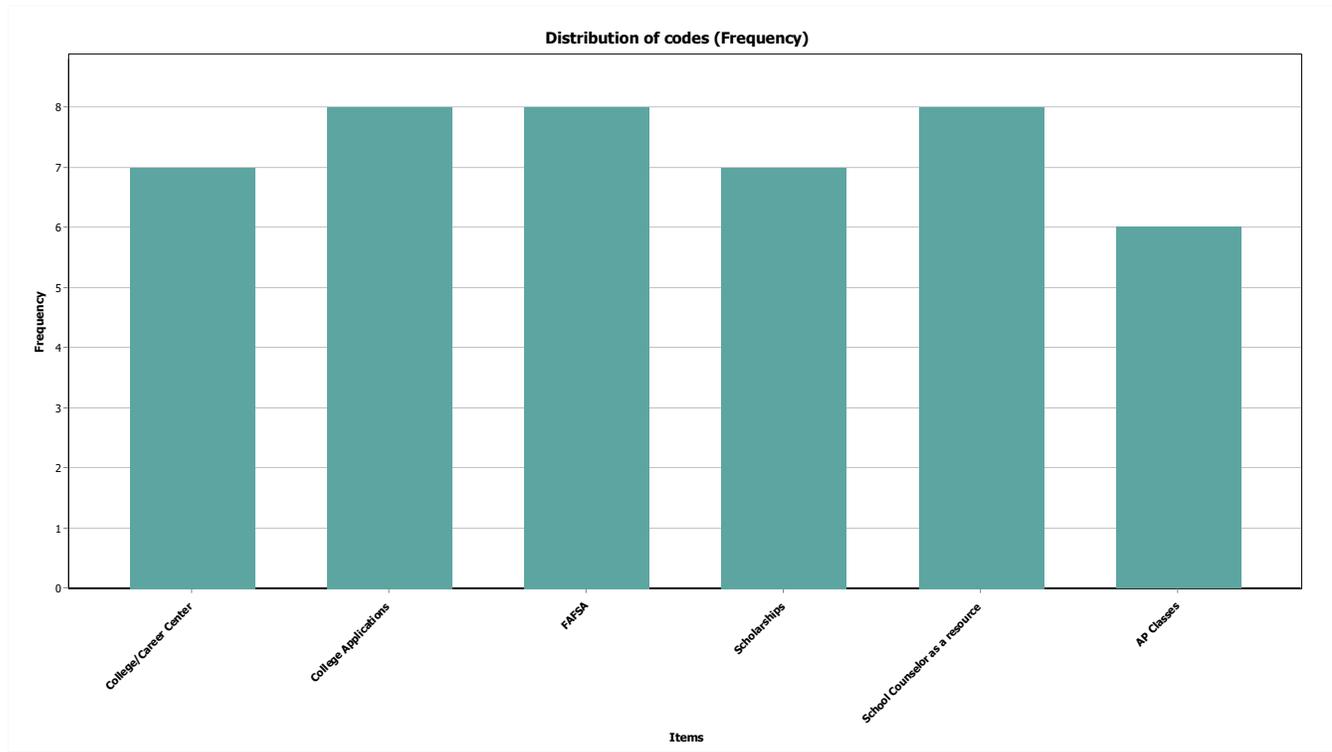


Figure 1. Resources students had in their high schools and number of students.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the resources that emerged as themes when the students were asked what resources their high schools provided that helped them transition to college.

Interview Question 3

What could your public high school have done or what could they have done better that would have helped you get into college?

College Visits. The first theme that emerged was for high schools to provide more college visits. Research shows that nonfirst generation college students go on more college visits than first-generation college students (Bryant & Nicolas, 2011). Students like DD, Raphael, and Sky felt like it would have benefited him to have more days that he could have visited college campuses.

DD: I feel if we had more college days to visit like Tech, A&M, UT. If we could somehow do that, that would strongly emphasize and persuade high school kids to go there. Because it seems like the campus itself, in person, really sets an impact in your mind like ‘wow, I really want to go here. It’s really nice. I like the school spirit’ and I really think that is probably the best thing they can improve on.

Raphael: I think that they (high school) could open up the options of where you can go to college more. They should allow you to see more colleges that are out there that you can still get scholarships for and won’t be financially unstable.

Sky agreed with DD that it would be beneficial to actually be on the campus to help you decide if you want to go there. But also made a good point in that it helps students to know that it is actually a possibility to go to that college or university.

Sky: The only thing that I would suggest would be more college days. It is super helpful to be on a campus to help you decide if you want to go there. It also helps students to know that it is possible to go to that particular campus.

Feeling Prepared for College. The second theme that emerged was the students feeling prepared for college. An important aspect of all of this data was with all of the resources that the public high schools provided for these students, do they feel like they were prepared for college when they made the transition to college? As previously mentioned, first-generation college students are more likely to have weaker cognitive skills in reading, math, and critical thinking (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Reid & Moore, 2008, & Terenzini et al., 1996). All of the resources provided by the high school would not be beneficial if the students felt as if they did not help. Of the students that were interviewed, 9 out of 10 students felt like their high school prepared them for college.

Jose: My high school did prepare me for college.

Benny agreed with Jose and felt like her high school did prepare her academically to go to college. For the vast majority, 9 out of 10, to feel like their high school did in fact prepare them for a university was a reflection of their high schools how hard those high schools worked. Those schools are meeting student's needs in the academic and career areas.

Benny: I feel like they prepared me academic wise.

Interview Question 4

What other information would you like to provide about your experience being a first-generation college student?

Challenges. The first theme that emerged from this research question was that being a first-generation college student comes with challenges. Research shows that when first-generation students enter college, they lack information about college (Fallon, 1997; Holland, 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Vasti, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, Ruder, 2006). This causes challenges in itself. Then first-generation college students have other challenges. Of the students that were interviewed 6 of 10 of them said that they have had challenges along the way. There were different reasons for the challenges. The following is a synopsis of responses from the students. For Emily, transitioning into a university was scary, but she gives advice of going to your advisor for help.

Emily: It (the transition) is scary, but just always go to your advisor and he or she will give you like a lot of information that you may have not known of. Frenchy agreed that his experience was difficult at the beginning because you are integrating into a new environment.

Frenchy: It (the transition) was difficult, at first, integrating.

DD says that it can be lonely and difficult at times because as a first-generation college student there is not anyone in your family that you can go to for help because your family has not been through what you are going through.

DD: My experience so far hasn't been easy because there is no family I can rely on. I can rely on them, but I can't. There is a certain point, where they can only give me a certain amount of advice. Since they haven't been in my shoes, they don't really know what to say. It can be kind of lonely and I guess difficult at times when you're like the only child in the family that has ever done this before.

For Diane, the autonomy of being in college has been a difficult transition. This transition for most college freshman is the first time that he or she has been on their own. For these students they are going from living with their families to living on their own for the first time. And for her this transition was difficult.

Diane: I also feel like most college students, it's kind of confusing and a bit complicated because you're by yourself now. So if I need help with this and that it's kind of harder.

Jose reiterates that the autonomy in the transition to college was difficult while elaborating on the fact that at home he had a parent that was there to remind him of things to do and now it is up to him. An interesting addition was that he found food and keeping food in his dorm room to be a difficulty.

Jose: Back at home I would always have my mom or someone in the house that would remind me of things to do. And in college it was mostly me. The biggest thing I noticed that I didn't know how my parents managed to keep milk, juice, and food in the fridge. 'Cause I would get to my dorm and I would have bologna and maybe mustard. That's it. That's the biggest change for me.

For Benny, it was also a challenge to be away from her family. Like Emily earlier she also felt like the transition to college was a little scary, but also shares that for her it got better.

Benny: Being a first generation college student and being away from my family, for the first time, is very difficult. One thing I could say is ‘you kind of have to tough it out’. So, I feel like it’s okay to be scared at the beginning of your college experience, but it gets better.

Dave had a different challenge. For him, his challenge in transitioning to college was learning to study. In high school, he never really had to study. When he transitioned into a university, he was met with the challenge of having to study in order to be successful.

Dave: I learned how to study. That’s really it. During high school I was always a quick thinker. I never really studied. And my mom always told me to, but I kind of never did and I wished I had, ‘cause I had to learn and figure out ways to do it my way.

As previously mentioned, first-generation college students are less likely to live on campus while attending college or be involved in educational activities on campus (Gibson & Slate, 2010; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella et al, 2004). Kristen explains how she was able to overcome that barrier.

Kristen: Being a first generation college student I feel like every student should live in a dorm for a year. I feel like living in a dorm will help you get more interactive at school. And by living on campus, you know what’s going on around you.

Financial. The next theme that emerged was that college was really expensive. Of the 10 students interviewed, 6 talked about how expensive college was and mentioned that their families make sacrifices to help them out as much as they can.

Diane: I think financially it's been a bit tough. 'Cause, you know, all of a sudden I went from, like, just paying a few classes to paying thousands of dollars, so a bit of sacrifice has had to be made.

Kristen agrees with Diane that her family has had to make sacrifices to help her out financially.

Kristen: We always talk about money because college is expensive. So my family experience, we had to cut back a lot of spending because college is expensive.

Frenchy's family's statement to him was that even though they are unable to help him with homework, they can help him out financially. For the students who are able to get any kind of financial help from family, this just reiterates the support that they have from their families to keep going to keep working hard.

Frenchy: They told me although they can't help me with the homework the biggest support that they can give is financially, and I'm just grateful that they are able to do that.

Resources/Organizations. Another theme that emerged from this research question was the students talking about how for them it made a difference to use the resources offered on campus when making the transition from high school and also getting involved in organizations. As previously mentioned, Pascarella et al. found that first-generation college students got more out of involvement in college, but were less likely to participate (2004). There were 6 out of the 10 students that gave this information. Emily explains how going to her advisor helped her.

Emily: One thing that I was really scared of was dropping a class cause I didn't know how that would go. But I talked it over with my advisor and I did. Just always going to pursue help whenever you need it. There is a lot of resources and

opportunities, within the university, that you may not know of, but to always go ask for it and to get really involved with organizations 'cause they will always help you with finding a tutor, finding more scholarships, finding just about anything and making a lot of friends too.

Sky had a similar experience as Emily with her advisor. This was a person that she could rely on to get help when she had questions about pretty much anything on campus.

Sky: My advisor has been helpful. I go to her whenever I have any questions.

When you don't know how to do something or need help, always ask questions.

Your advisor and other faculty are there to help you.

Diane agreed with Emily about the university offering tutoring in case student were in need of such resources.

Diane: I mean they give you all the resources to get help and stuff in case we need tutoring for classes.

Kristen talks about why for her it was important to live in a dorm on campus. It has helped her be more active in activities and organizations in college.

Kristen: Being a first generation college student I feel like every student should live in a dorm for a year. Because I feel like living in a dorm will help you get more interactive at school. And being a first generation college student you do want that experience of a college student because well for me my parents didn't know about any clubs or any, like, sorority or fraternities that's going on. And by living on campus, you know what's going on around you. And seeing on social media what's going on you see there's always free lunch. I just feel like, for my experience, or for any student it is good to live on campus so you could interact with other students.

Themes Further Than Research Questions

The aforementioned themes surfaced while going through the data as it was separated into the research questions. Upon further review of the data other themes started

to emerge. Those themes are pride, connection to family, perseverance, and public high school resources.

Pride. A theme that continued to arise from each of the students was a sense of pride both on the family's part as well as the student's. When Rafael's mom who made it to 7th grade, saw her child go off to college, there was an immense sense of pride and accomplishment knowing that he will have opportunities that she did not have. Diane also talks about her dad's education and his desire for her.

Diane: He had to drop out. He really does want me to be more than him. To succeed more in life.

For some of the families of the students interviewed in this research study, he or she was the first in their families to graduate from high school. All of the students described feeling a sense of pride in being the first person in their family to go to college like Rafael describes:

Rafael: Knowing that you accomplished something that hasn't happened before makes you proud.

Connection to Family. Most of the students in this research study felt an intense connection to his or her family. Students described their connections with their families and mainly their parents dating back to their early childhoods.

Each of the students who spoke of the connection that they had with their families remained connected and close to their family members, which helped him or her in the difficult transition to university life. Kristen speaks about feeling closer to her parents since she went to college.

Kristen: I feel like we got closer ever since I moved out. We got closer and I realized that my parents do miss me. Ever since I moved out I feel like I see more affection towards me.

Jose also feels a connection to his family that he feels like has become stronger since moving out of the home and going to college.

Jose: Now I have my mom calling me more than she used to. I guess that makes sense since I'm not there. I actually look forward to getting her phone call now since I don't get to see her every week. I get calls to remind me that they miss me, and I miss them.

For Benny, that connection to family made the transition to college difficult for not only herself but for her family. However, that transition became easier as the semester went on.

Benny: For my mom, it's been really really hard. When I was leaving that whole week, she was crying every day. My mom called me at the beginning of college every day, and we would talk. Now she calls me once a week or she'll text me every morning.

Perseverance. As each of the students told their stories, one theme was found woven through each of their stories and that was perseverance. These students faced different challenges, but were able to persevere and push through those challenges. The students saw college as an opportunity to succeed and be successful. For example, most of the students spoke about their parent's lack of knowledge about the college process. Instead of giving up these students used the resources that were available by their public high school to ask questions, find answers, and continue to work toward their goal of going to college.

When making that transition to college, the students spoke about that transition from home to the university that he or she was attending. Diane summed it up with the following statement.

Diane: The adjustment is hard.

Benny also spoke about how the transition was difficult for her and how she was able to persevere.

Benny: Being a first generation college student and being away from my family, for the first time, is very difficult. At the beginning of my college experience I was very scared and overwhelmed and just, didn't want to be here anymore. I just wanted to go back. But one thing I could say is 'you kind of have to tough it out' just push through. Everything does get better with time.

Significance of Public high school Resources. When looking at all of the data gathered, a significant theme that was found among all of the participants was that their high school and school counseling programs met a need for them concerning their successful transition to a university. Parents planted a college going seed with most of these students that the public high schools fostered and offered resources. For the one student who did not get the encouragement from home to go to college, the public high school was able to plant that college going seed and offer resources. The resources provided were resources that these students may not have otherwise had access to. These students, who did not have a parent who graduated from college, looked to their high schools to fill that gap. All of the students talked about going to teachers and counselors, people who have navigated the college process previously, anytime that they had a question or needed help. It is imperative that public high schools understand the

imperative role they play in all students attaining the goal of getting to college and especially Hispanic first-generation college students. As previously stated, Texas has a growing Hispanic population and this sample of Hispanic first-generation college students were able to identify specific resources their high schools provided to help them get to a university. Their high schools provided resources for students in the areas of FASFA, college applications, scholarships, college and career centers, school counselors, and AP/dual credit course offerings. Emily describes how her high school helped her.

Emily: Staff from my high school encouraged me to college even when it seemed impossible.

DD did a nice job of summing up how his high school helped him.

DD: Everything I needed to know my high school (college and career center, counselors) told me about, and that's how my high school helped me understand the process of going to college.

Triangulation

For the current research study, 10 high school counselors who work with Hispanic first-generation college students answered a short 4 question survey about their experiences and observations of this population.

When asked about the resources that their high school provides for all students and especially Hispanic first-generation college students, the majority of counselors stated that they have some type of college and career center. These centers offer support to students for everything college related. This verifies the theme that emerged among the students of their high schools having college and career centers and the important role that these centers play in their journey of getting to college.

Also, counselors were able to provide information about challenges that they see Hispanic first-generation college students face. Most of the school counselors named financial challenges as a primary challenge this population faces. This theme emerged among the students that were interviewed as well. Another significant challenge that school counselors reported was the fact that these students lack knowledge of the college process and in turn require lots of support and information. Family support being limited was a theme that emerged through the data analysis among the student interviews. Students reported that their parents support them, but are unable to provide information about the specifics of getting to college, which was stated by the school counselors as well.

The school counselors were asked what resources that they offer through the school counseling programs that help all students but especially Hispanic first-generation college students overcome these challenges. The majority of school counselors replied that they:

- Talk to their students about plans after high school
- Guide students from 9th grade year to graduation
- Support and encourage college
- Take students on college trips
- Provide information and resources to students

This information was an example of the theme that emerged in the data of the students using the school counselor as a resource for college and career information.

The last question asked of the school counselors focused on characteristics or attributes that they see that successful Hispanic first-generation college students possess. The overwhelming majority of school counselors stated that this population shows grit

and an internal motivation. Intrinsic motivation was a pattern that was seen among all of the participants in the study. Many counselors elaborated on that and said that they have perseverance, and when faced with challenges, these students use their resources and overcome those challenges.

Summary

The hope of identifying the themes that emerged through this research study was to identify what public high schools have done to help Hispanic first-generation college students get to a university straight from high school. The current chapter gave details of the interviews from the students themselves and identified information relevant to the study. Also included were thoughts from the researcher as the interviews were transcribed and themes started to emerge. The themes that emerged when students were asked to tell about their journey to becoming the first person in their family to go to college were (a) that they received family support from a young age about the importance of college and going to college (b) the family support they received was limited due to parents not having gone to college themselves and (c) that they received support/encouragement from the public schools that they attended. When looking at what their public high schools did to help them get to college the themes that emerged were (a) having a college and career center (b) receiving help on submitting college applications (c) receiving help submitting FASFA (d) receiving help with scholarships (e) using the school counselor as a resource and (f) taking AP/dual credit courses. Because this group of students has successfully made the transition to college, it was important to evaluate whether they have any suggestions for what high schools could do to better to help students like themselves. The themes that emerged from this questions were (a)

more college visits and (b) the majority of the students felt as though their high school prepared them for college. When the students were asked to provide any other information that they would like to about being a first-generation college student, the themes that emerged were (a) there have been challenges that they have faced (b) financial and (c) resources and organizations in college have been helpful. The results of this study reveal that public high schools have a significant impact on the lives of students and whether or not those students are going to go to college. Even though most of this group of Hispanic first-generation college students had support from their families, they needed the high school that they attended to provide support in the areas of college applications, FASFA, and scholarships. Also from their high school, they received assistance from their school counselor and many benefited from AP and dual credit courses. The next chapter will include a summary of the study including a discussion of the findings, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The last chapter was an examination of this research study and any implications that can be drawn from it. It includes a summary of the study, conclusion, implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

To understand what public high schools do to help Hispanic first-generation college students get to a university the current grounded theory study was conducted. In order to give the students themselves an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words, grounded theory was chosen. This way the researcher would be able to analyze the data gathered and determine the theories that emerge from interpreting the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After conducting the research review, the following research questions arose: What identifiable resources exist in public high schools for helping Hispanic students transition from high school to college? What are the lived experiences of Hispanic first-generation college students as they transition from high school to college?

The reason for this grounded theory research study was to identify what public high schools have done that helped Hispanic first-generation college students successfully transition into a university. In conducting this study, the hope was to contribute to the current information available on Hispanic first-generation college students and offer insight into how school districts and public high schools can design comprehensive school counseling programs to meet the needs of this particular population.

To answer the research questions, 10 Hispanic first-generation college students who were attending a university in the first year of college directly from high school were interviewed. Of the students who were interviewed 5 were male and 5 were female, all ranging in age from 18-20 years old. All of the students in the study identified as being of Hispanic ethnicity and each lives in West Texas.

According to Corbin and Strauss, “theory denotes a set of well-developed categories (themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some phenomenon” (Hage, 1972, p.34 as cited in Corbin and Strauss, 2008). So, the goal of theorizing was to provide insight and understanding of lived experiences (Glesne, 1999).

During data analysis, 3 categories became apparent (1) environment growing up (2) experiences in public school and (3) preparedness.

After more coding and data analysis, themes within each category emerged. The themes that emerged were: (1) participants received support and encouragement throughout childhood from their families to go to college (2) participants also received support and encouragement from the public schools they attended with an emphasis on their high schools (3) participants experiences challenges in making the transition to college. The following paragraphs include a brief summary of the themes that emerged from the research study.

The first theme was a representation of how the students who participated in this study grew up. The students reported having families that encouraged them to go to college. Education was something that was important to their families and something that they were encouraged to pursue. Of all 10 participants in the study, 9 were

encouraged by their families to go to college. Many reported that their moms encouraged them to go to college along with other family members. The second theme that emerged was that participants received support and encouragement from the public schools that they attended with some stating that this support starting as early as elementary school. The participant's high schools played a big role in the students being able to make the transition to high school by providing college and career centers, school counselors as a resource, AP/dual credit courses, and help with: college applications, FASFA, and scholarships.

For the third theme, all of the students talked about their challenges in being the first person in their family to go to college and making that transition to college from high school. Each of the participants found different aspects of the transition to college to be challenging. But one theme that emerged from all of the students was the transition to college being difficult. For them, the transition into college was the first time that he or she has been on their own. They have had this support system of family for the majority of their lives, and now they are going into college to live in a dorm and attend classes, and for this particular group of students they are doing so 2 hours away from home. Sentiments from the students included: integrating into college can be tough, difficult, lonely at times, confusing at times, and not having a parent there to remind me to do things. Independence was an adjustment for these students, but each have been able to successfully adapt. Within in this theme of challenges and the adjustment to college life, all of the students talked about how the transition gets better with time. You just have to keep working by being dedicated and having good time management. Also, students talked about using resources in college like their college advisors, tutoring

centers, and social media to stay connected and know about what was going on around campus.

Some patterns developed when looking across the themes including: intrinsic motivation, support system stayed intact and expanded once in college, affirmations from public schools, and the need for support.

Intrinsic motivation among the participants appeared over the themes of the college and career center, college applications, FASFA, scholarships, and using the school counselor as a resource. All of the participants stated that he or she went to these places or used the resources at school when they needed help. Each of them showed an intrinsic motivation to seek out the resources they needed to get everything done that they needed to successfully make the transition to college.

Another pattern that was found when looking at the themes was that the participant's support systems were still intact and had even expanded to include friends made in college, advisors, and resources available in college. This pattern could be seen across the themes of family support, financial, and resources/organizations. All of the students talked about still being connected to their families, and some even stated that they are closer now to their parents than they were before. Others expressed a new appreciation for their parents and siblings after moving away from their families. Participants talked about how much it helps them to come home and visit family. That connection to their support system was important to them. Also, students appreciate the sacrifices being made by their families so that they have the opportunity of going to college that he or she does. All of the students talked about how they have made new friends in college. They have made friends in their roommates and in the organizations

that they have joined. Some of the students talked about how it was beneficial to surround yourself with people that have the same interests as you hence joining organizations like Raider Aerospace Society.

All of the students reported receiving affirmations in public schools that resulted in him or her deciding that they wanted to go to college.....that it was beneficial to go to college. This pattern was seen in the themes of public school support/encouragement, college and career center, college applications, FAFSA, Scholarships, the school counselor as a resource, AP/dual credit courses, and feeling prepared for college. The seed was planted at home among parents and family for most of them and at school they received positive feedback and encouragement that turned into a belief in themselves that it was possible to be the first person in their family to go to college. A couple of students didn't receive those first words of encouragement from home, and for them, public schools planted that seed, and as with all the rest of the students, those public schools continued to foster that belief in themselves. For some those affirmations, words of encouragement, came as early as elementary school for others it started in middle school and all of the students stated that their high schools encouraged them to go to college, fostered the belief in themselves that it was possible to go, and provided the resources for them to make it a possibility.

The final pattern that was seen across the themes was the need for support through the process of transitioning to college. All of the students spoke about how they received help with the many different aspects of going to college. This pattern was seen across the themes of family support, college and career center, college applications, FASFA, scholarships, school counselor as a resource, feeling prepared for college, and challenges.

So, they had needs for help that the public schools filled and their parents filled that led to them successfully making the transition to a university.

It has been through individual interviews that these categories, themes, and patterns emerged to provide an understanding of the transition to college for these first-generation college students. The growing Hispanic population in Texas and the need to hear first-hand from Hispanic first generation college students what their public high schools did to help facilitate the transition for them to go to a university fostered the need for this study. The information contained in this study should be beneficial for school districts, public schools, school counselors, and the development of comprehensive school counseling programs as well as postsecondary institutions that train prospective school counselors.

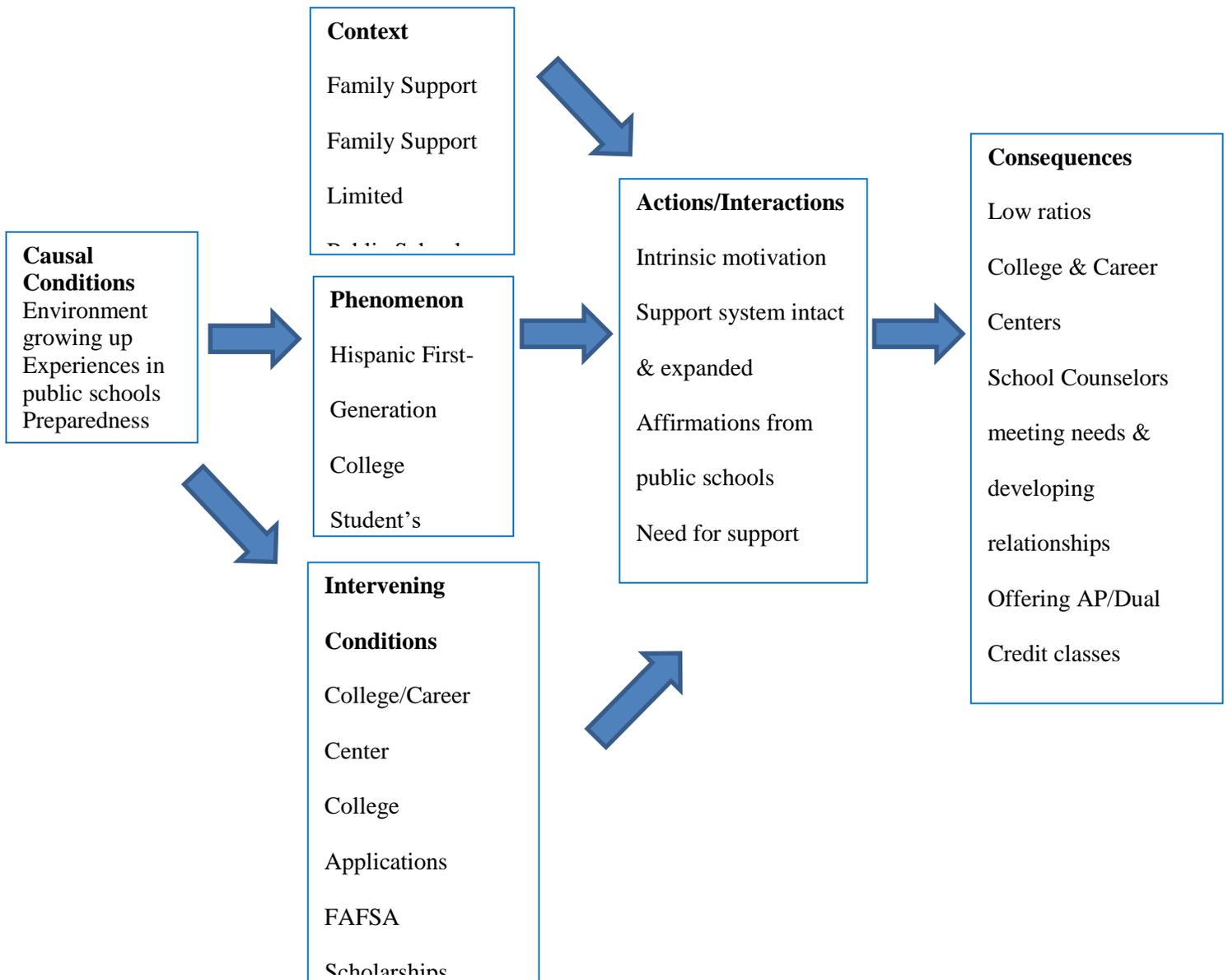


Figure 2. Axial coding diagram portraying the interrelationship of causal conditions, actions, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences with the core phenomenon of Hispanic First-generation college student's transition from high school to a university.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research

The participants in this study confirmed research done by Fallon (1997) that parental involvement increases the number of students who enroll in higher education.

The participants in this study confirmed research done by Holland (2015) that states for first-generation college students, there is a reliance on schools to provide information about college and the college process. More specifically, the participants confirmed that school counselors play a critical role in helping first-generation college students achieve their full potential (Fallon, 1997; Holland, 2015), and that the school counselor is someone that he or she can go to get college information (Reid & Moore, 2008). According to student's responses, also confirmed was research by Belasco (2013) that showed that reoccurring contact with the school counselor increased the chances of the student going to college.

Choy (2001) gave three recommendations in meeting the college and career needs of students: helping students aspire to college, helping them navigate the college admission process, and helping to make the transition to college easier. When looking at the responses of the students in this study, the majority of students reported that their public high schools met these needs for them as well as providing resources to complete the FASFA. The participants in this study confirmed that completing the FASFA can create a barrier in getting to college (Barrow, Brock, & Rouse, 2013; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Also, research shows that a predicting factor for students going on to college and graduating is having a challenging curriculum in high school like AP and dual credit classes in high school, which is something that they participants in this study affirmed. Lastly, participants in this study affirmed that the transition to college was a challenge, which supports Mitchell (1997) who found that for first-generation college students the transition to college can be difficult due to learning how to function in two

different worlds, symbolically the culture of home and the culture of college (Hsaio, 1992; Heinz Housel & Harvey, 2011).

So, the data from this study indicates that parents play a big role in students believing that he or she can go to college, and public high schools fill a need that the students have with resources and support that helps them fulfill their dreams of going to college. This information is beneficial for parents, counselors, prospective counselors, school districts, and anyone who has a hand in developing comprehensive school guidance programs. For the students who received support and encouragement from their parents to go to college, that seed was planted with students. The high schools were then able to provide all the resources necessary for these students to go to college. For the one student who did not receive encouragement from his parents to go to college, the high school was able to provide enough encouragement, support, and resources that fostered the belief in him that he could go to college, and he did. Public high schools and the resources that they provide including school counselors play a profound role in a student's life and their ability to go to college.

Theoretical Implications. The findings from this study implore public high schools and school counselors to meet the college and career needs of all students in high school, but especially Hispanic first-generation college students. Using client-centered counseling techniques would be beneficial because the counselor welcomes the client or student as they are (Rogers, 1958). Meeting these needs can look differently for different high schools, but the results from this study indicate that students benefit greatly from college and career centers, having structured resources for students to get help with college applications, FASFA, and scholarships.

Public high schools can take the information from this study and make sure that they are providing these resources for students. Many of the students in this study received this assistance in a college and career center. This is something that high schools may want to look at implementing if they have not already done so. These resources are not just helping the students, but also their families who are relying on the public high school to provide information and resources for their child to be able to get to college if that is something that he or she chooses to do.

School counselors are an invaluable resource for students as they take the steps necessary for college admissions. When students have limited resources, school counselors and the support they provide can be the social capital that students need to help them through the college admission process (Bryan et al., 2011). It would benefit students for school counselor to student ratios to be as low as possible. It is imperative that school counselors have the ability and time to meet student's academic, career, and personal/social needs as specified by the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). Also, encouraging students to take and stay in AP and dual credit classes in high school shows a benefit for those students once they are in college as students reported these classes really prepared them for the rigor of college classes. Public high schools should offer as many AP and dual credit classes as they can for students to take. Based on the results of this study, public high schools meeting all of these needs for students leads to students being able to successfully navigate the process of transitioning to a university from high school. As previously stated in Chapter IV, Kristen gives a synopsis of how she feels about her high school and how she feels they did in helping her get to college.

Kristen: So, without them (high school) I wouldn't probably be in college, to be honest.

Like Kristen, DD feels like his high school and the resources that it offered are the reason why he is in college.

DD: We start off by applying for college, which was a huge step because most likely I wouldn't have done it by myself.

Frenchy also feels like his high school changed the trajectory of his postsecondary education.

Frenchy: If it weren't for, like the college and career center I probably wouldn't have known that I had the opportunity to go to Tech. I probably would have stayed in my community college because it was easier.

Research Implications. This study was designed to investigate what public high schools have done or what resources they offer that help facilitate the transition from high school to college for Hispanic first-generation college students. Data was attained from this sample of Hispanic first-generation college students about the experiences that led to them successfully transitioning to college, and after further evaluation the following are suggestions for future inquiry. A similar research study being conducted in other parts of the country would validate findings in this study as well as expand on the subject. Since this research study was being done in West Texas, it would be beneficial to do similar studies in other high schools in Texas to see if the similar results would be found. Other research that would be beneficial would be to evaluate school counseling programs that serve potential Hispanic first-generation college students across the state of Texas to determine if they are offering the support and resources that were found to be beneficial

for this population in this study. To contribute more to current research, it would be beneficial to do similar studies with other college going populations like foster children or other minority populations. Another facet that could be expanded upon through future research would be the preparedness of school counselors to meet the needs of students in the college and career areas.

Practice Implications. This study was designed to focus on public high schools and the resources that they offer that help Hispanic first-generation college students make the transition to college. The results of the study showed the resources that helped this sample of students successfully make that transition. It is important that school counselors as well as administrators and all of the school community recognize that impact of school counseling programs. School counselors can take this information and make sure that they themselves or the school in some capacity are meeting these needs for students.

Recommendations

This section contains 5 recommendations for school counselors and public high schools. The first recommendation is for high schools to keep the ratio of students to school counselors as low as possible. The second is for public high schools to develop college and career centers. The third is for school counselors to ensure that they are meeting the needs for all students and especially Hispanic first-generation college students in the areas of college applications, FASFA, and scholarships. The fourth recommendation is for school counselors to develop a relationship with students that enables them to come to you for college and career assistance. The final

recommendation is for high schools to offer as many AP and dual credit classes as possible and encourage students to take these classes.

Recommendation 1: For high schools to keep the ratio of school counselors to students as low as possible.

As previously stated, the American School Counseling Association recommends a ratio of 1 to 250 for school counselors to students (2012). Other organizations like the Texas Counseling Association, Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, and the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association recommend ratios of 1 to 350 (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The actual average of school counselors to students in Texas was 1 to 465 in 2013-2014 (ASCA, 2014). The number of counselors needed to staff a school counseling program can be adjusted to best meet the needs of the students and the school community (TEA, 2017).

Recommendation 2: For public high schools to develop college and career centers to support school counseling programs and students.

The majority of students indicated that they were able to get assistance with everything college and career related through a college a career center located in their high school. College and career centers are a central location that students can get help with anything college and career related. When counselors are located in the college and career center, students can benefit that much more.

Recommendation 3: For school counselors to ensure that they are meeting the needs for all students and especially Hispanic first-generation college students in the areas of college applications, FASFA, and scholarships.

School counselors meet student's needs in the areas of academic, career, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2012). From the findings of this study, it was shown that there were 3 main areas where these Hispanic first-generation college students needed assistance and support from their high school. College applications was the first area where these students who have not had a parent graduate from college needed help. The next area was with filling out and submitting the FASFA. Some high schools had FASFA nights where students could go with their parents to get this filled out. College and career centers also were places that students could get help in filling FASFA out. The last area that emerged from the results of this study that students needed assistance with is scholarships. For high school working with potential Hispanic first-generation college students, it is important for the school counselors to provide support for students in these areas or ensure that there are resources in place for students to be able to get help in these areas.

Recommendation 4: For school counselors to develop a relationship with students that enables him or her feel like they can go to them for college and career assistance.

An overwhelming majority of students in this study shared that they used went to see their high school counselor when they needed assistance with anything college related. One of the students even stated that he felt like the school counselor plays the most important role because they are able to develop that personal connection with students. According to College Board, a school counselor is one of the best resources as students plan for college (2017). It is imperative that high schools have highly qualified school counselors that are knowledgeable about how to meet student's needs, and that

they are available for students. Through school counselors developing a relationship with students, it allows them to feel as though they have a resource to go to when they have questions. When school counselors and high schools are able to meet student's needs in all areas and especially in the area of college and career readiness, Hispanic first-generation college students as well as other students are able to successfully make the transition to college.

Recommendation 5: For high schools to offer as many AP and dual credit classes as possible and encourage students to take these classes.

More than half of the students interviewed for this research study reported that he or she took AP and dual credit courses in high school. For the students who took these classes in high school, all reported that they felt like they were prepared for the academic rigor of college because of the advanced courses they took in high school. Academic rigor and time management are two challenges that effect Hispanic first-generation college students persevering and graduating once in college according to the U.S. Department of Education (2014). In AP and dual credit classes both, students develop these skills.

Unanticipated Implications and Conclusions

When looking at this study, the information in the published research was affirmed. However, there was some information that came from the interviews that was not contained in the literature review. There were 3 unanticipated implications and conclusions, which were: parental impact, college and career centers, and preparation felt by students because of their high school. The first unanticipated implication and conclusion that was first and foremost was the impact that the parental support had on the

students. We are talking about Hispanic first-generation college students whose parents have not gone to college. Fallon (1997) stated that a big difference between first-generation and nonfirst-generation college students is family support. Parents talk to their children about goals and education based on their own experiences (Brooks-Terry, 1988), which is why when first-generation college students enter college, they lack information about college (Fallon, 1997; Holland, 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Vasti, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, Ruder, 2006). For the students that participated in this study, the overwhelming majority had parents that encouraged them from very young ages to go to college. Their parents asked them simple questions like:

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Where do you want to go to college?

And continuing to talk about college and push education made a profound impact on these students. The words of encouragement from their parents and other family members that anything that they dreamed was possible was so powerful for them and led to a belief that they could go to college. Previous research did not encompass the power that parents and family members have in the lives of potential first-generation college students.

A second major topic that was not covered in the literature was college and career centers. The majority of the students in this research study reported going to a college and career center to get assistance with anything college related. The college and career centers for the students was a central location where they can get help with anything from

college applications to FASFA to scholarships. Students were able to go into these career centers at different times during the day as well as before school and after school.

Parents were also welcomed to come into the college and career center with their child to get help with things like FASFA.

Lastly, the third major topic not fully covered in the literature was the preparation the students felt because of the resources and support that their public high schools provided. All of the students did report challenges they faced once in college, but when they spoke of their high schools and whether or not they felt like their high school prepared them to make the transition to college all but one student gave an assertive “yes.” Most students reported that there was nothing else that their high school could have done for them. The one student who did not give a “yes” to that answer said that he felt like his high school did an “okay” job. This group of students talking about their high school experiences and all of the resources and support they receive can help other high schools who work with similar populations. There is power in a student who is a first-generation college student feeling as though his or her high school did everything they needed to help them make the transition to college. Several of the students stated that if it was not for their high schools and the resources that they provide they may not be in college right now or may have gone to a community college because they did not know it was possible to go to a university. High schools, faculty, school counselors, school districts are places where the message of possibility resonates with students and it is necessary for high schools to understand this influential role, foster this message, and work to meet student’s academic, career, and personal/social needs every day (ASCA, 2012).

Summary

There is a significant amount of research on first-generation college student's prevalence, challenges once in college, persistence, and graduation rates. This research study was able to provide specific information on what high schools did and what resources that they offer that helped them successfully transition to a university from high school. Themes were identified from the data provided by students that brought out the different areas that led to them being current college students. The information from this research study can be used by school counselors, school districts, public schools, and Counselor Educators who train potential school counselors. If information from this study is used and recommendations used, potential Hispanic first-generation college students will be positively impacted and be able to successfully transition to college. This chapter provided a summary of results, implications, and recommendations.

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Appendix A

Recruiting Materials – TechAnnounce Ad

Freshman Hispanic first-generation college students needed

I am looking for freshman Hispanic first-generation students to participate in a research study on the transition to college. For more info or if you are interested in participating, please contact Dr. Crews or Dee-Anna Green.

We are currently looking for freshman in college who are Hispanic first-generation college students to participate in a research study on the transition from high school to college. Meetings took place in the TTU library in a private room. One interview was conducted by a doctoral candidate at TTU that lasted from 45-60 minutes in length.

These meetings can be set up at a convenient time for students, including evenings and weekends. Participation in the research study is completely confidential.

For more information or if you are interested in participating, please contact Dr. Charles Crews at (806) 834-4149 or charles.crews@ttu.edu.

If you have any questions you may contact me at: Dee-Anna Green at dee-anna.green@ttu.edu or (806) 674-6060.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Protection Program at Texas Tech University.

Appendix B

Information Sheet for Participants to Keep

What is the project studying?

This research project is a study that is focusing on Hispanic first-generation college students and their lived experience as they transition from high school to a university. This study hopes to contribute information that may later help school counseling programs meet the needs of Hispanic first-generation college students.

What would I do if I participate?

If you choose to participate in the study, the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The meetings can be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions and also stop the interview at any time. You will be asked if you would like to review the transcript and provide any feedback. If you would like to do this, then I will ask you to write your email address. You will be asked if you give permission for the interview to be audio taped and for those audio tapes to be stored on the researcher's external hard drive. The transcripts will then be uploaded into a software program that will assist the researcher in developing a theory from the themes found in the data. The information will be loaded using a pseudonym, and once the research is completed, the original audio will be deleted. Also, once the research is complete, any identifying information like email address will be deleted.

Can I withdraw my participation if I start to feel uncomfortable?

Yes, absolutely you can. Dr. Charles Crews and the IRB board have reviewed and approved the questions being asked in this study. You can stop answering questions at any time and you may leave at any time that you would like. Your participation is your choice.

How long will the participation in the study take?

The interview process will take between 45-60 minutes.

How will I benefit from participating in the study?

Your participation in this study will be contributing to the growth and knowledge of the school counseling community. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings of the study, you can contact me, and I can provide a copy of the findings or a copy of the study.

How are you protecting privacy?

Your name will not be linked to any documentation for the study or any reports, publications or presentations without permission by the participants. No one other than the researcher will have access to the raw data gathered during the study. All documentation associated with the study will be stored behind a locked cabinet or on a computer protected by a password.

If I have some questions about this study, who may I contact to address my concerns?

The study is being conducted by Dr. Charles Crews from the Counselor Education program at Texas Tech University. If you have any questions, you can call him at (806) 834-4149 or email charles.crews@ttu.edu

Dee-Anna Green (806) 674-6060

Texas Tech University has a board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can contact them at (806) 742-2064 with any questions or concerns.

Appendix C

Consent Form

What is the project studying

This research project is called “A Look at Hispanic First-Generation University College Students and Their High School Experiences,” which is a study that is focusing on Hispanic first-generation college students and their lived experience as they transition from high school to college. This study hopes to contribute information that may later help school counseling programs meet the needs of Hispanic first-generation college students.

What would I do if I participate?

In this study, you will be asked to share information on your experiences and thoughts. If you choose to participate in the study, the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The meetings can be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip questions and also stop the interview at any time. You will be asked if you would like to review the transcript and provide any feedback. If you would like to do this, then I will ask you to write your email address. You will be asked if you give permission for the interview to be audio taped and for those audio tapes to be stored on the researcher’s external hard drive. The transcripts will then be uploaded into a software program that will assist the researcher in developing a theory from the themes found in the data. The information will be loaded using a pseudonym, and once the research is completed, the original audio will be deleted. Also, once the research is complete, any identifying information like email address will be deleted.

Can I withdraw my participation if I start to feel uncomfortable?

Yes, absolutely you can. Dr. Charles Crews and the IRB board have reviewed and approved the questions being asked in this study. You can stop answering questions at any time and you may leave at any time that you would like. Your participation is your choice. We do appreciate any and all help that you are able to provide.

How long will the participation in the study take?

The interview process will take between 45-60 minutes.

How will I benefit from participating in the study?

Your participation in this study will be contributing to the growth and knowledge of the school counseling community. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings of the study, you can contact me, and I can provide a copy of the findings or a copy of the study.

How are you protecting privacy?

Your name will not be linked to any documentation for the study or any reports, publications or presentations without permission by the participants. No one other than

the researcher will have access to the raw data gathered during the study. All documentation associated with the study will be stored behind a locked cabinet or on a computer protected by a password.

If I have some questions about this study, who may I contact to address my concerns?

- The study is being conducted by Dr. Charles Crews from the Counselor Education program at Texas Tech University. If you have any questions, you can call him at (806) 834-4149 or email charles.crews@ttu.edu
- Texas Tech University has a board that protects the rights of people who participate in research, the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). You can contact them at (806) 742-2064 with any questions or concerns or email them at hrpp@ttu.edu. Questions can also be directed to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

This consent form is not valid after 9/30/2018.

Appendix D

Script to Read to Participants Before the Interview

My name is Dee-Anna Green, and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University in the Counselor Education Program. I am so glad that you have chosen to participate in this research study. I appreciate your participation and would like to thank you. The focus of this study is on first-generation college students and their experiences transitioning from high school to college. Your participation in this study will help us to learn more about the needs of first-generation college students and how high schools can best meet those needs. The interview will start by you reading the information sheet and asking any questions that you may have about the information sheet. Then, I will request for you to fill out a demographic survey. Next, I will ask your permission to audio record the interview. Upon your consent, I will then begin asking you the interview questions about your experiences in high school transitioning to college. You are free to skip any questions that you would like to at any time.

I want to express my sincere thank you for your taking time out of your busy day in order to meet with me and participate in this study. Do you have any questions at this time before we move on to the information sheet?

Appendix E

Demographic Information Form

Pseudonym: _____

Age Range (circle): 18-19 19-20

Gender: _____

Ethnicity: _____

How many college hours are you currently taking this semester?

How many hours per week do you usually work?

Are you currently living on campus?

Are you currently involved in any extracurricular activities on campus?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Pseudonym chosen by interviewee: _____

1. I will describe the purpose for the research to the participant; for example, the experiences of first-generation college students transitioning from high school to college.

At this time, the participants will sign the informed consent. They will be given the information sheet to keep with the same information as the informed consent form.

2. I will go over the IRB statements for the participants and answer any questions they may have.

3. I will ask the participants the questions on the Demographic Information Form and record their answers.

4. I will then ask the participants the following questions:

a. Hi, how are you doing today?

b. Tell me about your journey to becoming the first person in your family to go to college. I would like to hear your story in your own words.

- Please provide specific examples when possible.

c. What did your public high school do that helped you get into college?

- Please provide specific examples when possible.

d. What could your public high school have done that would have helped you get into college?

- e. What other information would you like to provide about your experience in being a first-generation college student?

After the questions have been answered, the researcher will thank the participant for their participation. Further, the researcher will remind the participant that he or she will be in contact in the near future with themes that have emerged from the data gathered during the interview for confirmation.

Appendix G

Email Script For School Counselors

Dear School Counselor,

My name is Dee-Anna Green; I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University majoring in Counselor Education. I am currently recruiting school counselors to answer a questionnaire for the research study that I am conducting for my dissertation. It would be my pleasure to have you complete this questionnaire, if you meet the following criteria:

- **You are a certified high school counselor.**
- **You currently work in a public high school.**

For this study, I am exploring the experiences of first-generation college student's transition from high school to college. I am using school counselor responses to help triangulate the responses given by the students.

If you meet this criteria and are willing to participate, I will ask that you print out this questionnaire, fill it out, and email it back to me. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, confidential, and I will work to maintain your anonymity in the final study report. Once the study is completed, please contact me if you would like a copy of the findings of the research study. All records will be kept in a secure storage location in a locked cabinet behind a locked door for 2 years following the study. This documentation will be shredded by a professional document shredding service after 2 years has passed. This research study has been approved by the Texas Tech Institutional Review Board. The purpose of this board is to protect the rights of

individuals who participate in research studies. You may ask them questions at (806) 742-2064.

This study is being supervised by Dr. Charles Crews in the Texas Tech University College of Education. He can be reached at (806) 834-4149 or charles.crews@ttu.edu.

If you have any questions about participating in the study, would like more information about the study, or if you would like to participate, please contact Dee-Anna Green at dee-anna.green@ttu.edu or (806) 674-6060.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Dee-Anna Green, M.Ed.

Counselor Education Doctoral Candidate

College of Education | Texas Tech University

Lubbock, Texas 79409

(806) 674-6060

Email: dee-anna.green@ttu.edu

Appendix H

Counselor Questionnaire

1. What systems/supports do you have in place to help all students and especially first generation college students get into college? _____

2. What challenges do you see the first-generation college students that your work with face? _____

3. What are ways that the school counseling program helps first-generation college students overcome these challenges? _____

4. What characteristics/attributes do you see that successful first-generation college students possess? _____
